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Central American Immigrant Women and the Enactment of State Policy: Everyday
Restriction on Mexico's Southern Border

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**CENTRAL AMERICAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN AND THE
ENACTMENT OF STATE POLICY: EVERYDAY RESTRICTION
ON MEXICO'S SOUTHERN BORDER**

by

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Dissertation

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Dedication

For my family—those who have come before me and who will come after me.

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**Central American Immigrant Women and the Enactment of State
Policy: Everyday Restriction on Mexico's Southern Border**

Lindsey Jennifer Carte, PhD

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: Rebecca Maria Torres

Central American immigrant women living in the Mexico-Guatemala border city of Tapachula routinely face multiple barriers to availing themselves and their children of rights entitled to them by law. In many cases, these denials unfold at the scale of the everyday, through interactions with low-to mid-level officials. As embodiments of the state, low-to mid-level officials such as bureaucrats, educators, social workers and healthcare officials possess the power to regulate immigrant citizenship and belonging through their everyday actions. However, we know very little about how officials working on the ground interpret and implement their power on an everyday basis; how this impacts immigrant experience and exercise of social and political citizenship rights; and how immigrants in turn respond to and negotiate results of interactions in their lives. Women and their Mexican-born children are disproportionately affected by this phenomenon, inducing consequences, such as exclusion from political and social citizenship, barring of children from the education system, and increased vulnerability to

exploitation and domestic violence.

Building upon literature on the changing geographies of the state, citizenship and migration in Geography, this dissertation seeks to broaden and deepen our understanding of how interactions between immigrant women and the micro-level state play out at the scale of the everyday and how these processes are significant in the lives of immigrants as well as low-to mid-level officials. Another goal of this work is to go beyond one-sided views of officials, to understand the overarching institutional contexts for their actions. To meet these objectives, I analyze data obtained during over a year of fieldwork conducted in Tapachula. My research consisted of in-depth interviews with low-to mid-level officials and Central American immigrant women, participatory workshops, and participant observation working in a local government agency. My findings suggest that low-to-mid level officials' actions constitute a form of everyday restriction, which, implemented through minute, mundane actions has major impacts on immigrant women's sense of citizenship in Tapachula. However, officials' actions are informed by complex institutional and socio-spatial factors and power-relations, which provide valuable context for our understanding of this phenomenon.

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Prologue:

Immigrant-State Encounters in Tapachula

“Don’t you think it’s time to close the factory?,” a mid-ranking Mexican clerk in a public service office asked Esther, a thirty-three-year-old Guatemalan mother, applying for services for her children. Within five minutes of their first encounter, the official had already conveyed how he felt about Esther being a single-mother of eight children between the ages of three months and seventeen years. As if out of obligation, she explained awkwardly to the bureaucrat that she planned to have “the operation” to prevent her from having more children when her last child was born, but since she delivered in the hospital, rather than at home, she got an infection and could not follow through with her original plan. Esther, like many other Central American women, emigrated to Tapachula, a city on the Mexico-Guatemala border, to work. Her children were all born in Mexico, but none have birth certificates. This means that they likely had limited access to schooling, healthcare or public health insurance and no access to other public benefits. I listened as Esther explained to the official that she thought it was impossible to register her children’s births because she was Guatemalan—as an undocumented immigrant, she did not know that her children were entitled to citizenship rights in Mexico. And when she did find out, she could not afford it.

As the official, Esther and I sat together in the office, the official continued to explain the grueling paperwork process required for Esther to obtain services for all of her children and even so, he neglected to mention that she would have to come back to the office five or six times to do all of the paperwork. He never told her the total cost to

obtain the official birth certificates, which would include a penalty for registering all the children late; or the fact that there was campaign coming up when fees would be waived. The officials' comments regarding Esther's fertility, along with his omissions present a serious obstacle for her. Not only is she shamed by the official who does not agree with her life choices, she is denied correct information about the complicated bureaucratic process upon which she is about to embark. At first glance, these issues may seem mundane and benign—just another offhanded remark to shirk off, or an innocent memory lapse. While the official may have meant no harm, these minute actions hold deeper meaning and result in serious consequences for immigrants and their families. Passive aggressive comments are rooted in pervasive stereotypes about the sexuality of Central American immigrant women in Tapachula, who are often hyper-sexualized and regarded as having “too many” children. Taken together, these small actions and attitudes can bar immigrant women like Esther and her children from fully availing of rights to which they are legally entitled.

I came into contact with Esther by coincidence while gathering information from public officials during the research that informs this work. I sat with her as she met with this official and never expected to see her again. A few weeks later, I returned to the same office building to meet with another official, Esther was leaving—she had not been able to see the same mid-level official she had met with before as he was out at a meeting. We spoke for a few moments in the open yet still hot stairwell, fumes from the sewer, or possibly the out-of-order bathrooms wafting up around us. She had a problem with some of her paperwork—she realized that her eldest son was going to turn eighteen

soon, and would not be eligible for the service she was hoping to obtain for him. She doubted if it was even worth going through the trouble. I encouraged her to go back upstairs with me to get her information. In a few minutes the official returned, we saw him and Esther explained her doubts. I stood in the office near a concrete wall with white paint greying from dust and dirty palm marks while Official X explained that the first document did not necessarily have to be “certified” and that “maybe your son isn’t actually eighteen yet.” Esther did not capture what Official X was trying to say, so he continued to repeat, “Chances are your son isn’t eighteen,” and “Chances are he hasn’t had his birthday yet—check the documents well... Analyze well what I’m saying to you, I can’t tell you anything else, but check the documents.” He was trying to tell her to lie about her child’s age so she could qualify. Though technically not allowed, the official tried to cut through some of the red tape and regulations of his bureaucracy to help Esther. From his desk in the sweltering office crowded with people, all needing something from him, Official X illustrates that not all actions are obstructionist, but that bureaucracy may be limiting to both officials and immigrants.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

Central American women immigrants living in the Mexico-Guatemala border city of Tapachula face multiple barriers to accessing rights for themselves and their families, including the right to legal identity (birth certificates, immigration documents), healthcare and education, among others. Notably, these denials do not always take place as a result of restrictive laws and policies created at the state or national level, but rather unfold due to the decisions and actions of micro-scale actors, such as clerks, agents, social workers, teachers, nurses and bureaucrats. These low- to mid-level officials,¹ as bureaucrats and representatives of the state, act to restrict immigrants' rights in minute, mundane and unseen ways in everyday life. Little is known about how these officials working on the ground become empowered, their experiences on the job and the ways in which they in turn interpret and implement their powers to enact policy on an everyday basis and how this impacts clients. Being blocked from receiving services can ultimately lead to negative effects for immigrants, and women in particular, including vulnerability to exploitation, domestic violence, poverty and other human rights violations for which the region is increasingly known.

The overarching objectives of this study involve broadening and deepening our understanding of how interactions between immigrant women and the micro-level state

¹ I use the term low-to mid-level officials to encompass a variety of state and non-state employees that represent the state at the local level. These officials work in entry-level posts (even though they may have worked in the same agencies for years) and middle management positions. In line with my Foucauldian approach to the state, which I outline below, I conceptualize the state as being diffuse, dispersed and seemingly everywhere. Thus, I consider teachers, nurses in public hospitals, social workers, police and other atypical bureaucrats to be among this group of "low-to mid-level officials"

play out at the scale of the everyday and how these processes are significant in the lives of immigrants as well as low-to mid-level officials. Through this research, I endeavor to uncover low- to mid-level officials' everyday actions in interpreting and implementing policy—incorporating both the perspectives of the officials and of immigrant women. First, this research unpacks immigrant-official interactions from the standpoint of immigrant women in order to examine their significance in women's lives, exploring in particular the various elements of these engagements and asking how negative experiences have shaped women's feelings of citizenship and belonging in Tapachula. Breaking down how officials act at work and how they behave towards immigrants is key to discovering why and how these actors deny immigrants these rights. Documenting interactions and their reverberations in women's lives, however, is insufficient without delving deeper into the context of how officials become empowered to do their jobs. As such, this dissertation also examines officials' experiences in serving immigrants in order to build a more comprehensive understanding of how officials, as embodiments of the state, function. As a result, this research also addresses the institutional socio-spatial dynamics and norms that drive these actions. In sum, the overarching objective of my work is to trace officials' typical, everyday actions as they work with Central American immigrants, uncover the meaning that these actions have in immigrant women's lives and understand the broader context within which these actions take place, including officials' perceptions of the phenomenon of migration and immigration policy and the institutional factors that inform their work.

With these objectives in mind, this dissertation is guided by the following interconnected research questions: 1) What are low- to mid-level officials' everyday actions in implementing and interpreting policy?; 2) How do low- to mid-level officials support or contradict official immigration policies?; 3) What are the existing institutional norms and conditions that shape officials' actions?; 4) What are Central American immigrant women's experiences with low- to mid-level officials?; and 5) What are Central Americans' experiences of social and political citizenship as a result of their interactions with low- to mid-level officials? To answer these questions, I conducted fieldwork in Tapachula for over a year between 2010 and 2012, drawing on an ethnographic, multi-methods approach that is informed by in-depth interviews with both immigrants and low- to mid-level officials, participant observation as a volunteer in a local government agency and participatory workshops with immigrant women.

Note on Research Design and Site

At the heart of this dissertation are questions related to everyday politics—and specifically, how state power is deployed and its meanings in the lives of immigrants and low- to mid-level representatives of the state. Thus, my research design, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, is informed by a political ethnography, which seeks to locate politics at the everyday scale, as they unfold in the lives of people (Auyero, 2006; Baiocchi & Connor, 2008). Ethnography involves participant observation, which means joining people in their daily life activities over months to gain a window into their everyday worlds, and is thus very well-suited for this kind of research. Along with

participant observation, which I conducted working as a volunteer in a local branch of a government bureaucracy, I carried out in-depth, loosely structured interviews with both Central American women and low- to mid-level officials. Political ethnography, as an approach involves presenting multiple, sometimes conflicting and nuanced perspectives of a problematic, breaking it down to understand it. While this seems to be an ideal mode of inquiry, it also poses its own unique challenges. To begin, we can run the risk of presenting viewpoints that are unpopular and unsavory. With respect to this research, it came to my attention that attempting to understand the reasons behind officials' abusive actions toward migrants while illustrating the complexity of these situations, might at first glance seem apologetic for their actions, whereas this is not at all the case. As Tilly puts it (cited in Auyero, 2012)

Political ethnography is risky business, at once intensely sociable and deeply isolating. On one side, its effective pursuit requires close involvement with political actors, and therefore the danger of becoming their dupes, their representatives, their brokers, or their accomplices. On the other, bringing out the news so others can understand depends on multiple translations: from the stories that political participants tell into stories that audiences will understand, from local circumstances to issues that will be recognizable outside the locality, from concrete explanations for particular actions to accounts in which outsiders will at least recognize analogies to classes of actions with which they are familiar. (Cited in Auyero 2012; p.13)

Political ethnography is not just about being close to political actors, in this case the low-level representatives of the state, it is also about understanding people's daily interactions with this state. To understand Central American women's nuanced experiences from a community-level perspective, I also employed participatory research techniques. Drawing on Freire's (2000) critical pedagogy, participatory research is a form

of collaborative knowledge production that relies on dynamic activities and workshops, among other techniques to encourage dialogue amongst participants (Herlihy & Knapp, 2003; Sletto, 2009). The advantages are many, but most importantly, participatory research ideally returns power and control from the hands of the “researcher” and places it in those of the “participants.” In agreement with this, I collaborated with Central American immigrant women in planning a series of workshops to begin a dialogue on their everyday encounters with low- to mid-level state actors.

Indeed, as noted above, there is considerable blurriness inherent in understanding the state’s relationships with people and translating this into writing. To meet this work’s goal of providing a multifaceted account of how the micro-scale state takes up its authority to regulate immigrant citizenship, I utilize multiple voices to convey evidence. This dissertation relies primarily on data from my interviews and participatory workshops with immigrant women, interviews with low- to mid-level officials and data from my participant observation with both groups. As a result, in addition to the perspectives of immigrant women and the officials, my voice, in the form of fieldnotes is integrated throughout this dissertation. My notes are lightly edited in some cases, and range from merely descriptive to more analytical observations. I incorporate fieldnotes as a key source of ethnographic data as well as a means to reveal and reflect on my own positionality as I engaged in the fieldwork for this project. My use of fieldnotes helps to bring the reader closer to the spaces where research was conducted and often captures details—for instance, the body language of officials as they wait on clients—that would normally be left out of analysis. Fieldnotes are used throughout and sometimes inserted in

groups to support a particular argument (see Auyero, 2009 as an example of other work employing fieldnotes in a similar manner).

Tapachula's Transnational Landscapes of Migration

I conducted the fieldwork for this study in the Mexico-Guatemala border city of Tapachula, Chiapas (Figure 1.1). Tapachula is a city of the “borderlands,” an important, yet marginal place in Chiapas—one of the most economically, politically, spatially and culturally marginalized regions in the country. This distinct sense of place is materialized in the many spaces where immigrants and non-immigrants mingle, in the institutions where immigrants receive services and in the very places where immigrants live. Tapachula's physical and figurative location must be factored into how state power circulates through institutions and institutional actors. In the first section of this chapter, I describe Tapachula as a place focusing on its transnational spatialities as well as its marginality.

Situated on the Pacific coast, just 40 kilometers from the nearest border crossing—at Talismán/El Carmen—the city is the region's most important with a population of 320,541 (city and surrounding areas) in 2010. Tapachula is the southern border's commercial center. Not only is it strategic to trade with Guatemala, but it also is at the heart of the Soconusco agricultural region. Mountainous terrain surrounding the city is dominated by small holder and mid-size coffee plantations, many of which are owned by families of German descent who immigrated in the earlier part of the 20th century. Descendants of these families maintain this distinct European identity to this

day, and German surnames are common markers of the city's most elite families. The coastal plain of the Soconusco produces bananas, papaya, mango and *rambután*, an Asian import similar to lychee that is a favorite in the region. The importance of agriculture in the region has been a point of attraction for Central American seasonal labor migrants, especially Guatemalans. The city also has a notable population of Chinese immigrants who came to the region to work in agriculture around the turn of the 20th century and then continued to migrate in small numbers.

Tapachula as a municipality is relatively wealthy compared to the rest of the state, however, Chiapas is the second most marginalized state in the country, according to the Mexican government's marginalization index in 2010 (Consejo Nacional de Población [CONAPO], 2010). This measure indicates that many residents live without proper access to basic sanitation and potable water, flooring in houses, education, food or healthcare. The Zapatista Movement of 1994, born in the heavily Indigenous highland region of the state, emerged from the combination of this high level of marginality— socio-economic, spatial and political— and strong opposition to neoliberalization of the Mexico. Though the movement was located mostly in the Central Highlands and Lacandón Jungle regions of the state, geographically distant from the coastal lowlands where Tapachula is located, and despite the fact that Tapachula is not identified as a region with many participants in the movement, we cannot overlook the importance of the movement to raising the notoriety of the state.

Tapachula is laid out in the grid pattern typical of Mexican cities, with its main park, located in the historic center of the city. However, unlike the famed cities and towns

of Central Mexico, the park is not a *zócalo*, but just a *parque*. Tapachula reminds many visitors of other coastal cities in Mexico and Central America—the heat, the humidity the gritty streets, the tropical flora. The oppressive sun of the morning and early afternoon gives way to torrential downpours nearly every afternoon from May to October, flooding the streets and effectively stopping all action in the city for a couple of hours each day.² Dry, fresh evenings follow the rains and hundreds of people swarm to the city’s parks, enjoying street food, street performers and marimba. A walk through the city center brings the visitor through crowded streets lined by *casas de empeño*, hardware stores, Chinese food restaurants—a vestige of the sizable Chinese migration to the city, and the fact that Chinese food is considered by many to be Tapachula’s *comida típica*. Marimba can be heard everywhere, at any time in the city. Marimba groups carry their instruments through the streets stopping in front of businesses and even residences to play for passersby in exchange for a few pesos. Cars driving by blare the latest reggaeton or *norteña* hit, making for an interesting juxtaposition of new and traditional music. The new and old not only mix through music, however. The historic wooden houses of the late 19th and early 20th century can exist next to more regal, neoclassical structures, adobe houses giving way to modest modern concrete structures, to the power-laden modernist grandeur of the city’s coffee and merchant elite class.

The city is home to two main market places, each extending west of the city center to the Coatán River that runs through the city. Though these markets are officially

² I arrived for the first time to Tapachula during one of these tropical downpours. The taxi driver assured me that the severe flooding with rushing water that seemed to affect every street in the city was nothing compared to what he experienced as a child. According to him, the streets would be so inundated that they would fill with fish.

in two distinct locations, the overflow of merchants and vendors sprawls across a single section of the city, so as to create a large commercial area that seems indistinguishable to a visitor. The markets brim with seafood vendors, spilling into the streets where there is always insufficient protection from the hot sun. Away from the lingering odors of fresh fish, tropical flowers and fruits are sold, along with practically anything else a household requires. Many of the vendors selling fruit and vegetables arrive from Guatemala daily and the other Central Americans might be found working in stalls selling meat, produce and clothing. The malls with big-box store anchors located on the periphery of the city are becoming more important, but the marketplace is still the most popular place in the city to do shopping. On any day of the week at Wal-Mart, Sam's Club or even the large chain grocery stores like Chedraui, trucks and cars with license plates from Guatemala are prominent in the store parking lots.

Another clear sign of the city's location on the border and its importance as a place of passage for migrants and merchants are the hotels of different sizes that seem to be ubiquitous throughout the city. Small hotels that provide rooms for transmigrants and Central American vendors, and other visitors of few means dot the market area. Other mid-size self-proclaimed "family" hotels cater to the middle class throughout the city-center, and the new Holiday Inn, or the Best Western, outside the city center attract upper middle class domestic travelers.

Symbolic markers of the immigrant presence in Tapachula are ubiquitous and it seems that immigrants' own places in the city reflect patterns of both dispersal and concentration. For example, transmigrants and temporary laborer women are

concentrated within the main park on Sundays or near the shelters or *albergues*. Central American permanent immigrants, however, do not seem to cluster in immigrant enclaves as in the patterns that can be observed in the United States or Europe; immigrant families reside in neighborhoods alongside Mexican families. However, immigrants and their families tend to live in the urban periphery and the peri-urban neighborhoods of Tapachula. These are largely marginal neighborhoods, generally with beginnings as informal settlements that have been slowly incorporated into the city infrastructure. In sum, immigrants and their influences materialize throughout Tapachula, making it truly both a city of the borderlands as well as a city of immigration.

Chiapas: Major Cities and in Relation to Mexico



Compiled by Lindsey Carte, December 10, 2009. Source: INE GI. Projection: North America Lambert Conformal Conic

Figure 1.1: Chiapas: Major Cities and in Relation to Mexico

Feminist Political Geographies of the State, Citizenship and Migration

By unpacking the complex relationships between Central American immigrant women and low- to mid-level officials at the Mexico-Guatemala border, this dissertation seeks to illuminate the ways in which the Mexican state enacts its power to govern immigrant mobility in a space that is at once a transnational and marginalized borderland (see Chapter 3 for more discussion). In so doing, it inherently raises questions about the nature of state power, how the neoliberal state, in particular, employs power, the scales and spaces at which this power is enacted and embodied, and the impacts this exercise has on both immigrants and officials themselves. I conceptualize the meanings of officials' and immigrant women's interactions in Tapachula drawing on work in Feminist Political Geography and Anthropology that theorizes the state and state power, citizenship and international migration. The threads that link these theoretical approaches are my feminist framing, which is predicated on situated understandings of the state (Haraway, 1988; Dowler 2001; Hyndman, 2001; Dixon & Marston, 2011), as well as an engagement with post-structural theory, grounded in Foucault's (1991) work on governmentality and other scholarship on neoliberal globalization and governmentality. I briefly describe my theoretical framework below, beginning with a discussion of a conceptualization of the neoliberal state, its power, and how arguments about the spatialization of this state benefit from an intersection with theory in feminist geopolitics. I then discuss how these bodies of literature conceive citizenship and belonging and finish by touching on my contributions to migration studies in geography. I further

advance my specific theoretical arguments, as relevant to the analysis of the specific empirical findings, in each of the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

Questions surrounding the importance and role of the nation-state in the face of neoliberal globalization have led to considerable debate on the importance of this entity. Neoliberalism, albeit adopted variably and topographically (Brenner, Peck & Theodore, 2010; Martin, 2005), imposes a withdrawal of the state from the regulation of economic markets, cuts in social programs, and emphasizes “free” trade and increasing economic integration among countries. Neoliberal globalization then, describes this resurgence of liberal economic policy with the contemporary moment in which distance and time have been rendered less relevant with the emergence of new communications and transportation technologies. This apparently shrinking world, some have argued, has at once furnished the conditions for the deployment of neoliberalism and necessitated new forms of governance (Trouillot, 2001). The so-called “roll back” of the state characteristic of neoliberalism, does not necessarily suggest its complete withdrawal, but rather the transfer or shift of power and responsibility to other actors or entities, such as individuals, corporations or non-profit organizations (Peck & Tickell, 2002).

Has the state been reconfigured in the face of globalization? If so, how? My conceptualization of the state draws on work from scholars who posit these changes as part of new ways the state is spatialized in response to this phenomenon (Brenner, 1999; Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Trouillot, 2001). Over ten years ago, Ferguson and Gupta (2002) contended that the spatial characteristics of the neoliberal state had not been given sufficient attention and as a result scholars were overlooking important opportunities to

qualify its strategies for the implementation of its power. The authors argued that the state manifests itself strategically through specific spatial properties, and as a result of this spatial representation, states establish and reinforce their authority and legitimacy. Thus, through its spatialization, the state gains and wields power. Importantly, this spatialization, according to Ferguson and Gupta, unfolds in mundane and minute ways, but is also shaped by transnational forces resulting from neoliberalism. Specifically, Ferguson and Gupta describe power through the spatial concepts of “verticality”— the idea that the state situates itself as superior to and “above civil society, community and family” indicating that the state functions in a top-down manner; and “encompassment,” which suggests that the state is “located within an ever widening series of circles that begins with family and local community and ends with the system of nation-states” (p. 982). Thus, the images deployed by the state depict an entity that sits above social and spatial forms and simultaneously contains them. According to the authors, this spatialization is evident in the routines and mundane acts of bureaucracy and its everyday practices, and in fact these everyday operations are how the state is spatialized. Reflecting on this conceptualization of the state in the moment of globalization, the authors note that transnational connections—such as international non-governmental organizations, social movements or supra-national organizations of governance, for example—challenge this “vertical encompassment of the local” and this authority. Ferguson and Gupta argue for a reconsideration of these metaphors when we consider the impacts of globalization.

Neoliberal governmentality and transnational governmentality, as laid out by Ferguson and Gupta (2002) and other authors, provide helpful backdrops for the conceptualization of new spatializations of the state (MacLeavey & Harrison, 2010). States are diffuse, dispersed and imagined and constructed at multiple scales. Neoliberal globalization reconfigures the way the state governs and is embodied spatially. Scholars point out that one of the key sites where these spatial (re)configurations unfold is in international borderlands and in the governance of transnational migrants (Mountz, 2004, 2011; Varsanyi, 2008b). Indeed, the policing of mobile bodies and territory is seen as key to the protection of state sovereignty.

One of the hallmarks of globalization is the unprecedented movement of people and goods across space. It has been argued that the transnational migration of people from the Global South to the Global North has been encouraged by neoliberal policy, which causes economic restructuring that can exacerbate inequality (Delgado-Wise, 2004). One of the more important sites at which the nation-state exerts its sovereign power over its territory is at its borders. At the border, the state regulates the entrance and exit of people, restricting the entrance of undesirable others. In the age of neoliberal governmentality, the regulation of borders has shifted—immigration enforcement is no longer limited to just defending the physical border. It is located in the interior, as exemplified in the extension of border patrol sometimes hundreds of miles away from the actual border (Coleman, 2007); on islands, or in airports (Mountz, 2011); or in cities, suburbs and rural areas where the local governments implement restrictive laws targeting undocumented immigrants (Varsanyi, 2008a). Border control in the age of neoliberal

governmentality has shifted to include more mundane, minute and dispersed techniques incorporating technological advances (i.e. biometrics, the use of drones and heat sensing technologies) at diverse scales (Sparke, 2006).

Drawing on Ferguson and Gupta's (2002) idea of transnational governance and building on theories of neoliberal governmentality, I construct my argument on how the Mexican state governs its borderlands. I argue that new Mexican immigration policies are at once constructed under international pressure from human rights activists to ease the humanitarian crisis, and also under geopolitical pressure from the U.S. to secure and surveil its Southern Border, themes I will discuss further in Chapters 2 and 3. Ferguson and Gupta advocate considering how transnational NGOs, and supranational organizations and grassroots organizations impact governmentality. In this research, I build on this by examining the spatial practices of states and their interplay in transnational border spaces and with transnational migrants.

I rely on Foucault's conceptualization of power to guide my discussion of how the contemporary state governs population. To Foucault, power is deployed through everyday, diffuse and dispersed techniques that condition subjects to normalize expectations and behaviors. According to Ettliger (2011), "Governance, then, is not about individuals in positions of power who exert direct, sovereign, and coercive control over a territory but rather it is that norms of population are unconsciously produced and reproduced by citizen-subjects, thereby making governance at a distance possible" (p. 538). Power is constantly circulating, "And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in a position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this

power” (Foucault, 1980: p. 98, cited in Sharp et al., 2000, p.1). Thus, this definition opposes hierarchical accounts of power that pit a dominator against the dominated, instead favoring dispersed and ubiquitous descriptions.

Governmentality is inherently spatial, and the techniques of power (and in particular, Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power) are mobilized through and embodied in space. For example, Foucault’s famous metaphor of the panopticon, a structure designed to give the illusion of constant surveillance, causes prisoners to self-discipline (Foucault, 1977). The behavior-changing force of space thus renders physical force unnecessary. Thus disciplinary spaces are important to governing population. Sharp, Routledge, Philo and Ronan (2000), drawing on Foucault, conceive power as a “thoroughly entangled bundle of exchanges dispersed ‘everywhere’ through society, as comprising a ‘micro-physical’ or ‘capillary’ geography of linkages, intensities and frictions, as thereby not being straightforwardly in the ‘service’ of any one set of peoples, institutions or movements” (p. 20). Thus, power is not top-down, or centered in one place—instead it is a product of non-binary relationships metaphorically and materially existing and assembling across space.

Mountz (2004) contends, “Rather than a coherent, hidden strategy awaiting discovery, states are comprised of persons with distinct objectives and perspectives, often struggling amongst themselves over state projects” (p. 327-328). If the state is heterogeneous and multi-scalar then its power is deployed at multiple scales. A feminist geopolitical project argues for the embodiment of the state and its power as this allows for an understanding of the state’s mundane practices, which often go unseen and involve

groups such as women, people of color, people from the Global South and other groups that are generally excluded from our analyses of the state. Feminist geopolitics branches from critical geopolitics, which has the objective of examining “the geographical assumptions, designations and understandings that enter into the making of world politics” (Agnew 2003, 5). Drawing on feminist theory that posits that the “personal is political” practitioners of feminist geopolitics argue that global political, economic and social processes do not just play out at the macro-scale but also in “localized, everyday, embodied ways” (Hyndman 2001, p. 212). For example, research in feminist geopolitics shifts scale to the everyday to view war through the intimate lens of body counts during the attacks on the United States on September 11th, 2001 or in Iraq (Hyndman, 2003; Hyndman, 2007); how globalized narratives of fear are experienced by youth in their daily lives (Pain, 2009); how gendered international aid and development discourse plays out in the relationships between aid workers and recipients on the ground (Fluri, 2011); how geopolitical conflict marks the body and sexuality (Smith, 2011); and the making of ‘intimate’ boundaries (Sundberg, 2008). Through their feminist geopolitical analytic, these studies demonstrate how power relations at diverse scales are interconnected.

In this project, I draw on feminist geopolitics to locate the state at the everyday scale and in so doing attempt to illuminate the material, entangled relationships between immigrant women and the state. Thus, I contribute to literature on feminist geopolitics by furthering accounts of the everyday material spatialities of the state as consisting of truly entangled, multi-scalar power relationships (Sharp et al. 2000). Part of the feminist geopolitical project is also producing accountable, situated accounts of the state in

people's lives (Dowler & Sharp, 2001; Hyndman, 2004). As such, I employ the concept of citizenship as a lens through which we may view the impacts of these experiences in immigrant women's everyday lives. Here, I use the term citizenship to describe individuals' experiences of their relationships to the nation-state. I examine two interlinked forms of citizenship, including legal citizenship—or direct membership in a nation-state—and social citizenship, which refers to access to the social benefits and goods of the state, sometimes conditional upon legal membership in the polity, but not in all cases. I also include the sense of “belonging” in my conceptualization of citizenship, which refers to a person's own feelings of comfort in a place. If power is productive in that it generates new configurations, relationships and senses of being, then what kinds of subjects does it produce? I draw on a bottom-up and embodied view of citizenship elaborated by geographers in order to understand Central American immigrant women's own imaginations of citizenship (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2003; Staeheli, Ehrkamp, Leitner & Nagel, 2012). This furthers my discussion of the nature of the everyday state by taking into account how state power circulates in the relationships between women and the state.

As this dissertation deals with major questions about how the neoliberal state regulates migration and immigrants at its borders, it also draws on and contributes to migration studies literature in geography and beyond. I position my study within the literature on gender and migration, not only because of my focus on women migrants, but also because this literature reflects the feminist underpinnings of this project in that it seeks to uncover uneven geographies of power. Continuing with the theme of embodiment, gender and migration studies also provide a frame for understanding how

the state regulates particular migrant bodies. To quote Hyndman (2001), one important site of analysis for feminist geopolitics is that of human mobility, because it “not only provides a basis to analyze power relations across space and among groups with lesser or greater social or economic status, but controlling mobility can also be the basis of political intervention against those who have abused power” (p. 217). Indeed, transnational migration is a key issue in world politics, and migrants and refugees must be taken into account at all levels of macro-scale decisions, including economic restructuring, development, war and conflict, for example. Simply put, migration, in many cases, is spurred by international relations as people begin to bear the brunt of negative consequences of uneven development, structural adjustment and other geopolitical conflict.

Feminist studies of migration in geography and the social sciences have sought to not only establish the importance of the presence of women in the streams of international migrants, but they have also brought to the fore the uneven power dynamics that are at the roots of migration (Silvey, 2004), changing gender relations (Lawson, 1998; Boehm, 2008); the experiential nature of citizenship (Leitner & Ehrkamp, 2006); embodied labor and care work (Dyer, McDowell & Batnitzky, 2008); and the social construction of socio-spatial borders that impact immigrants’ experience in place (Deeb-Sossa & Bickham Mendez, 2008). Despite the growing body of literature on gender and migration in geography, we still know little about how immigrants, and especially women, interface with state actors in their daily lives and the impacts of these interactions on women’s practices and experiences of both social and legal citizenship.

Through this ethnography I attempt to fill this lacuna by detailing Central American women immigrants' experiences with the state in their daily lives, and the impact this has on their experience of citizenship and belonging.

The Importance of Central American Migration to Mexico

In a more tangible sense, the questions guiding this research urgently need to be addressed for two main reasons including: 1) The continued importance of South-South migration and its challenges for policy implementation; and 2) The current existence of a human rights crisis concerning Central American immigrants in Mexico. The following section addresses these concerns.

South-South Migration

South-South migration, or the migration of people from countries located in the “Global South” to other developing countries, rather than countries in the “Global North,” is almost as common as a South-North movements, however far less researched (Hujo & Piper, 2007; Ratha & Shaw, 2007; United Nations, 2012). In 2010, there were 73 million migrants from developing countries who migrated to reside in other developing countries or roughly one-third (34%) of all migrants, while South-North migrants numbered 74 million people (35%) (United Nations, 2012). These estimates confirm the importance of South-South migration to world migration systems, however, scholars emphasize that the numbers are probably underestimations due to the fact that undocumented migration is undercounted (Ratha and Shaw, 2007). According to Ratha

and Shaw (2007), migrants to the South who are from the South, migrate due to proximity, strength in networks, for a small increase in income, seasonal labor migration or natural disasters, among other reasons.

Though the majority of Central American emigrants still opt to settle in the Global North, and particularly the U.S. (an estimated 92%), new streams of migration, before “inconceivable,” are occurring more frequently, such as Hondurans and Guatemalans who migrate to El Salvador (Mazza & Sohnen, 2010, p.1). Other flows are more well-established, including Nicaraguans to Costa Rica, Bolivians and Paraguayans to Argentina or Peruvians to Chile (Gindling, 2009; Parrado & Cerrutti, 2003; Sabogal & Nuñez, 2010). While there has been a decline in migration of Latin Americans to the United States, due to the economic crisis beginning in 2008, Mazza & Sohnen (2010) comment that no evidence suggests a decrease in Latin American intra-regional flows. Another important detail is that a growing number of these migrants are unaccompanied minors who are often met with detention in receiving societies, including in Mexico and the United States, due to the weak institutional measures in place to deal with this growing migrant population (Martin, 2011).

Regardless of the magnitude of its flows, Latin American intraregional migration is important and remains under-researched. As violence, economic crisis and environmental disasters continue to displace people in the region, it seems that emigration will continue to be an important issue in Latin American, and especially Central American countries. Indeed, the creation and maintenance of migrant networks linking immigrants from Central America to southern Mexico and especially Tapachula

could encourage further migration to the region, as this is one of the most important factors promoting transnational migration. Southern Mexico could become a more important site of settlement for Central Americans as networks strengthen and as migration to the United States continues to be costly and dangerous due to increased restriction on the United States' border with Mexico.³ The passage of tough, often discriminatory local ordinances restricting immigrants' in several states in the U.S., including Arizona, Nebraska and Alabama arguably make the United States a less welcoming-place for immigrants. The proliferation of large-scale, drug-related violence that increasingly threatens transmigrants crossing through Mexican territory is another factor that could lead migrants to chose to remain in Southern Mexico. According to the migrants interviewed in this study, Southern Mexico offers a relatively safe and comparatively inexpensive place to settle in comparison to home countries.

Intraregional migration in South and Central America poses several specific challenges. Among them are questions pertaining to policy creation surrounding migration management and integration. Well-documented cases of petty corruption, state-sponsored violence and weak institutions pose major roadblocks to the effective implementation of policies that protect migrants, where they exist (Rose-Ackerman, 1978; Lederman et al., 2005). How will emerging economic and political world-powers in the region—countries like Brazil, Mexico and Colombia—continue to deal with inflows of immigrants? Much of the discussion on migration regulation has addressed

³ Upon writing, the U.S. government was negotiating an immigration reform bill, S.744, the “Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Modernization Act” that would invest billions more in border security at the country's limit with Mexico.

how core countries like the U.S. or EU handle international migration. Just as feminist geopolitics encourages a jump from the international scale to the local (or macro to micro), I argue that it is also necessary to shift our discussions of migration regulation from so-called “developed” countries to emerging economic and geopolitical powers.

Hujo and Piper (2007) point out that social policy—which is concerned with protecting rights, equality, democratization—is rarely considered in migration policy formulation, a deficiency that should be remedied, they argue, because of the advantages social programs can bring to all residents of a country, including migrants by improving overall wellbeing and democracy. Through ethnography, this dissertation presents a case-study that illustrates how social policies created to address migration fall short because of poor implementation practices. Bureaucracies that implement these policies are embodied institutions made up of individual workers of diverse experiences and beliefs, and thus deserving of study to uncover how they become empowered to make implementation decisions. This research also presents detailed accounts of the experiences of immigrants who have been denied access to social policy, and in doing so provides evidence supporting the vital importance of crafting and enforcing policy, while simultaneously providing insights for policy creation.

Humanitarian Crisis in Mexico

In August 2010, in the northern border state of Tamaulipas, 72 Central and South American transmigrants journeying to the U.S. were found massacred by a notorious organized crime group. Soon after, Mexico’s National Commission on Human Rights

(CNDH), reported that 11,333 migrants had been kidnapped in Mexico in 2010 alone, and that local, state and federal authorities were likely complicit in these mass kidnappings (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos [CNDH], 2011) . These acts of extreme violence have produced a climate of crisis marked by fear, stress and mistrust for both Central American immigrants and the Mexican public in general. The current situation has caused outrage in Mexico and in the international community, resulting in the passage of the new Ley de Migración (Migration Law) in Mexico in 2010. One of the first laws of its kind in this country, it has been recognized for its affirmation of immigrants' human rights and for providing a pathway to legal residency and citizenship for the undocumented.

However, as horrific, visible acts of violence and corruption dominate the national debate on immigration on the grand scale, in daily life more mundane abuses color immigrant experience and belonging. This less-obvious form of violence takes place at the micro-scale, and is carried out in the daily actions of bureaucrats, teachers, nurses, and other low- to mid-level officials who are charged with delivering services and helping immigrants access the rights guaranteed to them by law. By using a qualitative approach, my project seeks to understand how the seemingly minute actions of an official, such as giving misinformation, making immigrants unnecessarily wait for services, sexual harassment and other actions have strong reverberations within immigrants' lives and curtail their access to fundamental rights, in addition to reinforcing the climate of adversity and discrimination. These actions invoke the physical, emotional and material consequences of severe stress. Central American women in particular often

bear the brunt of negative interactions with low- to mid-level officials, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation, domestic violence, and blocking their (and their children's) access to legal identity and human services. Because of this, my project focuses especially on Central American women and their experiences with low-level state actors.

Dissertation Structure

The following chapters will delve into the question of how low- to mid-level officials embody the state in their everyday interactions with Central American immigrants, the impacts of these interactions on Central American women's lives and broader institutional influences on their actions. In Chapter 2, I present the research design and methodology that form part of the ethnographic and participatory approach. Chapter 3 will provide a more detailed background on the issue of Central American immigration in Mexico, the country's "pro-migrant" policies, and describe the state agencies in which this research took place. In this chapter I also outline the typical migration and integration processes of two immigrant women in order to provide context for later discussions of immigrant experiences. Next, Chapter 4 examines low- to mid-level officials' interactions with Central American women as they attempt to access services. Drawing mainly from interviews and participatory workshops with women, as well as my fieldnotes, I detail how officials embody the state in their interactions with immigrant women, through often abusive actions, arguing that minute, mundane actions or microaggressions form a type of "everyday restriction." In Chapter 5, I detail how women's experiences with everyday restriction has broad consequences in their everyday lives that serve to limit their access to citizenship rights to which they are legally entitled,

and how this leads to poverty and increased vulnerability to abuse. Departing from an embodied conceptualization of citizenship that relies on *centroamericanas*⁴ own perceptions of belonging, I contend that the state-based forms of citizenship continue to be vital, and highly desired among Central American women. Chapter 6 begins to incorporate the perspectives and voices of low- to mid-level officials in order to construct a context within which to understand their actions and experiences in serving the Central American community. In outlining their perceptions of Central American migration, immigrants themselves and new immigration policies that they are charged with enforcing, I demonstrate that officials perpetuate negative stereotypes that criminalize and sexualize immigrants, effectively constructing socio-spatial borders that determine who is deserving and undeserving of receiving social goods and services. Later, Chapter 7 outlines the institutional context within which officials carry out their day-to-day jobs and thus implement their power. In this section, I argue that officials' actions are part of larger institutional realities including material and human resource scarcity and stress, which make their jobs difficult and could impact their service provision. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes this dissertation, summarizing major findings, arguments and theoretical contributions and providing suggestions for policy improvement.

⁴ Spanish for "Central American women."

Chapter 2:

Research Design and Methods

Introduction to Study Population and Research Site

I came to this research as a university student traveling in the state of Chiapas. During this time, I visited ruins located on the Mexico-Guatemala border, accessible only by boat. The river was the border, and our boatman explained to us that on the way he would be crossing to the Guatemalan side to pick up a family and drop them off on the other bank of the river—in Mexico. He explained that the border was like this—people in the two places were connected: community members moved back and forth as a simple matter of life. My own experience with borders until that point was of moving back and forth between New York and Montreal—for me, borders symbolized order, control and passage for people with the right papers. The openness at the Mexico-Guatemala border surprised me, and I wanted to understand more; so, I began to do research.

I entered graduate school that fall of 2006 where I began to unpack my questions surrounding international migration, globalization and the growing trend of securitization of international migration policy. The same “open” border I had visited a few years before was being described as a porous threat to U.S. national security—the first stop for drugs and people headed for Mexico’s northern border. I visited Tapachula in 2007 in order to begin to understand Central American migration to this city for my master’s thesis work, and to interview women and men from Central America. Their interviews almost always revolved around their experiences struggling to regularize their

immigration status and/or to obtain birth certificates for their Mexican-born children, and how their children were being barred access to local schools.

I chose to work in Tapachula because as the major city along the southern border, I felt that it would provide an ideal backdrop for interfacing with the population of Central American immigrants living there. By the time I began my initial research for this project in 2007, transit migration through Tapachula had seemed to decline due to the destruction of the train route that crossed through the city. People that were settling in Tapachula were there for work opportunities and had stayed usually because of the city's relative security, higher quality of life or because they had established families there. After my initial research and a few subsequent stays in Tapachula between 2008 and 2010, I decided that I would study immigrant women's—and not men's, or both men and women's—experiences with the state, for two primary reasons. First, because of concerns for my own safety, conducting participant observation or seeking out and doing interviews past four or five in the afternoon in the neighborhoods was impractical. This was also the time when men would be most accessible to me, as they returned home from work. Women in this study also worked, but in general, their work schedules were more flexible as many still maintained their traditional responsibility of taking care of their children. I could find the women at their homes at least during part of the day, and arrange to spend time with them or interview them at their convenience. Second, after my initial research and discussions with local academics and NGO workers, it seemed that women were bearing the brunt of negative interactions with government officials—and we wondered collectively whether this was because a) there were more women

immigrants in Tapachula—which could be feasible because Central American migration flows are highly “feminized” and because the journey to the U.S. becomes more risky for women, influencing decisions to settle permanently in Mexico; b) women, because of their more flexible schedules tend to be in charge of the time-consuming process of getting documents or securing public services; or c) women in general were more concerned with and/or empowered to seek out services than men were.

Such questions, along with my personal interest in this project stem from these formative experiences in Tapachula and my own personal political commitments to social justice, and in particular immigrant rights. I view Central American immigration to Tapachula, and to Mexico in general as inseparable from flows of Latin American migration to the United States—they are all inevitably produced by conflicts fueled by U.S. involvement and economic restructuring resulting from reforms implemented at the behest of the U.S. In the special case of immigration to Mexico, the securitization of the U.S. border has made crossing that border expensive and unsafe, a fact that has also impacted how transmigrants, people crossing through one country to get to another, move through Mexico in increasingly dangerous environments. In effect, as a Mexican colleague has found, many of the Central American immigrants residing in Tapachula had initially planned to reach the United States; however, the hardships of the journey prevented them from doing so (Fernández Casanueva, 2012).

“De la Gran Manzana al Gran Mango”: A Note on Positionality

About one month into my fieldwork, I attended a party in celebration of a close friend's birthday. Our regular group of friends was in attendance: the mix of Italian biologists, Mexican human rights workers, academics and *migrantólogos*, plus a handful of native-born *tapachultecos* of various professions. Over the second round of tacos, I began to chat with a school psychologist born and raised in a town close to Tapachula. He asked where I was from and I replied, *del estado de Nueva York*, as I usually did in order to differentiate myself from New Yorkers from the “city.” Missing the subtle differentiation, nevertheless, he cleverly replied “*Ah entonces, ¿fuiste de la gran manzana al gran mango!*” (Oh, so you went from the Big Apple to the Big Mango). This joke became standard in our group, and soon, according to friends, I was no longer living in Tapachula, but in *Tapayork*.

I mention this lighthearted anecdote from my fieldwork because it provides a glimpse into how my presence, and my difference as a white, single, North American woman was received in Tapachula. Despite my Spanish language skills and my experience in the region, I could not divorce myself from my identity as a *gringa* from New York. Recognition of this identity is important in that feminist geographers contend that examining one's positionality—or the unique standpoint, perspectives and experiences that inform our positions as researchers—is key to the production of situated knowledges (Rose, 1997). The practice of reflexivity, through which we consider critically our positionality and how that affects our research, upsets the positivist view of the all-knowing researcher as an objective observer of “research subjects.” The false

preservation of this “view from nowhere,” according to Donna Haraway (1988), is a “god trick”—it is a myth that we can achieve positivist objectivity because we can never realistically separate our social location from our research (p. 581). Indeed, I consider my reflexivity is necessary in order to parse out the uneven power relationships that are inherent in conducting research.

Throughout this dissertation, I attempt to integrate reflexivity through many of the fieldnotes that I rely on to provide examples of my observations. In some of these fieldnotes, my own emotions, thoughts and perceptions will be apparent to the reader. This is an intentional practice of my positioning myself in relation to my work. The key elements of my positionality that I feel were particularly important during my fieldwork and writing of this project are based on my being from the United States, and a middle-class single woman. This part of “who I am” both hindered and facilitated my research. Throughout the fieldwork I found myself constantly questioning my role; feeling like an outsider, I wondered whether or not I should be doing the research, since my own personal ties to the region were so few. I asked myself often if as an outsider, I could fairly present the stories I was being told, without feeling as though I was extracting them.

As a white woman from the U.S., I clearly did not socially, culturally or ethnically “belong” in Tapachula, and especially not in some of the neighborhoods where I conducted my research—where taller, lighter skinned, single women would not commonly be seen. I also almost exclusively used Tapachula’s public transportation system of *combis* or little passenger vans. At the beginning, I experienced a bit of

discomfort because of my appearance: my difference attracted attention from women and men alike, people stared sometimes and I also experienced verbal sexual harassment when I would walk alone. I remedied much of this discomfort by conducting my research during the mornings when most men were working, and also by hiring a local research assistant—a decision on which I will comment in detail below—who accompanied me to nearly all interviews and neighborhood/household visits that I conducted. My difference made me feel self-conscious, which sometimes translated into nervousness, and errors in my Spanish when asking for interviews and in other household visits.

While hyperaware of my difference, I was also sensitive as to how this impacted people's perceptions of me, and whether or not they would want to speak with me or participate in my study. On several occasions, people thought that my research assistant, Rosy, and I were religious missionaries because we roamed the neighborhoods together and often went door-to-door to talk to people. In the neighborhoods and with immigrant participants, most everyone thought it was very strange that as a 26/27 year-old-woman, I was unmarried with no children. This could have made women skeptical of me, and less willing to share important details. Or, this could have had the opposite effect, depending on the person and the context for our meeting.

However, I found that being an outsider did render certain advantages. Overall, people were interested in and curious about me and my project. They asked me questions about where I was from, why I was in Mexico, and took interest in my culture. They offered me food and beverages wherever I went. People were open and friendly. I believe that that my being an outsider who was genuinely interested in immigrant women's

experiences and struggles, helped to remove me from the local context of discrimination. As such, participants viewed me more as an ally and were able to be more open in sharing their stories with me. However, this did have its drawbacks. For example, rumors circulated that I was talking to immigrant women in order to help them obtain their regularization documents or other benefits for their families. I perceived rumors like this to be threatening to my credibility as a researcher and worried quite a bit about whether or not, in some way, I could have given participants false hopes about the benefits of working with me on my study. Yet, I determined that there was little I could do to control gossip beyond being extremely clear with each person to whom I spoke about the purpose of my study and the fact that there were no immediate benefits to participating. Later, I determined that rumors may have had their origins with political leadership from the neighborhoods in which I worked. Out of respect and to facilitate my entry into the community, I would ask permission from community leaders before implementing my study in any neighborhood or *colonia*. It came to my attention that *colonia* presidents in two neighborhoods had told residents that I could help them with their papers. In a sense, my study had been co-opted by local leadership as a way for presidents to deliver a promise of a good to their constituents.

With low- to mid-level officials, I also found that my being an outsider was an advantage. While in one office in particular it was quite difficult to obtain interviews—potential participants refused interviews, despite my close relationships with them—in most agencies, people readily cooperated. In this sense, I felt that my positionality as a U.S. citizen empowered me, and sometimes unfairly so. For example, I was often invited

by low- to mid-level officials to the front of long lines of people waiting for services. In other cases, my credentials as a researcher from The University of Texas helped me to push through barriers and obtain information that may not have been as easily accessible to others. I do not condone this; rather, I feel that it is important to openly declare that this was a factor in facilitating my interviews. The following fieldnote speaks to this:

Fieldnote 4/26/2012

We walked up to the guard and asked who we could speak with to get general information on Social Welfare Program X. We first asked for the director, but he was quick to tell us that the director was not in. Knowing better, I asked, “then is there anyone here that can give me any information on the program, like an assistant? Sub-director, anyone?” By this time Rosy wasn’t talking anymore because unfortunately, only my “gringa power” opens the doors in these situations. When we go to offices, she recommended that I do the talking. Being Mexican does not help get into these offices, but being from the U.S. does. So after insisting, the security guard allowed us to talk to the receptionist.

Because of my positionality, I decided to work with a research assistant in order to facilitate my entrance into the community, understand and learn about important cultural cues, collaboratively discuss strategies for recruiting interviewees and to have general support in the day-to-day tasks of the research. I also felt that working with a partner was important for my personal safety. Though Tapachula is relatively secure, the urban periphery is less so and my local contacts encouraged me to avoid visiting alone the neighborhoods where I conducted my research. My research assistant, Rosa Icela “Rosy” Cigarroa de Aquino, was recommended to me by contacts at a local university. A mother of two in her late thirties, Rosy had spent the last twenty years in Tapachula raising her family and was finishing her last semesters at the university as a student in pedagogy. Her involvement with a local church that conducted many outreach projects,

along with her excellent communication skills and knowledge of the city all greatly facilitated this project. In addition, Rosy's insightfulness and training in critical pedagogy made her a keen listener and communicator. During interviews Rosy would intervene to clarify or explain further questions or concepts that I had not communicated clearly enough. Since interviews were lengthy, and largely consisted of open-ended questions, if my lead-ins were not eliciting the detailed responses that we desired, Rosy could intervene. She also took notes during the interviews, which we later referred to during debriefings that would take place usually as we walked home. After a day in the field, our debriefings helped us both to reflect on the day's events and important themes we discussed, to formulate plans for the next day, and talk about our own impressions, thoughts and feelings.

Research Design

Because this study sought to understand the complex, nuanced and everyday experiences of various actors, it required a multi-method, ethnographic research design. Methods such as semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and participatory workshops allowed me to explore both the experiences of Central American women immigrants as they seek to access citizenship rights, as well as the experiences of low- to mid-level officials as they serve these women. I conducted open and semi-structured interviews with low- to mid-level officials, Central American immigrant women, and other local key informants. I used participant observation in a local branch of a public-service providing agency and with immigrant women in their neighborhoods and on

several occasions as they sought services; and I held participatory workshops with groups of immigrant women. Using these strategies allowed me to access women's and officials' situated knowledges and practices at various levels, including the individual, household and community scales, while also providing an intimate view of the everyday politics that circulate to create these knowledges. The remainder of this chapter details my use of these methods. First, I give a description and justification of my overarching ethnographic approach, which draws on political ethnography, discussing its two major components: participant observation and interviews. Then, I explain how I incorporated participatory methods into this research, focusing specifically on the collaborative design of workshops with *centroamericanas* and a role-playing exercise we crafted.

Political Ethnography: "Politics under a Microscope"

The use of ethnography as a mode of inquiry has grown across the discipline of Geography, and particularly in Feminist Geography, Migration Studies, and Political and Cultural Ecology (Cosgrove & Jackson, 1987; Herbert, 2000). Political geographers tend to favor discourse analysis as the dominant mode of inquiry, and as Megoran (2006) argues, this can produce work that misses everyday political processes. Cognizant of this, geographers doing feminist geopolitics have called for the use of ethnographic methods and other qualitative methods to understand the everyday state and power processes (Dowler & Sharp, 2001). Indeed, these methods are most appropriate for gathering in-depth knowledge on the generally hard to detect *micro-scale* of politics as they are built upon prolonged and close contact with people in their everyday lives.

Mountz (2004), in her study of bureaucrats in the Canadian immigration agency, embodied the state through an ethnography based on participant observation working alongside bureaucrats in order to understand the state's strategic spatialization in response to human smuggling. Similarly, Koopman (2011) embedded herself with peace accompaniers in Colombia as a strategy to understand how the relationships between activists and the people they accompany creates an alter-geopolitics on the ground; and Wendy Wolford's (2010) study of the Brazilian landless-workers movement, the MST, is another that uses ethnography to go inside the movement to understand the everyday, "banal geographies of organization and resistance" (p. 6). Despite these examples—and certainly there are others that I neglect to mention here—and the increased use of ethnographic methods, we have had few discussions as a sub-discipline about *doing* ethnography and what political geography can add to this discussion. Because of this, I find recent work on political and institutional ethnography in Sociology as particularly useful to inform my investigation of women's and low- to mid-level officials' daily encounters.

Javier Auyero (2006) calls political ethnography the study of "politics under a microscope," making this approach well-suited to the feminist project of scaling down to examine the everyday. Baiocchi and Connor (2008) create three categories that encompass political ethnography: 1) the study of political events, institutions or actors at the micro-level and as they unfold; 2) the study of the "routine encounters between people and those institutions"; and 3) events that are consequences of politics that are not readily associated with politics, which they term the "lived experience of the political" (p.

140). My work falls within all three categories as I am interested in both understanding people's (officials', immigrants') interaction with institutions and how these processes unfold on the ground in daily life, and also in how policies enacted—or not enacted—at the local scale influence immigrants' lives.

In the following sections I discuss the multiple research methods that I used in addressing the major questions that guided research and building my ethnography. These questions were: 1) What are low- to mid-level officials' everyday actions in implementing and interpreting policy?; 2) How do low- to mid-level officials support or contradict official immigration policies?; 3) What are the existing institutional norms and conditions that shape officials' actions?; 4) What are Central American immigrant women's experiences with low- to mid-level officials?; and 5) What are Central Americans' experiences of social and political citizenship as a result of their interactions with low- to mid-level officials?

Participant Observation

According to Megoran's (2006) content analysis of methodologies used by political geographers, he found that between 1996 and 2000 not one article published in *Geopolitics* used primary ethnographic data, and here "ethnographic" work usually indicated qualitative interviewing, and less so the classical anthropological method of participant observation. It is important to recognize that not all data are accessible through speaking directly with people, and that this is especially true when research centers on interactions between two distinct parties, due to the fact that each group will

have its own perceptions of its experience and its own situated knowledge. Understanding low- to mid-level officials daily experiences in serving immigrant populations, and immigrants' own everyday lives required my own participation and observation of these daily happenings. Participant observation, according to Bernard (2006), "involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives" and it "produces a kind of experiential knowledge that lets you talk convincingly, from the gut, about what it feels like to plant a garden in the high Andes or dance all night in a street rave in Seattle" (p. 342). Participant observation is foundational for ethnography and I engaged in observation activities in two ways. I conducted participant observation with officials as a worker in a local public service providing agency for six weeks; and also accompanied several immigrant women to office visits with officials and spent considerable time in the neighborhoods where I conducted the majority of my interviews. I walked through the neighborhoods to not only learn about the spaces and daily practices of the families that lived there, but also to form connections with families and as a result learn more about their everyday lives. I devoted mornings to visiting neighborhoods, and spent quite a bit of time listening, conversing and taking part in daily life.

I chose to conduct participant observation in a local immigrant-serving agency, hoping that as more of an insider, I would gain rich insights into the ways that low- to mid-level officials come into and employ their power. During the first months of research, I narrowed in on a branch of a state agency serving a high volume of immigrant clients. This state agency in particular is notorious in the immigrant and human rights

community for treating immigrants poorly; however, the branch I worked at in particular was considerably more highly regarded among participants. I do not name the agency here, out of respect for the privacy of the people with whom I worked. I was able to perform this participant observation after seeking permission from both the locally based official in charge, and from the director of the agency at the state-level in the capital city of Tuxtla Gutierrez. When permission was granted, I discussed the parameters of my involvement in day-to-day work with the local official. He allowed me to come to work as a *pasante*, an unpaid intern, in the afternoons, over six weeks.

During my time in the agency, my job was to assist the officials who had the most contact with people. I oriented clients and spoke with them about the requisites of certain processes, I helped to process clients, and I checked completed paperwork for errors. As an intern, I formed positive and friendly relationships with the staff, though oftentimes I felt that my presence in the office was strange to the general public. I did not deliver instructions in the same natural, quick and effortless way that seasoned workers did. I made grammatical mistakes. I visibly suffered from the extreme heat inside the office, while everyone else continued to look fresh without a drop of sweat to be seen. I did not use the same vocabulary, and I was extremely formal—avoiding the customary use of diminutives *mamita* or *papito*⁵ with clients—which is the ubiquitous trademark of any public official in Tapachula. However, whereas in other spaces people would have

⁵ *Mamita*, is the diminutive of *madre* or mother; *papito* is the diminutive of *padre*, or father. This would sound much like “sweetheart,” or “dear” would be used in English, in the same sort of context. However, *mamita* and *papito* are used very frequently, and by almost everyone in Tapachula and not everyone would consider it patronizing to be called *mamita* or *papito*.

openly conversed with me or asked me questions, curious about where I am from—here people just politely nodded and did not doubt me even as I may have patched together my sentences a bit differently from a native-born *tapachulteco*.

To record information gathered and pertinent observations, I occasionally took notes in a personal notebook during observation periods and then wrote longer journal entries at the end of each day. Taking short and occasional notes throughout the day helped me to remember key observations, without being conspicuous and raising questions with coworkers or people in the neighborhood. Later in the day, these notes would be transcribed and expanded upon.

Interviews with Central American Immigrants

I also employed in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Central American immigrant women, low- to mid-level officials and other key informants to inform my ethnography. Interviews were loosely structured in order to elicit longer narratives, histories and detailed accounts from participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, with the exception of two officials who preferred not to be recorded. Since interviews were undertaken with two rather distinct populations requiring diverse interview approaches, I describe each group separately.

I conducted in-depth, narrative-evoking interviews with Central American immigrants in order to understand their experiences with low- to mid-level officials in migrating, seeking out services and in other aspects of their everyday lives, as well as to gather information on the specific actions of officials; and to understand the impacts of

these actions and interactions on their everyday experiences of belonging and citizenship in Tapachula. Between 2010 and 2011, I recruited 25 women and one immigrant man. Interviewees were selected based on their willingness to speak with me and participate in an interview. In most cases, I had already come to know women through my direct and participant observations in the *colonias* where I conducted the majority of the research. Locating immigrant participants was challenging in the sense that there is no official information that indicates where immigrants live and work. Because of concerns with confidentiality, as well as our desire to speak with women in comfortable settings, we decided to recruit participants close to their homes. We also wanted to upset stereotypes about where immigrants typically worked, which meant avoiding recruiting participants in workplaces associated with migrants such as the markets, the main public park and bars. We also wished to spend longer periods of time with women and their neighbors, and this necessitated meeting them where they lived, on their own terms.

As such, with the help of my research assistant, we identified around ten possible *colonias* that were said to have a higher concentration of immigrant residents. Upon arriving in the *colonias* by local public transportation, we immediately located neighborhood leaders who served as our entry point into the immigrant community. We felt this was necessary due to the tight-knit nature of the *colonias* and out of respect for local norms. We briefed leaders about the project and asked permission to be present and seek out interviews. Usually community leaders would offer (we did not prompt them) to mention to immigrant neighbors that we were doing a study. This helped us to contact immigrant women. During these periods of direct and participant observation in the

colonias, I would often times make my presence known by speaking with people on the street and saying hello to women and families doing their morning chores on their patios. Generally, this would lead to longer conversations, and invitations to sit down and enjoy a *refresco* as we chatted. In all cases, from the beginning, I made it clear to the women with whom I spoke that I was doing research, that I would like to eventually do an interview with them, that they could decide if they wanted to participate at a later date and that we could schedule the interview at their convenience.

We conducted the majority of interviews with immigrants at their homes, usually seated outside on their patios. Interviews were structured around participants' descriptions of their "migration journey" and their encounters with low- to mid-level officials along the way, from the moment they left their sending countries to the moment they arrived in Tapachula. Then, we discussed encounters occurring in Tapachula surrounding key life events. Participants were free to elaborate in detail on their experiences. Most interviews lasted for at least two hours.

The women immigrants that I interviewed had all lived in Mexico for at least one year, with the majority of participants residing there for over five years, and all participants were between the ages of 25 and 50, with the exception of one woman who was in her late sixties. Most were from Honduras and Guatemala, while fewer were from El Salvador.

Interviews with Low- to Mid-Level Officials

I employed loosely-structured interviews to encourage low- to mid-level officials to share their narratives on their work experiences, perceptions of migrants and migration policy, their everyday duties, and actions and interactions with Central American immigrants, and in particular with immigrant women. I also used interviews to understand low- to mid-level officials' everyday work in implementing pro-migrant policies; how they received information on policies from higher levels of their institutions; and institutional norms.

Recruitment of low- to mid-level officials as interview participants required networking, patience and perseverance. I recruited participants from two local *registros civiles* (Office of Vital Records), two *Centros de Salud* (Health Centers), the local *Secretaria de Desarrollo Social y Humano* (Department of Social and Human Development), or SEDESOL, office where *Oportunidades* benefits were administered; the local office of the *Seguro Popular* (the federal public health insurance program), and the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* (National Institute of Migration), or the INM, which is the federal agency that regulates immigration. Because Central American women often mentioned discrimination in financial institutions and micro-lending, I also interviewed tellers in two local branches of national banking institutions and in one international (Mexican-based) micro-lending institution. Though not an official part of the state apparatus, access to credit and banking services is key in women's ability to enjoy citizenship rights, and women's main complaint was that banking services would not honor the validity of their FM2/FM3 visas or other forms of identification. I chose these

agencies based on preliminary research with immigrant women, human rights activists and other key informants in the local academic community. This preliminary work helped me to identify the areas and agencies that were most important in the daily lives of immigrant women. I interviewed approximately 25 officials.

As a matter of protocol and respect for local norms, I obtained permission from supervisors before I approached any of the officials that participated in this study, except for the tellers and micro-lender who I contacted through my social network in Tapachula, outside of their workspaces. With both immigrants and officials, I employed convenience and snowball sampling. I used my connections with officials to help obtain other interviews and I also obtained interviews by visiting each agency in which potential participants worked. Obtaining interviews presented its own set of challenges. Officials in general were reserved, very busy and skeptical of my research. I compensated for these challenges through persistence and by presenting my credentials and a summary of my research project goals and interview topics to supervisors and each potential participant. In some cases, I visited the same agency several times over a series of months in order to gain officials' trust and a commitment to conduct an interview. On a few occasions, I was kept waiting for days as I was made to return to the same agency several times in a week as interviews were pushed back from one day to the next. As will be explored in the following chapters, my waiting was in many ways similar to how Central American immigrant women were made to wait in their daily experiences. However, in another case, in the agency in which I conducted my participant observation, despite the large

amount of time I spent cultivating relationships it was more difficult to secure interviews.

The following fieldnote describes this experience:

Fieldnote 3/3/2011

It's been very stressful just asking for interviews, though in some cases it's easier than I had planned. For example, in the Agency X, I only had to talk to the director for a few minutes and he was on board...But in Agency Z [where I conducted participant observation] it's been so hard, even though I've had a lot of contact with them over the last months. I feel like I'm bothering them, like I'm pushing them to do the interviews. They seem very guarded, and suspicious of what I'm doing and what kind of information I'm going to get from them. Friday, before we went to the *botanero* together, one of the low-level clerks and I were talking quite a bit about the importance of *convivencia* and getting to know each other, and how important this is in Mexican culture. He was asking me more questions about my research, and when I explained to him more, he said something like "now that I know this I am more willing to give you an interview"—he simply felt like he understood more that I wasn't trying to antagonize them, that the interview is for a project, and it's really about their jobs, how they do their jobs and what they perceive of policies that have been passed, and how their positions have changed over the years.

I offered each participant the opportunity to conduct the interview on their own time in a neutral space. I invited them, depending on the time of day, to eat lunch or have coffee and dessert to both compensate them and to offer an alternative to the office space and thus encourage them to speak with me more openly. Regardless, the majority of the interviews took place during a break in officials' workdays in their offices, which to them was most convenient. As in interviews with immigrants, confidentiality and anonymity were extremely important. I conducted the majority of the interviews with low- to mid-level officials alone (the exception were the interviews with the bank tellers, which occurred at night and thus required that I not be out alone), and without the help of a research assistant in order to ensure the privacy and comfort of the participant and also

because many of the interviews took place in the city-center, which is secure and accessible.

Each interview was structured around several key, broad questions in order to elicit detail and allow respondents the freedom to address issues in open and creative ways. Major topics included: the story of how they came to their job; their responsibilities and daily tasks; the most challenging aspect of their job; their views of migration in Tapachula in general; institutional changes they have witnessed as a result of migration to Tapachula; their knowledge of and opinions on the Governor's pro-migrant project; and how they personally determine if someone is a migrant or not, in order to begin a conversation on any stereotypes of immigrants that they might be aware of or perpetuate themselves.

All of the research for this dissertation took place in Spanish and all translations are my own. There are terms that are used throughout that I have intentionally included without translating because they are concepts that are uniquely or better expressed in Spanish. Quotations from participants are all translated into English, and only when necessary, I also provide the original Spanish in parentheses. All names of research participants have been changed to protect their privacy. Following the same logic, I do not reveal the names of the agencies where I conducted interviews or participant observation. Because of this, I am careful to not include details and descriptions that would indicate particular agencies to the reader. In certain cases, I indicate the difference between the healthcare industry (made up of the public health insurance *Seguro Popular* and various clinics) because the separate agencies together represent a large enough

sample that describing certain details would not pose a risk to revealing a specific branch of an agency or official. As a result of these ethical concerns, I have edited passages to change names and omit questionable descriptions.

The Everyday, Feminist Geopolitics and Participatory Research

Scholarship in feminist geopolitics encourages geographers to consider how state power is embodied at multiple scales (Dowler & Sharp, 2001; Hyndman, 2001). Despite the growth of the field of feminist geopolitics, there has been less discussion surrounding the methodological approaches and techniques that could be used to facilitate feminist geopolitical analyses empirically. Those who have taken up the subject have established the importance of ethnographic approaches to understanding how geopolitical processes are embodied on the ground in daily life (Sharp et al., 2000; Dowler & Sharp, 2001, p. 172; Hyndman, 2003; Mountz, 2004). Drawing attention to this issue, Pain (2009) calls for the embodiment of geopolitical narratives of fear, at the scale of the everyday, and argues for techniques that stimulate the emergence of critical consciousness through the use of participatory methods as a means to this goal. Building on Pain's (2009) work, I argue for the use of participatory research methods to broaden and deepen our understanding of how geopolitical processes, such as the regulation of international migration unfold at the micro-scale, and how this impacts the lives of Central American women on the Mexico-Guatemala border. I contend that participatory approaches, in addition to ethnography, are well suited to capturing these typically unseen processes.

In his 1983 work, *Putting the Last First*, Robert Chambers argued for breaking out of “survey slavery” in rural development, viewing surveys as an “extractive” means to produce knowledge about people and processes in rural regions, with little consideration of local knowledge. Since the publication of his work, participatory methods have been adopted across disciplines, and beyond rural settings. The term participatory appraisal encompasses a large and diverse field of multi-disciplinary, participatory approaches that stress the use of inclusive, research participant-led, and critical techniques that have been rigorously employed by development practitioners and academics since the 1970s (Chambers, 1994; Pain, 2004; Torres & Carte, *forthcoming*). In geography, in particular, there has been a surge in the use of engaged, activist and participatory approaches building on the discipline’s engagement with participatory mapping (Herlihy & Knapp, 2003; Sletto, 2009). The origins and uses of participatory methods, their incorporation into participatory action research, mapping and other engaged approaches in geography have been discussed at length elsewhere (Pain, 2004; Kesby 2007; Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007; Davies & Dwyer, 2008). Thus, the brief discussion below focuses on how participatory methods have been used as part of feminist approaches to the everyday.

In general, feminist geography seeks to include voices that are marginalized in society and research, and by doing so it strives to uncover uneven geographies of power (Valentine, 2007). Thus, the main goals of participatory research and feminist scholarship are well-aligned. Feminism contributes to participatory research in that it encourages reflexivity and reciprocity during the research process and analysis (Pain, 2004).

Recently, a handful of works have explored the potential of using participatory approaches to understanding the everyday and the geopolitical (Kesby, 2007; Pain, 2009; Pain, Panelli, Kindon & Little, 2010). Critical of disembodied and dislocated accounts of globalized fear in critical geopolitics, Pain (2009) calls for the use of *conscientização*, the Freirian principal of critical consciousness raising, upon which participatory approaches are based. Pain argues that *conscientização*, a concept that can be roughly translated as ‘becoming conscious,’ should be used in the construction of an emotional geopolitics that embodies fear rather than conceptualizing it as a looming, dislocated phenomenon emanating from above.

Putting this into practice, Pain et al. (2010) used participatory and youth-oriented techniques with young people in the UK and in New Zealand to understand the daily implications of globalized fear narratives about terrorism and local crime. They found that youth are critical and reflexive about ‘globalized’ fears and hopes, and that their actual fears and hopes are largely place-based and result from their experiences in their daily lives. Additionally, Cahill’s (2007) work, which envisions Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a post-structuralist, transformative project, illustrates how PAR can be used to understand young women’s identity, and their own personal transformation. In a slightly different vein, Sara Koopman’s (2011) collaborative work with international peace accompaniers in Colombia also represents a type of feminist participatory study that seeks to understand how the geopolitical is shaped at the micro-scale of the everyday. These studies have used participation to understand the everyday, and micro-scale political processes and power.

Participatory Design and Implementation of Workshops

My use of participatory methods formed part of an overarching mixed-methods approach to understanding how immigrants, as well as low- to mid-level officials experience their interactions with each other. Workshops were at the core of this participatory approach because of their potential to raise critical consciousness in the community; bring immigrant community members together; produce grounded information; and provide an overview for important issues that could be explored further with other methods, such as interviews. The workshop is at once a pedagogical and research space in which dynamic activities such as diagramming, role-playing and mapping can be used to bridge the gap between different cultures and learning styles to encourage dialogue about common problems and possible solutions to these problems.

Considering my positionality as an outsider, U.S. researcher I felt that workshops would be more productive and useful to participants if they were collaboratively planned and facilitated by community members themselves. This meant I would take a back seat in planning and facilitating, in order to ensure that workshops better represented local needs and interests. With the help of Rosy, we invited two Central American immigrant women who had expressed interest in helping with the study to serve as workshop co-organizers and co-facilitators. The two women were both from Honduras: Melissa in her late twenties with five years of experience living on and off in Tapachula and Lourdes in her late forties who has lived in Tapachula for over 20 years.

Both Lourdes, a stay-at-home mother and grandmother, and Melissa, a working mother with experience in a non-profit in Honduras, had very little familiarity with

community organization and participatory techniques before we embarked on this process. As a result, we organized a series of four brief, capacity building workshops in order to share the basics of doing research, the goals of workshops, commonly used techniques and their thoughts and reflections on the entire process. All capacity building meetings, with the exception of a portion of one meeting, were recorded and transcribed. During the capacity-building meetings, we began to collectively design and plan the workshops, discussing: the goals for the workshops, the techniques to be used, program order, strategies for recruitment of participants, and refreshments, among other details. Capacity-building meetings took place in local cafés, and averaged two hours in length. Because of the time commitment and transportation costs incurred, the leaders were provided a modest stipend commensurate with personal expenses incurred plus a fair wage for labor.⁶

Together we developed the following broad goals for the workshops: 1) to understand what women were experiencing; 2) to have them talk about their rights and how they could work together to obtain more information about rights; and 3) to imagine strategies for how to protect these rights. The facilitators also wanted to gauge participants' interest in forming a small community organization geared toward providing women with information on their rights with the potential to grow in membership contingent upon local interest. We conducted three workshops with a total of eighteen women (the average size for workshops was nine participants), with five women

⁶ Remunerating workshop leaders was not an incentive for their participation, but rather fair compensation for their work. Low-income women's time is in high demand and valuable. The stipend was given in recognition of time dedicated to the project.

attending all three of the workshops. Workshops included various activities, from ice breakers/introduction activities, to role-playing, prioritization of problems, brainstorming, ranking solutions and problems. All activities included visual components and small break-out group discussions before larger group discussions.

Role-Play

Because this dissertation draws heavily on the data generated during the role-playing activity from our workshops, this section describes the significance and advantages of employing role-play as a technique. It also highlights some of the challenges and advantages of collaboratively planning workshops. According to Pretty (1995), role-play as a tool used in participatory research projects is a way for participants to use their own experience to play a real life situation, and in doing so it builds self-confidence and empathy among participants, and generates answers and solutions to common problems (p. 23). Role-play's potential as a collaborative research technique rests in its inclusivity, and its ability to creatively engage with participants. Because no reading or writing is required, role-play is accessible to participants of different educational levels and learning styles, allowing people of diverse backgrounds to take part in activities comfortably. Group discussion and rehearsal allows participants time to reflect on the topic at hand, and to formulate their skits, rehearse, pose questions and express doubts openly in a friendly environment. The creative, bottom-up element of role play allows participants to guide and control the subject matter of the skits. This has two major benefits. First, participants, and not researchers, determine what they deem most

important and worth sharing about their experiences. This not only shifts the balance of power between the ‘subject’ and researcher; it also helps ensure that key issues and dimensions are not overlooked—a considerable risk when the study agenda is set solely by the researcher. This is in contrast to interviews, surveys and to some extent, focus groups, where the researcher asks a question to elicit a response and thus drives the topic of discussion. In contrast, in role-play, participants are the driving force behind the scene being acted out. Second, because participants (in this case women) have this autonomy, when workshops deal with sensitive issues such as violence and discrimination, role play can act as a conduit for participants to express such experiences, often imbued with strong emotions, without necessarily personalizing the specific situations.

The act of performing the skits is an opportunity to embody experiences in a way that would not have been possible in interviews, for example. In contrast to an interview, where perceptions and experiences are conveyed through conversation, often only between the interviewer and the interviewee, in a role-play, participants build a performance playing with voice intonation, body language, facial expressions or using props. These details provide important data for analysis of immigrants’ perceptions and experiences with low- to mid-level state actors.

Melissa first presented the idea to use role play or ‘dramatization’ during one of our initial planning meetings, suggesting that participants would find the workshop more engaging if we used dynamic activities. She explained that it was necessary to,

make it dynamic, because that way the workshop would go better, people don't get bored—because if you just make people write, oh no! So then, I think that it should be dynamic . . . and I even have an idea – we could even create a play ourselves.

To Melissa, doing a dramatization or skit would encourage group members' heightened participation. She justified her opinion, echoing the main goals of participatory research:

I mean this way people will understand it more, they'll catch on more easily, as we would say. But if I just start writing on a board, the people won't understand. Remember there are people that don't know how to read or write, so sometimes it's better to use dynamic exercises.

Thus, as a group we decided to use a role playing exercise to help unpack women's experiences with officials in a creative, constructive way that broke down tension, allowed women to laugh and share their oftentimes frustrating experiences and also led to profound reflections on women's ideas for change.

In further conversation, a vision for a dramatization activity unfolded. Melissa describes one example:

I have an example: you know when you come over as a *mojada* [wetback]⁷—we could make like a group of police and a group of migrant women. So I'm the police officer— I take everything from you... You give me everything and then I let you cross the border. Everything that happens to us here— what we've lived in a play... That's what I had in mind, because obviously in this way we get to see too, and it's what happens in real life, Lindsey. When you cross [the border], the police assault you — it's true. These aren't lies; they robbed me.

Despite initial enthusiasm for using role-play, in our final planning meeting, the workshop leaders expressed major concerns with the technique. Lourdes wondered whether doing these skits about oftentimes traumatic, humiliating, and frustrating events

⁷ *Mojado/a* is a pejorative term to refer to undocumented Latino immigrants in the U.S. and Mexico. Despite the negative meaning of the word, it seemed that many of the immigrants I worked with Tapachula used it to describe themselves or other immigrants.

would cause immigrants to not want to participate or worse, to relive emotional moments during the workshop when they would prefer to not remember. Melissa agreed—she experienced traumatic events during her time in Tapachula that she would not be comfortable rehashing with a group of strangers. Indeed, one of the possible drawbacks of using role-play may be that participants could be uncomfortable with and embarrassed sharing the strong emotions that could surface during a performance (Pretty, 1995). Trying to be reflexive but also practical since this was the major activity planned for our workshop the next day, we wondered if whether instead of cancelling the activity, we could instead modify it to let participants have more freedom to create and act-out scenarios on their own terms. We pointed out that the women had the freedom to create the scene of their choice, and did not have to bring up violence or humiliation, for example. Lourdes insisted, however, that even the slightest suggestion of traumatic scenarios could provoke memories that participants were likely trying to suppress. She was concerned that if we did the role-play as we had planned, women would feel uncomfortable and therefore lose interest in attending our future workshops. Doing the role-play could cause more harm than good, according to the co-facilitators. Had we decided not to collaboratively plan the workshops, these serious and relevant issues would not have been raised.

After weighing the advantages and disadvantages of cancelling the activity, we decided as a group that we would modify our approach to make the role-play more open. The major modification would be to give groups the choice of which scenario/space to write about and to eliminate the choice of crossing the border and an encounter with the

police as possible scenarios. This highlights the importance of collaborative planning; the insider perspectives of the co-planners helped make the role-play sensitive to the needs of the participants and more appropriate to the context.

After we established the basic parameters for the activity, as discussed above, we drafted a more detailed plan of action for the role-play. We implemented the activity according to these guidelines. The day of the workshop, there were ten women present for the activity (including facilitators, who also wanted to participate). We randomly split the women into four groups and provided each group with the choice of five possible spaces where they would come into contact with an official— the *registro civil*, a school, the migration office, a public health clinic, and a place of their choice. They were then prompted to create a dramatization with the characters of their preference to represent something that would/could happen in this space.

Once in groups, the women had about fifteen to twenty minutes to discuss, create and practice their skits, and approximately five to ten minutes to perform them. Initially, we were nervous about the activity in the planning stages, always wondering whether it would engage the participants, or conversely if they would think it a trivial use of their time. Another potential drawback of role-play is that participants may be inhibited by the act of performance. However, we found that all participants were quite enthusiastic. There was much movement and spirited conversation in the room as they shared their experiences with each other in order to prepare their skits, assigned each other roles and rehearsed. We recorded the entire activity from beginning to end, plus the ensuing breakout discussion using a digital voice recorder. Small breakout group sessions during

planning were only partially recorded due to limitations with equipment—ideally each groups’ discussion should be recorded with a separate voice recorder. All audio files were transcribed to facilitate analysis. We also took photographs during the performances, which provided supporting evidence on body language, scene set-up and sketch characters.

The process of collaboratively planning workshops was key to producing a culturally appropriate, nuanced method to understand collective sentiment on immigrant women’s experiences in Tapachula. However, one limitation to this process was that beyond debriefing meetings with the collaborators after each workshop, we were unable to meet again to analyze data as a group, which would have made the process more participatory, and deepened the insights gained.

Conclusion

This project brings together ethnographic and participatory approaches to produce a research design appropriate for understanding the micro-scale operations of the state and immigrant women’s interactions with this state. Grounded in feminist political geography, it incorporates perspectives from sociologists doing political ethnography to uncover the complex, multi-faceted nature of these processes. By combining these approaches, this design prioritizes the experiences and situated knowledges of often marginal immigrant women and low- to mid-level officials. Techniques such as participant observation, in-depth interviews and participatory workshops ensured the

collection of nuanced, local knowledge. Indeed, my multi-faceted approach allowed for triangulation and the examination of data at different scales.

Chapter 3:

¿Una frontera amiga?: Central American Migrations and Policy



Figure 3.1: Sign, Office of Special Prosecutor for Crimes Against Immigrants. *Center: Special Prosecutor for Crimes Against Immigrants/Chiapas, A Friendly Border/For the Respect of the Rights of Immigrants/24 Hour Service. Right: Actions, not Words.*

The above image, touting the Mexico-Guatemala border as the “friendly border” (Figure 3.1) is an attempt to construct the region, which includes Tapachula, as distinct from the country’s limit with the United States and different from the reputation the city

has garnered as being a center for gang activity, the sex industry and rampant abuses against migrants. The slogan is part of a re-branding of the region that formed part of then Governor Juan Sabines Guerrero's (2006-2012) roll-out of policies meant to improve a growing number of Central American immigrants' access to protections and legal and social rights that had been denied consistently in the past. These relatively progressive policy measures at the state and national levels formed part of a neoliberal multicultural strategy that also coincided with the emergence of regional integration and development discourse directed at Mesoamerica (including Chiapas and the Central American countries). Though taken at face value, these policies seem positive for immigrants: however, as revealed in later chapters, they are not always implemented properly. Specifically, the numerous policies provide insight into the spatialization of the neoliberal state in that they have been dispersed without the necessary resources (both monetary and training) causing officials at the implementation level to improvise. This is representative of the dispersed controls of neoliberal governance. The purpose of this chapter is to describe Central American migration to Mexico within this unique policy context and to detail the policy measures created at the national level and in the state of Chiapas. I first describe the context for migration and its root causes and then define the policy, laying the foundation for the reader to understand the rights to which immigrants are entitled upon migrating.

Central American Migrations: Root Causes

Central Americans from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador have emigrated in growing numbers since the 1980s. In 2010, eleven percent of Guatemala's population, or 1.6 million were emigrants (UNICEF, 2011). In 2011, there were over 1.2 million Salvadoran immigrants and nearly 500,000 Hondurans resident in the United States (Motel & Patten, 2013). To better grasp the context within which many Central Americans migrate, in the following section I briefly discuss the reasons for the mass emigration of Guatemalans, Hondurans and Salvadorans during the last thirty years. Then, I will describe the migrant journey to the U.S. through Mexico, and how this transmigration manifests and has become part of the Mexican socio-spatial landscape in recent years. Though transmigration is not the focus of this study, its large-scale impacts on Mexican nationals' and Central American immigrants' imaginations of migration make it inseparable from our understandings of more permanent settlement. Finally, I will argue for the importance of studying permanent Central American settlement in Tapachula and the surrounding region, briefly reviewing the existing research on this issue and situating my own study.

People from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras have migrated in growing numbers, mainly to the United States, since the onset of civil conflict in Guatemala and El Salvador, weak economies as well as natural disasters in all three countries. Guatemalans and Salvadorans migrated in large numbers beginning in the 1970s and 1980s due intense civil conflict in both of these countries. According to Rodriguez (1987), in 1986 it was estimated that there were 100,000 undocumented Central

American immigrants, as a distinct Latino immigrant group (compared especially to Mexicans) in the city of Houston, Texas alone.

Honduras differs from El Salvador and Guatemala in that major emigration began only in the mid-1990s encouraged by natural disasters, rather than internal conflict. In fact, as the rest of the region expelled refugees during years of civil conflict, Honduras was often seen as a place of refuge (UNDP, 2006). In 1998, Hurricane Mitch devastated the country, and according to a survey on human development conducted in Honduras, 61% of families interviewed who had a family member migrate said that they departed between 1998-2005 (UNDP, 2006).

Mexico primarily receives migrants from Central America due to transmigration and seasonal or temporary labor migration—with long-term settlement becoming more noticeable in recent years. I will discuss each of these trends below in further detail.

Transmigration

The large part of Central American migration to Mexico takes the form of transmigration, which is migration characterized by crossing through one foreign territory to arrive in another. This transmigration has a long history dating to the beginnings of Central American emigration; the journey to the U.S. itself necessitates travel across Mexico. According to noted scholar on Central American migration in Mexico Rodolfo Casillas (2008), before the 1980s, the United States and Mexico paid little attention to Central American transnational mobility because of the small size of the phenomenon. However, with the end of conflict in Guatemala (1996) and El Salvador (1992) so too

ended the United States' unspoken commitment to allow would-be refugees to settle within its territory. Around the same time, U.S. immigration policy made a sharp shift toward the increasing securitization of the border with Operation Hold the Line in 1993 and Operation Gatekeeper in 1994 followed by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) in 1996, all of which were measures that penalized migration and increased security at traditional entry points along the Mexico-U.S. border. These policies had the effect of dispersing migrants to more dangerous border crossing zones, away from the infrastructure of border cities, and generally into the Sonoran desert, where migrants face higher risks of injury and death (Eschbach, Hagan, Rodriguez, Hernandez-Leon & Bailey, 1999). In addition, since crossing the border became markedly more difficult, due to the increased security and the risk, a market for human smuggling emerged to meet immigrants' needs (Cornelius, 2001). Restriction became the hallmark of U.S. immigration policy, and to some extent, the model is reflected in Mexico. According to Casillas (2008), the creation of the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* (National Institute of Migration), the Mexican equivalent to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency in the U.S., is representative of this shift.

Transmigration in general became more risky and expensive near the same time we witness the beginning of the increase of Central American migration to the United States. Casillas (2008) importantly observed that Central American transmigration is more of a problem for the U.S. than its neighbor to the south

In and of itself, the Central American transmigration has not been and is not a problem for Mexico. It is not a problem from the moment that the transmigrants buy goods (food and medicine for example) and buy services (transportation,

housing, etc.) enlivening the commercial activities of the places that they pass through...Nevertheless, transmigration began to be a problem when the United States changed its migration policy toward Central America (p. 160).⁸

In general, Central American transmigrants intending to head north to Mexico's northern border with the United States are undocumented—a fact that complicates measurement and mapping of the flows. According to Casillas (2008) transmigrants make their journeys on foot, by train, bus or with *coyotes* or smugglers, if they can afford them. The majority of transmigrants, however, are easy to locate. Because they are undocumented and carry little money, even riding the bus is unpractical. So instead, migrants follow the main commercial train routes, sometimes hundreds clustering at times on top of trains. The train is widely known as *la bestia* or “the beast,” because of the danger associated with riding it. Hundreds of migrants are killed, lose limbs or are severely injured due to falls from the train—so many that in Tapachula there is an *albergue*, or shelter, dedicated to caring for just this group of people. Since *la bestia* is one of the only transportation options for migrants, the routes have become a place for corrupt officials and other criminal gangs to converge in order to take advantage of transmigrants. They are routinely extorted, sexually assaulted, robbed and/or kidnapped on the trains (Amnesty International, 2010).

One of the main railroad tracks cuts through the center of Tapachula, just a few blocks south of its downtown in a heavily populated area. For years, transmigrants would board trains going north in this central part of the city subsequently generating a migration-related industry surrounding the railroad. This industry included food stands,

⁸ My translation from the original Spanish.

hotels and other types of small vendors. Families could rent rooms to the migrants for extra income, and *coyotes* or *polleros* (human smugglers) were on hand to offer their services for the long journey ahead. The train's conspicuous location in the city center meant that migrants were a visible and everyday part of life for people in Tapachula. For transmigrants using the train, easy access to the downtown's nearby market place, churches and migrant shelters further dispersed presence throughout the city. When Hurricane Stan devastated the region in 2005, the route between Tapachula and Arriaga, about a three-hour car or bus drive north near the border with the state of Oaxaca was destroyed and made inoperable. Instead of taking the train from Tapachula, transmigrants were forced to begin their route in Arriaga, sometimes walking for a week to arrive there. Despite commitments to repair the railroad lines along the southern border and Tapachula, the train traffic through the city has yet to be reinitiated. There were plans to begin operations in 2012, however at writing, repairs were still unfinished. Regardless, Central American transmigrants crossing the border near Tapachula still utilize the city as a resting place due to the many resources available to them there. Tapachula continues to be known for the important presence of transmigration in this city.

In Tapachula, November 20th, 2004 is remembered not only because it is the anniversary of the start of the Mexican Revolution, but also because on this day that celebrations erupted into violence as gang members or *maras* engaged in a shoot-out during the annual parade. The Mexican military was deployed in the aftermath to patrol zones that were considered hot beds for gang activity. This terrorized residents of Tapachula and when I discussed gang violence with interviewees and in casual

conversation this incident would always be described. *Tapachultecos* and the media directly link the gang violence of this period to the existence of transmigration in the region (Castellanos, 2004; Hernández Navarro, 2004). Even at the time when gang violence was more tangible in the lives of *tapachultecos*, Castellanos (2004) cited a report that 51% of violent crimes committed against transmigrants at the time were committed by officials or police; 49% by common criminals and only two out of nine of those crimes were committed by *maras*. Transmigrants are seen as easily exploitable by criminals because they often lack knowledge of Mexico, are tired and sometimes weak from travel, and also because they sometimes carry all of their valuables and money with them in order to fund their journeys. In addition, locals tend to believe *maras* are themselves Central American immigrants. According to people's perceptions, gang violence has sharply decreased after the destruction of the train route, which keeps many transmigrants from ever crossing through the city center (Diario del Sur, 2009).

In early 2013, architect, and native *tapachulteco*, Hans Kabsch Vela and scholars Carmen Fernández and Santiago Martínez started plans for the *Museo de las Migraciones* (Museum of Migration) in Tapachula. The museum would utilize the ruins of the city's old train infrastructure to memorialize transmigration through the city, a thing of the past, yet still present in the memories of the *tapachultecos*. According to the authors of the project:

Historically Tapachula and the Soconusco have been a point of encounter of multiple cultures because of its privileged location: It's the bridge between North America and Central America and has been the witness to diverse migrations over time...The idea of a Museum and Memorial of this type is to remember a part of

our history and tangible and intangible culture (Kabsch Vela, obtained in personal communication, 18 June 2013).

The project calls for the conversion the abandoned train depot and train wagons into the spaces of the museum. The initial architectural plans envision a monument at multiple sites dispersed throughout the city, and beginning at the old train depot. The memorial is a striking symbol of what once was a daily reality in Tapachula. The architectural sketches for the plan feature the weathered freight cars covered with moss and tropical vines as key spaces for the museum. A pencil sketch included in the plans depicts the ghost-like outlines of migrants huddled together on top of a train-car of the past. Still at the stage of inception, this project is a testament to the impacts that migration, and especially transmigration, has had on the cultural landscapes of Tapachula.

Mexico as a Receiving Society: Short Term Labor Migration, Domestic and Agricultural Workers

An overlooked reality is that Mexico is and has always been a country of destination for Central American immigrants, many of whom settle on the southern border in Tapachula (Fernández Casanueva, 2012; Rivas Castillo, 2011). Though official data is inaccurate in estimating this population, it is hard to ignore the arguable Central Americanization that has taken place in Tapachula and other cities along the southern border. This shift is no longer just marked by the long-standing Guatemalan immigration (Castillo, 1990; Martínez, 1994), which consists of the temporary labor migration of farm and domestic workers, refugees and permanent immigrants, but is now characterized by Salvadoran *pupuserías* and restaurants with names like “Hondumex.”

Currently, there is a lack of data that accurately quantifies flows of permanent migration, highlighting the governments' and the academy's focus on transmigration. However, with registered voluntary repatriations of Central Americans in just the southern border state of Chiapas in 2011 reaching just under 22,000, we begin to understand the magnitude of the phenomenon (Instituto Nacional de Migración, 2012). Just as official measurement of Central American transmigrants and permanent migrants are nonexistent due to lack of data (most migrants are undocumented, making gathering estimates very difficult), there are also no estimations. We do know however, based on repatriation and detention data that the majority of Central American migrants are Guatemalans, followed by Hondurans then Salvadorans (Instituto Nacional de Migración, 2012). According to official statistics, the number of foreign born in Mexico has tripled in the last twenty years: In 1990 foreign residents numbered at 340, 842; in 2000, 492,617 and in 2010 the foreign-born population residing in the country numbered 961,121 (INEGI, 2010). Between January and November of 2012, 7,697 Guatemalans and 6,109 Hondurans had processed non-immigrant, permanent resident and "immigrant" visas—all different levels of legal residency visas.⁹ This figure then does not include the number of undocumented Central American immigrants.

Chiapas and the Soconusco region in the Southwestern region of the state, in general are important agricultural centers, and many seasonal workers from Guatemala cross the border to labor in the region's many coffee plantations. Estimates of this population vary greatly from anywhere between 45,000 to 70,000 annually, and this is

⁹ Number of Salvadorans is unspecified.

because many workers are undocumented (though increasingly visas are more readily available for these workers, see below) (Castillo, 2006). Hondurans have also been known to work on fruit plantations along the coast (mango, papaya, banana), but in smaller numbers. The region has also been marked by the entrance of Guatemalan refugees, who have now mostly been resettled. During the time of the Civil War between 1960-1996 it is estimated that over 400,000 people sought refuge in camps in Chiapas and Quintana Roo. Only around 46,000 of whom were recognized and processed by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (Smith, 2006).

In spite of the inadequacy of the data to capture the phenomenon of long-term and permanent immigration, it is nevertheless dynamic and growing according to scholars and non-profit organizations conducting qualitative research on the subject, on the ground. Immigrant women interviewed in this study from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala expressed that Tapachula was appealing because of the relatively lower costs of food and living, in general, and greater security. Tapachula and other sites in Mexico could continue to be a next best option for Central Americans due to the higher quality of life and the growing impossibilities of crossing through Mexico to the U.S. Both Jaime Rivas Castillo (2011) and Carmen Fernández Casanueva (2012) argue that the Honduran and Salvadoran immigrants that they studied did not initially intend to remain in Tapachula when they began their journeys from their homelands. Instead they had hoped to reach the United States, but due to problems—such as due to being robbed and not having the resources to continue, attacked, injured or simply finding the trip too risky, for example— along the route ended up staying in Tapachula. Fernández Casanueva found

that Honduran immigrants may have once settled in Tapachula mostly due to failed migrations to the United States, however more recently they immediately choose Tapachula because of the growing migrant networks linking their home country and the city. Networks facilitate migration by lowering the related risks through relationships with family, friends or other acquaintances to facilitate the journey and settlement, and by creating a sense of familiarity with the destination place before migration. In the same study, Fernández Casanueva establishes that Hondurans in Tapachula, despite several impediments such as the lack of low-cost communications, still experience transnational linkages in their day-to-day lives.

Central American women also migrate to Tapachula and the border area to work in the sex industry, which relies in general on the labor of immigrant women rather than local women. Sex work in Tapachula and the surrounding border region takes place in general in “bars” and “brothels.” This type of bar—not all bars are part of the sex industry—has *ficheras* who socialize with clients, selling them drinks and also having clients buy drinks for them. They earn a commission on what they sell plus tips. Fernández Casanueva (2009) found that Central American women sex workers on the border differed from women engaging in work as domestic laborers in that they were generally from urban areas and had children to support, whereas women migrating to work in homes were generally from rural areas and single. Like domestic workers, they were also young, sometimes adolescents. The author found that women sex workers’ decisions to migrate resulted from a combination of personal and family strategies—an

opportunity to support families, and also escape repressive structures and intra-familial and intimate partner violence at home.

Throughout its history, Mexico has been perceived primarily as an immigrant sending country, even despite immigrant flows of Spanish, Lebanese and Latin American that arrived in the 19th and 20th centuries. The number of immigrants could not compare to the millions of emigrants leaving the country, and in reflecting this perception, the country had no comprehensive immigration policy until recently in 2010. However, in light of the realities of growing Central American migration and transmigration, as described in the previous section, border states began to elaborate their own policy measures. Chiapas has been a leader in formulating state specific measures. In the following section I lay out some of the measures that are most relevant to this study, establishing what rights are available to migrants. Drawing on official documents, interviews, government websites, academic and non-governmental organizations' reports, I point out that much of the new policy still tends to ignore the phenomenon of long-term and permanent settlement of Central Americans, instead focusing on the pressing problem of the rights of transmigrants. I do not make this distinction to criticize the government for prioritizing transmigrants' rights—it cannot be denied that Mexico is facing an extreme humanitarian crisis regarding this population—however, I wish to draw attention to immigrants that settle in Mexico as well, with hope that this group also gains prominence for policy makers, in anticipation of the possible growth of this population in the coming years. First, I will discuss the unique general context for Mexican immigration policy, and how U.S. geopolitical interests impact the formation of

this policy. Next I discuss the general details regarding the policies, and finally focus on the three areas that are particularly important to this dissertation: rights to identity, health, and regularization of immigration status.

Policy Context: The United States' Other Border

The United States' interest in Mexico's southern border with Guatemala and Belize grew during the period of Central American conflicts, which peaked in the 1980s. A neighbor to this Cold War hot spot, the Southeastern states of Chiapas and Tabasco and the neighboring Yucatán Peninsula are regions marked by strong cultural and economic ties to Guatemala. Indeed, Mexico and Guatemala are separated by a border that is remarkably open for North American sensibilities, yet extremely common in the rest of the world. The region was feared to become a haven for guerilla fighters and organizing the opposition, and thus have violence spill over into Mexico (Pessar, 2001). Refugee camps were established in Chiapas and the Yucatan during the 1980s. In today's current, post September 11th, 2001 context, where security narratives reign in nation-states' geopolitical discourse, open borders and the people and goods that cross them are viewed as threats. The "porosity" of the Mexico-Guatemala border, which though regulated still allows for great mobility of people and goods, is a major factor of concern for the United States. As Santiago Martínez Junco (2010) observes in his review of Mexican migration policy, "Mexican migration policy plays a double role: one in front of the United States and another in front of the Central American countries, constituting a contradictory migration policy (p. 139)." To elaborate on this, it seems that to satisfy U.S. interests,

Mexico bases the rationale for its immigration policies on security discourse: securing borders, apprehending and deporting immigrants endeavoring to reach the U.S. borders, which results in the criminalization of migration. Indeed, the Mexico-Guatemala border is a major geopolitical interest for the U.S. and the region has received millions of dollars in aid under the Merida Initiative, the U.S.-Mexico partnership to combat organized crime and violence in Mexico. Central America, on the other hand, demands the protection of the human rights of their emigrants, much as Mexico does on behalf of its emigrants residing in the United States.

Policy Context: Local and National Legislation

As noted previously, the state of Chiapas is at the center of Central American migration to Mexico, being a state where initial border crossing begins, where many transmigrants ultimately decide to stay, and a receiving area for permanent migrants. Growing pressure from civil society to find solutions to the violence and exploitation threatening transmigrants helped to begin efforts to control migration flows and assuage the increasing exploitation of immigrants. Chiapas, in particular, has been at the vanguard of promoting federal regularization programs through the National Institute of Migration (INM) and created its own state-level policy measures to deal with increasing migration. It is necessary first to outline immigration policies and the rights to which immigrants are entitled to under ideal circumstances, before we begin to describe how low-to mid-level officials sometimes oppose these rules with their everyday actions.

At the time of this research (September 2010-January of 2012), there were many changes occurring within immigration policy structure at the national level. In 2011, Mexico's most comprehensive immigration law, *la Ley de Migración*, was passed into legislation; however, it was not implemented until November of 2012. In addition, the INM itself was going through restructuring that was meant to root out corruption. Though this action itself did not change policy, per se, it did introduce new lower, mid and upper-level officials into Tapachula, which did, according to participants in this study, have an impact on the implementation of certain policies, as will be explained more below. As a result, this research still took place during the *pre-Ley de Migración* period. It is important to note that even before the *Ley de Migración*, smaller policy measures were introduced to protect immigrants. While the "comprehensive" migration policy had not been passed, state-level and other federal level measures, especially with respect to governing social programs shifted quite regularly during the presidency of Felipe Calderón and Governor Sabines (2006-2012). It is also important to note that during this research new measures related to social service provision were being introduced constantly. In the below sections, I attempt to capture this shifting policy landscape. However, we should also remember that newly-passed state and institutional policies (new rules for service provision within agencies, for example) take time to be introduced and advertised in the community at large, so their impacts might not always be immediately perceived. Policies were always in flux, and even when being modified in favor of migrants, these changes can lead to confusion among both intended beneficiaries and officials.

In this section, I will first discuss the rights to which an undocumented woman migrant is entitled based on the policies on record pre-*Ley de Migración*. I focus on the undocumented experience because the vast majority of Central American immigrants in Mexico, with the exception of Guatemalans in Chiapas, are undocumented upon entry due to the fact that it is practically impossible to obtain authorization to migrate for the purposes for which many decide to leave home. In subsequent sections I will describe these policies and their origins in further detail.

Migrating to Mexico from Central America: Imagining Ideal Scenarios

At the time of this study, after crossing the Mexico-Guatemala border without authorization, or “without papers,” and living in Mexico during a certain period of time without documents, an immigrant could apply for a “regularization” of her immigration status, shifting from an undocumented/unauthorized status to holding a visa for “lawful” residency. If she has children or a partner who are Mexican, she would be entitled to an FM2 visa, which is a permanent residency visa that upon a certain number of renovations leads to naturalization. The FM2 allows the holder to work and travel within Mexico and internationally and re-enter. If she does not have a family in Mexico, then she would likely be given the non-immigrant visa, the FM3, which would allow her to work in most circumstances.

With a visa, obtaining vital services for the immigrant and her family should be relatively straightforward, assuming she holds all requisites in addition to the visa and has the financial resources to pay for transportation, fees, missed days at work, and

miscellaneous copies of documents, for example. A visa is needed in order to obtain public health insurance (*Seguro Popular*), *Oportunidades*, a conditional-cash transfer program to encourage children's attendance in school and health care (in a family where she is head of household and no other Mexican citizen above the age of 15 resides); and to get married. A visa is also required for most banking and financial services. Before 2009 a Mexican-born child older than 6 months could not be registered (receive a birth certificate) if a foreign-born parent did not have a visa. After 2009, parents' immigration status could not be taken into account when registering a child. Until 2011, Mexican-citizen born children with undocumented parents did not have access to *Seguro Popular* or *Oportunidades*. Beginning in 2008, Central American immigrant women in Tapachula with Mexican national family members, which includes all of the women interviewed for this study, qualified for the FM2 visa, which means that after five years one is eligible to become a Mexican citizen. This process involves taking a test, paying a fee and traveling to Mexico City for the official ceremony.

Guatemalan immigrants (and Belizeans in Quintana Roo) to Mexico differ from other Central American immigrants in that certain residents do have access to visas in order to cross the border with authorization. Guatemalans who are seasonal agricultural migrants planning to work in Chiapas were eligible for a FMVA (*Forma Migratoria del Visitante Agrícolas*), a temporary worker visa which limits mobility but allows the immigrant to work. This visa has since shifted to be called the FMTF (*Forma Migratoria del Trabajador Fronterizo*). Border region residents from Guatemala may also visit the area, but may not work, using the FMVL (*Forma Migratoria del Visitante Local*).

Though this visa does not provide authorization to work, many of the Guatemalan domestic workers in Tapachula enter with this visa.

Right to Legal Identity: Regularization of immigration status

Since 2002, the INM has initiated periodic regularization campaigns aimed at providing papers for undocumented Central American immigrants. In the early days of this policy, if immigrants met basic residency requirements, had a family in Mexico, could afford to pay a fine, and had proper documentation, they were able to apply for a temporary, yet renewable, residency visa called the FM3. Holding an FM3 visa allows one to work (with exceptions), access certain social programs, and travel within the national territory without risk of being deported. In 2008, during the second major campaign (*Programa de Regularización 2008-2011*), which took place after several years of this ongoing program, the government shifted from the practice of mostly distributing the non-immigrant FM3 visas to Central Americans in Tapachula, to instead assigning an immigrant visa called the FM2, a permanent residency visa¹⁰. To be eligible for an FM2 visa during this campaign, the applicant had to be a resident in the country beginning in January 2007, and either have a Mexican family member (child or spouse) or be employed. During this period, applicants needed to present a valid ID from their country of origin, to be able to prove relationships with Mexicans or provide proof of employment, and of course fill out numerous forms to gather personal data. When filing

¹⁰ Mexico also created a new visa for temporary workers along the border or the, *Forma Migratoria del Trabajador Fronterizo* (FMTF), which allows Guatemalans and Belizeans to work in any sector along the border.

for the FM2 the first time, applicants must pay a fine plus another processing fee, which varied but averaged at over \$4,000 MXN¹¹ (approximately \$308 USD). However, if the migrant could prove financial hardship, then the processing fee could be waived and only the fine, at about \$1,155 MXN would be charged. Immigrants would only be required to furnish a passport from their country of origin upon the first renewal of their FM2 visa.

Though the FM2 visa is processed for people who work in Mexico with no family ties, these visas are generally given to white collar workers, artists, scientists and the like, which excludes many Central Americans who tend perform labor intensive jobs. Thus, if a Central American immigrant does not have family ties in Mexico, they will be granted the FM3, non-immigrant visa, which is applied for in much the same way that one would apply for an FM2.

During my most recent fieldwork for this dissertation project, which took place between 2010 and 2011 and in January of 2012, the process for obtaining the FM2 seemed to be in flux with the appointment of a new regional delegate. Though the INM is administered at a federal level, it seems that in Tapachula, since the migration context is unique, over the years special programs and campaigns could be enacted to facilitate regularization. For example, beginning in 2010, applicants were required to fill out their forms on a computer with internet access in order to connect to the INM webpage. Previously forms could be completed by hand or on a type-writer. In October 2011 and January 2012, I also heard reports that the new delegate had toughened requirements to

¹¹ For reference, the daily minimum wage in the state of Chiapas is 59 MXN or approximately \$4.50 USD.

regularize migration status;¹² in the past, migrants who were unable to obtain passports from their countries of origin were able to present a document from their consulate proving their nationality and identity. The fact that a regional delegate might tighten or relax requirements for regularization may seem strange, considering that the delegate is charged with enforcing a federal mandate. However, this exemplifies the uneven implementation of policy, which leads to confusion. It also underscores Chiapas's relative marginality compared to the rest of the country. In addition, formerly fee waivers for low income applicants could be applied for with help from the Consulates or the Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Matías de Córdova (CDHFM), however beginning in 2011 immigrants needing a fee waiver must apply on their own behalf, in writing. At that time, the INM does a thorough socioeconomic survey at the immigrant's residence, including taking photographs. It is important to note that these changes coincide with a restructuring of the INM that took place after the *Ley de Migración* was passed and adopted. Many personnel were fired or transferred within the organization (INM, 2013).

The immigration Regularization Program of 2008-2011 was phased out and replaced by the new *Ley de Migración*, which entered into implementation officially in November 2012. The new law transforms the previous categories into a *Visa de Residente Temporal* (Temporary Resident's Visa), which roughly corresponds to the FM3; a *Visa de Residente Permanente* (Permanent Resident's Visa), corresponding to the FM2; and an *Inmigrado* ("Immigrated") which is a permanent resident's visa that does not have to be

¹² This was first revealed to me by human rights workers and then confirmed in an informal interview with a management-level source in the regional INM office. I have also received reports that post-*Ley de Migración*, similar confusion continues, only now aspects of the previous laws are mixed with current policies.

renewed on a yearly basis like the other visas, but is a step short of providing naturalization.

Right to Legal Identity: Birth Certificates and the Registro Civil

In 2007, the state of Chiapas shaped its new State Development Plan, which includes 710 policy measures concerning the rights of migrants and migration control (Interview, Subsecretary of the Southern Border, 2009). According to policy documents and interviews with officials, the policy has been created in recognition of the importance of migration for regional development, humanitarian concerns, and diplomatic relations with Central American countries. The State Development Plan guarantees human rights, personal security, and temporary work for immigrants, and programs that facilitate immigrant access to healthcare and education.

Of particular importance are the measures' guarantees for immigrant children's rights to legal identity (birth certificates) and the right to access healthcare. Though Mexico grants citizenship *jus soli*, or to all those born within Mexican territory, undocumented as well as documented Central American parents have been excluded from obtaining citizenship rights and identity for their children. In Mexico, the *registro civil*, or civil registry, is the government agency charged with distributing birth and death certificates and performing marriages and divorces. Unlike in the United States, it is still common in Mexico, and Chiapas in particular, to bring newborns to the *registro civil* to register their birth and obtain a birth certificate, rather than doing so in the hospital. Though people are encouraged and receive incentives to register their children before

they are six months old, it is not uncommon for older children to be registered. Children may be registered by a parent until they are eighteen years of age, after which the process is fraught with complex paperwork, long wait times, and fees. The most common reasons in general for waiting to register children include lack of information or knowledge of the procedure, inability to travel to the *registro civil*, or problems gathering required documents. For immigrants, lack of information or misinformation on their rights to register their Mexican-born children, the type of documentation required, and cost (if the child is older than six months) can be major barriers to obtaining birth certificates.

Until 2010, immigrants registering a child older than six months had to also provide proof of legal residency in the country (at the time the FM3 or FM2 visa, for example). It is important to note that according to interviews and conversations with immigrants and local non-profits this policy was unevenly implemented, ignored, or made stricter depending on the situation, place or time. The major problem with this longstanding policy is that it places a high burden on parents to supply paperwork that could be impossible to provide, with the unintended consequence of their children's exclusion from the registry. In response to irregularities in service delivery for children of immigrants and in a major push to improve access to identity for all children in the state, Chiapas opened a special *registro civil* to attend to the immigrant population in Tapachula in 2009. Importantly, not only do immigrants report discrimination with the system; but poor, rural-dwelling and Indigenous citizens of Mexico also face barriers to receiving birth certificates, that are similar to those that immigrants experience (Mercado Asencio, 2012).

At the time of research, the steps for obtaining a birth certificate were daunting. For example in the *registro civil*, in addition to the several paperwork requirements (all of which must be provided in original and copy form) an immigrant applicant for a birth certificate could expect to make a total of at least six trips to at least two offices, if they had all of the required paperwork on hand already (a Mexican citizen would make four). These include: one visit for general information on requirements; a second visit so that the head official can check to see if the applicant had all of the necessary requisites gathered and to make an appointment to come back to process the official birth certificate; a third visit to actually go through the process of obtaining the birth certificate; a fourth trip to the INM office to report the birth of a child to immigrant parents, during which they sign and seal two copies of a specific paper (*oficio*)- INM keeps one copy; a fifth trip back to the *registro civil* to drop off one copy of the signed and sealed *oficio*; and finally, a sixth trip back to the *registro civil* at least one week later in order to pick up the official copy of the birth certificate, which would be ready at that time. A birth certificate is free if you register the child before he or she is six months old. However, there is a fee to pick up the official copy of a birth certificate, which, at the time of research was \$85 MXN (\$6.80 USD). If the child is older than six months, then there are other charges associated with the birth certificate. The point of this lengthy description of the requirements is to show the complexity of bureaucratic processes for even the most basic and necessary documents.

Right to Health

Policies that reinforced undocumented and documented immigrants' rights to public healthcare have existed since before the passage of the 2011 Migration Law in Mexico, in Chiapas and especially along the southern border. In line with these policies, women are guaranteed pre-natal care and children receive preferential treatment within the system. According to interviews with healthcare workers, in Tapachula, immigrants have full access to the public health system at no or low cost. Documented immigrants should be able to participate in the public health insurance program, the *Seguro Popular*. Yet, until 2012, it was common and state-sanctioned practice to deny Mexican children of undocumented immigrants access to the *Seguro Popular*, a practice that was justified by the explanation that the main beneficiary on a policy had to be documented. In Chiapas, immigrants are given the *Cartilla de Salud Migrante*, a laminated, fold-over document that lists important medical records (i.e. vaccinations) and contains other information. Though not a guarantee for care, it is a tangible product that can be used to raise awareness in immigrant communities on their rights to healthcare.

Oportunidades (Opportunities)

Oportunidades is a conditional cash transfer program established by the Mexican government in 2002 in order to provide families, and particular women and their children with greater access to health care and education. Beneficiaries receive a monthly stipend for each school-age child in return for parents' participation in themed informational meetings, children's attendance in school and regular visits to the health center for

preventative care. The program is extended to the population when municipalities, and then neighborhoods, are identified as having high margins of poverty. At the local level, *brigadas* or brigades go door-to-door in these neighborhoods enrolling, and/or re-enrolling families. The first step of the enrollment process is an economic study of the household the point of which is to gather evidence of each family's eligibility to receive the benefit. As explained by one of the managers in charge of *Oportunidades* in Chiapas in 2011, families wishing to enroll must provide a Mexican birth certificate for someone in household who is over 15. According to my interview with the same manager, "If a family does not have any member that is over 15 who has a birth certificate then we cannot give them the service, because the steps in the process are already established and we just implement the instructions." There have been several reports documented of immigrant women, who are married to Mexican citizens and who have Mexican children being denied access to this program (Rivas & CDHFMC, 2013).

National-Level Policies

Under mounting pressure from civil society and the public after the tragic massacre of 72 transmigrants in Tamaulipas, Mexico's 2011 *Ley de Migración* (Migration Law), is the country's first attempt at a comprehensive migration policy. The key tenets of this policy include a strong emphasis on respect for the human rights of migrants, facilitation of immigrants' mobility, and parity in the treatment of immigrants and Mexican citizens. It eliminates the category of non-immigrant visas, which facilitates immigrants' permanent residency in the country (Alba & Castillo, 2012). As Alba and Castillo (2012) signal in their report, the new law's emphasis on both human rights and

national and border security, “can appear contradictory and doubtlessly require the agencies mandated with its implementation to enjoy a degree of discretion as they prioritize certain objectives over others” (p.15). The law has also been seriously criticized for excluding civil society, scholars and activists from participating in the elaboration of the law—arguing that those who best understand the phenomenon of migration and problems facing migrants in Mexico are those that work with migrants and the migrants themselves (Dean, 2011). Other criticisms include: the continued detention of migrants for unconstitutional amounts of time; the high level of discretion given to officials to implement laws; and the lack of a visa for transmigrants, which could help protect them from exploitation and violence as they cross the country (Zuñiga, 2011).

Migrating to Tapachula

This dissertation outlines Central American women’s struggles in accessing rights of legal and social citizenship upon migrating to Tapachula. Regardless of the difficulties most women face, “success stories” do exist. The following narratives exhibit the cases of two women who, while still facing great difficulties, were able to obtain FM2 visas and other vital services for their families.

Doña¹³Angela migrated from San Marcos, Guatemala at fifteen. Her father brought her over the border to find work along with the rest of her siblings. One day a

¹³*Doña* is a title used in Mexico and other countries in Latin America to convey respect. In the neighborhoods where I conducted research, relationships between neighbors can be very friendly and they are always respectful—polite forms of verbs (*usted*) are always used, even between the closest of friends, and always addressed as *Don* and *Doña*. A woman becomes “Doña” at marriage or after a certain age, which varies depending on place. Since I addressed all immigrant women as Doña followed by their given

woman offered her work selling bread from 3AM to 3PM in the market and she jumped at the opportunity, enthusiastic to “earn the trust of the boss and be perfect.” She slept in the same room as the other workers in the bosses’ house, and would see her brothers and sisters once or twice a week. A year later, at 16, she met her current partner, another Guatemalan citizen from her region and soon after they had their first child. After starting her family, she continued to work, this time as a domestic worker.

Doña Angela is reserved when you first meet her, but once deep in conversation her dynamism and strength of will is apparent. At the time I interviewed her in 2011, she was 33 years old, had three children and was running two small taco stands with her husband. Doña Angela works at night and I would often visit her at the beginning of her shifts before customers arrived while she prepared for the night ahead by making salsas and cooking a variety of meats on her grill. She lives with her family in a comfortable home made of cinder block, with cement floors and a detached outhouse and place to bathe. The patio is lined with small trees and other plants that separate the main house from the bathhouse. Doña Angela lives in a *colonia* or neighborhood that was once an informal settlement that had recently been incorporated into the city. The roads are still unpaved and the river is dangerously close by, however the city sent crews to modify the river bed in order to prevent future flooding. Doña Angela and her husband rent their house and the land it is on, because, as foreign citizens, they are unable to possess the title in their names. In Mexico, foreigners are unable to own property near international

names during my research, I continue this practice here. I substitute all names in this dissertation for pseudonyms out of respect for participants’ privacy.

borders. For this reason many immigrants choose to buy land to construct modest homes in irregular settlements; however because many of these settlements are in precarious locations and land title rights are not always straightforward, problems tend to occur—something that Doña Angela’s neighbors have experienced.

In 2002, Doña Angela applied for an FM3 visa for the first time. She admitted that the many pre-requisites and steps made the process difficult, however she was able to obtain her documents without any major problems or impediments. Her main motivation for processing this document was to be able to register her children and have access to other rights like banking. She was also hoping to be able to legally marry her husband, which requires immigrants’ to hold a regular status. Doña Angela’s partner did not decide to process his FM3 at the same time that she did, and remains undocumented. This is a factor that has caused Doña Angela stress, particularly because her documents classify her as a single mother. The clerk who helped her to submit her forms encouraged her to declare herself single; since her husband was undocumented they were not able to be married, and in addition, at the time, in many cases a married woman would be declared a dependent and then unable to use the FM3 to work. She told me, “I felt bad, because my papers say I’m independent...just living with someone...(*juntada nada más*). I’m not married at all on those documents and I felt bad because after that I had a problem at home because my husband wasn’t recognized. But I had to, I didn’t think about my husband, I thought more about my kids and I really needed those papers.” For Doña Angela, there have been multiple advantages to having the FM2: “It’s helped me to

receive *Oportunidades*, it's helped me to have a bank account, it's helped me to join the *Seguro Popular*, which we all have but my husband doesn't, for example."

After years of renewing her FM3, and eventually her FM2 documents, in 2012 Doña Angela found out about a campaign being administered by the municipal branch of *Atención al Migrante* that would support her with the process of naturalization. She enthusiastically took advantage of the program, but her only hesitation was studying for the exam. Doña Angela has less than a primary school education, and in fact for a time she was going to night school in Tapachula to improve her reading and writing skills—something she hoped to start again. When she went to enroll in the campaign to become naturalized the people running it scolded her, she said "they scolded me and said 'what, were you sleeping?' you should only have your FM2 for a certain amount of time.'" Technically, one is eligible for naturalization after three years of processing the FM2. However, no one ever encouraged Doña Angela to explore that option. Naturalization was a longtime dream of Doña Angela's—indeed, she felt as if she were from Tapachula since she arrived at such a young age, and even with the FM2, she felt that she was not receiving the rights to which she was entitled. After acknowledging the gains, however, she mentioned,

I want you to know that they don't accept that document (the FM2) in all of the banks—like if you want to buy a refrigerator or a washing machine [on credit], it doesn't work, they tell you to find another person who has the title of a house that can help you buy it...You are rejected, in Banamex and at Banco Azteca, they

don't take it, they prefer a passport from Guatemala, in fact. It's really terrible, because the passport shouldn't have a value here, but the FM2 should...

Doña Frances was born in San Salvador, the only child of a hard working mother, and a father who was involved in the *guerrilla*. Her parents separated when she was a girl and despite this she lived comfortably with her mother, who ran a small shoemaking business and took in other children with no place to go. When Doña Frances was 15, she became pregnant with her first child. She got married, and lived with her new husband and eventually had another child two years later. When she was 18, her life changed suddenly when her mother died of a diabetes related illness—at the time, her relationship was falling apart as well and she fell into a deep depression. More problems occurred in the years that followed, and an increasingly angry and unhappy woman, Doña Frances made the difficult decision to leave behind her children, and try to migrate to the United States as an undocumented immigrant, where at least she could provide more for her children and avoid what going to prison would entail for her.

Doña Frances never made it to the United States. After arriving in Tapachula, she found shelter sleeping on top of cardboard boxes on the patio of a kind family who lived by the train tracks. She soon realized what jumping on the train would entail, after days of waiting for the next one to pass—running, practicing, and imagining what it would take to ride through rain forest, mountains and desert with total strangers and probably criminals. She decided it was not worth the risk and determined that finding work in Tapachula was a safer and surer option. A self-described hard worker, after a string of odd jobs, Doña Frances eventually began to sell lingerie that she would buy wholesale

from Guatemalan vendors in the market and re-sell to sex workers in Tapachula, going night club to night club. She did well, and soon she met her current partner of over five years, Don Javier—a man more than 25 years her senior.

I met Doña Frances through her neighbor, in December of 2010. She sold second-hand clothes on the patio of her home. Her now long-time partner was an entrepreneur who had inherited a few small businesses, a comfortable home and a couple of other properties from his recently-deceased mother. Doña Frances was 30 when I met and interviewed her. She had successfully obtained her FM3 and then FM2 a few years before and renewed it faithfully since then, with little problem. She had a passport from El Salvador, and her birth certificate and passport in order and she had the financial resources to pay for it. However, her experiences with officials were not without mishaps, and upon her most recent renewal of the FM2, just before I met her, the clerk asked her how a man like her partner could be interested in someone like her, leaving her angry and hurt.

As I readied to leave Tapachula, Doña Frances had achieved the longtime dream of bringing her two children, who had lived with their father's family for close to 10 years while she was gone, to live in Mexico. Among the difficulties of adjusting to the new country and family life, Doña Frances had to also find a way to obtain permission for her children to migrate. Even with their resources, this proved to be too difficult a task, and the boys ended up crossing the river without papers.

Doña Angela and Doña Frances are two women who have both successfully regularized their immigration statuses and obtained important vital services for

themselves and, in the case of Doña Angela, their families. They have settled in Tapachula, and according to both, they would not return to their home countries. Interestingly, their migration stories are quite typical of the majority of the women included in this study: They have migrated to find work, try to make it to the U.S., or to escape some type of problem, abuse or violence in their home country. The great majority of women (with the exception of two) have children who were born in Mexico. Regardless of their successes, however, they both have dealt with discrimination at the hands of neighbors, and officials, and note that the system has failed them in some way: Doña Angela is not able to access credit with her FM2 visa, while Doña Frances could not successfully sponsor her two children to be authorized migrants to Tapachula. Both women have in common the fact that they have partners that contribute economically to their households in addition to their own employment, which allows them to be able to maneuver their resources to afford the process of applying and paying for visas. This, and the human capital the women possess has allowed them to resist, in most cases, being abused within the system.

Conclusion

Chiapas's Governor Sabines has been lauded for his pro-migrant policies by Central American governments (Sabines, 2012). Though the evidence presented later in this dissertation clearly demonstrates that there is still much work left to do, the administration of Governor Sabines at the time responded with concrete gestures to the growing immigrant population and their needs. It is also important to note, however, that because policies are constantly evolving they are at risk of being implemented unevenly

across the state and many questions remain as to whether or not the state has enough resources to carefully and fairly implement them. Additionally, on the ground, there is a disconnect between policy and experience and there are continued concerns within the immigrant community, for example some immigrants are fearful they will be deported if they seek out services (Chandomí, 2012). Unprecedented protests carried out by immigrants in Tapachula called for uniform and accessible regularization processes (Scott Vázquez, 2012; Gonzalez, 2012; Ochoa Arguello, 2012). These on the ground realities indicate that immigrants living in Mexico have not experienced the enfranchisement that has been guaranteed to them. This begs the question of whether or not anything has actually changed from pre-neoliberal, centralized, statist practices of governance that also served to disenfranchise. I contend that progressive policies form part of Mexico's neoliberal multiculturalism which, as discussed elsewhere (see Speed, 2005 in particular) serve to symbolically enfranchise subaltern groups while neglecting to provide tangible access to economic and other social citizenship rights.

Chapter 4:

Everyday Restriction: Low- to Mid-Level Officials' Actions and Central American Women

In this chapter, I draw from field notes, observation, interviews and participatory workshops to present examples of how immigrant women are blocked, delayed and discouraged from accessing their rights to legal identity, health care, and regularization of their immigration status and other services as a result of negative and confusing institutional interactions with low- to mid-level officials. I argue that blocked access to rights plays out at the everyday, micro-level, and sometimes unintentionally or without being perceived, constitutes what I call “everyday restriction.” Unlike overt forms of restriction sanctioned by macro-level state actors, such as detention, deportation and harsh laws and policies that limit immigrant citizenship, mobility, access to employment and human services, everyday restriction plays out in the day-to-day lives of immigrant women in Tapachula. Instead of consisting of definite, pronounced experiences as in overt restriction, everyday restriction is insidious. First, it is carried out by low- to mid-level state actors—bureaucrats and other service providers who serve as the public’s main access points to the institutions for which they work. Second, officials carrying out everyday restriction may not be cognizant of their actions. Specifically, their restrictive actions are often comprised of microaggressions: body language, negative attitudes, rude comments and arbitrariness, which taken together, result in poor service provision to the immigrant community (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez & Wills, 1977; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo & Rivera, 2009). This induces negative impacts for immigrant women and

their families, including curtailed and denied access to the rights of social and legal citizenship guaranteed to them by federal and local laws, such as the right to legal identity, health care, education and regularization of immigration status. These impacts will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Everyday restriction is elusive, primarily due to the fact that officials' actions are not easily measured or observed. However, from the standpoint of immigrant women, low- to mid-level officials' individual (micro) actions unnecessarily complicate their experiences. Nearly all of the immigrant women and the representatives from non-profits defending migrants' rights that I interviewed in Tapachula reported time and again that they were being prevented from availing themselves of rights after seeking out services at local agencies. There was no doubt in the minds of the women I spoke to that they had been disenfranchised. If the law clearly allows immigrants to access certain rights, then why was it not being enforced? The objective of this chapter is to bring officials' actions to light in order to better understand how they contribute to Central American immigrant women's experiences with everyday restriction in Tapachula. In so doing, I first contextualize my discussion of micro-restriction within the existing literature on feminist geopolitics, which encourages "scaling down" examinations of state power and the regulation of international migration. Next, I describe officials' micro-scale actions, focusing in particular on attitudes and body language; refusal; arbitrary complications to service provision, such as extra paperwork; and mis/dis-information. Exposing officials' actions is a difficult task in that interviewing officials would be unlikely to yield substantial observations regarding their negative and often illegal actions. In

consideration of this reality, and acknowledging the value of Central American women's experiences, in this chapter I draw on data from my interviews and participatory workshops with immigrant women, as well as field notes from my participant observation in order to describe these sometimes intangible actions.

Why Everyday Restriction Matters

Contemporary transnational migrants undertake their journeys within a global context in which the regulation of migration flows is overwhelmingly characterized by restriction. This restriction is manifest in the intensified apprehension, detention and deportation of migrants; the proliferation of border walls and fences; and increased surveillance, among other strategies. Several Latin American countries, however, have crafted migration policies that tend to combine restrictive, security-centered measures on the one hand, with relatively "pro-immigrant" policies that provide opportunities for the regularization of immigration status, and guarantee access to certain social benefits, on the other. This model has been implemented in countries such as Argentina, exemplified in the adoption of a regularization program targeting immigrants from MERCOSUR countries (*La Patria Grande*), as well as in Chile, which recently granted amnesty to certain undocumented immigrants (Mazza & Sohnen, 2010; Doña-Reveco & Levinson, 2012). As mentioned in Chapter 3, in 2011, Mexico signed its first, most comprehensive immigration policy to date, the *Ley de Migración* (Migration Law) into law, which simultaneously received praise for its stated commitment to the protection of migrants' human rights, and harsh criticism from civil society for its equal emphasis on security.

The Mexican state of Chiapas has pro-migrant policies that pre-date this law, including regularization programs, guaranteed access to healthcare, education and legal identity.

However, despite receiving much acclaim, we know little about the implementation and success of these measures on the ground. While migration policy and the regulation of transnational migration is generated and evaluated at the macro-scale, or national level, the actual implementation of policies occurs in daily circumstances at the micro-, or local level, and receives far less attention. On-the-ground enforcement is chiefly the responsibility of individual bureaucrats, agents and other gatekeepers in everyday situations. These low-to mid-level officials are thus charged with the interpretation and implementation of migration policies, and thereby hold considerable power. Even when policies are put into place at the macro-level that protect or further immigrants' rights and access to citizenship, what unfolds on the ground can depend greatly upon the actions of and resources available to those agencies and individuals charged with implementing the policies.

I argue that we cannot understand or evaluate immigration policies without considering how they take shape on the ground. This chapter provides empirical evidence to broaden our understanding of the experiences of women immigrants in their specific encounters with low-level representatives of the state to demonstrate that women face systematic discrimination at the everyday level, in spite of a number of state policies that have been implemented to protect them. *Centroamericanas* are disproportionately impacted by this issue, as they are oftentimes charged with seeking out services and important documents on behalf of their family members, as well as for themselves. These

cases of restriction go unperceived due to the fact that much research has instead focused on deportation, detention and immigrant deaths, for example (Hagan et al., 2011; Nevins, 2007). Thus, this project employs ethnographic and participatory methods in order to capture the minutiae of everyday restriction.

Understanding how everyday restriction functions on the ground is urgent to the case of South-South migration, especially considering how the well-documented phenomenon of petty corruption due to weakened institutional frameworks and the scarcity of resources to fund capacity building and training can lead to the large-scale abuse of immigrants (Rose-Ackerman, 1978; Lederman, et al., 2005). Oftentimes, this occurs in spite of laws and human rights conventions that protect migrants. I contend that we cannot consider the efficacy of standing policy or the impacts of restriction without careful consideration of how forms of corruption and discrimination combine with officials' uneven implementation and reformulation of policies on the ground, and how this impacts immigrants. Indeed, in Mexico, more subtle, mundane forms of restriction induce impacts as harsh as those caused by *de jure* policies, including truncated political and social citizenship rights for immigrants and their families, many of whom are likely to be Mexican citizens. For this reason, it is fundamental to "scale" down research on the state in order to understand how it actually functions in peoples' daily lives.

The State, Migrants and Everyday Restriction

At the micro-scale, the state is largely made up of bureaucrats, petty clerks, agents and social service providers, as well as police officers and teachers, among others, who

are all doing the work of the state by interpreting and implementing its policies. These “street level bureaucrats” and the “gatekeepers,” who are oftentimes not directly associated with the state apparatus, can possess considerable power (Lipsky, 2010; Heyman, 2004). Deeb-Sossa and Bickham Mendez (2008) describe a subtle, yet striking form of discrimination that takes place when public service providers in health clinics and food pantries serve as gatekeepers empowered to control access to immigrant women’s services and how this process of boundary-making serves to enforce belonging.

Arguments within feminist political geography encourage us to examine the “actually existing” state, how it is grounded, embodied and how it functions at the micro-scale (Dowler & Sharp, 2001; Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Mountz, 2004). By shifting the scale of analysis, we reveal processes, phenomena and experiences that are often unseen or ignored as focus is generally applied to overarching, grand-scale narratives and descriptions of political processes. Indeed, investigating the state and its power in diverse spaces and settings, including in people’s daily lives provides the opportunity to recognize the impacts of geopolitical processes on the ground, and also gives insight into how the politics of the state manifest, are reconstituted and reconfigured at these levels (Secor, 2001; Silvey, 2004). In her study of national level immigration bureaucrats’ reactions to human smuggling in Canada, Mountz (2004) found that observation of their day-to-day functions reveals that an embodied “state is multiple, conflicted and in perpetual negotiation” (p. 339). In other words, when we examine the state as it exists in its day-to-day functions, we realize that it is not a static, monolithic or homogeneous entity. By locating the state at different scales, we better comprehend how it functions.

However, to a lesser extent, these analyses of the state include the seemingly mundane, on-the-ground interactions that low- to mid-level state actors share with immigrants (and others) as they seek out services and livelihoods. The last decade has brought growing interest in examining the changing shape and role of the state in the global era, in particular on the states' diversity and diffuseness (Trouillot, 2001; Ferguson & Gupta, 2002). Indeed, the devolution of state responsibilities to lower scales of government, as well as to NGOs and other grassroots organizations is key to the state's implementation of neoliberal governmentality. Low-to mid-level officials make up the neoliberal state and thus through their actions, exemplify aspects of how the Mexican neoliberal state functions.

Literature on the regulation and restriction of transnational migration flows is largely focused on national and international policies and actions and the enforcement of political, physical and socially constructed borders. Restriction or regulation of migration is part of the state's power to control the movement of people and include and exclude bodies within a territory. Transnational migration flows more often than not are viewed as problematic and are met with restrictive measures the world-over. Academic accounts of regulation and restriction and their impacts often deal with the phenomenon on the grand scale, and as part of state-sanctioned activity. For example, recent work has described the proliferation and impacts of deportation (Hagan et al., 2011; Hiemstra, 2012), as well as restrictive policy measures, security and militarization of the border (Coleman, 2012; Nevins, 2007). Overt restriction at the local level is also being studied with the creation of state- and city-level laws to limit immigrants' rights, such as the U.S.

states of Arizona and Alabama's controversial measures (Boushey & Luedtke, 2011), and specific city-level ordinances in Pennsylvania, Texas, and Nebraska (Wong, 2012; Walker & Leitner, 2011; Gilbert, 2009; Varsanyi, 2008). These policies have been shown to directly impact legal and social citizenship rights (Varsanyi, 2006), and various studies embody and locate the consequences of such overt measures on individuals, families and communities as immigrants experience marginalization (Menjívar, 2006; Coutin, 2003). However, there is less work on discrimination by officials and the forms this takes.

In order to better understand how the daily actions of those that represent the state impact immigrants, we must shift scales to provide a more intimate, grounded understanding of how policies developed at the macro, or state level, pragmatically function at the micro-scale of the everyday. Practical and everyday accounts of what state officials do and how civilians perceive and experience their interactions with the state are pertinent to our understanding of how the state functions at lower levels, implementing policies often elaborated at the macro-scales. Studying the state at this scale also exposes how micro-level actors exist at the confluence of the global and the local. Officials' everyday actions are not isolated, but rather they make up part of the overarching, transnational economic and political regimes that bear migration and subsequent attempts to regulate it. It is also exceedingly important to understand how global processes and top-down policies are manifest on the ground and actually impact the lives of immigrants, in order to then create collaborative, grassroots and/or policy solutions to improve delivery, minimize and eliminate damaging processes, and effect meaningful social change.

Describing the embodiment of the state and its power implicitly requires qualifying not only its characteristics, but also its actions. I couch my discussion of the actions that make up everyday restriction within the literature on racial microaggressions (Pierce et al., 1977). Racial microaggressions are defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273, *cited in* Sue et al., 2009, p. 183). Sue et al. (2009) establish that for the target group, in their study, people of color, microaggressions are “tinged with explicit and implicit racial snubs, put-downs or a pattern of disrespect” (p.183). Microaggressions are experienced in situations marked by historic and deeply embedded, uneven power dynamics, in which women, immigrants, and other marginalized groups are targeted. I contend that this concept is particularly useful for understanding the less tangible, though equally damaging, actions of low- to mid-level officials in their interactions with immigrant women.

This and the following chapter illustrate *centroamericanas*’ experiences with the state as they seek to avail themselves of public services and rights. Here, this everyday state is represented by low- to mid-level officials and the institutional networks of which they are part. *Centroamericanas* and low- to mid-level officials interact with one another in a range of spaces, including schools, hospitals, social benefits offices, and even in the streets. In the following section, I present the most common experiences that immigrant women reported taking place in the *registro civil*, public health clinics and the local immigration office. Low- to mid-level officials’ actions as everyday forms of restriction

fall into four categories, each of which will be explored in greater depth below: 1) indirectly refusing to provide service; 2) directly refusing to provide service; 3) presentation of arbitrary requirements; and 4) providing (mis)information to the public. It is important to note that officials are not a homogenous group, and indeed their actions are not always negative, and in some instances they may go to great lengths to actually help immigrants. I will discuss the nuanced perspectives of low- to mid-level officials in later chapters, however here I chose to focus on negative aspects of everyday restriction because it is damaging to Central American women immigrants. To protect the privacy of low- to mid-level officials, agencies, and immigrant participants in this study, I do not share the names or specific locations of agencies.

Subtle and Indirect Refusals

A refusal to provide service is the most straightforward means by which low- to mid-level officials restrict immigrants' access to their rights. However, these denials of service can take the form of indirect actions. The participants of this study rarely reported that officials turned them away in a manner that clearly indicated that direct refusal to serve them. Instead, immigrant participants experienced particular actions, attitudes, communication styles, and body language that they perceived to be refusal. Though outright refusals to serve immigrant women do indeed occur, officials may discourage immigrants from claiming services through other more subtle cues that intimidate, frustrate or overwhelm clients. Insults, body language or a rude attitude, are examples of some of the cues that immigrant clients have observed, and that are often interpreted as a

refusal of service. The following examples evidence this spectrum of refusal. The first set of examples is drawn from my participant observation, and demonstrates how microaggressions can discourage clients from accessing services and be interpreted as a form of “soft refusal.” Then, I describe two case studies of women who were denied services in order to describe how refusal of service occurs, according to immigrant women.

Low- to mid-level officials, consciously or unknowingly convey messages to the public through their attitudes, body language and other minute actions, to which subsequently, the public assigns meaning. Attitudes and body language establish the context for officials’ actions and can condition the public’s experiences in a certain agency. The following fieldnotes from my time conducting participant observation present examples of officials’ actions while we served the public and assisted them with paperwork.

Fieldnote 2/9/2011

Employee A seems incapable of raising her voice above the sound of a whisper, especially when answering someone’s questions (which are frequent). It’s very hard to hear her, and when she is asked something, her gaze does not turn away from the computer screen. Now she looks more at me when we speak and I’ve lost my fear to ask her questions. But for people coming in for the first time, I think it adds to the intimidation factor.

Fieldnote 2/24/2011

One attitude I observed today was the silence, or the ‘blank stare’ that they [low- to mid-level officials] give directly after being asked a question. The person approaches, apologizing for the disruption with a *disculpe*,¹⁴ and then the worker just stares for a few seconds, or worse, doesn’t acknowledge the question, the *disculpe* or anything as they continue to focus on the task they were working on. Eventually, they answer. But it’s the silence in between the initial approach and the response that seems to have the effect, I believe, of making the client feel unvalued, and maybe even stupid and inferior. Maybe they feel frustrated and angry too. Employee B does this move extremely well, maybe she is actually just taking a few moments to think about her response? She follows up, depending on to whom she is talking, with “*Mamita, ahorita le va a atender*,¹⁵” or if she doesn’t like the person, she leaves out the *mamita*. ...it is possible that they don’t realize that they are doing this, but that doesn’t make it any less effective.

Microaggressions, as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities,” are often unnoticed details that fall into the background of our analyses of everyday events (Sue et al 2007, 273, *cited in* Sue et al. 2009, 183). The above field notes record my observations of mundane actions that nevertheless take on important meanings for the people that witness and experience them. Minute actions are also imbued with power. The bureaucratic power plays inform the context in which other actions unfold. Take, for example, the (non)strategic use of silence by officials. Going to a public agency can be intimidating. As the field notes also demonstrate, low- to mid-level officials are inconsistent in their behavior—sometimes they are cheerful, direct and even play with children. However, inconsistency only strengthens officials’ power: not knowing what to expect upon arrival to a public office leaves clients, and especially immigrant clients, vulnerable to abuse. These mundane power plays become an important

¹⁴ “Pardon me.”

¹⁵ *Mamita*, he’ll be with you in just a moment.”

detail in immigrant women's perceptions of their experiences in receiving services. In general, body language and rudeness, which convey a lack of interest in providing services communicates very literally to immigrant women that they are not welcome in the offices, and becomes a sort of "soft refusal," which due to intimidation or fear can cause would-be clients to avoid demanding services.

In another subtle form of indirect refusal demonstrated in other cases, immigrant women reported that low- to mid-level officials supplied them with arbitrary justifications to deny them services. Doña Raquel, a young Honduran mother, provided an example in which she was directly turned away from a local *registro civil*, even after diligently gathering the many requisites needed to obtain a birth certificate for her child—a feat that on its own is a barrier to many poor, marginalized or immigrant women in Tapachula. Her daughter was in fact born in Mexico, but she had waited six years to register her. Instead of helping to clarify Doña Raquel's daughter's status, the attending official insisted that the child was not Mexican and chastised Doña Raquel for not having placed her in school. She explained,

...when I go to the *registro* to get her [her daughter] a birth certificate, they tell me, "no," that they won't register her because she is already six-years-old and because she is Honduran, and not Mexican. "How could it be that this girl isn't already registered, if she should already be in school?" And that was what it was like to fight with this woman [the official].

The official refused to serve Doña Raquel despite the fact that she presented the appropriate documentation to prove her daughter's identity. Instead, she made unsubstantiated assumptions about the origin and nationality of the child. Nevertheless,

the official held enough power to use her claims to justify not registering Raquel's daughter, a decision that bears the consequence of blocking the child's access to school and healthcare in addition to the other citizenship rights associated with holding legal identity and nationality. The passage evidences how officials have the power to arbitrarily determine who will be served, based on their personal discretion.

As with many of the women who participated in this study, Doña Raquel's experience induced anger and frustration. After the new *registro civil* that specialized in serving migrants opened to attend to the growing immigrant population in Tapachula, Doña Raquel was finally able register her daughter. She expressed her desire to prove to the official that she was wrong:

I'm going to show her that the girl isn't from Honduras, that she's from here- and I even have a birth certificate to show it—and now I'm just waiting for them to have it ready so I can bring it there and show it to her because she was wrong, and those women are used to doing things like that.

After being blocked from obtaining her daughter's birth certificate the first time, Doña Raquel was eager to correct the official —her frustration and sense of justice drove her desire to find the official and somehow rebalance the power dynamic between the two of them. Weak and discretionary justifications for refusing to serve immigrant women, like those mentioned above, tend to further reinforce boundaries between immigrant women and officials—confirming participants' perceptions that officials hold all of the power, and *centroamericanas* have no choice but to accept their decisions.

Doña Consuelo, a 34 year-old Honduran mother of two who has lived in Tapachula for 9 years, experienced a similarly confusing encounter with officials when

she and her partner sought prenatal care at a local public hospital. As in Doña Raquel's case, the official's justification for denial of service was based on the legitimacy of her identity, and questions surrounding the future citizenship rights of her unborn child—which legally should have no bearing on her eligibility to receive pre-natal care in Tapachula. According to law, prenatal care is guaranteed to all women, regardless of immigration status. In her interview, Doña Consuelo described the circumstances under which she was barred from care:

There in the hospital, because I didn't have my papers, they didn't want to receive me. They told me no because if something were to happen to me, how would they be able to identify me? How were they to know that my husband was actually my husband, and that 'he' was my child¹⁶, and if I had conceived here [in Tapachula], or if I had come from the 'other side' already pregnant.

The social worker's doubts about where the child was conceived as well as his refusal to extend care to Doña Consuelo indicate this public servants' deeper misunderstanding of official policy and standard operating procedure in the public hospital. This official's actions are couched within his or her own assumptions about the importance of documentation of legal identity of the immigrant and the unborn child in order to determine entitlement to basic health care.

At the time of Doña Consuelo's pregnancy, access to prenatal care was universal in Chiapas. Thus, Consuelo should have been accommodated in some way. However, due to the social worker's own perception of the law, or possibly the institution's specific policies, whether intentionally or inadvertently (out of ignorance) non-compliant with the law, Doña Consuelo was still unjustly denied services. In contrast, Doña Consuelo and

¹⁶ This statement refers to after the child is born.

her Mexican partner have a different interpretation of what it means to be a citizen with entitlement to social goods. She quotes her husband as arguing, “yes, she’s been here for four years, she is my wife, he is my son [referring to the unborn child], how is it that you’re not going to take care of her for me?” According to their reasoning, the simple fact that Doña Consuelo has lived in Tapachula for years, has a Mexican partner and is pregnant with his child should entitle her to care.

As evidenced by Doña Raquel and Doña Consuelo’s stories—which only represent two of the several cases reported to me during fieldwork—officials are straightforward in their intention to refuse services to immigrant women, however they often express themselves indirectly, and justify their decisions with explanations that simply “do not make sense” to their clients. However, one must accept irrational explanations regardless of their validity, which in turn forms part of the dynamic of disempowerment experienced by immigrants. This disconnect in expectations and the gap between the law and its implementation, combined with immigrants’ vulnerability creates an uneven playing field upon which immigrants are likely to lose. The lack of logic and consistency of explanations reflects these officials’ capricious behavior, which ultimately converts itself into a mechanism of power and control in the sense that it prevents immigrants from claiming their rights. Officials’ capriciousness is a form of restriction that functions to curtail access while it also could reinforce immigrants’ sense of helplessness and hopelessness. This incites considerable frustration among immigrant clients who lack access to accurate, consistent and formal sources of information concerning their rights to protect themselves.

Arbitrary Requirements: Obstructed by *Papeleo* and *Vueltas*

Centroamericanas are also obstructed from obtaining their rights by the complicated web of paperwork, requirements and fees that the state requires. In some cases, such bureaucratic barriers exist legally, while in other cases officials may arbitrarily add their own requirements, a clearly illegal practice. This exacerbates the burden of paperwork already assumed by immigrant women, who are at a disadvantage when navigating Mexican bureaucracy because of their typically truncated access to information and socio-economic and spatial constraints. For example, there are many forms and documents required in order to obtain a typical official document. The requirements for a birth certificate, for example, can include copies of identification cards, birth certificates of the parents, the presence of multiple witnesses (who must be Mexican nationals), proof of an address, and a paper certifying that a birth took place (*constancia de alumbramiento*), among other documents. For the poor and for immigrants, having to gather these papers—some of which require payment to obtain—and to make copies of them all amounts to a considerable sum of money in addition to the loss of work time. Some participants in this study estimated that it could take up to a week to complete an official *trámite* or process to obtain a birth certificate. Indeed, extra requirements complicate immigrants' attempts to obtain official documents or services because they often do not have ready access to an updated and stamped copy of their birth certificate, the money, time off work, or reliable sources of information about these processes. However, in addition to sanctioned paperwork or *papeleo*, participants

complained that low- to mid-level officials also placed additional, unsanctioned requirements or roadblocks on clients.

Officials' power is amplified when their actions are unpredictable. In general, bureaucratic procedures and requirements should be routine and consistent with written regulations. However, as *centroamericanas* often reported, low- to mid-level officials often veered from the procedures laid out in policy, asking for different or extra requisites than previously believed to be required. An example of this is illustrated in the following scene from a role play activity performed by *centroamericanas* during participatory workshops. In this section, I examine immigrants' perceptions of arbitrary extra paperwork, though at times it seems that both types of paperwork elicit similar negative reactions and responses from Central American immigrant women.

As discussed by interviewees, demands could range from small things like bringing the official a soda or a snack, or paying a larger sum, to even bringing paper or toner to use in order to print documents. In Spanish, these extra steps are referred to as *vuelatas*, literally translated as "turns," and closely related to the English idiom of "going around in circles." In other cases officials dis-informed clients regarding requirements causing them to make extra trips to obtain the proper documents. These extra requirements are common and are often perceived as benign and "just part of doing business," by officials and clients alike. It is difficult to discern whether these exclusionary practices are intentional, done with malice, or a thoughtless/unmindful reproduction of deeply engrained and taken for granted institutional norms. Regardless,

these types of conditions are inherently unfair and over-burden the poor and those unfamiliar with official processes; many immigrants fall into these two groups.

Exemplifying this reality, a group of *centroamericanas* participating in a workshop role-playing exercise parodied a typical experience for immigrant women who go to an immigration office to obtain documents:

Clerk: Do you have all of your documents?

Central American Woman (CA): No.

Clerk: Do you know English and Spanish?

CA: No.

*(loud laughter in the room)*¹⁷

Clerk: And French?

CA: No.

Clerk: *Capriciously.* Did you bring your grandfather's birth certificate? Your great-grandfather's? Your own birth certificate...passport?

CA: No.

Clerk: Your permission to enter Tapachula?

CA: *(a bit more confidently)* Yes!

Clerk: Did you make a copy of it?

CA: No!

Clerk: *(Sternly)* Go and make 100 copies of it!

Ah, and, did you have permission from your husband to come here to Immigration?

¹⁷ Throughout the following scene excerpts, "scene notes" are in italics and provide important details about how the scene was acted out by characters, and audience participation. The scene notes were aggregated after viewing notes and photographs and listening to workshop recordings.

CA: No.

Clerk: Go and get permission! Come back in a month!

CA: Oh no, but in a month? It's so much time!

Clerk: Do you want your papers?

CA: Yes.

Clerk: Well, then you'll come back in a month.

CA: (*shyly and quietly*) My goodness!

While skits and mini-theater exercises are often overlooked as sources of relevant data due to their tendency to be playful, comedic and sometimes exaggerations of experiences (Pratt, 2000; Carte & Torres, *forthcoming*), as evidenced above, role players make important observations through their use of hyperbole and parody. At once, the participants comment on the perceived injustice of the number of requisites; the absurdity of certain requirements; the inconvenience and difficulty of obtaining requisites; and officials' rudeness and capricious attitudes. Whether official or extra-official, perceived or real, *vueltas* imposed by the state or officials themselves are barriers that are unseen in macro-level analysis of restriction.

The cost of processing applications includes making numerous copies of supporting documents, transportation, and time absent from work, which prohibits many immigrants from obtaining important documents. Doña Ángela, the Guatemalan taco vendor introduced in Chapter 3, explained that she waited for several years to register her first three children because she, "worked first to register them all at once and for the same

amount, I said ‘if we run around for one of them, we might as well run around for all three at once.’” Putting off applications for pertinent documents, however, provokes further discrimination. Doña Ángela remembers the reaction of the clerk who received her in the *registro civil*:

They criticized us, “why did you wait until now? They’re 7, 6 and 3 years-old, why haven’t you registered them before now?” Well, because there was no money. “Ok then, well come back this other day, we aren’t going to register them today because you’re missing certain requirements. And if you’re not going to have them registered, then go back to where you came from.” I said, “I’ll return, but my kids won’t—how am I supposed to register them there [in Guatemala]? They weren’t born there. I’m going to fight for the rights that they deserve, so let’s see if you don’t serve us when I come back,” I told her.

The passage exemplifies a situation in which many immigrant women have found themselves: registering children on time might be impeded by fear, financial considerations, or lack of information. However, waiting can lead to discrimination and biases that spring from officials’ assumptions about Central American immigrants. In Doña Ángela’s case, the official doubted whether her children were actually born in Mexico, and thus eligible to receive citizenship rights. Doña Ángela’s strong reaction to the official’s request that “they go back to where they came from,” is evidence that she does not perceive herself or her children as victims of the officials. She is aware of the rights her children are entitled to, although she feels she does not have these same rights. Her comment also highlighted another common perception among Central American immigrants—that their children would not be entitled to a birth certificate from their country of origin (rules vary by country), or dual citizenship rights in their parents’ countries of origin (possible in all sending countries of immigrants represented in this

study—Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador). In the case of Guatemala, for example, children born to Guatemalan parents abroad may register the birth of their child with the Guatemalan Embassy or Consulate, but only after providing a birth certificate from the jurisdiction where they were born first.¹⁸ It seems that many women interviewed were unaware that they may be able to register their children for dual citizenship rights.

The following scene from a role playing activity held during participatory workshops represents another prototypical encounter with officials in the migration office that is enlivened by participants' body language, voice intonation, expressions and interactions with the audience.

A Guard stands sternly while a Central American woman walks down the short hallway. In the background a participant yells out, '¡que pase el desgraciado!' (Let the miserable wretch enter) mimicking the famous line of popular talk-show host, Laura Bozzo, as the scene starts. The Guard starts to call the 'immigrants' forward to receive their appointment tickets from her. The women comment in the background that the Guard must look tough and angry, implying that the woman playing the role is not tough enough.

Guard: Where are you from?

Central American Woman (CA): From Guatemala.

Guard: Ah, okay. I'm going to give you a number, and wait for your turn. Take a number and wait for your turn, go ahead.

CA: *(CA walks forward and sits down at table with Clerk.)* Good morning. Pardon me, what paperwork do they require for someone to apply for naturalization?

Clerk: *(slowly, and intentionally, looking down at the papers in front of her rather than at CA)* Your birth certificate, Passport, three languages, a bank

¹⁸ For more information, see the *Ministerio de relaciones exteriores de Guatemala* webpage, http://www.minex.gob.gt/Visor_Pagina.aspx?PaginaID=42 accessed 10/15/2012

account, a house here with three floors, your grandma's birth certificate, the video of your *quinceañera*. You don't have any of these things?

CA: Nothing.

Clerk: Well, go and bring them. And come back in two weeks.

CA: (*Raising her voice, incredulously*) Two weeks? And you think that I have the time to be running around?

Clerk: Well, if you want your papers, come back.

CA: Is there any other paper where it says all of the requirements?

Clerk: The titles to all your properties.

(*In the audience a woman yells out 'And if she doesn't have any?' There is laughter.*)

CA: I don't have any property. I rent.

Clerk: Then buy some.

CA: (*Blankly*) Thank you.

Clerk: (*Looking up from her paperwork, yelling*) Next!

As the participants act out the skit, their body language and tone of voice, as well as interactions with the audience enhance the scene. When the Central American character enters the office to find out what requirements are needed to become a Mexican citizen, the clerk barely looks up from her documents while she demands absurd and exaggerated requisites, such as proof of property ownership and a video of her *quinceañera*. The clerk's aloof body language plus her quick and dismissive demeanor, contrasts with the Central American actor's polite and shy tone, highlighting the uneven power dynamic between the two. As the scene progresses, the Central American actress gains confidence, which is reflected in her body language and tone of voice as she

declares her frustration at having to wait two weeks to return with all of the proper documents. This demonstrates a measure of resistance to the unfair treatment. After taking in the scene, we may conclude then that immigrants feel that the list of forms and other requirements to qualify for and apply for their visas are often unnecessarily difficult to obtain, and that they are unhappy with the officials' capricious behavior.

This was confirmed in the following breakout discussion of actual events that occurred in each woman's own lives. One participant explained,

Well, that's what you go through in the immigration office, and it's true because I went through that. The guard was very rude to me. The person from Migration did the same thing that they did to her. They asked, "do you have a copy of this, do you have a copy of that?" He said, "come back in a week" and there I go back and "no, you're missing this" and they've got you doing whatever they please. That's what you go through, and that's what I went through, I don't know if the rest of you have been through the same?

As evidenced by the above passage, these women's sharing of their experiences through dramatization also led to meaningful discussion after the role play. Here, the clerk played the part of a cold and uncaring official, making little eye contact with the client, and staring at the papers in front of her as if the client were not there—expressing indifference that immigrants can detect when they encounter low-level officials. The capricious character of her tone was interwoven with sternness, again implying the authority of one who intends to do what he or she pleases with a client. In these scenes, processes are brought to life by the actors, adding another dimension to the participants' representations of their lived reality. In turn, the subtleties of performance convey certain details and emotions experienced during encounters with the state that might not be

revealed in an interview. For researchers, the major challenge of understanding the everyday is often caused by difficulties in capturing the minutiae of life at the micro-scale. Role play as embodied performance can provide another entry point for researchers and community members trying to unpack complex, multi-scalar phenomena.

The following scene reveals important details about women's encounters with the state and also the power of role playing to reveal important and sensitive details about these everyday encounters. It portrays the discrimination against Central American women in *registros civiles*, the government office where people register births, deaths and marriages. The skit below deals with immigrants' rights to marry and denial of this right by corrupt officials. Since undocumented Central American immigrants are unable to legally marry their partners, unscrupulous officials taking advantage of a weak system and immigrants' vulnerability may resort to extortion in order to make extra money.

Clerk: Come forward, ma'am. What can I do for you?

CA: Good morning. You see, I'd like to get married. I need to know, what are the requirements so that I can get married?

Clerk: Yes, but in the first place, are you going to marry a Mexican?

CA: Yes, to a Mexican.

Clerk: And where are you from?

CA: I'm from Honduras.

Clerk: You're Honduran. In that case, do you have your papers in order?

CA: Well the truth is no, I only have my ID card from Honduras.

Clerk: No *mamita*, you have to have everything in order because in a *registro civil* there are records and these records are kept in order. So I'm going to give you the list [of requirements] so you may get your papers, and come back when you already have them ready.

CA: The truth is I don't have all of them, because I don't have the option to go back to Honduras to get them all together. I only have my stamped birth certificate. Will you check to see if there is another way for me to get married besides what you mention?

Clerk: Look, I can tell you something like this. (*Whispers*). Just between us, yes we can get your papers, but the thing is that you have to give us a sum of money. If you dare to bring me the money that we are asking you for, then yes, we will marry you. It would cost you \$25,000 Pesos (*About \$2,000 USD*).

(*Laughter—the audience talks about how common the mala jugada or playing dirty — a colloquial way to refer to corruption— is in these offices*)

CA: I'm poor and so is my husband, and we don't have the capacity to get \$25,000 pesos, I don't know what we could do in this situation.

Clerk: (*Whispering*) Well, if you don't bring the money you won't be able to get your papers.

CA: Ok, well, God bless you.

Clerk: Well then, I'm really sorry. At your service. (*Laughter and applause.*)

Though Mexican nationals often complain of bureaucratic corruption, immigrants and in particular women, are especially vulnerable to corrupt officials. In the prior scene, because the Central American character does not have a visa, the clerk takes advantage of her undocumented status and offers her an “under the table” option. The skit and ensuing group discussion underscore the importance of the role of the *registro civil* officials in properly enforcing policy. Thus, the official, as a micro-representative of the state, operating in a context in which impunity and corruption are commonplace, can in some

cases take advantage of this vulnerability to ask for bribes, a theme that is also exemplified in the scene described below, which also takes place in the *registro civil*. When she asks the clerk whether or not there would be another way that she could get married without having her papers in order, the clerk offers to resolve the issue in exchange for the payment of a bribe in a sum higher than most participants' earnings during a period of four to six months. Thus, it is important to note that any bribe would be difficult for the majority of participants to pay, making their willing participation in the *mala jugada* less likely.

It was very difficult, if not impossible, to discuss this type of corruption in interviews with low- to mid-level officials and immigrants. Corruption and extortion are part of everyday life for many people in the region, and although there is common consciousness of the phenomenon, asking for details in an interview is rarely appropriate. Furthermore, if the opportunity does arise to discuss corruption in an interview, participants might not feel comfortable providing the elaborate details of their experiences. We found that immigrants were much more forthcoming in discussing the circumstances surrounding more direct and tangible violations of their rights than corruption. Role play presents a unique opportunity to explore this form of officials' behavior, as volunteered by the participants themselves, without directly probing or eliciting responses to direct questions about corruption.

How May We (Dis)inform you?: Deploying Confusion and Arbitrariness

Another subtle manner in which low- to mid-level officials use their power is through giving misinformation or simply not mentioning relevant information. This happens in bureaucratic offices where immigrants go to process paperwork for their children's birth certificates or for their migration documents, for example. During visits to these offices, immigrants and Mexican clients alike rely on low- to mid-level officials to supply them with the correct information they need to complete their transactions as quickly and as cheaply as possible. Admittedly, it is impossible to determine whether low- to mid-level officials employ these tools intentionally or with malice. Whatever the case, officials' motivations for doing so are complex, and go further than simply being the result of clear-cut discrimination. The following fieldnotes exemplify this trend.

Fieldnote 3/2/2011

A man (Mexican, with a Honduran passport for his wife) came in to see the *licenciado* [official in charge] so that he could review his documents and make sure he had everything he needed to get a birth certificate for his child. It was 11:59. The *licenciado* was not there. The man told me that another employee [Employee A] had told him that the time when the *licenciado* would review paperwork was only between 11AM-12PM, which this employee always tells the public. Employee B always, in contrast, tells the public that paperwork is reviewed between 10AM-12PM. Clear example of different information being deployed from the same office. I shouted over to Employee B, asking if she could give him an appointment to come back even though the *licenciado* was gone. She said "No, you have to come between 10-12."

Fieldnote 2/15/2011

Employee B called me over. She was explaining to the immigrant woman that she had to go make a payment in the *Unidad Administrativa* before she could proceed with receiving her paperwork. I didn't ask, but I wondered why she was telling the woman she needed to go all the way over there to pay, since they usually can just pay at the cash register on site.

Fieldnote 2/18/2011

Now a few days later, I found out that the family that had to go to the *Unidad Administrativa* to pay their bill actually had to go there because they ran out of receipts or “*boletos*” in the office. I only found this out because I asked why. At no point during the exchange with this woman, did *anyone* attempt to explain to me, or the woman, why she had to go to the *Unidad Administrativa* to pay the bill.

My fieldnotes are more evidence of the various “holes” in the information that make accessing services difficult for people who hold little knowledge of bureaucratic proceedings. After my participant observation, I observed several other occasions when employees did not supply clients with complete information, and were inconsistent with the quantity and quality of information given out. In general, I concluded that, if the client did not ask an employee about certain processes they would not receive the information they needed.

Conclusions

The experiences of Central American women living, working and raising families in Tapachula indicate that despite the existence of policies that should protect them, they face excessive barriers to the enjoyment of their citizenship rights. In the cases that I have described here, low- to mid-level officials using their power as representatives of the state reformulate, interpret and implement policies in their daily work. The above examples demonstrate that officials’ actions can be subtle, and may not always consist of outward negations of rights, but of insults, or simply adding arbitrary extra requirements. Regardless of the forms they take, officials’ negations of immigrant women’s rights

produce severe, and marked consequences in their lives, including lack of access to identity for children, education, financial services, and social welfare programs. As I argue, unchecked, these practices convert into a form of everyday restriction, which has many consequences for *centroamericanas* and their families' enjoyment of social and political citizenship rights and livelihoods. By employing a feminist geopolitical analysis that aims to embody the state at scales "finer and coarser" than the nation-state (Hyndman, 2001; p. 213), this text demonstrates that official measures to regulate and incorporate international migrants are, in daily practice, left to individual officials' discretion.

Giving blank stares when asked questions, not looking up at a client when answering a question, and using a barely audible voice are all commonplace, and especially with clientele that could be classified as poor. Yet, these small actions (all of us who have had these experiences can attest to this) serve to frustrate, humiliate, and discourage. Though officials may not technically be working outside of the law, again these are small, yet potent ways of putting immigrants in their place. Keeping quiet about discounts at the *registro civil* could mean that a poor mother misses the opportunity to save a significant amount of money; simply stating clearly and completely the requirements needed to register children could mean saving one or two trips to the civil registry, which is significant when one totals the cost of transportation and missed hours of work. Such omissions produce many consequences, most obviously the loss of income, and feelings of frustration, but most importantly it also could serve to discourage immigrants from completing bureaucratic processes and from accessing their rights.

Without placing close attention to the micro-scale of enforcement, we will never understand how immigrants interface with the institutions that are charged with serving them, and thus we will never be able to improve this service delivery. Progressive policy measures are ineffective without close examination and restructuring of implementation practices. For state and national level measures in Mexico to serve their professed objectives of protecting migrants' human rights, we must focus on how they are being implemented on an everyday basis.

In shifting the scale of analysis to that of the everyday, this research also draws our attention to a less-studied trend in the phenomenon of Central American migrants' experiences in Mexico, which is key to the study of South-South migration, due to the importance of the migration of Central Americans in the North American system, but also because of the changing landscapes of migration in Mexico. A major question has yet to be investigated: will Central American permanent immigration to Mexico increase in the coming years, and if it does, how will Mexico shape its immigration policy? Largely, the focus is still on transmigrants in the law and in academic accounts. By focusing on the everyday lives of immigrants in the city, it is evident that Tapachula is not merely a stopping point for transmigrants, but it is also a destination for immigrants.

Though it has not been the intention of this chapter to understand motivations for officials' behavior, we may speculate that they perform their work within complex institutional networks and face internal and external pressures that could influence their actions. Preliminary results of this research indicate that resource scarcity, lack of training, the pressures of their jobs as well as an overarching climate of discrimination

against migrants all seem to play a role in their decisions. After a discussion of how immigrants experience everyday restriction in Chapter 5, Chapters 6 and 7 will address officials' roles more critically by including their perspectives to fully comprehend their positioning and experiences in order to create effective and appropriate policies that protect immigrants.

Chapter 5:

Meanings of Restriction: Central American Women's Embodied Citizenship and Belonging

As the year 2012 came to a close, Central American families residing in Tapachula organized and participated in small, yet unprecedented demonstrations during which they protested the unjust standards of the National Institute of Migration (INM). They claimed that agency had unfairly tightened the requirements in place for migrants to regularize their immigration status. Adding fuel to their protests, the addition of these new obstacles to the regularization process occurred in spite of the new *Ley de Migración*, which, according to the media and lawmakers, was supposed to facilitate undocumented immigrants' integration into Mexico. Signaling her frustration with this change—before she was able to process her visa for free—and the fact that laws are enforced at the whim of the delegate in charge, Salvadoran immigrant Julia López told the local newspaper *El Orbe*, “Each authority takes up his own policies, and we can't do anything about it” (cited in Scott Vázquez, 2012). The protests centered specifically on the high cost of obtaining FM2 and FM3 visas —over \$4,000 pesos (around \$310 USD)—when previously this cost could be waived if the applicant could demonstrate economic hardship. To put this in perspective, the minimum wage in Chiapas is \$59 pesos (\$4.85 USD) a day and with the exception of only one immigrant participant in this study, each participant's average income is less than minimum wage.

On April 17th, 2013, Central American immigrants again protested the high price of regularization, and also the rise of deportations of those who were unable to pay for

the visas. A newly formed community organization, the “*Comunidad Centroamericana*” spearheaded the protest. The president of the group, a Honduran woman named Nora Rodríguez told the same newspaper, “ ‘We want them to lower the price from \$4,815 pesos and \$3,130 pesos for a document that in reality, when one goes to a banking institution and the first thing they ask him for is a passport, they tell us that the FM2 and the Legal Status Card, doesn’t serve us at all here, not even to withdraw money, it doesn’t work as an ID, and so we don’t understand the reason for such high prices’ ” (cited in Zúñiga, 2013). She continued, “ ‘We migrated from our countries not only because of economic problems, but also because of the gangs— this is about people who are searching for a better future for our children. We stayed here and we don’t want our families here to break up, because we already come from broken families’ ” (cited in Zúñiga, 2013).

The recent protests and their coverage in the local media are important because they would have seemed unimaginable in past years. They signal the growth of the Central American community in Tapachula, and as its numbers grow, its political engagement and organization has increased as well. The demands of demonstrators reflect the same concerns of immigrant participants in this study. As evidenced in the previous chapter, despite the existence of policies claiming to protect their rights, immigrants often are unable to avail themselves of these rights. The protestors quoted above claim that the price they are being charged does not correspond to the product’s quality: they disagree with paying for documents that rarely are able to furnish the protections and access to rights they expected. In many ways, with or without papers they

deal with the same discrimination—an observation that speaks to the everyday restriction discussed in the previous chapter. With or without “papers,” protesting groups of immigrants perceive themselves as having limited rights, which induces numerous negative consequences, just as another woman protesting quoted in *El Orbe* stated, “because they don’t have an FM3 or FM2, the immigrants don’t follow up on the official complaints that they lodge, and additionally, the people that are going to the hospital, that don’t have family here [refers to transmigrants], they are charging them, even though they are *de paso*¹⁹ and they don’t have money...” (cited in Zúñiga, 2013). The protestor’s analysis of the situation places responsibility for this change in fees on the shoulders of a higher ranking official, paralleling the arguments of the last chapter, which contend that the negation of rights is largely due to micro-scale aggressions playing out at the lowest levels of bureaucracy.

The above quotations anticipate the major questions of this chapter: What is the meaning of everyday restriction in Central American women’s lives? And how does this impact their daily experiences of citizenship? As noted in Chapter 1, I conceptualize citizenship as both legal membership in a national polity—including full membership and residency visas—and substantive membership, or belonging, which can be defined as the experience of feeling as if one belongs in a place (Goldring, 2002). Drawing on the narratives of several *centroamericanas* in particular, I discuss how everyday restriction can deepen poverty among women; increase vulnerability to abuses in the home and in public; and produce commonly held feelings of alienation and “non-existence.” I argue

¹⁹ “Just passing through,” refers to transmigrants.

that regardless of their experiences with everyday restriction and the perception that their documents do not necessarily protect them, women continue to place a high value on state-sanctioned forms of citizenship, and will resort to extra-official means in order to obtain them.

Embodying the Citizen

Understanding the way migrants experience their interactions with government officials necessitates a study of citizenship and belonging. Much work has described the emergence of post-national, supra-national, or local variations of citizenship as well as citizenship “from below” (Desforges et al., 2005; Guarnizo & Smith, 1998). These works discuss the declining importance of the nation-state in the elaboration of citizenship rights. Less work has examined the continued importance of the nation-state in immigrants’ own imaginations of citizenship (Leitner & Ehrkamp, 2006). This study builds on existing literature on citizenship by contributing immigrants’ perceptions of belonging and their access to legal citizenship, by also considering citizenship as an experiential, embodied concept.

In predominate modern conceptualizations of citizenship, rights are granted to members who have acquired their membership through their connections to a given territorially defined nation-state. Globalization, mobility, and migration problematize citizenship models that are based on membership in a territorially defined, sovereign state. Mindful of this problematic, geographers have conceptualized several possible post-national “spaces of citizenship” (Desforges et al., 2005) based on universal concepts

of human rights and transnational models of citizenship (Glick Schiller, et al. 1995; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). These models provide alternatives to place-bound concepts of citizenship, which have helped othered and excluded groups stake claims for membership. Varsanyi (2007, 2008a) suggests that citizenship has been re-scaled such that state and city-level citizenship rights have become more important as a result of the devolution of national governance to the local level through court rulings, the emergence of local immigration legislation, and the acceptance of alternative forms of identification. According to these authors, post-national citizenship models open the space for new forms of citizenship, at the local, regional or supranational levels. For example, the acceptance of a consular identity card rather than a driver's license to do banking or the right to receive health care enforced by a UN mandate, rather than state law.

Leitner and Ehrkamp (2006) argue that though theories challenging the role of the nation-state to regulate citizenship help to describe the complexities of membership in the global era, the decoupling of the nation-state from citizenship is problematic because it does not always reflect immigrants' own perceptions of their membership. According to their study, nation-state citizenship is still key to the procurement of social citizenship, or belonging. Complicating this observation, Nagel and Staeheli (2004) posit that one can be a national citizen of a country without belonging, calling into question the perceived continuity of membership in the nation-state and social citizenship. Just as power is embodied within officials, immigrants embody citizenship. As such, the study of membership may also be scaled-down and situated to incorporate immigrants' own imaginings of citizenship (Secor, 2004), which would require gathering immigrants'

thoughts, feelings, experiences and perceptions of belonging and legal membership, as it is lived by them.

Different conceptualizations of citizenship prioritize various forces as the main factors responsible for shaping experiences of citizenship. However, according to recent arguments, individuals' own experiences and imaginings of citizenship and the everyday socio-spatial forces that shape belonging tend to be missing from these accounts (Leitner & Ehrkamp, 2006; Staeheli, 2011). In a recent review of literature on citizenship in political geography, Staeheli (2011) observes, "Just as Waldo seems to get lost on each page of his books, citizens – individuals- seem to have been lost in the approach to citizenship I have tried to develop, in which the relationships, practices and acts that construct, regulate, and contest citizenship are at least as important as the status assigned to individuals" (p. 398). While space—territoriality, cities, housing— the state, and institutions and other relationships are important to shaping citizenship, subjective experience also plays a key role in its framing. Grounding citizenship at the everyday scale, Staeheli and her coauthors (2012) contend that citizenship is "ordinary." Relying on connotations of the word that suggest both "routineness" and "order," they propose that citizenship results from how laws are spatialized in daily life. Thus, socio-spatial elements of daily life such as community, home, family and work, among others, as well as standards of care and morals are brought into the framing of what citizenship looks like.

Grounding citizenship at the everyday scale, Staeheli et al. (2012) draw on the narrative of an undocumented student Jesus Apodaca, a DREAMer, as evidence for their

argument. As an undocumented student Jesus is barred from receiving his scholarship to attend the university; however, as a hard working, intelligent young man with strong relationships in his community, standards of care mandate that his citizenship is local and “[built] through participation, moral behavior, and demonstrable respect and care for others in his community and school” (p. 640). Thus, these authors assert that “the ordinary, the quotidian, the everyday plays a powerful role in the way citizenship is structured, practiced and enacted...The addition of ‘ordinary’ to ‘citizenship’ then, highlights the importance of authority, standing, office, custom, what is common-place and standard. This expanded conceptualization entwines legal status, norms, and systems of rule with the everyday and the unremarkable” (p. 640). Thus, relevant to this study, citizenship is not based solely on legal rights, it is shaped by mundane factors in immigrants’ lives.

This project contributes to the current discussion on citizenship in Geography and beyond by examining how scaled-down uses of power by diverse actors regulate immigrant citizenship in daily life, and by extension immigrant belonging. In this way the project furthers our understanding of how women immigrants in particular interface with the state as they exercise their rights. Departing women’s standpoint, the chapter consequently situates immigrant citizenship—rather than conceive of citizenship from the top down (i.e. the laws and policies the state outlines regarding citizenship). I discuss this drawing upon women’s individual experience, thus depicting an “actually existing” citizenship of immigrant women in Tapachula (Brenner, 2002) .

Experiencing Everyday Restriction

Central American immigrant women's discussions of their experiences highlight that encounters with low-to-mid level officials and state agencies are rife with negative experiences, which are invisible in macro-scale accounts of Central American immigration in Mexico. However, if these negative experiences are to constitute a more subtle, everyday form of restriction, as this article proposes, we must consider the reverberations of these encounters in *centroamericanas'* and their families' everyday lives. The impacts range from the immediate—like being barred access to social programs, including healthcare, and schooling—to the major problem of not possessing legal identity or nationality/citizenship and the myriad of unseen consequences that seep into many facets of women's lives. The following section will discuss these consequences, as described by the Central American immigrant women who were interviewed. In order to explore citizenship as an embodied concept, we must first understand how Central American migrant women experience restriction and its consequences.

Deepening of Poverty due to Barred Access to Legal Citizenship

As described in Chapter 4 everyday restriction manifests when low-to-mid level officials consciously or unknowingly block immigrants' access to vital documents or services through their mundane actions. Based on evidence presented, in the previous chapter women are denied access to social programs either due to these officials' unlawful behavior or because they do not hold the appropriate visa. It is important to note

that, at least in Tapachula,²⁰ during the time of this research the policy of major social service providers was to allow women access to programs if they had the appropriate visa, and if they did not, their Mexican-born children would still be entitled. One tangible impact of being denied access to much-needed social welfare programs is a deepening of poverty or increased difficulty in overcoming poverty. The following narrative of Doña Consuelo's life in Tapachula reflects how refusal of services and pervasive barriers to the regularization of her immigration status translates into tangible impacts on her family's livelihood and well-being.

Doña Consuelo is a Honduran mother of four in her early thirties who arrived in Tapachula in 2003. She left her home and two young children behind with the intention of making it to the United States. In Honduras, she said, “there is no work, and even if you're educated, there aren't opportunities. There, only those that are “white collar” (*los que tienen cuello*) can have a good job.” Just as she started her journey to the United States, they robbed her in Guatemala—taking everything she had. Instead of turning back, she decided to travel on to Tapachula, Mexico and remain there. She recalled thinking, “I'm too close to Mexico to return home, so I came here, with a lot of difficulty, but I did it.” In order to recuperate the money she lost when she was robbed, she had to find work in Tapachula, but she was vulnerable—not knowing anyone and staying in a hotel she was contacted by “people from the bars, they always know where people are [migrants] (*sabe donde está uno*)— they always know how to find us, and they

²⁰Again, though these programs are federal and thus should be implemented evenly across the country, it seems that modifications to these policies were made in Tapachula and surrounding areas. This could be because of the unique challenges to policy implementation that are a circumstance of being a border region.

go to them, and they offered me a job, but the job was in a bar...well...as they say, one of those bars where they dance naked, and no, I couldn't do that [...]" Finally she was offered work as a receptionist in a hotel that lodged Hondurans, which she was skeptical about because the offer seemed too good to be true. She asked the owners, "are you sure they don't do bad things with the people that stay there?" It was at this job where she met her current partner, a Mexican taxi driver, and decided to remain in Mexico.

For one of our many meetings, I met Doña Consuelo on her dusty patio outside the one-room home she shared with her two Mexican-born children and her partner. They live together on a plot in an informal settlement that they are in the process of regularizing—that is, becoming formally incorporated into the city and its infrastructure—a battle which they are at risk of losing since the land they are occupying is on the banks of a wide creek, making the zone particularly vulnerable to severe flooding during the rainy season.

As we sat together on well-used plastic chairs, Doña Consuelo explained how her economic situation worsened after she was refused prenatal care to which she was legally entitled by a social worker at the public clinic:

I became pregnant with my daughter and we had to go live in a smaller room because I had symptoms of a miscarriage and so, my husband said, 'we can't pay both things, so we need to pay for the clinic.' The hospital refused me because I'm a foreigner and I don't have papers. So my husband said, 'I'm going to work very, very hard and you're going to go have your child at Clinic X'²¹ — that's a private clinic that's expensive but we didn't have any other option.

²¹ The name of the clinic has been changed to protect the confidentiality of the participant.

With a family of three living in a small room, over the years, Consuelo's economic situation deteriorated even further as she stopped working in order to take care of her daughter, and then became pregnant with a second child. Finally, after an intense argument with an enrollment specialist, she was finally able to obtain health insurance coverage with her second child, but her lack of documentation has impeded her in many other ways. With two children to support in Mexico and two in Honduras under the care of her mother, Doña Consuelo deals with the sadness and guilt of having left her children behind and being unable to provide for them:

D. Consuelo: It was so difficult to leave my children—they were there standing in the doorway and it hurts my soul—it still hurts...

Lindsey: Have you been able to visit?

D. Consuelo: No, I haven't had the money, so I haven't been able to. Sometimes I send them money, and sometimes I don't. They tell me "don't worry *mami*, here my *mamá*²² is supporting us," yes, but my obligation as a mother is to send them their money. But, for example, today the little girl [her daughter in Mexico] didn't go to school because I didn't give her any breakfast until this *señor* [signals to the gentleman inside talking with her partner] came over to bring us food. As God is great and sends his angels to help us, this gentleman came over and gave us breakfast to eat...but she didn't go to school and this is the problem.

One way for Consuelo and other Central American immigrants in her position to theoretically guarantee access to basic human services to which they are legally entitled would be to regularize their immigration status by applying for the FM2 visa. However, Consuelo's unsuccessful efforts to regularize her immigration status are illustrative of the

²² During fieldwork I often overheard children raised in extended families call their grandmothers "*mamá*" the Spanish for "mom," instead of "*abuela/abuelita*" which is Spanish for grandmother. This could be related to the fact that childrearing is much more of a collective experience in many places Mexico and Central America, but it also hints to the fact that so many grandparents have taken on the roles of primary caregivers to their grandchildren as their own children migrate.

patterns outlined in the previous chapter: Misinformation, inconsistency and lack of coordination on the part of low-level officials in the immigration office and in her home country's consulate have converged to create a veritable labyrinth, preventing her from obtaining the documentation that would technically allow her to enjoy her rights. Consuelo has consistently made an effort to obtain her FM2 visa to no avail because of corrupt officials or poor implementation of policy. As she recognizes, having papers is the only way she will be able to get ahead, "...here there are no opportunities for one as a foreigner, if I wanted to work at a company (*una empresa*) I can't because I don't have papers. I would like to start my own business, and I can't because the opportunities to do so are only for Mexican women, they aren't for foreign people and that's why I would like to get my papers (*arreglar mis papeles*)."

Doña Consuelo's ultimate professional goals are to obtain a micro-loan, install an oven on her property, learn to bake bread and cakes and sell them in the surrounding neighborhoods.

My interviews and workshops with other women indicate that though many immigrants intended to apply for these visas, the cost, amount of paper work, lack of proper identification, time, and knowledge of the application process were major deterrents to a successful application. Without the FM3 or FM2, participants are not able to engage in regular work, and are sometimes denied birth certificates for their Mexican-born children, or are unable to register their Mexican-born or Central American-born children in school. Blocking children's right to legal identity and education directly violates the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966), to which Mexico is a signatory. The following fieldnote illustrates how

the bureaucratic process both in Tapachula and in the Honduran Consulate have truncated Doña Consuelo's access to legal citizenship.

Fieldnote 1/23/2012

This morning I met Doña Consuelo and her two little children at the Honduran Consulate. It was closed because they were finally moving into the new consular building—a move they had delayed, even though all the other consulates had been there for almost a year. We took a cab to the consulate and climbed the stairs to the second floor. At first the guard wouldn't let us in because they were moving-in and cleaning. But we pushed and she went to ask if we could talk to someone. The receptionist came out—she said she couldn't do anything for us today because they didn't have anything set up but that on Wednesday, she could. Again, I interjected and said we only had a question—and she said ok. Consuelo asked if they were giving out passports, and they said that maybe in February... The continuing problem with this Consulate is that they don't process passports or any other type of document in their office... So, I asked then about the *constancia* that I was told about last year that could be used in place of passport—*constancia de no tramitar*—stating that the person couldn't travel to get the passport. She asked me who told me about this, I said the woman at the desk a few months ago. She said she would call *migración* to see if they would accept a letter like that... I wonder what they do for everyone else that doesn't have a passport? Anyway, she said she'd call us back. I think that it's a good idea to go on Wednesday to check and see.

The above field note reiterates a common description of the barriers to receiving services that migrants encounter, which largely play out at the micro-scale, as established in the previous chapter such as red tape and run-arounds as well as the fact that passports are not readily available to Central American immigrants. For example, solicitants must present a valid passport from their home country in order to file for an FM2 visa. As demonstrated in interviews and workshops undertaken for this study, most Central American immigrants do not have a passport from their home country upon their initial arrival. My research also indicates that the Guatemalan, Salvadoran and Honduran consulates in Tapachula do not always have the ability to furnish their co-nationals with

these passports. As a result, applicants must return to their home countries to apply for and obtain the passports. Without a passport or other forms of ID (which undocumented immigrants also commonly lack) any travel across international borders is precarious, leaving the traveler open to detention by state authorities and exploitation by criminal groups as undocumented travelers must utilize clandestine routes and at great expense. It serves as an example of the complexity that produces uncertainty and leaves immigrants in precarious positions lacking basic rights and vulnerable to deepening poverty and abuse.

At the time of this research, the local Honduran consulate stopped issuing passports after a scandal, during which consulate employees were accused of allegedly stealing applicants' payments and then never furnishing the passports (Asume, 2011). Doña Consuelo's neighbor was one of the applicants affected. Applicants' money was never returned, neither were their passports ever produced. After a new consul was installed, there was news that they would start printing passports again. However, during my fieldwork visits to the consulate we were told each time that some technical difficulty or a botched delivery of equipment would hold up the process a few more months. This example shows the similarities between Honduran and Mexican bureaucracy, indicating that this problem impacts immigrants both in Mexico and in sending countries.

Another option for Doña Consuelo would be to take advantage of the National Institute of Migration's (INM) periodic regularization campaigns that lessen requirements and paperwork burdens in order to allow applicants in situations similar to hers, to access documents without a passport. These programs generally provided a grace period of a

year (until renewal) to provide a passport. However, when a local human rights organization informed her of the 2011 campaign, Doña Consuelo went to the INM office only to be turned away rudely by the guard—not an immigration agent—who said that there was no current campaign and that without a passport she would not get her documents. Still, Consuelo had hoped that another option existed that we had been told had worked in the past (but not guaranteed) by community members, the human rights organization and the consulate. This would involve having the consulate write a letter verifying Consuelo’s identity and explaining the impossibility of her obtaining a passport. I went to the INM personally to verify this information and spoke with a mid-level agent on duty at the time who reported that since the new delegate to the INM had taken office this was no longer an option and that she did not foresee any new campaigns in the future even though they had become a yearly occurrence under previous delegates. This underscores the discretion individual officials can hold in implementing policy.

Doña Consuelo’s final option would be to return to Honduras to take advantage of a same-day passport service. She had not returned to her native country in the years that she had been in Tapachula—it was too expensive and too risky to endure with two small children. To return, Doña Consuelo explained that she would have to travel by bus, possibly changing buses in several locations to save money. Since she does not have valid identification or a passport she would have to first enter Guatemala at an unofficial border crossing, travel through Guatemala, and then cross into her native Honduras at another unofficial border crossing—on a makeshift raft or by swimming—to avoid being questioned or extorted.

Doña Consuelo's experience demonstrates that regardless of the availability of political citizenship for immigrants in Chiapas, they confront excessive barriers to avail of citizenship rights both in Mexico and at home. Despite her earnest attempts to obtain her visa, she was met with a complicated web of extra-official, official and external factors that prevented her from enjoying a right that "on paper" should have been available to her. It is commonplace that policies and regulations change when new officials are instated, with the passage of new laws, and with the changing roles of the consulates and migrants' rights non-profits. In practice, individual actors and institutions can, and often do interpret policies as they wish; and irregularities or events that interfere with institutions' implementation of policies often go uncorrected, causing delays and lapses in service delivery that not only produce inconveniences for clients, but also prevent them from claiming other related services. It seems that for an immigrant to be successful in applying for regularization, he or she would have to possess a considerable amount of social capital—in this case, connections to more powerful people, and education—along with the financial ability to pay for legal advice, the processing fees, transportation costs and missed hours and days at work.

Indeed, not holding an FM2 visa could also be used as an excuse for low- to mid-level officials to informally deny rights to which immigrants are entitled. Participants recounted stories of how they, or others they knew, were unfairly asked for proof of legal residence in order to obtain birth certificates for their children or to register them in schools. Unfortunately, it is not only immigration officials who are able to informally deny rights, but banks also deny services to immigrants without an FM2. For some

immigrants interviewed, receiving the benefits of social programs is necessary for feeding their families, sending children to school, treating illnesses and having basic, stable housing.

Non-existence

All of this is a dilemma that will never end. I watch the news, and the government, for as much as it says that it's democratic... they claim that Mexicans as much as non-Mexicans who live here have the same rights, because that's what the law says. We [immigrants] have Mexican children—which is supposed to mean that we have the right to everything, something that is not true, at least not in my case... We're here as if we didn't exist in the country of Mexico, why? Because there is no document that legally protects you that says you do [exist]. The ones that do exist here—maybe—are our children, but we don't, as I repeat to you, those documents are worthless... With the FM3, I should get the opportunity to ask for a loan, or maybe have a doctor, more than anything for my kids, but for me, no this isn't the case—you realize that we don't exist.

– Doña Michaela

Doña Michaela, the Guatemalan mother who has lived in Tapachula for 24 years, grew tired of being denied services because she was unable to get a visa or because officials' wrongly turned her away. Her experience, in addition to all of the negative experiences with officials she has heard about has caused her to believe that even if she had a document legalizing her status in Mexico she would still not be able to enjoy the rights that she knows she deserves. For Doña Michaela, laws that boast equality and fair treatment for immigrants living in Tapachula are not enforced. Her feeling of nonexistence is one that has been documented by Susan Bibler Coutin (2003), who demonstrated that the effects of living in a “space of nonexistence” weigh heavily and produce insecurity and vulnerability in many aspects of daily life. Even though Doña Michaela feels that existing options for visas do not offer her protections, she longs for

the paper that actually would give validity to her existence in Mexico, a paper that would furnish the rights to do what citizens do—including the right to enroll in an adult education program, have access to micro-credit loans, and have health insurance for her children—so much would improve for her and her family.

Similarly, when Mexican-born children are denied birth certificates because of their parents' immigration status, they bear consequences that have far-reaching effects in their lives. Indeed, being without a birth certificate is not a problem that only affects children, but also adults; this is partly a result of the fact that it becomes harder to obtain a birth certificate as a person ages. Doña Raquel, the young Honduran mother introduced in the previous chapter, explained the significance of her being denied a birth certificate for her daughter, who was around five-years-old at the time: "Well, she doesn't exist—there's no girl—she doesn't study, she doesn't have insurance, nor many government benefits, she doesn't have anything; she's no one. She has no identity: no one knows who she is." Raquel's startlingly sober assessment of her daughter's situation summarizes so clearly the predicament of many children of Central American parents. Access to legal identity, a right that is often taken for granted, is key to securing the rights of citizenship.

After Hurricane Stan destroyed their home in 2005, Raquel and her husband were forced to return to their native Honduras with their then one-year-old daughter. Three years after their return to Honduras Doña Raquel's family made decisions to return to Tapachula from Honduras, based on the fact that their daughter did not have a birth certificate at the time which meant that she had few opportunities to receive an education in Honduras. In Tapachula birth certificates are required for inscription in public schools.

She explained, explained, “more than anything because I didn’t have papers for my daughter, how was I going to put her in school or anything? So I had to come back to put her name in the register here, so she could study.” According to Doña Raquel, they were not able to obtain a birth certificate for their daughter in Honduras, either, since she was born in Mexico. Out of fear of the consequences of their own undocumented status, they had not registered her in Mexico before they left—a fact that they later regretted. Doña Raquel lamented, “I think I was the one in the wrong, because I should have done that paperwork, but she was already one year old and I was afraid to go register her because I thought, ‘they’re going to take her away from me.’ It was because of fear that I didn’t try to register her.”

According to participants at some schools in Tapachula, students without a birth certificate are turned away immediately, while at the majority, children without birth certificates are accepted as auditors, or *oyentes*, upon the condition that their parents will register them as soon as possible. Official policy is to allow students to attend schools as auditors if they do not have a birth certificate. However, if a student finishes elementary school without a birth certificate, their studies will not be considered valid (they receive no *certificado* or certificate) and they will not be allowed to enter secondary school. Teachers and principals often assume that obtaining a birth certificate is simple; however as evidenced above, for Central American immigrants facing various barriers, obtaining one can be particularly hard. Thus, despite the universal right of all children to receive free public education in Mexico, regardless of nationality, until the completion of secondary school, the system excludes Mexican-born children of Central American

immigrants who do not have birth certificates. As evidenced above, this scenario is often the result of the states' failure to regulate bureaucrats; the lack of reliable and accurate information; economic marginalization; and blatant discrimination.

Despite discrimination and feeling powerless, some participants believe that they have earned the right to feel like they belong in Tapachula. As Doña Maripaz, a middle-class Honduran mother and grandmother explained, “Yes, I feel like I’m a part of here, like everyone [who] pays their taxes, I pay mine, and in addition, I pay a tax that the people that are from here don’t pay, which is the disdain and the discrimination, and I think that this is the most expensive tax that we pay...” Doña Maripaz feels that because she has paid her dues in Tapachula by enduring harsh and unfair treatment and discrimination, she has earned the right to be a member of the society. Still, Doña Maripaz hopes for change in Tapachula, a city that she argues has been “forgotten by everyone,” in the sense that so much injustice and violence is committed without being noticed. She feels that if people were more active, and mobilized for change, that, “Central American women would come without the necessity of having to sleep with someone...it makes me furious! ²³ And this impotence that one feels when they don’t want to do something but they have to do it anyway? I say, for myself, I would like to have the power to help everyone that comes from there, either economically or however, so they don’t feel so scorned, or unhappy when they get here.”

²³ Doña Maripaz is referring to the fact that many Central American women are subject to sexual harassment and sex-based extortion.

Even while admitting that they themselves would not wish to return to their home countries, other women I interviewed were clear in stating that they would tell others not to consider migrating to the U.S. or to Tapachula, as the risks are too high and the abuses are abundant. At the end of our interview, I asked Doña Consuelo, if there was anything else that she wanted to share with me. She put it this way, “In fact, yes, I would. A lot of people cross through here, migrants, asking for money, and it really hurts me to see this, because they’re crossing through here and every day in the paper you see that ‘they killed one Honduran today, they raped two Honduran women, in Tapachula, etcetera’... Thank God that I was able to avoid this fate, but I would like it if they [migrants] didn’t come here anymore—they are only coming to suffer. If you get here and meet good people, like I’ve met here, then sure, it’s worth it, but in general, no. When I came here I suffered so much, psychologically, I was doing very poorly... People that looked at me saw me with a different face, like they wanted to exploit me, people always offered me jobs working in bars [in Tapachula working in a bar as a woman often signifies that you are a sex worker].” Doña Consuelo sees herself as “one of the lucky ones” who was able to avoid the violence and sexual exploitation that other immigrants have faced because she met helpful people along the way.

Vulnerability to Abuse

As discussed in Chapter 4, confusion over requirements to obtain legal citizenship documents is commonplace. In the absence of straightforward, consistent and correct information on their rights, immigrants are left with few tools to defend themselves from

predatory officials, charlatan “lawyers” promising to furnish them with visas and Mexican birth certificates, and intimate partners leveraging vulnerability and lack of citizenship rights as a form of abuse to manipulate and control. Immigrant women who are blocked from receiving visas and taking advantage of vital social programs that assist low-income families are vulnerable to abuse. In the following section, I present examples demonstrating how this vulnerability to abuse plays out in women’s everyday lives. As a consequence of poor enforcement of pro-migrant policies, women struggle to obtain legal and social citizenship rights.

One such experience of abuse was illustrated during a role playing exercise that took place during participatory workshops. As expressed in Chapter 2, because of the flexibility and anonymity offered by role play, it is an appropriate conduit for eliciting feedback from research participants dealing with sensitive subject matters. As role play takes the pressure off participants to self report corruption and crime, it also opens the space for frank discussions of personal experiences. Again, this stems from the fact that the participants hold considerable control in a role play. Those who wish to openly share their experiences may do so indirectly through performance, or directly as we see in the discussions that take place before, during and after skits are performed. As skits were prepared and shared, the women in the audience interacted with the actors, commenting and laughing, proving that the role play inspired audience members to contemplate their own experiences and share their opinions with the group. In some cases these discussions raised consciousness of immigrants’ rights, as well as abuses that have become so naturalized that they are often accepted, normalized and even expected.

In the skit, the woman acting as the clerk, a Honduran immigrant in her 60's, plays the part of an official and also a narrator. The narrator sets the scene while also serving as a link between the audience and the actors. This encourages an ensuing discussion between the players and the audience. As the scene set in the *registro civil* begins, the narrator explains that the Central American character “came to the *registro civil* to get a birth certificate [for her Mexican-born daughter] so she can have rights to school, and to health, and all of the other rights that one born in a place has to have.”

Clerk/Narrator and one immigrant woman act in this scene. Clerk is seated at the head of a table with her paperwork. Immigrant woman walks in with a large purse, and sits at the Clerk's 'desk.'

Clerk: Sit, ma'am. Come forward. (*Politely*) What can I do for you, ma'am?

CA: (*There's a pause*) I've come to see what papers I need to become a naturalized citizen here in Tapachula because I want to register my daughter.

Clerk: But, do you have your papers in order?

CA: No, I'm from Guatemala.

Clerk: You're Guatemalan, I mean, Central American.

CA: I only have my birth certificate from there on me.

Clerk: Hmm, the birth certificate from there... In this case you need to organize your papers well in order to be able to register that girl, because if you don't nothing can be done for her.

CA: And what papers can I bring?

Clerk: Well, the papers that you need, the papers that you have to have (*pauses*) are, umm, a passport. Do you have a passport?

CA: (*Timidly*) No.

Clerk: I'm going to give you a list of the papers that you're going to need and please, you have to get them so that that girl or boy that you're going to register has rights...

The skit centers around the Central American woman, Doña Magda, and the clerk's exchange about what requirements are needed to become a naturalized citizen in order to simply be able obtain a birth certificate for a Mexican-born child. It is important to note that naturalization services are not provided by the *registro civil*, however due to corruption, misinformation, and confusion about the legal processes, some adults in the immigrant community will go to the *registro* hoping to be able to obtain a Mexican birth certificate. Until only recently it was common for Central Americans to be refused birth certificates for their Mexican-born, and therefore Mexican-citizen children, leaving the children without legal identity or national citizenship. As mentioned in the Chapter 3, at the time of writing, there were various laws enacted that protect Central Americans' right to obtain birth certificates for their children, however, despite these laws, in practice many were still denied.²⁴

However, for the women acting out the scene, both of whom have adult children born in Tapachula, at the time they were registering their children, there were very few policies that ensured that Central Americans could obtain birth certificates for their Mexican-born children unless they themselves had legal residency in the country. The scene illustrates that some participants are still unaware of laws that have facilitated the

24 As mentioned in Chapter 3, in Tapachula, the majority of births are registered in the *registro civil*. In 2011, one public hospital in Tapachula began to issue birth certificates to some newborns. Regardless, the great majority of birth certificates are issued in the other *registros civiles*, often months and even years after the child is born.

regularization of immigration status and removed many of the roadblocks for foreigners registering their children. When children are denied birth certificates, they are blocked from receiving the human rights and services they are entitled to by law, including education, public health insurance, and when older, employment opportunities, among others things. As a result, children with no birth certificates are placed at an extreme disadvantage in a society that requires that you produce a birth certificate for nearly all important government-sponsored, and even private services, such as banking.

At the end of the above dialogue, the role players broke character, taking control of the scene and beginning an unplanned discussion of a real-life experience of one of the actors. The participant, Doña Magda, bravely recounted her own story, which began in much the same way as the skit—she went to a *registro civil*, rather than the immigration office, to see if there was a way that she could become a naturalized citizen in Mexico in order to get birth certificates for her Mexican-born children. In this case, the clerk in the *registro civil* misinformed her and told her that she could become naturalized as long as she brought a copy of her birth certificate from Guatemala. After weeks of waiting and returning to check on the status of the paperwork, they finally told her that her papers had been lost. Doña Magda admitted to the group,

...the father of my children would tell me that if he registered the kids by myself, then when the day came that he wanted to leave, he would take the kids with him...so then, I said, I can't let this happen—I have to find another way. So I had to look for someone else's birth certificate to use in order to register my kids.

The post role-play discussion continued on with the woman playing the clerk explaining to the audience how Doña Magda was able to finally register her children:

“Another person who was Mexican and who had rights helped her. Because there are people who help others in this way, but it isn’t correct.”

Until 2009, undocumented immigrant parents were officially unable to register their children who were older than six months. For this reason, often if one parent had Mexican citizenship, then this parent would register the child as a single parent, leaving the other parent without rights. Even with the implementation of new policies, the belief that an immigrant without papers cannot register their child still circulates in the general community. Central American women without citizenship rights, social capital and knowledge of the law can be extremely vulnerable to the type of manipulation and abuses by their partners, as exemplified in this case. The above scenario also raises the issue of how, when placed in difficult situations resulting from discrimination and corruption, some people feel that they have no other option but to seek false papers for themselves or their children. In the example above, the official takes advantage of the immigrants’ vulnerability, and lack of knowledge as there is no way to naturalize someone’s citizenship at a *registro civil*. The passages also indicate that the participants perceive these types of bureaucratic shortcuts as unethical while simultaneously feeling that they are the only method through which they are able to secure their rights. They continued, explaining their reasoning, out of character:

Clerk: So then, the lady got her papers, but they’re false.

CA: Exactly, they’re false.

Clerk: But she had no other way to get them...She was between a rock and a hard place.

CA: And there are many cases like mine.

Clerk: An infinite number! (*The audience applauds loudly.*)

The role play and then commentary lead to a supportive discussion of the realities of this woman's situation. If the Central American immigrant failed to find a way to register her children with her name on the birth certificate, she would be vulnerable to her husband's abuses—she would have no way to prove that the children were legally hers, while her husband could use the fact that the children belonged to only him to blackmail her. The confession also reveals much about the personal, daily struggles of some immigrant women within their households due to their lack of legal status, and the clear role of the state in exasperating these problems.

Thus, the role play helped to create an important discussion amongst the women regarding an extremely sensitive issue. However, in contrast to initial fears that women would not be open to sharing such personal details of their lives with each other, it seems that the role play helped to encourage conversation and openness by breaking the ice with humor and placing everyone on an even playing field. The common, yet unseen everyday consequences of not being able to get papers, and then being denied birth certificates for children, places women in a vulnerable position with respect to both their parental rights and domestic violence. In this instance, the participants' undocumented status left her subject to blackmail by her husband—if she left, or did anything wrong, he could take away the children.

“I’m Mexican Now!”: Circumventing the System for Citizenship Rights

Fieldnote 10/31/ 2011

Rosy and I went to visit Doña Vero today. Her house was full of used-clothing to sell; she cleared a couple of chairs off so we could sit. As her son slept and a handful of her grandchildren gathered around the TV, we chatted with Doña Vero and one of her daughters. She happily exclaimed to me, “*Licenciada*, I’m Mexican now!” Rosy and I looked at each other, wondering how she was able to regularize her status when the last we had spoken to her, she was trying desperately to get an FM2. She told us that the neighborhood president (*la presidenta de la colonia*) helped her to get a birth certificate during a campaign so she could get *Oportunidades*.

Not possessing an FM2 or other appropriate visa means blocked access to a number of vital services, not only for immigrants but also for their Mexican-born children, who are Mexican citizens, as well as immigrant children. As mentioned in Chapter 3, without a visa, immigrants are: not authorized to work; not able to enroll in Mexico’s public healthcare program, the *Seguro Popular*; or in conditional cash-transfer programs, like *Oportunidades* that provide important support for families with school-age children. They cannot access credit or banking services; or travel freely outside of Tapachula. For all immigrants, holding a visa should indicate that they are able to access certain services and rights, without question.

Doña Alma, a Guatemalan mother of three who has spent her entire adult life in Tapachula, mused about how her life would be if she had an FM2, “[Things would be different] in the respect that we would be able to have credit and that maybe my support money could come to me directly, in my name. Having my papers, I would also be able to stroll around as I please.” Her statement signals another interesting issue regarding how women’s mobility is restricted without a visa. With such high stakes placed on

having papers, it is no wonder that in certain cases, women who have not been able to obtain them because of the associated costs, the complexity of the process, or lack of supporting documents, employ other, extra-official means to circumvent the system.

Just as Doña Magda's example (the above skit) introduces the problem of some officials' corrupt practices, it also indicates how in her real life, she was able to outsmart the system by using someone else's birth certificate to illegally register herself during a campaign, as did Doña Vero. Though instances when immigrant women spoke with me directly about getting "papers" by circumventing the system were not widespread, they were also not uncommon. On a few occasions I was told by participants that family members or friends had hired a "lawyer" (*licenciado*), paying large sums of money to obtain false documents. More common, it seems, is the practice of taking advantage of small-scale political clientelism in order to obtain an official identification card (the IFE, in Mexico). The first step in this process would be to obtain a Mexican birth certificate, generally by taking advantage of a special *campaña*, or campaign or by buying a false one. The above field note exemplifies this circumstance. Campaigns have different sponsors, occur at different times during the year, and are a means used to provide a particular service to a large number of people for a reduced or waived fee, for a limited amount of time. For example, in addition to birth certificates there are *campañas* for immunization, general health, and birth certificates among other things. In our interview, Doña Michaela told of how she hoped a campaign would help her get birth certificates for her children, so they could continue to attend school. The quotation is situated within a broader explanation of how and why she decided to obtain her FM3 visa, which she

processed in order to register her children, after failed attempts to register them through campaigns.

I started to do the paper work for the FM3 because my kids' school wouldn't receive them anymore without a birth certificate. When they were in kindergarten I just signed a contract promising that I would get their birth certificates, but I couldn't get them. One day a *licenciada* came to the neighborhood where we were living—help from the government— and I gave her all of my papers, all of them and they disappeared! And the kids were never registered. So when the president of the neighborhood where we lived told us about a campaign for the Day of the Child, I gave them the papers again. But, as usual, I was giving them a copy, and thank goodness, because they went up into thin air! And they said it was because we were Guatemalan and we couldn't do any *trámite*.

While campaigns do serve an important purpose—they make vital services available and accessible for little to no cost to people in need—they are also a way for political leaders at the neighborhood-scale to use the information and services provided by the campaigns to their own benefit. For example, a community leader might monopolize information on a campaign by being the “official” source of information, then he or she might arrange to transport people from the neighborhood to the campaign site and might also play a key role in helping people in the neighborhood to obtain prerequisite documents necessary to participate in the campaign. This type of clientelistic arrangement could help a neighborhood-level politician maintain or strengthen political power. In interviews with low-level officials and immigrants, it was suggested that campaigns, since they circumvent certain requirements, were one way to obtain false papers. Also, an applicant might face fewer questions when backed by a political leader.

Similarly, the below field note illustrates a situation similar to Doña Vero's, but also reflects that going “under the table” might provide a much needed document, while

at the same time it could raise red flags when comparing the paperwork of a whole family.

Fieldnote 5/11/2011

We bumped into Doña Rigoberta and one of her older daughters. Doña Rigoberta's older daughter, despite being born in Guatemala, has a Mexican birth certificate. She says she got it during a *campana*. She asked me how she could change her son's (16 years old) birth certificate so it would no longer say "Guatemalan mother" because she now has her papers. I told her frankly that she was very lucky to have her papers, and I didn't think she would be able to get her nationality erased without raising a few eye brows. I said, better just leave it. She already has an IFE, so that's all that she needs for now.

Changing her nationality on her son's birth certificate is important because she will need to present her papers side by side with her son's until he is independent. For example, registering for school, health insurance or *Oportunidades* likely requires the parent's ID and the child's birth certificate to be presented side by side, which could raise eyebrows. There is also the question of discrimination: In a few casual conversations and interviews, people I met with mentioned that sometimes having a parent from Guatemala or another Central American country listed on a birth certificate could bring about unwarranted bias and that some wished to avoid this.

Doña Vero and Doña Rigoberta are two women who, like the majority of the women in this study, viewed their and their families' wellbeing as being directly related to the possession of state-sanctioned forms of legal citizenship in the form of a visa, birth certificate or naturalization. Because of the difficulties in procuring "papers," they found ways to circumvent the state, taking advantage of campaigns and social capital to obtain false papers.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have described how everyday restriction of legal citizenship rights impacts immigrant women's daily lives by contributing to deepening poverty, feelings of nonexistence and hopelessness, increased vulnerability to abuse by authorities and intimate partners, as well as by leading some women to believe that circumventing the system is the only option. Through the stories presented here, I demonstrate that despite some women's lack of confidence in the actual granting of rights and access to services provided by an FM2/FM3 visa, all women had a strong desire to obtain legal forms of state-sanctioned citizenship (FM2/FM3 and naturalization). Without it, they perceived their chances of receiving much needed social programs, providing education for their children and securing their housing, among other things as being very low. As evidenced throughout the chapter, blocked opportunities to legal membership cause marginalization and frustration serious enough to make false papers a valuable commodity for some.

In an article that questions the predominance of transnationalism as a theory of migration that explains the growing connections between places and people through transnational space, Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004) argued that the state continues to be the defining factor in shaping and limiting immigrant citizenship and experience in receiving societies. Unlike Waldinger and Fitzgerald, I do not wish to challenge years of strong scholarship supporting transnationalism and the creation of transnational spaces as a distinct product of the global era in which we live; however transnational is not necessarily a term encompassing all migrations or migrants. In agreement with Waldinger

and Fitzgerald, as I have put forth in this chapter, the nation-state, albeit scaled-down, indeed remains of key importance in accessing public goods and this in turn has a substantial impact on feelings of belonging and exclusion. Central American migrants live largely separate from compatriots, have little access to low-cost communications, in general are unable to consistently remit to family members, due to economic hardship and because without papers even sending money through Western Union is difficult. The opportunity for a sense of belonging that might emerge from the formation of a transnational community does not exist for migrants in Tapachula. Unlike some transnationals who hold dual citizenship or work visas, Central American women overwhelmingly lack full state-centered citizenship in Mexico and as such they remain in between countries, without receiving the benefits of either.

Central American women's struggles for citizenship and belonging are illustrative of a sense that membership is desired and valued. Though the women interviewed in this study were largely disconnected from social movements or community groups that would help them to procure rights through collective negotiation with government officials or protest, the example that opens this chapter illustrates that this could be changing. This increased political engagement, mostly spearheaded by women could result in the state facilitating access to rights and also a heightened sense of involvement in the community and belonging for immigrant women.

Chapter 6:

Low- to Mid-Level Officials' Perceptions of Migration and Central American Immigrants

Tapachula is still calm, but as migrants have passed through, it's changed a lot, because migrants are really people of different ideas—more uninhibited in some aspects. Here, we're traditional people, more... more... how would you say? Homebodies (*hogareños*). So because of these changes, the people that we deal with are different. The way they think is different than the way that someone from Tapachula thinks... When a lot of people started to arrive that's when, I tell you, that Tapachula was losing itself! Losing itself! The small town-like city wasn't very tranquil anymore, and the people would say “at eight o'clock I want you here at home; be home by ten o'clock and don't be walking around in the street” because, it was said, that the kids [*muchachos*- euphemism for gang members, largely perceived to be Central American] were all over the streets.

– Katia

I interviewed Katia, a mid-level official in an agency of the health sector, in her hot office, which was crowded with coworkers' desks and the clutter of enrollment forms, and remarkably absent of a fan. Katia, who has lived in Tapachula her entire life told me that she is more traditional—self-admittedly, *hogareña* (a homebody) and very *pegada a sus papás* (attached to her parents). She is 30 years-old and serious about her job. In the above passage, Katia describes a sentiment that is echoed by many native-born *tapachultecos*. She laments the loss of a Tapachula that once was: Tapachula had lost its “small-town feel” to the growth of gang violence and foreigners, and longtime residents reacted by staying in, and off the streets. The type of migrants that the city receives threatens her idealized image of Tapachula as a traditional, quiet and moral place. As I discuss in previous chapters the rise in gang violence is directly tied to migration in two ways: 1) the popular perception, though only somewhat accurate, is that the *maras*— the

term used, especially in Mexico and Central America to refer to gangs, —are a product of Central America; and 2) the *maras* have been attracted to the region to prey on Central American transmigrants. This automatically links Central American immigrants to a deeply held fear of gang violence in the city. In essence, the population is criminalized.

Though she is trying to say it politely and indirectly, Katia summarizes another major problem that many *tapachultecos* have with migrants: they are “uninhibited.” In this context, this adjective refers to a perception that migrants challenge dominant, conservative sexual norms; are more likely to commit crimes; and are perceived as outspoken, demanding and entitled. These stereotypes have deep roots—after all, as mentioned previously in Chapter 3, Tapachula is a border city, and has always been a receiving area for migrants and visitors from Central America. However, the more recent history of the region has been marked by numerous other factors including, the civil war in Guatemala and El Salvador in the 80s and 90s; the growth of gang violence in these countries and the subsequent spread of transnational gangs into Mexico; the sharp increase in visibility of transmigration and Tapachula becoming a major corridor for transmigrants because of the presence of the train; as well as the growth in prominence of the sex industry along the border. All these factors occurring simultaneously have imprinted certain images into the collective consciousness of *tapachultecos*. Thus, the moral decline that Katia describes above has much to do with the branding of Central American migrants as hypersexual criminals.

The above text from my interview with Katia reflects a narrative retold in countless places impacted by immigration. It is well-documented that fear of the “other,”

fear of change in the way of life or cultural norms, and the eventual criminalization of migrants in public discourse is at the root of much of the stereotyping and negative feelings toward immigrants by non-migrant groups. Katia's nostalgia for a pre-migration Tapachula might be an idealized view of a past that never really existed. Regardless, in her experience, and that of other officials living in Tapachula who have witnessed the growth of transmigration alongside a real rise in gang violence, which was accompanied by much media coverage have undoubtedly impacted their perceptions and thus attitudes on migration (see for example, Chavez, 2007). With this in mind, in this chapter I contextualize—without homogenizing—officials' perceptions of migrants, focusing in particular on the two aforementioned stereotypes widely-held by officials that hypersexualize Central American immigrants and describe them as entitled or demanding. I argue that these stereotypes, though not totalizing, provide an important context from which officials perform their everyday tasks in serving the Central American community in Tapachula. I conclude that these gendered stereotypes serve to mark and reinforce social borders between migrants and officials, which officials then can employ to determine those who belong, and thus who are worthy to avail themselves of the rights of citizenship.

Setting the background for how officials use their power requires placing their actions within the context of their ideas, perceptions and conceptions of ongoing Central American migration to Tapachula and the surrounding municipality. Officials' actions do not take place in a vacuum; we must consider how their worldview and experience on the job and in their personal lives informs their interactions with immigrants. Indeed, this

section shows that they come to their jobs with well-developed ideas and stereotypes regarding migrants.

In order to build this nuanced and more complete understanding of low- to mid-level officials' actions as revealed through immigrant women's experiences, this section relies on interview data to share officials' views of the phenomenon of migration in general and in the context of new policies, while also unpacking officials' perceptions of migrants themselves. First, I explore the ways that officials view new immigration policies in order to shed light on their beliefs—as officials' thoughts, perspectives and motivations are often left out of the discussions on immigration enforcement. I find that while officials generally think policies are positive from a humanitarian perspective, they also feel that immigrants are unfairly receiving services that even many Mexican citizens do not receive. They also expressed that they have not been afforded the opportunity they deserve to weigh-in on the formation and implementation of the policies. Second, while examining officials' perceptions of the phenomenon of migration, I find that while I do not intend to generalize, many officials reiterated and perpetuated negative, gendered stereotypes associated with migrant women. I argue that this stereotyping forms part of what feminist geographers consider to be socio-spatial bordering (see Deeb-Sossa & Bickham Mendez, 2008), which functions as a way to categorize and keep immigrant women “in place” or, “out of place.” In effect, this builds on our discussion of everyday restriction, introduced in Chapter 4. It is important to remember, however, that low- to mid-level officials' perspectives are multi-dimensional, and that simplistic categorization

of merely negative or positive viewpoints are unhelpful in creating a fair and complex understanding of their positionality.

Socio-Spatial Boundaries, Gendering and Migrants

Geographers increasingly using a feminist framework of analysis aim to understand how gender and social relations are constructed and reconstructed across space and time (Massey, 1994). Feminist works in geography do not merely denote the study of the changing relationships and roles of women and men, but encourage scholars to apply the “lens of gender” along with critical theories of race and class to reveal uneven geographies of power (Silvey, 2006). Through applying a “gender lens,” geographers and other social scientists studying migration have established the importance of female migration (Donato et al., 2006), the study of gendered migration patterns (Donato et al., 2008), the impact of migration on the social construction of gender relations in sending and receiving societies (Lawson, 1998; Boehm, 2004); as well as the socio-spatial impacts of migration on those left-behind (Salazar Parreñas, 2005; Walton-Roberts & Pratt, 2005; Toyota et al., 2007) .

In her piece on the status of feminist theory in migration studies, Rachel Silvey (2006) identifies several areas in which geographers have made major contributions, particularly in research dealing with the socio-spatial production of borders. Borders are not merely territorial markers of state sovereignty. As territorial boundaries of nations are constituted and maintained by socio-spatial processes and technologies of governance (Paasi, 2009) they are also located within everyday spaces, fashioned to enforce

belonging and entitlement (Browne, 2002). In this sense, feminist geographies of migration have called for investigations of social borders themselves and the socio-spatial processes that shape them, as well as their impact on the lived reality of migrants in sending and receiving societies (Deeb-Sossa & Bickham Mendez, 2008; Silvey, 2006). However, not only socially constructed borders impact immigrant experience. Literal border zones themselves imply different codes of discipline and power and can produce unequal geographies of gender, race and class, and also produce spaces that are in between belonging and not belonging (Menjívar, 2006).

Applying a feminist theoretical framework also implies studying how the maintenance of socially constructed and literal borders impact men, women, and youth and other groups differently. National and state policies that regulate migration have been shown to target men and women in diverse ways, especially in cases concerning labor recruitment or marriage (Walton-Roberts, 2004). From the perspective of the everyday scale of the “gatekeepers” who provide or deny public goods, we see that gender plays substantial role in how immigrants are treated. For example, Deeb-Sossa and Bickham Mendez (2008) revealed that it was often women clinic workers who discriminated against other women immigrant patients seeking care.

The question of how different groups of migrants are perceived in bordered spaces necessitates the study of the factors that construct gendered spaces and officials’ role in their construction. We must also study how this translates into their subsequent dealings with migrants as well as migrants’ notions of how gender impacts their

treatment by officials. This theory will inform my examination of the role that gender plays in shaping migrants' experiences with low- to mid-level officials.

Officials' Opinions of "Pro-migrant" Policies

Low- to mid-level officials are key to implementing the policies generated at higher institutional levels, including those at the state and national levels. As discussed in Chapter 3, the state of Chiapas, under the governor, Juan Sabines, implemented many measures that opened the doors for immigrants and transmigrants from Central America to take advantage of basic human services and rights that they were previously barred from using due to their citizenship status, inability to produce acceptable identification documents and/or discrimination. In order to implement new policies, low- to mid-level officials working day to day to connect people with services would also need to be informed of the policies and trained to implement them. However, as one borderline mid-level official in the health sector, Gertrudis, expressed to me, no one had ever asked them what they thought about the new laws, nor what it meant to them to have to implement them: "*no tenemos ni voz ni voto*" (we don't have a voice or a vote). Feeling powerless, or without a voice or vote, is a common theme to many of these officials even if in their daily actions it seems that they behave just the opposite.

Officials generally agreed that in the past several years, they have witnessed a growth in "pro-migrant" policies and that the services that they provide have changed as a result of this increase. Katia commented, "They've focused a lot on them and now they even have special programs for them, special campaigns. So, the Governor and also the

Secretary of the Southern Border has concentrated on them to make sure that they are well-received here and that they think well of us as Mexicans and most importantly of all of us in the zone which is closer to them, in the state of Chiapas.” For Katia, the extra attention serves to improve the reputation of people in Mexico—creating an image of hospitality that one might imagine is used to promote tourism—while at the same time it promotes the fair treatment to migrants. Regardless, there are strings attached for migrants: services are, “only available when they have their papers in order.” This statement is not true of all agencies, however.

In line with this recognition of greater access, Camila, a low-level official also in the health sector, also expresses that she feels that in the current system migrants are prioritized above Mexican nationals, although she does not blame migrants for this, as Gertrudis does. She mentioned:

It doesn't bother me too much, because in a way a Central American is just as human as I am...But then sometimes it is a little uncomfortable because you are Mexican and they place so many requirements on you before you can get anything done, while at the same time a migrant will come in and “one, two, three” done. You aren't investigating a migrant as much as you would someone from here. Everything that a migrant gets is easier to get than a person who's from here.

Camila's opinion is based on her conception of her practical experience: the current system seems to facilitate greater access to services for immigrants' over those who are native-born, and that makes her feel uncomfortable. This stems from her underlying belief that someone who is born in Mexico is endowed with certain rights and privileges, which should entitle her easier access to the public goods provided by her state than foreign-born people. Despite the perceived bureaucratic unfairness, Camila

touches on another important theme in the officials' discourse: the idea of humanity. As human beings, immigrants should receive services.

Building on this, Gertrudis also touches on this duality. While she does not agree that immigrants should receive preferential treatment in comparison with her native-born clients, she does not believe immigrants should be treated inhumanely. In the following excerpt from our interview, she conveys that there is a major downside to the policies that help migrants: they create inequality within the system.

I don't agree [with the services they get] and it isn't that I'm inhumane or anything like that, but it's just that here for example, our own people if they don't have the money, I try to reclassify them. If they are at level 5, they pay 45 pesos per consultation [\$3-4 USD]... and they say no, we want you to waive the costs and give us the services for free. So then they have to go through the process of reclassifying themselves, and they go to have a socioeconomic study done so that they can determine the quota they would pay, and if it turns out they can't [waive the fees], what are we going to do? When for those people [the migrants] they give them support for everything, the lab, the consultation... For example an HIV test, which is very expensive, they give to them for free, while people from here have to pay. They're giving a lot of priority to the people who aren't from here, and the people from here, our own people, no.

The idea that pro-migrant policies create inequality is a theme that is worth examining due to the fact that it is widely held in the community. It raises important questions with regard to how some of the most marginal Mexicans perceive Central American immigrants, namely: is there competition among the poorest, most marginalized Mexicans and immigrants? The issue here is that both groups live in similar circumstances and deal with similar types of discrimination. For example, a poor Mexican may also lack proper, state-sponsored forms of identification, therefore making it harder to prove identity and nationality, or may also be likely to be treated poorly or

discriminated against when seeking out services. Immigrants often live in the same neighborhoods as the poorest native-born Mexicans. Oftentimes these neighborhoods are informal or irregular settlements, some in various stages of being formally incorporated into the city, and often lack basic infrastructure and services. It is well-documented that the poor also have curtailed access to basic services because of lack of information, restricted mobility, and other factors related to poverty, among other reasons. The officials I interviewed view immigrants as directly competing with poor Mexicans for resources.

In addition to sometimes receiving certain healthcare services and products for free, another example that was cited by a few officials is how certain groups of migrants—those applying for refugee status, those who have been detained in Tapachula’s detention center or *estación migratoria*, and those brought in by certain non-governmental organizations—are given attention before other clients. In the public health clinics in Tapachula, people wishing to see a doctor must line up at the clinic that corresponds to their neighborhood, sometimes beginning the wait at 5am on a given day in order to receive a *ficha* or a ticket for an appointment. One official cited that she agrees with taking care of people who have emergencies first, because “our mission is to support people in the moment they need it,” however, she feels that when certain groups are given priority, sometimes just by speaking with the director and “they give them all of the attention, and a space,” they feel that “there are political questions that we don’t want to be linked with.” This official implies that immigrants are given priority because of

political interests: in order to continue to be in good standing within the current political order, their superiors make it a point to enforce new pro-migrant policies.

Despite some interviewees' disagreement with the perceived favoritism brought about by new policies, others expressed that they were pleased to see that immigrants were receiving better treatment. Joanna, a young low-level official who spends her days greeting the public and filling in forms, takes a more humanitarian perspective on the issue. She explains:

I think that they are good [the policies]...They're good because we're all human beings, and there shouldn't be borders. They are just lines (*colindancias*)...that divide countries...it's great that they help foreigners to get ahead in this country, but it also implies that the foreigners don't come here just to have those benefits, or that they come with some type of authority because the governor supports them or because Mexico's policy supports them, and then they get here and want to be in charge here. So, like I said, they are human beings, and so are we, and they must respect our policies, and the benefits that they are given, but they shouldn't act like bigwigs, (*mandamás*), as they say.

I spoke with various officials that expressed the same concerns as Joanna. While not supporting a hardline perspective against what some of her other colleagues perceived as “abusive,” “entitled” immigrants, Joanna is still cautious and even suspicious of those that might “be coming to Mexico just to take advantage of the benefits.” Though Joanna recognizes the humanity of migrants as people who have the right to migrate and be treated fairly, as in the previous chapter, she also expresses a sort of fear migrants will become suddenly empowered by their new access to services, leading them to “be in charge” in Mexico.

Another official who works directly with the public, expressed that he was opposed to the practice of limiting access to health services to anyone: people who live in Tapachula, regardless of where they are from should be able to access healthcare. He gave a recent example of deliberations he overheard at work, regarding a couple from Honduras. “The client heard a comment that we would only take care of pregnant [immigrant] women and not the husbands, so I asked my boss, ‘How are we not going to care for the husband if he lives here anyway? Even if they’re from *el otro lado*, their home is here.’”

Still, Esmeralda, a middle-aged receptionist at a local agency, who told me that she was well-suited for her job because she had a “*cara de enojona*,” (face of an angry woman) felt that though laws are a positive step in protecting immigrants’ rights, they may not be effective enough to prevent ongoing abuses from continuing to occur. She stated:

I think they are treated the same. I’ve only seen one side of all of this though. An immigrant has more freedom than before but for example, if for some reason “they” see a person from there coming their way? Forget it! Now we are seeing that the immigrants are going over the mountains and not the highway because there they are assaulted, the women are raped, they are killed. So many things. I think they have no protection and now that we’re talking about this—you know, the church where I go there are two Guatemalans that go there too and they went through terrible things—they were scooped up by the police, put in jail and then they said that they took them to where the migrants’ shelters (*albergues*) are, over there by the Cahoacán River, and they say they had a few meals there—but the food was terrible and rotten...

While this official begins by commenting that she feels that immigrants are treated the same as Mexicans at the time of receiving services, her later points contradict her initial reactions to my question demonstrating that she acknowledges and

sympathizes with the hardships of migrating. Thus, despite the new entitlements to rights, this official is still aware of abuses that occur, especially for migrants who are crossing the border. She draws on her personal experience with migrants outside of her job—she goes to church with two immigrants—which could be a reason that she is able to sympathize and humanize their experience.

Even when officials maintained that they believe that migrants are demanding and even act entitled, all participants seemed aware of the abuses that migrants faced in Mexico. However, in general their disapproval of the abuses was directed toward transmigrants and not toward permanent immigrants (who are more likely to make up their day-to-day clientele). For example, when I asked Esmeralda if she had seen any news coverage of the new policies offering protections, she answered:

Supposedly, and I say this because, I don't know if you've seen the news but I was watching TV Azteca the other day and I don't know where this was, but there was a girl in the middle of the river because she was being chased by someone with a machete...

Esmeralda referred to a video that went viral in March of 2011 of an official from the National Institute of Migration (INM) who, with a machete in hand, chased a Honduran immigrant woman into the Usumacinta river, the boundary between Guatemala and the state of Tabasco. An onlooker taped with his cell phone as the events unfolded, and the woman was forced to escape the official by jumping into the river, and barely being able to stay afloat while the agent continued to threaten her verbally from the bank of the river. Minutes later, when the agent finally retreated, she was saved by a man in a speed boat (Barbozo Sosa, 2011). I told Esmeralda that I had seen the video, and that it was

very impactful. She responded, “It gave me a feeling...I don’t know... Well, where is this support then that they give that protects them? Where is it? The girl couldn’t get out of the river, imagine if the current was rising?”

Gender-based Stereotypes of Central American Women

In Tapachula, Central American immigrant women are subject to pervasive gender-based stereotyping, which assumes that they are either sex workers; hypersexual; or “home-wreckers” (see also Cruz Salazar, 2011). As Katia, the same official quoted at the beginning of this chapter, continued her idealization of the Tapachula of her childhood, she attributed the decline of Tapachula not only to crime caused largely by Central American migrants affiliated with gangs, but also with perceived rise in prostitution in the city.

Tapachula was such a calm city, there wasn’t even AIDS here and [pause] there also weren’t so many places...bordellos, we could say, there weren’t so many of those kinds of women—they’re from *el otro lado*, the majority of them. If you go and do an interview to ask them questions, out of seven, maybe three will be Mexican and the other four are from *el otro lado*. So, you’ll find more of “them” and the HIV virus in this type of work. There’s a lot of HIV. [When the city started to change] it was so tranquil that quickly we were able to identify who was a dancer and in what place...

As a border region, and major commercial corridor for trucking and shipping, as discussed in Chapter 3, Tapachula has long been a center for sex, just as it has always been a hub for migration and cultural exchange. More and more, however, as discourse on human rights, human trafficking and the HIV/AIDS epidemic have become prominent in the local, national and international media, Tapachula has been singled out as a hub for sex work, sex trafficking, strip clubs and brothels in the national and international media

and by its residents, who directly link this with migration. This idea is reflected in Katia's words: She contrasts the peaceful Tapachula pre-migration boom, with her current vision of her city, which, to her concern, is being over-occupied by sex workers from Central America. According to Katia, the brothels are contaminated with HIV and AIDs, also due to migrants who she implies have brought it there. The manner in which Katia discusses the themes of prostitution, HIV and immigrants demonstrates the rather commonplace conceptions of these phenomena along the southern border. Again, we see discourse that directly links the decline in the wholesomeness of Tapachula with Central American women, of whom there are many working in the "growing" sex industry, which has led to an increase in HIV-AIDS, causing disruption and danger in Tapachula. Strong stereotyping of Central American women as "contaminated," or "sluts," emerge from the connection between prostitution, the rise in migration and the declining perceived reputation of Tapachula as a nice city in which to live.

In my many discussions with women and men in Tapachula and in my interviews with low- to mid-level officials, it became apparent that gender stereotypes could be used to identify "who is who" among clients. These gendered-filters could be applied to identify and categorize clients, to understand where they fit within the grand scheme of service provision. In order to understand what the components of these stereotypes, I asked nearly all of the officials that I interviewed, "Can you tell if someone is an immigrant when they come in? If so, how do you know? Are there differences between men and women?"

Esmeralda replied to this question capturing the essence of the gendered stereotyping of Central American women:

Esmeralda: Well, yes. Yes you know who they are.

Lindsey: How?

Esmeralda: By the way they look, their physicality. By the way they talk, and by the way they dress too.

Lindsey: In what way?

Esmeralda: Look, for example the women from there, the women from Honduras, you can tell by the way they dress. They show a lot of cleavage, very...very...well, they show everything! Women from here do it too, but the women from there are more exaggerated (*exageraditas*) in the way they dress. And then there's the way they talk, the way they are. Everything. Then yes, I know how to distinguish [between women from Central America and Mexico].

Our dialogue exposes how Esmeralda views Central American women. First and foremost, *centroamericanas* are easily identifiable just by looking at them. Regardless of the many shared phenotypic traits of people from Tapachula and Central America, *centroamericanas* look and seem different to Esmeralda. Their accents are different and even the way they dress is uncharacteristic of the place. Most important is the sexualizing gaze that Esmeralda places on these women: their clothes are too tight, they show too much skin, they are too “exaggerated” in their sexuality, and though women from Tapachula can also use tight clothing, as Esmeralda admits, it is not as tight as a *centroamericana's*.

The fact that Central American women are marked by their revealing, “sexy” clothing is tied to the idea that Central American women possesses a reputation as “husband-

stealers,” and that this raises fears among Mexican women. After clarifying that Central American women are served more than Central American men in the agency she works for, Esmeralda explains what makes up this reputation:

Lindsey: Are there many women [Central American] that come in?

Esmeralda: Yes. Yes, there’s a lot of people, a lot.

Lindsey: Are there more women than men?

Esmeralda: Yes, because there are many women who are already living here with men who are from here.

Lindsey: Do you think that Central American women have a bad reputation in Tapachula?

Esmeralda: The women from over there? Yes. Well, look, from what I’ve seen, but more than anything, are the rumors that I hear that the people say...that they come here to steal husbands from the women who are from here.

Lindsey: Do you believe that?

Esmeralda: Well, like I’ve told you, because of the way that they are, the way they dress, I think that yes [it’s true.] And on top of that they’re good-looking!

While Esmeralda admits she does not have first-hand experience with this “problem,” she feels she has reason to believe the rumors, because after all, ‘the women are attractive and they dress to attract men.’ This attitude, held by Esmeralda and many other *tapachultecos*, has been long-observed in communities where uneven power dynamics create “others,” who are sexualized, labeled as promiscuous or immoral in order to maintain majority group supremacy and keep newcomers or other marginal groups “out of place” (Cresswell, 2006).

Soon after, I asked about men. Esmeralda told me that she has heard more about the “bad reputation” of women than about the men, because “maybe I haven’t observed them as much as the women...I haven’t paid as much attention to them.” Wanting to dig deeper to understand the roots of this notion about Central American women, I asked Esmeralda what was behind this widely-held opinion, and asked why she thought this stereotype was so prevalent. She replied, “Maybe it’s fear, because people from here talk very poorly of the people that come from over there. They classify them as sluts (*mujerzuelas*).” When questioned further about the negative stereotyping of Central American women, Esmeralda presents a more analytical viewpoint, talking about people in general, rather than herself, she notes that *centroamericanas* are categorized, and talked badly about, possibly out of fear, and in a way this analysis implies that she acknowledges this “categorization,” could be unfair.

Katia’s perception of migration is tied up with her fears of growing crime and the seeming decline of Tapachula as a smaller, safer and more traditional city. She reproduces the gendered stereotypes that categorize Central American immigrants by their appearance. As I note above, because of the phenotypical similarities of many of the people of Mesoamerica, it could be nearly impossible to accurately tell just by looking at someone where they are from. If officials felt they could not identify an immigrant based on their physical features, they expressed that they could tell by their clothing or the way they carried themselves. Katia noted, “And now the ones that come from *el otro lado*, you can even tell who they are because of the way they dress, it makes you doubtful, so you say ‘this girl isn’t from here.’” She continued,

I go to get my nails done in a salon and one day these girls came in from a *certain* place, they come all together to get their nails done. So I brought it up with the young woman [who was doing Katia's nails], and she said 'no, they're from *that* place.' Goodness gracious! I'm going to have to be careful with them, I thought. And she told me not to worry, but they were *mujeronas* (attractive)—they weren't Mexicans. You can tell someone's from *el otro lado* just by looking at their features (*fisionomía*). They looked very loose (*eran muy galantes*) and very well, I mean, very well-endowed (*muy muy bien formaditas*).

This passage reveals much about how Katia perceives Central American women. From the first moment, she assumed the women were sex-workers or exotic dancers because they all came in together, and despite this she was unable to utter to me the name of the place where she thought the group of women might work substituting “a certain place” (*un cierto lugar*) or, “that place” (*tal lugar*). The dialogue magnifies Katia's fear of this otherized, sexualized and racialized *centroamericana*— while clearly setting herself apart by exaggerating her own decency—i.e. I'm going to have to be careful of them, because they must work in an unsavory place. To Katia, these *mujeronas*, “loose,” and well-endowed women are not from Mexico.

Another low-level official who worked closely with migrants, Gertrudis, speaking to me in a frank and rapid-fire tone as she busily typed in a monthly report due later that week, introduced another perspective into the discussion of the sexualization of women migrants:

In 2000, I had to interview a patient from El Salvador whose goal was the “American Dream.” And what was the service she needed? For the doctors to insert an intra-uterine device (IUD) because she was going to be transported (*la iban a trasladar*) by a truck driver, and according to her ignorance, so she wouldn't get pregnant. But she never thought about whether or not she'd be exposed to HIV or AIDS! So then, this is the way she was going to pay the truck driver. This type of person sells *everything*... *everything* they have to be able to get from here to there. But what happens, what they never tell you about...and

they bring children...That they end up asking them for a certain amount of money, and then it turns out that they were raped, humiliated, everything and then they never go back.

Gertrudis told me this story in the matter-of-fact tone of a woman who had seen it all, however, her words also expressed a sense of outrage and judgment toward these women who have “sold everything.” Here, *everything* connotes their bodies and their sex—they are willing to do anything to get to the United States. To Gertrudis, it is not worth it. She is expecting to shock with this story of a woman leveraging her sex as a currency to cross Mexico, coming in to receive a contraceptive and not thinking about the risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease. Activists, the news media and documentary filmmakers appropriate stories of women in this situation quite often to convey the desperation of women willing to do anything to emigrate. It is often painted as a woman’s last acts of agency before she leaves on her journey and is exposed to a high likelihood that she will be sexually assaulted. They use the IUDs or injected contraceptives because they know they will be vulnerable to sexual assault along the route.

The story that Gertrudis recounts, however, depicts a woman who chooses to travel in exchange for sex, by which Gertrudis is clearly shocked. Realities such as these, that are retold in Tapachula again and again, on the one hand elicit shock, anger, sadness and even compassion in some while at the same time they feed into stereotypes of the sexualized, and “desperate-enough-to-sell her body” like conceptions of women immigrants from Central America. Through these stereotypes, immigrant women’s agency and humanity are taken away in order to instead describe them as inhuman for

making the choice to migrate under such terms—terms that fall outside of the spectrum for moral conduct in Tapachula.

Demanding Immigrants

In addition to perpetuating gendered stereotypes of immigrant women, officials I interviewed also expressed that they felt that immigrants were too demanding and acted overly entitled to the services they provide them.

Esmeralda explained:

Sometimes they are demanding, they're very demanding in the sense that for example, we have a problem here that sometimes with one or two doctors who go on vacation and then another one will come in and ask to have the day off, and they leave us here with one or two doctors. Imagine all of those people that come in the morning—and that's when they get angry and aggravated. It isn't our fault, so we tell them "they only give a certain number of appointments per day..." And that's when they start to demand things, "why don't they have more doctors," so we have to send them to the director... he's a good person and so he personally will give them a consultation.

Esmeralda's description of immigrants' behavior introduces another major issue: the impact scarcity of resources has on service provision. As the agency's first site of contact with the public, these low- to mid-level officials are often operating in a stressful environment in which resources are scarce enough to impact the way that they are able to deliver services—a theme that will be discussed further in future chapters. In their roles, workers like Esmeralda are in the middle of what can be a frustrated public and a strained clinic. Here, however, she separates immigrants from the rest of the public. According to Esmeralda, *they* do not understand why they must wait in line for appointments, and push back when they are unhappy with services.

Another mid-level official, Viviana, working in another branch of the healthcare sector agreed with Esmeralda's observations. In explaining the confusion and difficulties many immigrant women face while trying to obtain care, the mid-level official noted that this was due to lack of information, and mostly due to the perception that immigrant women do not approach the right people to get clear information. She put it this way: "but the women (*señoras*) also don't come in for care; they want the care to fall out of the sky!" As she continued she shared her doubts about a system that would provide free care to immigrants, giving examples from the U.S. and France,

I asked another person who came to interview me, like you are, who was a French woman, "but why does everything have to be free? I was in France," I told her, "and I had a really strong headache and I asked the hotel staff to send me a pain killer and that I would pay, and they didn't send it to me!" So what's that all about? Why do we have to make things free and they don't? I'm telling you, I have family in the U.S. and logically they have great health insurance and so they're really well taken care of, but if you ask an immigrant with no papers and he'll never have any of that—Am I right?

Sometimes, it was not immigrants who were seen as monopolizing services, but other specialized immigrant-serving government agencies. Esmeralda explains:

So when the agencies come in, like the COMAR²⁵ or *Migración*, we have to serve them. Before there were regulations on how we had to deal with that, now they just show us their ID and they want all the attention for them, right that instant. ...And the people that are in line since 5:00 AM? What happens to them?

This official questions the fairness of allowing agencies dealing with immigrants to line-jump, without making prior arrangements with the clinic. It might be considered a professional courtesy to allow colleagues from other government agencies to receive preferential treatment. However, Fernando a 25-year-old, entry-level official in the health

²⁵ *Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados*, in English, the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid.

sector is troubled by this practice that he views as unfair to the other people that need services. As other representatives of the state, the agents mentioned here use their position as peers to waive wait times; an injustice to the many people already waiting in line, according to the informant. Also complaining about the unfairness, he politely refused to serve members of one NGO that came in and expected to receive attention. Instead of stopping everything to have them seen, he told them that there were no appointments left for the day and that there were too many people who had been waiting. He then referred the NGO workers to the director, suggesting that instead they establish an agreement for the date, time and schedule they would return.

While the previous characterizations of immigrants and immigrant-serving agencies as “line-jumpers” refer more to transmigrants and those immigrants being processed as refugees, long-term immigrants were also portrayed as abusing the system. For example, one mid-level official believes that, “there are people from Central America who have lived here for a long time—*they want to abuse the system.*” She goes on to explain:

...but it doesn’t work that way with us because after the interview we do, we already know what they’re about. Sometimes they say, “We’re from Tapachula.” But, why are you lying? We’re not going to deny you the service, so what do you get out of lying? We want them to tell us the truth, because it doesn’t matter where they’re from. Because even if we didn’t want to give them their consultation, we have to because now they’re going to “pull our ears” if we don’t do it—there’s no other way, even if we don’t want to.

To pose as a Mexican citizen in order to obtain services is perceived as an abuse of the system, however, if even non-Mexicans are entitled to services, is this truly the issue? It could be argued that immigrants who lie to obtain services do so because they

are unaware of what they are entitled to, or they are afraid they might receive poor treatment because of who they are. Here, it is implied that after living in Tapachula long enough, the client should know better about how the system operates and then not lie. To this official, hearing lies from would-be clients adds fuel to her frustration of having to handle immigrant clients. The official seems to miss the point that immigrants do not have adequate knowledge of services to which they are entitled and that they can be fearful enough of being turned away that they may lie in order to receive them.

Several low- to mid-level officials expressed openly their belief that immigrants acted with a sense of entitlement and were demanding when they accessed services. According to my interviews, in the eyes of the officials, these attitudes were evidenced by immigrants' actions. The following passage is a story one official told during an interview:

Here we have a lot of these people that... well for example, on Monday a couple from Honduras came in with their baby and the woman is pregnant. What does she do? This is what I don't like. That just by coming here, they open the doors easily, and if they go to the U.S., the same doesn't happen. But here since there are no regulations—and that's the reality—they come in here asking for things. Ay! I'm pregnant! They lose their shame, their dignity—the little that they have left—and then they ask for money. There was a meeting here, and they went in and they didn't respect that. And so we had to intervene and I called the police so they would get her out of here and even after that she didn't want to leave. Those kind of people already feel like they're at home, and still they yell at us “we have the same rights as you! We have the same rights as you!” So, I don't agree, I don't agree because now they're even going to have Seguro Popular [public health insurance] when our President Vicente Fox said that the Seguro Popular was only for Mexicans! And now they're giving these people everything, and for that reason in some ways I don't agree and that's why every time I say something, I always come off badly (*siempre salgo mal*), because they're political agreements.

This passage exemplifies the strong feelings that a few low- to mid-level officials had regarding immigrants' entitlement to services. First, the sharp, frustrated tone of this excerpt is exemplified through several exclamations as well as use of terms that clearly set immigrants apart from the general population, such as "those people" (*esa gente*). Her anger stems from what she perceives as immigrants, who unfairly "feel at home," and feel entitlement to rights that according to her knowledge and beliefs should be reserved for Mexican citizens. Her comparison between Tapachula and the U.S. demonstrates that indeed strict U.S. policies can have influences beyond borders and across scales of governance. Her perception that in the U.S. immigrants and immigration are regulated, and that services are not as easily doled out reinforces her belief that in Tapachula there should be more restrictions on migrants. This is a standpoint that could be debated from several perspectives: on the one hand the border is open and crossing is rather simple, while on the other it seems that access to human services and rights is complicated in Mexico—even while available—by institutional weakness. Again, immigrant women bear the brunt of the officials' critique—the patient who is demanding to be seen, and who is unfazed when the police are called on her, is characterized as out of control, disrespectful and as having lost all shame and dignity—"the little she had left." The above passage again reinforces gendered stereotypes and immigrants undeservingness. However, the story also indicates that officials disagree with the way services are provided to immigrants, or that they may take issue with having to provide those services at all.

Conclusions

Low- to mid-level officials are almost all longtime residents of Tapachula who have lived in a city that is partially defined by international migration and by its location in the Mexico-Guatemala borderland. They possess notions of migration that spring from this unique experience, but that are also informed by their work in a social service industry that has shifted in recent years to deal more generously with migrants. In this section, I have presented evidence to illustrate how officials perceive migration and migrants in Tapachula, arguing that understanding low- to mid-level officials' standpoint on the phenomenon is likely to be linked to how they perform the daily tasks of their jobs, something I will explore more in the coming chapter. I contend that negative stereotypes of migrants that demarcate immigrants, and especially immigrant women, as undeserving outsiders are pervasive.

I first introduced what officials shared concerning the general phenomenon of migration in their city, revealing that increases in migration—but particularly transmigration—corresponds with fear. In this case, officials' fears correspond to violence and crime, which they link back to the era when they claim Tapachula was terrorized with increased gang activity due to the passage of the "*bestia*" through the city. While gang activity has lessened in Tapachula it still remains linked to migration in officials' minds. Their fear is also linked to the idea of Tapachula becoming a larger, less "small-town" type of place because of this crime, which has largely stopped since the train ceased to pass through the city after a 2005 hurricane, and also because of the more current problem of the growing sex trade in the city and along the border.

The decline of Tapachula as a “moral” place in the perceptions of residents, being directly linked to flows of migration exists, and in some ways, begets the creation of stereotypes, which are then used to label immigrants. These stereotypes are deeply gendered, and though there are those that exist to characterize men, the officials in this study were far more likely to label women. Women immigrants are highly sexualized: officials claimed to know them by their appearance, which according to interviews consisted of tight, sexy clothing that exaggerated and drew attention to their more attractive bodies and features. They are characterized as sex workers, willing to sell anything to migrate to the U.S., and women “to be careful of” who would take native-born women’s husbands. Officials view these threats as shocking, immoral, desperate and negative. My findings regarding the stereotyping of Central American women as sexual others in Tapachula reflect the results of previous work written on the sexualization of immigrant women in Tapachula (Cruz Salazar, 2011).

Still, questions requiring further study remain. Officials’ narratives, which dispute the deservingness of immigrants, sexualize them and perpetuate a climate of fear around immigration are not only common to Tapachula, but can be heard all over the world. In particular, it would be interesting to understand further how these stereotypes are formed in Tapachula, and whether or not they gain influence from similar stereotypes circulating in the United States about Mexican immigrants and even if some of the contradictory attitudes expressed by several officials (i.e. feeling glad there are laws to protect immigrants just as long as they do not act like “they are in charge” because of it) spring from possible transnational connections. There are also broader questions of gender to be

addressed here, especially with regard to the fact that many of the voices we hear in this chapter are of female officials being highly critical of female migrants. Female workers were also those who were more likely to stereotype and sexualize *centroamericanas*. More research would be necessary to further understand the reasoning behind this and whether it is relevant to draw connections.

Chapter 7:

Embodying the State: Incorporating Officials' Everyday Experiences Working in their Institutions

As mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, too often we rely on one-sided, “flat” representations of problems in which there seems to be a clear “good guy” and “bad guy.” Research in migration studies— like public discourse and political debates on immigration—has done little to break down this dichotomy. This is likely because it is risky to add depth to “bad guy” characters when one group has suffered the negative consequences of their actions. It is not my intention to apologize for low- to mid-level officials’ poor treatment of immigrant clients, their stereotyping of these clients, and their subsequent role in blocking immigrants and their families’ access to human rights. Rather, I intend to open a space for discussion of the basic conditions that contribute to a perpetuation of these abuses in the hopes that this nuanced account will contribute to more sound policy creation and grassroots action.

The objective of this chapter is to add depth to our understanding of how low- to mid-level officials do their jobs, the conditions within which they work and the institutional dynamics that color their everyday experiences. In endeavoring to round out the representations of low- to mid-level officials, a task that carries over from the last chapter, I argue that, though it is impossible to establish a clear causality for officials’ actions—and this dissertation does not purport to do so—examining officials’ everyday work experiences provides insight into how they become empowered, while they are simultaneously constrained by the institutional conditions and norms that surround them.

Drawing on interviews with officials, I find that institutional circumstances, norms and power dynamics play a part in shaping their daily experiences in doing their work. Officials discussed at length the circumstances that imply conditions of powerlessness, even though their actions towards immigrants, discussed in previous chapters, suggest otherwise.

This chapter explores the institutional factors that shape officials' experiences in their everyday work and in dealing with immigrant clients. Juan's story, shared below, anticipates the major themes of this chapter: low-to mid-level officials' daily work takes place in environments of harsh scarcity, increasing pressure to meet quotas or satisfy requirements of new pro-immigrant policies. These pressures make up part of the institutional conditions and norms that shape officials' experiences and possibly their actions. In addition, they deal with the stresses of serving the public, day-in and day-out.

I examine Juan's narrative, which complicates understandings of low- to mid-level officials' actions set out in the first chapters of this dissertation. Unlike some of the officials described in those chapters, Juan seems different. First, he expresses enthusiasm about meeting the challenges that the new policies set out—he does not shirk off his responsibilities and is willing to work within the given structure to implement policies he supports, even when the working conditions within his agency may limit him. Second, he is a mid-level official, which implies different sets of responsibilities and different frequencies of contact with the public. In general, Juan's story is a departure from the often one-dimensional images of low- to mid- level officials that emphasize their negative actions.

Juan's Narrative

Juan is a career civil servant, and at 28 he had been promoted to direct one of Tapachula's most emblematic, important and busy public service providing institutions. His institution serves both immigrants and the general public. Juan is different from the majority of officials interviewed for this study because of his rank—he holds a post reserved for political appointees (*puesto político*). This sets him apart from other officials I interviewed because as a “mid-level” official who meets with the public every day, he must interface with his superiors at the state-level of his agency as well as with his subordinates. My interactions with Juan span hours of conversations over my year of fieldwork and one official interview recorded one afternoon soon before my departure from Tapachula.

Juan is one official who is doing the day-in and day-out work of implementing the Governor's policies. He is ambitious and his zeal for meeting and surpassing monthly goals keeps his poorly paid and overworked staff of six to seven employees going at a pace that does not seem sustainable to an outsider like myself. His enthusiasm is as much linked to his youthfulness as his connections with the governor's political objectives. He proudly asserted during our interview that in his office, “We are the ones who truly take up the policies of Governor Juan Sabines.” While one doubting citizen accused him of running a “Mexican-making factory” (*fábrica de mexicanos*) to secure the votes of would-be and future citizens, to him the work they are doing to serve Central American immigrants in the state is rooted in a humanitarian project that is not related to garnering votes.

I think that I would be a liar to tell you otherwise, but all of us in the government—the young people, the new generations, I’m 28 years old—we have electoral, political objectives (*tenemos un fin político electoral*). But, regardless, this political end is about doing what’s right (*haciendo el bien*). It’s not as if I say, ‘I’m an official and you have to vote for me,’ no. I think you build the platform as you go, there’s an electoral end, but it exists to give the citizens the support they need.

As a political insider and because of his daily job responsibilities, Juan is under pressure from both the governor’s office and from other state-level institutions to implement the administration’s new pro-migrant policies, including pressure from state levels of his institution in the capital city of Tuxtla Gutierrez. These pressures are manifest in two ways: he is compelled to increase the number of clients he serves (especially migrants and their families) on the one hand, while on the other he is burdened by the roadblocks to meeting those goals and performing regular service provision because of the archaic/cumbersome bureaucratic structures of his own institution. All together, stresses and pressures shape Juan’s everyday work life.

Following new guidelines and reaching the goals for improving service provision are some of the main responsibilities of a mid-level official like Juan. When the new pro-migrant policies were put into law (they began to affect his agency in particular in 2009) it was made clear that the staff would need to adapt quickly to the guidelines. However, not all of his local colleagues shared his zeal for following the policy. Juan spoke of a meeting that took place between his supervisor, all of the local mid-level officials of his agency and representatives from the Central American consulates located in Tapachula:

She went in front of the Consuls from the Central American countries... and she told them, ‘gentleman, we’re not going to make you provide evidence (*no vamos a evidenciarlos*)—send us your official letters in writing (*oficios*) and if those

officials don't serve them [migrants] then I'm going to get involved.' I think it's important that we recognize that the director was willing to do that—that she would come to Tapachula and say 'Hey officials, start working!' It's very interesting—I understand that this is the only state in the country that deals with migrants this way. The governor has always emphasized the right to identity, and has always said that as people we have the right to it because springing from this right we acquire other rights and obligations—rights to health, to education, so then we have really inserted ourselves in an issue where people need support. Two years in, we still have a few officials who don't very much care for this approach, but the majority is working little by little. Everything depends on each official.

The supervisor's clear message was that pro-migrant policies must and will be enforced. Thus, there seems to be political will at the top levels to implement these policies, and indeed a commitment to attempt to enforce implementation, but at the ground level there are still officials who are not following these rules, either because they do not agree (as illustrated by some officials in the previous chapter), have not been trained properly, or possibly do not have the materials or social capital to implement them—themes we will discuss further in this chapter. However, Juan indicates that despite this pressure, the people charged with carrying out these policies at the everyday level are disconnected from the upper level policy makers. Low- to mid-level officials still have the power to block or slow implementation.

Most days, Juan can be found in his austere yet stuffy office typing on his personal netbook and fielding communications from MSN messenger with two smartphones always readily available on his desk. He seldom turns on the air conditioning or a fan, even during the most sweltering of afternoons. This frugality is both intentional and necessary. As he is compelled to serve more immigrants, Juan grapples with a routine scarcity of material and human resources. He explains:

Look, it's difficult because we don't have necessary tools. The government gives them to us, but it doesn't give them to us complete (*el gobierno nos las da pero no nos las da completas*). We're really lacking paper—I'd be a liar to say otherwise...we don't have the basic stuff—toner! Because this struggle to meet the goals is missing a little bit of planning...So I think that's one of the serious problems.

As the boss, Juan is in charge of mitigating this scarcity in order to get the job done. This often means that he personally absorbs extra costs or asks for favors in exchange for services: "Sometimes we take it out of our own pockets, and sometimes the people cooperate by giving us toner or paper (*te obsequia un tóner, te obsequia hojas*). The scarcity is very serious. Sometimes the city governments support us." If his agency absolutely does not have the resources to process services on a given day, they must turn the public away, telling them to return at a later date. For Juan negotiating the scarcity is "the extra energy you give to your job" (*el plus que le pones a tu trabajo*). Mitigating shortages means making "alliances" and taking advantage of personal contacts to meet goals while still working "inside the rules" (*se hace todo bajo normas*). He says, "if I do something wrong, I'll get to Tuxtla and they'll send me to the supervisor."

Each month the agency's paperwork and records are audited by other officials in the state capital, "each month we go to Tuxtla, and they check all of our work, absolutely everything." Commenting on his co-workers' temperament in the capital, he remembers that when they first started implementing the new policies and thus serving more immigrants, the people in Tuxtla "were tyrannical with us" (*eran déspotas con nosotros los oficiales*). Each month auditors scrutinized the records of that month's transactions, rejecting any paperwork that was filed improperly, had errors, or lacked credible

supporting documents (i.e. copies of birth certificates, proof of address, etc., that are needed in order to apply for most public services). In other words, Juan found himself having to defend the documents that he prepared following the new policies to officials at a higher level than himself. Before the new laws were passed, for example, in order to serve the large number of immigrants seeking services, Juan discovered he needed to bend the rules:

At the beginning, before the new policies were put into place, we were fighting a lot over using the *pase local*²⁶ to claim that an immigrant had legal residency in the country. And every month I would arrive with my *pases locales* and they would say, “Again? We already told you that you couldn’t use that.” But that’s how I am, right? So, in order to avoid being rejected, before the new director made the announcement about the new regulations, I would tell them that we do it with the *constancia de origen* from their consulate,²⁷ but they would say “listen, no. In the guidelines it says that you need the birth certificate or a *constancia de origen* issued by the authority of their Consul.” Different people have different criteria, and that’s where we would have confrontations. There were different standards. Now, however, the revisers are well monitored and so they’ll all have the same criteria—that’s why they give us courses twice a year. But, there are always different characters, there’s the person who always says, “look, you need to erase here; put the voucher here, etc.” There are others, who just say, “what’s wrong, Official? You don’t know how to do your work?” So, there are different personalities.

Though Juan indicates that over time officials at the state level have indeed improved in their consistency, it also seems that even with the new implementation and attempts at standardization, someone in his position still must find ways to bend the rules. This indicates that there are many grey areas in implementation when new policies are initiated without tested frameworks. The cooperation of bureaucrats at the state level is

²⁶ Refers to a short-term visitor’s visa which Guatemalan residents of the border region are eligible to use to move within a limited area close to the Mexican border, see Chapter 2 for discussion.

²⁷ The *constancia de origen* is a document with a photograph provided by a Consulate in order to verify an immigrants’ identity and place of origin when no other document, such as a passport, is available.

necessary to providing immigrants with their services, and for Juan to meet goals and therefore make good on his political and moral obligations to serve more immigrants.

It is important to note that officials in the capital, a four to five hour car ride away from the border, do not have the same contact with immigrants as their counterparts in Tapachula or other border cities. Not only do these officials have very little contact with the public, as they work behind the scenes to correct forms, but Tuxtla Gutierrez simply does not have the same concentration of immigrants. When Juan arrives there for his monthly meetings then, he must defend his paperwork to colleagues unfamiliar with the context in which he works in Tapachula, “fighting” along the way for his documents to be accepted.

Embodying the State: Entanglements of Power

Juan’s story brings to light how the Mexican state is embodied at the micro-scale. Through his, and other stories presented in this dissertation, I have demonstrated what this state’s actions look like, as they are the fundamental components of state power. Taking this feminist geopolitical analysis a step further, I also discussed how this power manifests in immigrants’ lives. What is left is to describe the context for officials’ actions, including their everyday experiences working in their institutions. In so doing, I hope to take our conceptualization of the embodiment of state power forward by understanding how institutional norms, conditions, and spaces are reflected in the entangled power of the state (Sharp et al. 2000). Power flows through the relationships between officials, and their superiors and institutions.

As discussed in other sections of this dissertation, one of the key goals of doing feminist geopolitics is to embody the state—to shift from the macro scale discussions that have prevailed in traditional geopolitics (Dowler and Sharp, 2001; Hyndman, 2000: p. 213; Mountz, 2004; Secor, 2001). By scaling down, we move the discussion from the elite, typically-male dominated sphere of national and international politics, to the everyday scale of politics, in which groups typically excluded from macro scale power circles are present. The everyday operations of power are increasingly discussed in terms of how they are embodied, or, in other words, how they are located and given concrete meaning at various scales. Mountz (2004) contends that embodying the day-to-day functions of the state by studying immigration bureaucracy and civil servants uncovers and humanizes power, and as a result reveals that an embodied “state is multiple, conflicted and in perpetual negotiation” (p. 339). Embodying the power to regulate migration provides a more intimate, grounded understanding of how policies developed at the macro, or state level, pragmatically function at the micro-scale of the everyday.

Ferguson and Gupta (2002) argue that in the contemporary neoliberal era, state power is located in atypical and diverse actors and forms; it is not only enacted by bureaucracies, or traditional government agencies, but also by non-governmental organizations, bank clerks, and educators, for example. They urge scholars to construct an “anthropology of the state,” to better understand this phenomenon. This study builds on Ferguson and Gupta’s “anthropology of the state,” by seeking to understand how atypical actors and individuals that make up the state enact power. Realizing that

individuals are embedded in networks, this chapter examines how individual officials are influenced by institutional power relations.

As indicated in Weber's (1947) classic work, bureaucracy is an important mechanism in the enforcement of state policies, including those related to borders and citizenship. However, few studies have been dedicated to understanding how these actors also embody state power (Trouillot, 2003; Mountz, 2004). Drawing on the concept of the anthropology of the state this chapter illuminates how power is embodied by the atypical actors and individuals as well as their institutional conditions that make up the state.

Despite our progress in embodying the state, and scaling down, theorizations of state power in geography, however, have largely neglected to describe and explain the embodied actions, behaviors and attitudes of bureaucrats and officials at the everyday scale. In his 1980 book, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: The Dilemmas of the Individual on Public Services*, Michael Lipsky contends that the low-level bureaucrats—government employees charged with providing services, such as teachers, police officers, and social workers, are often times the only point of encounter that regular people have with their governments. As such, the actions of these street-level bureaucrats condition people's expectations and experiences with their government and policy. According to Lipsky, bureaucrats operate with considerable discretion and thus may or may not provide services according to in the way they were originally intended. However, not all street-level bureaucrats perform poorly, and Lipsky contends that certain conditions favor the proper execution of policies—bureaucrats working under less-than ideal, and limited working structures could be more likely to practice poor implementation. These

conditions include scarcity and lack of resources, and high demand for services, which produce stress, for example. The negative interactions with the public are often “coping mechanisms.” However, Lipsky makes clear that he does not intend to totalize bureaucrats’ experiences or actions; in many cases the best workers are able to overcome structural shortages.

Working Conditions and (Dis)empowerment

Scarcity, relationships with peers and superiors, stress along with pressures to meet goals in poor conditions all contribute to the daily operations of the micro-level state in Tapachula. In the following sections, I build upon Juan’s narrative and introduce the voices of officials from other agencies in order to demonstrate how these conditions can be disempowering, even when officials’ discretionary power seems to be on the rise, as shown in other chapters. State power is constructed relationally as people move through their daily tasks within these institutional spaces.

Material Scarcity in the Office

Gertrudis, in the same matter-of-fact manner illustrated in the last chapter, asserted: “Patients not only need to be treated well by hospital workers, they need medicine too.” With this comment, Gertrudis intimates the existence of a formidable problem in Tapachula’s public agencies: scarcity of material resources. According to low- to mid-level officials, dealing with material scarcity in their workplaces is one of the most challenging aspects of their job. As Juan indicated above, his office also goes

without necessary supplies, but is expected to continue to work at the same pace. Without the proper supplies, it was sometimes impossible to complete these daily tasks, sometimes preventing officials from serving clients. Each of the agencies experiences this scarcity differently, however the consequences tend to be the same: when a lack of resources leads to incomplete, or insufficient service this can add to stress and conflicts with the public, as I will discuss in the following section. Before delving into these consequences, however, I first describe a few cases of material scarcity in the officials' own words.

Material scarcity manifests primarily in shortages of paper, pens, toner for printers and copy machines and official forms. In the healthcare sector, clinics might be missing bandages, syringes, or the most basic medicines. Scarcity of productivity-aiding technology is also a problem: modern computers, software and copy-machines are not often available, and when they are, in some cases they may be out of date or broken. Joana, the young low-level official introduced in the previous chapter, described the scarcity she experienced in the office where she works:

More than anything, I feel that the printers fail too much...the printers, the toner—sometimes we have to provide it ourselves, from our own pockets to be able to move ahead with the work (*sacar adelante el trabajo*). The office material—that's the white paper, the pens—there was a time when the [main agency] wasn't providing that to the offices...well, at least it wasn't arriving here, but since last month we started getting materials again. It was a period that lasted a long period of a few, if I'm not exaggerating, a few years that we didn't get office materials.

Another lifetime low-level official, Geraldo, stressed that typewriters are among the most important tools of their job, however they are often in a state of disrepair. He put it this way:

[The theme of scarcity] is very important. To start, we don't have enough typewriters (*máquinas*), and the ones we do have, if they even work, it's because they are really good ones, but the rest don't receive maintenance, they aren't serviced. A typewriter to us is something that's very important, even the computers too.

Typewriters are used to fill out all official documents; indeed, Geraldo's job involves writing on a typewriter all day long. Mariluz, another veteran, borderline-mid-level official working in another branch of Joana's agency, observed that this scarcity began during Governor Sabines' term, and had not been experienced to the same extent before; however, I was not able to verify this opinion.

Lacking basic material, in extreme cases, can mean that clients are not served until these resources are replenished. For example, on three occasions when I volunteered at a local agency there was no "system." In general, the phrase "there's no system," (*no hay sistema*) though it sounds as if it refers to a computer network, can refer to something as simple as lacking forms. In some cases, the internet or power will go off, which can also cause problems if the agency must connect to a main "system" to input and access important records. In this case, the agency can be closed to the public until it replenishes its vital supplies. For example, when a *registro civil* runs out of blank forms, officials are unable to provide birth certificates to the public. That means that everyone with an appointment to register a child that day must be seen on a different day. This causes a backlog, meaning more people would have to be seen on a future date, pushing the

officials to work longer and more quickly on that day. On the day they shut down, workers will usually dedicate the day to revising paperwork “off the system.” For a client, being unable to register a child or pick up an official copy of their birth certificate may then delay their access to other services that require that document.

When I asked Geraldo how they dealt with not having enough supplies in his office, he told me,

Well, it’s a responsibility that the boss takes on. Yes, because the boss is the one who has to make sure the office functions and now yes, he has to take money out of his own pocket, he has to put it up, because even if they don’t give him the material the office still has to keep running (*seguir adelante*).

Confused, I asked him again, how the boss could do this. He replied, “well, he has to provide a solution, that’s why I said that he has to take it out of his own pocket if we run out of paper, or pens...he has to buy it.” The boss is not generally reimbursed for his expenses. As Juan José mentioned in his interview, it is the “extra” the boss puts into his work.

Handling the Public in a Context of Scarcity

Fieldnote 9/2/2011

I worked again today with Lucía, helping to collect some signatures. It’s mundane, and you are in constant contact with people. On the first one that I did, I collected the four signatures in the wrong order. My first thought was, ‘It’s fine! Just leave it’—my brain was so tired, I was already too lazy to care. I just wanted to move to the next document. But then I thought about it and realized, this could potentially cause major problems for this family or child in the future... One wrong signature and who knows what would happen. I’d better check. In the end, I checked and my mistake didn’t matter, but these are the kind of mundane details that give power to the whole process of the bureaucracy and to the state. The signature out of place, the number times that you have to come in, etc.

This lightly edited field note from my time working in a service-providing agency represents my own introduction into the worlds of low- to mid-level officials laboring in Tapachula's bureaucratic landscape. Though not surprising—we might expect public servants' work to be boring—we often do not consider how the mundaneness of bureaucratic work plays into how low- to mid-level officials come into their power. As I reflect on my own experience working at the lowest level of a state agency, I recall how alarmed I felt to realize that my small mistake in collecting key signatures in the wrong order could have much larger implications: I could have caused the document we were working on to be rejected and then nullified during either the in-house revision process performed at the end of the week, or worse yet, the monthly review process in the capital city performed at the end of the each month. Rejection of a document could mean that a family or individual would have to re-apply—step-by-step—for the document in question, losing valuable time and money. For an immigrant or poor family, this could translate into a substantial loss of resources. This is one of the more minute and often unperceived forms of power that an official holds—its inevitable that we all make mistakes as Victoria, one of the other low-level workers confessed to me. The consequences of a mistake, however, may have unforeseen impacts.

Victoria, attempting to make me feel better about my error, commented that, “working with people you reach a limit. Sometimes people annoy me” (*a veces la gente me fastidia*). Said to me in the aftermath of my mistake, Victoria seemed to imply with her comment that constant contact with the public leads you to a point where perhaps one begins to overlook details. Is there an unseen connection between the working conditions

including pressure, stress, and scarcity and the service that is provided? I contend that the context of officials' everyday work provides a backdrop for how officials become empowered to embody the state.

As referenced by Victoria's above comment, working with the public can be tiresome. Officials interviewed cited this as one of the more challenging aspects of their work, especially when interactions turned negative. Negative moments with the public generally stemmed from scarcity of material or human resources. For example, one young "appointment booker" at a local clinic, Ruperto, put it this way:

At first it takes a lot to manage the patients, more than anything dealing with people is difficult because sometimes the people, sometimes you tell them something, you explain it and sometimes they don't understand and they tell you "no."

Communicating in a clear, understandable fashion is difficult when dealing with a confused public. Ruperto gave the example of having to explain to disoriented patients that they have come to the wrong clinic for care. Each neighborhood corresponds to a particular clinic and specific time of day for appointments—there is the morning shift (line-ups starting as early as 5AM) and then the afternoon shift. The only exception to this rule is for emergencies, and in that case, as the receptionist, Ruperto is also in charge of triage. Ruperto told me,

If he says, "I've had a fever for three days, four days," it's not urgent anymore, but if he came in with a temperature of 40 (degrees Celsius), obviously he has to pass, now this is something that we give importance to and sometimes the people don't understand that, and then they're like "no, my stomach hurts." "And when did it start?" "It's been like this for a week, two weeks." "Well, then why didn't you come then?"

According to Ruperto, difficulties also arise when patients have already been made to run around because,

...they've been sent here, thrown out of there and in that case we say, you know what, yes *mamita* and sometimes, yes *papito*...that's why we tell you, "you need to go to the Health Center that corresponds to your neighborhood so you don't have to spend on transportation..." The government says that [healthcare] is free but it doesn't seem like it.

This type of "run-around," as I have discussed in previous chapters, can be especially disorienting to immigrant clients, who often have poor access to information on where and when to go to get public services.

As we have seen in previous chapters, clients are often confused over the steps required by the bureaucratic process to obtain services. Central American immigrants interviewed blame officials for not sharing information clearly, for their arbitrariness and for their rudeness. Officials, however, sometimes present dealing with the public as balancing pressures from their peers and supervisors on the one hand and the public in general. This balancing act becomes complicated when scarcity surfaces. For example, Ruperto discussed that in the clinic where he works, there are sometimes critical shortages of medical staff. A typical public health clinic in Tapachula has several consultation rooms, or *consultorios*, each with its own corresponding nurses and doctors. At the beginning of a workday, patients waiting in line are given a ticket that assigns them to be seen (in order) in a certain consultation room by a certain doctor.

Esmeralda echoes Ruperto's observations and in so doing introduces an important reflection on the subject. For Esmeralda, there is a need to treat patients well just as much as coworkers in order to get the job done:

We have to treat the patients well, and then we have to get along with our coworkers too, with the nurses, the doctors...because sometimes, if a patient comes late, the doctors say “but why are you sending him to me?” ...we’ve all had problems with coworkers, just like we do with the public, but in this case you really need to know how to handle it.

Esmeralda’s comment demonstrates the importance of managing relationships with coworkers in order to be able to perform well the tasks of her own job. As such, these relationships are factors that shape officials’ experiences in the workplace—in a way functioning as unspoken institutional norms that can drive or crush productivity and morale. Having strong relationships with co-workers means that you are respected and that you are more likely to receive favors when in need. Contrary to this, if you fall out with your coworkers, then when negotiations over when patients are seen arise, they may not be willing to help you.

Clerks and cashiers, who are at the bottom of the hierarchy in most public agencies must focus not only on being the public face of their institutions and as such representing the rules and norms of those institutions to the clientele, but they can also find themselves negotiating the gap between their clients’ needs and their colleagues’ willingness to serve them. I asked Ruperto how his co-workers reacted to serving immigrants and he put it this way:

It doesn’t sit well with someone when you tell them what to do. We have the obligation [to serve immigrants] because we have instructions. We send them to Social Work, we tell them “this person coming in, look, here, he’s Central American, pass him through.” If the doctor sees him, or doesn’t see him I already did my job by passing him through to Social Work and giving him an appointment. As soon as I pass him to the appointment, if the doctor gets behind and starts doubting, I already passed him and it isn’t my responsibility, it’s his problem. If the patient complains, it doesn’t fall on me. The one that has to

“deliver” is the doctor. Because sometimes there are doctors who like them [Central Americans], and doctors who don’t like them (*porque a veces hay médicos que les gusta, médicos que no les gusta, pues*).

Thus, the roots of poor service do not necessarily begin with one official. The co-workers, and relationships with co-workers are significant in determining positive outcomes for migrants. Nurses, doctors or other types of ‘superiors’ might be the ones discriminating, and this discrimination trickles down to the person giving service at the window, mediating between two very diverse interests. In the case above, Ruperto exculpates himself from responsibility as soon as he passes the patient to the next level of service. As long as he completes the tasks associated with his job, he has done enough. Due to his lowly position in his agency, it is likely that he does not have the social capital, or influence necessary to oblige those above him to see all patients if they are unwilling.

Though they are not allowed to pick and chose who they serve, doctors and nurses, according to Ruperto, do refuse to see people because they are busy or, as Ruperto interprets it “*a veces no le gusta*.” Ruperto feels confident that his responsibility to have clients seen by doctors is fulfilled as soon as he is done doling out the appointments. After that point, if the nurse or doctor refuses to see a client or is absent, then it is out of his hands. In response to this answer, I asked Ruperto if doctors could choose whom to see. He responded with the following improvised dialogue representing an everyday experience in negotiating with doctors and other clinic staff.

Doctor: No, it’s not my turn, give him to somebody else!

Ruperto: But you're up next in the sequence!

Doctor: Yes, but look, I have permission to leave work early. I have a lot of problems to take care of today.

Ruperto: Fine, but you haven't shown me your permission slip to leave and the director didn't mention to me that you are leaving, so...

Doctor: No, don't send the patient to me. I'm leaving!

Ruperto says that at this point when the doctor is refusing to see a patient he speaks to the director and alerts him to the situation. If he finds out that the doctor indeed does not have permission to leave, he asks him one more time to receive the patient. At that point if he still refuses, Ruperto tells him to see the director. Ruperto is not in control of his colleagues' actions, however he is the face of the institution to the public. This evidence demonstrates that while low-level officials like Ruperto may seem to be in control of ensuring the public receives services, other institutional actors also have influence.

Insiders: Drawing Connections to Understand Officials' Actions

Low- to mid-level officials offer a window into understanding the way that their peers behave when dealing with Central American immigrants and clients in general. The majority of those interviewed acknowledged that people in their line of work have the reputation of being rude, capricious, unfair and mean. In their own words the people I interviewed discussed the behavior of their co-workers, and even themselves—along the way providing their own interpretations and rationales for certain behaviors.

Tania is a middle-aged official who occupies a post just below the rank of a mid-level official in her agency. I began our discussion, repeating to her an observation that

some immigrants had described to me. I told her that I had heard from several immigrant participants that they were denied service in one of the city's *registro civiles*, wondering what she thought of that.

Tania: Yes, that's true. It's another very interesting situation. I've also heard, for example, that now that a special *registro civil* for immigrants exists, everyone just sends immigrants there.

Lindsey: But they shouldn't do that, right? Any *registro civil* should give them service.

Tania: It's a way to get out of doing the work. Like for example the other day, a woman was sent in from another branch of our agency. Over there they give out appointments knowing that people come from far away and the buses return early and still they have them there waiting in the offices at one or two in the afternoon. This is the problem: I could be wrong, but I'll tell you again it depends on the opinion people have about other types of people. There's no reason to treat people disrespectfully.

According to Tania, sending immigrants away or being disrespectful of potential clients' time and thus passively turning them away, is based on officials' individual opinion of those that pass through their offices and not necessarily reflective of policy, nor the working conditions they experience. Tania also suggests that officials should take into consideration impediments that clients might face in availing themselves of services—like how far away they live—out of a sense of care. Building on this, Geraldo also agrees that it “isn't necessarily discrimination, but more politics,” that explain why officials might deny service or treat clients poorly.

He explains that “all officials in some way or another” have their posts thanks to their political connections, which means that for some people it is easier than for others to obtain their jobs, depending on the type of connection they have. If they have a “*un buen*

padrino,” a political “godfather,” they will not necessarily worry about how they treat the public because it would not matter who complained (*a ellos no les preocupa que dirán*). Again, Geraldo, like Tania, brings up the term *sacudirse del trabajo*, “to shake off work.” He put it this way: “So, they make the poor people wait, they make them run around and maybe they do serve them but they do it while making them run around. They don’t follow the orders the way they are given to them.” Later, he continues: “So, if they don’t need the work, obviously they aren’t going to give the service to the community or to society. Why? Because they don’t have need to be tolerating people!” In sum, Geraldo, believes that as officials feel more empowered by the strength of their political connections, they “shake off” more work because complaints will not cause them to loose their positions. He reiterates what many immigrant clients have experienced with respect to being made to overcome more bureaucratic obstacles because of the negligence of officials.

Geraldo’s above statement is revealing not only because of his own view about why officials treat the public poorly, but also because it suggests that the public needs to be “tolerated.” Dealing with the public is challenging, and takes an intentional effort to acknowledge clients. As seen above, working with the public *is* challenging for officials, and requires patience and understanding in order to communicate effectively, especially when clients may be angry or confused. Geraldo describes some behaviors he has observed in his co-workers:

They don’t even know what the person is going to say and they are already cutting them off and giving them poor treatment, and in the moment that they use strong

words with a person, they're already giving them bad service...and representing public servants poorly.

Because of the lack of resources and the high demand for services, dealing with the public can be overwhelming. According to Geraldo, “the agglomeration of people is a little bit of a pain for us, because it makes us tense to have so many people (*un mundo de gente*) in the office.” In dealing with this stress, Geraldo says that it is a challenge to maintain composure, and that can be a weakness for his colleagues:

Yes, sometimes we do come to a point where we get stressed out and it's not that we get aggravated with the people, but we simply reach our own personal limits and when one gets tired and is all nerves and just wants to get the work done and then with so many system failures, the building that sometimes isn't in the best conditions, as we would like it to be, we don't have air conditioning, we don't have fans—even with this heat and the people. So yes, it's a little difficult to give service at 100%, and I assure you that we don't give that kind of service. We don't give it for the same reason, because we don't have...we don't have the necessary material.

For Gerardo, then, the combination of stress, nerves, frustration with not being able to get the job done, coupled with the lack of materials is at the root of poor service provision. Like other workers I interviewed, these stresses sometimes make doing the job impossible. Since the beginning of the gradual implementation of new pro-migrant policies, agencies have had to deal with higher demand of their services from immigrant communities in Tapachula. One question that my research raises is whether or not this increase in demand for services has placed extra pressure on the agencies' already-strained resources, and if so, if this could be a source of extra stress for officials. Juan starts to outline the connections between these factors above and how they specifically impact his own agency. This is not meant to be generalizable to all other agencies

included in his study, but provides a good context for what happens in one of the more scarcity-prone offices in Tapachula.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter has been to demonstrate that low- to mid-level officials are not individuals who, out on their own, independently work to contradict state-sanctioned policy. Indeed, while they do seem to operate with great discretion in some cases, this chapter has demonstrated that institutional factors and norms play a fundamental role in influencing the experiences of officials on the job, and in some cases in their service delivery. As officials' testimonies suggest above, scarcity and stress limit their possibilities and complicate service provision, keeping them from meeting their full potential on the job. While officials do admit that their jobs are stressful and they constantly have to "tolerate" clients and mediate with coworkers, in their minds, the conditions of scarcity are not always directly related to the increasing discretionary power and abuses. Specifically, most of the officials did not mention that their institutional realities were related to the widespread poor treatment of Central American immigrants and transmigrants. They related this more to discrimination and laziness, arguing that these colleagues either "don't need the work" are unmotivated and do not want to work, or think poorly of the people they are expected to serve, and in particular, of migrants. As we have seen in the last chapter, it is clear that some officials do subscribe to and perpetuate negative stereotypes, but at the same time it is not unperceivable that harsh scarcity could be related to officials not being able to do their jobs properly. When there

is a lack of supplies, discretion grows—and in a rush to meet their obligations, they handle problems in any way that they can. As such, these overarching conditions of the state must also be factored into our discussion.

Throughout this chapter, I have embodied the state through humanizing officials and attempting to understand their unique standpoints and also opening avenues for delving more deeply into their behaviors. As such, we begin to view officials as occupying more ambivalent positions within their institutions. Officials' actions, as everyday restriction, and their perpetuation of gendered and ethnocentric stereotypes empower officials on the one hand. While on the other, driving scarcity coexists with increasing pressure to meet goals and serve new population, resulting in disempowerment. Officials are both enabled and restricted by the conditions within which they work. Future research should continue to work to understand how complex behaviors of state officials are formed as a result of institutional factors existing at multiple scales, and also their own personal life experiences outside of their jobs. Officials too are subjects of neoliberal governance, and understanding these subjectivities could have important outcomes for organizing and policy-making.

Finally, it is necessary to comment briefly on the possible role of corruption in the daily work of officials. Corruption is an insidious, ubiquitous yet sometimes inconspicuous part of officials' everyday working conditions. Though evidence of corruption surfaced in both my interactions with officials, my own participant observation working in a government agency and in my work with officials, immigrants were the only participants to comment directly about the phenomenon. Corrupt practices

are often the result of scarcity and miserable salaries: bribes help officials make ends meet. Officials that do not partake in corrupt practices might be pressured into following them and this could have an impact on morale. I do not explore corruption in depth here due to the limitations of my data, however, it is well-documented that corruption is a part of everyday life in Mexico (Sarsfield, 2012) the impacts of which must be explored in more detail by future research.

Chapter 8:

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this dissertation has been to understand how Central American women experience the state in Tapachula, to demonstrate the meaning and consequences of these interactions in their daily lives, and to embody this state in order to better comprehend how it functions and the institutional factors that shape its dealings with Central American immigrants. Based on participatory workshops and in-depth interviews and participant observation working in a government agency, I found that women are blocked, delayed and discouraged from accessing basic rights to legal identity, healthcare and other services for themselves and their family, and that these denials unfold at the micro-scale. Despite the presence of laws that are supposed to protect immigrants, low- to mid-level officials—“street level” bureaucrats and gatekeepers charged with dealing with the public—contradict policy in subtle, typically unseen ways to disenfranchise immigrant women. This takes place (knowingly or unknowingly) through microaggressions, which are subtle, mundane and minute actions that consist of giving mis- or dis-information and arbitrary instructions or more direct refusal of service. These actions, though largely unseen by scholars studying state regulation of international migration at different scales, are pervasive and have a considerable impact on Central American women’s lives in Tapachula. I argue that this constitutes a form of everyday restriction, playing out at the lowest scales of governance, through means uneasy to quantify.

Everyday restriction has great significance in Central American women's lives. To begin, by blocking women from availing themselves and their families of rights to legal identity and regularization of immigration status, Central American women are also denied membership in public health insurance, and access to other social programs and human services. Without the appropriate visa, women are also unable to work within the so-called formal economy, which means that if they are employed, they are more likely to work in jobs that are insecure where they receive less pay and no benefits—usually as domestic laborers. Many of the women in this study either worked in their homes or were small-scale entrepreneurs dedicated to preparing and selling food from their homes or from small stands located in well-transited areas throughout the city. Interviews with immigrant women evidenced that their exclusion from these programs had the impact of deepening poverty. For example, women without an FM2 or FM3 visa were more likely to be food-insecure, and live in precarious housing in neighborhoods lacking basic infrastructure and oftentimes located in flood zones.

Women expressed that they experienced feelings of “non-existence,” or deep feelings of not belonging/feeling out of place related to their inability to obtain documents and have access to the same rights as their Mexican neighbors. It is important to note that women acknowledged that for themselves, as undocumented immigrants, they could understand how they might be excluded from receiving the same benefits from the state, however they could not accept that their Mexican-citizen children be also denied these basic rights to legal identity (birth certificates), education, healthcare and other vital social programs. Inability to obtain citizenship rights also leads to

vulnerability to further abuse by officials and intra-familial emotional and physical violence as immigration status becomes a type of currency manipulated by Mexican-citizen family members. I found that regardless of these harsh consequences of low-level restriction, which caused some women to question the point of even bothering to regularize their status, most were still convinced that regularizing their status was the only option to improve their lives. Sometimes participants resorted to extra-official means to obtaining legal identity documents for themselves. Seeking out false papers is as much a testament to the importance of papers in women's lives as it is to the existence of predatory lawyers, and other charlatans and corrupt officials who readily take advantage of those in the immigrant community. The evidence suggests that if citizenship is made accessible, Central Americans will find a way to take advantage of these rights in order to seize the opportunities that in this instance can only be afforded by legal membership. However, even when it is made available at the policy-making level, women are often unable to take advantage of these rights because of the everyday restrictions that are exerted by officials.

In this research I have not only endeavored to uncover immigrant women's experiences with the everyday state, I have also sought to describe how this everyday state encounters immigrants. On the Mexico-Guatemala border and beyond, academics and human rights oriented NGOs tend to focus their attention on qualifying and reporting abuses, and less so on generating insights into how abuses happen, who commits them, and why. Understanding officials' perceptions of migration to Tapachula, of migration policies, and of immigrants themselves is a starting point for understanding these issues. I

begin to fill this gap in the research through analysis of data from my participant observation working in a local bureaucracy and in-depth interviews with low- to mid-level officials from several local government agencies in Tapachula. Incorporating low- to mid-level officials' individual perspectives into this study, I find that fear of growing crime and change in their city drives their negative perceptions of migration. Their fears are rooted in past experiences of heightened gang presence in the city that occurred at the peak of Central American transmigration through the city in the early years of the 2000s. Gangs or *maras* are presumed to be Central American in origin, contributing to this negative perception.

Low- to mid-level officials, nevertheless, present more nuanced opinions concerning the recently implemented pro-migrant policies that they have been charged with implementing. In general, it seems that most officials expressed that they were open to the new policies, feeling that Central American immigrants deserved to be treated fairly and as "human beings." Interviewees also pointed out that the pro-migrant policies would improve the region's human rights reputation in the eyes of Central American countries. However, low- to mid-level officials also expressed their concern that delivering rights to Central Americans could inspire immigrants to arrive and become undeservingly empowered. Narratives of undeservingness and immigrants' sense of entitlement seem to be connected to officials' own fears of being disempowered. Already occupying precarious positions within Tapachula's social structure, most officials interviewed also are likely to qualify for the same social benefits that immigrants would be seeking out. In addition, I found that low- to mid-level officials' stereotypes of

immigrants were clearly gendered. Low- to mid-level officials pathologize Central American women as hypersexual and driven to “steal” Mexican women’s husbands. These stereotypes were accepted as truth and were pervasive within my sample population. Drawing on literature on socio-spatial borders in Geography, I argue that these stereotypes function to demarcate who is “in place” and “out of place” and thus worthy of receiving services and entitlements.

Low- to mid-level officials’ pre-established perceptions of Central Americans are representative of discriminatory attitudes that surely are reflected in their daily work. However, the context for officials’ behavior goes beyond individually informed actions. We must describe and understand the institutional relations and contexts in which low- to mid-level officials participate and perform their jobs. Though there is not sufficient evidence to argue for causality, it seems that these contexts, as Lipsky (1980) suggests weigh heavily on officials’ abilities to deliver services properly. As low-level representatives of the state, officials are the intermediaries between the general public and the institutions for which they work. These institutions consist of their superiors, the spaces where they labor, and the conditions that exist in these spaces. As intermediaries, officials must balance the needs of the public with the desires of their superiors, the existing policies, and the material resources on hand. As I describe in Chapter 7, this can be challenging for low- to mid-level officials when co-workers and superiors refuse to cooperate with them, often producing stress. I also found that harsh environments of scarcity of and human resources, social capital and material resources negatively impact officials. While the poor implementation of new policies plays out overwhelmingly at the

everyday scale through low- to mid-level officials' actions, we still cannot ignore the fact that officials exist within entangled webs of power (Sharp et al., 2000).

Nevertheless, though interviewees discussed the challenges of their jobs quite openly with me, when I asked them directly about the bad reputations of their agencies' employees or to report on why they believed their co-workers mistreat the public and especially immigrants, they did not necessarily connect material and resource scarcity to these problems. While stress made it hard to "tolerate" people, participants expressed that laziness, absence of desire to work or lack of necessity to work were the most important factors that led to poor service. Others cited the poor opinion—a type of superiority—that some low- to mid-level officials have of the public as key to explaining their behavior. Another question that remains at large is what the role of corruption, a well-documented element of the Mexican state plays here. Though this is considerably more difficult to capture through research, we must not disregard this as an element that shapes officials' actions, noting that negative interactions and mis-information could be part of strategies used in extortion. In the end, I conclude that bureaucracy could be just as limiting to the officials as it is to the clients. Certainly, as shown in several examples throughout this dissertation, and given the recent media attention to corruption within Mexico's National Institute of Migration (INM), and the well-documented fact that immigrants and transmigrants in Mexico are extremely common targets of corruption, I would be remiss to not include this pervasive force as a factor in my description of the institutional forces that shape officials' power.

The Everyday State, Citizenship, and Gendered Migration: Contributions to the Literature

This research has focused on furthering understandings of how the state functions to regulate international migration. As part of a feminist geopolitical project, my point of departure has been to understand how this state functions at the scale of the everyday, as I have argued that this scale is most appropriate for uncovering the concrete, embodied actions of the state and their impacts on immigrants. Drawing on the work of political ethnographers, I also contend that this approach aids in presenting a more complete view of how politics unfold from *multiple* angles, which enhances our understanding of complex phenomena (Tilly, 2006; Baiocchi & Connor, 2008). This dissertation makes contributions to the literature in Feminist Geopolitics, Citizenship Studies and Migration Studies at the following key three conceptual nodes that I will discuss further in this section. In particular, this work builds on: 1) The idea of the *embodied state* through the concept of “everyday restriction,” in Chapter 4; 2) Research on *embodied citizenship*, in Chapter 5; and 3) How the relational nature of power manifests in the day-to-day conditions of the state, in Chapters 6 and 7. In contributing to these three particular nodes in the literature, this work provides insights into re-spatialization of the state and citizenship in the face of immanent growing international migration.

On-the-ground research concerning the state and the nature of state power in people’s everyday lives is key to illustrating how policy, global processes such as neoliberalism, and national scale and top-down implementation of policies, actually manifest in daily practice and the material impacts that they have on people’s livelihoods

and well-being. By focusing attention on the micro-scale of the everyday, practitioners of Feminist Geopolitics aim to incorporate less-included voices, bringing to the foreground phenomena like on the ground policy implementation that are often over-looked in studies of the macro-scale. Understanding how the state works at the local-level encourages an evaluation of top-down as well as local policies; helps us to grasp the challenges and successes of their implementation; and informs our understanding of how expectations of enforcement can be skewed, tainted or re-appropriated at local levels. Furthermore, it emphasizes the spaces and people that make up the state; indeed, the latter's beliefs, emotions and actions are just as important to understand as those of the immigrants who are impacted by policies and their implementation.

Embodied Citizenship

Just as political geographers have argued for the examination of the everyday state, they have also suggested that we embody citizenship to allow us to produce more tangible experiences of citizenship, congruent with what people on the ground are living and imagining as their experiences (Sharp, 2007; Leitner & Ehrkamp, 2006). This study has built on this concept by integrating Central American women's experiences of citizenship, in particular focusing on how denied access to legal citizenship (visas, birth certificates and other IDs) and state related social citizenship goods (i.e. social programs such as *Oportunidades* and *Seguro Popular*) impacts women's daily lives. In this sense, citizenship is conceptualized as an experience in quality of living that is related to belonging. I argue that we cannot separate legal or social citizenship (in the sense of

classical definitions of the two categories) from broader experiences of membership. Based on evidence from this study, I show that women clearly connected their day-to-day circumstances of living in poverty, not having access to healthcare, being vulnerable to abuse and having difficulty obtaining legal identity and other services for their children to their condition of “not belonging” in Tapachula. Thus, their embodied experiences of citizenship indicate their non-membership. At the same time, women feel for the most part that securing their rights and feeling as if they were members is only possible through obtaining some form of legal citizenship.

Embodied State

A major goal of this research has been to provide an ethnographic case study to demonstrate how the everyday state functions in its encounters with Central American women in Tapachula. In shifting scale downward, in agreement with the feminist geopolitics, we uncover processes that generally go unseen in macro-scale accounts of geopolitics and governance, which while focusing on important macro-level processes (which in the case of migration regulation might involve national level policy making; large scale detention or deportation; or international flows of remittances), ignore the minutiae of what these policies look like on the ground. By ignoring the micro-scale, the experiences of subaltern groups—like women, children immigrants, minorities—as well as the low-level members of the state are lost in our analyses of how this state works. With respect to this research, locating the state using ethnography revealed that the day-to-day practices of low- to mid-level officials—consisting of microaggressions and

refusal, as summarized above—form part of a phenomenon that I term *everyday restriction*. Here, restriction to rights and services plays out at the hands of the everyday state, and not at the sometimes exceptional, upper scales of governance. In Tapachula, *everyday restriction* also takes place in direct opposition to laws established to protect immigrants' rights.

The Relational Nature of State Power

Part of the project of embodying the everyday state is understanding how it deploys power in its daily activities. This case study demonstrates that officials were simultaneously empowered and disempowered. On the one hand, as native-born Mexicans, officials perpetuated negative gender-based stereotypes of immigrant women, a process of “bordering” that demarcates who belongs and who does not in Tapachula. These stereotypes and perceptions of migration undoubtedly influence their interactions with Central American immigrant women—and Central American women confirm feeling deeply excluded from fully availing themselves of their rights because of circumstances generated by everyday restriction. However, on the other hand, officials report oftentimes being caught between delivering service and grinding scarcity that limits them and renders them voiceless within their own agencies. In this sense, black and white dichotomies of powerful/powerless do not apply here. Strict interpretations of power as the ability to dominate or coerce, while others practice a directly oppositional resistance do not capture the subtleties of the manner that power circulates in everyday life. Foucauldian entanglements of power, as described by Sharp et al. (2000), are more

complex in this instance. In this sense, low- to mid-level officials gain their discretionary power as a result of their positions, but at the same time they are limited by the conditions of state bureaucracy within which they work. This occurs as officials assert their assumption that immigrants receive favorable treatment in Mexico, while immigrants on the other hand continue to express strong feelings of exclusion, injustice and discrimination.

Drawing Connections: Geographies of the Neoliberal State

Throughout this dissertation I examine how the neoliberal devolution of governance to the micro-scales and dispersed actors creates a seemingly paradoxical example of migration control and management of international borders. On the one hand, Mexico has state- and national level policies that benefit migrants, formed under pressure from transnational and local NGOs to protect migrants, the U.S. government to increase security at borders, and possible other political and economic interests. On the other, low-level actors, doing the day-to-day work of the state emit a contradictory message. This in part reflects the observations made by Ferguson and Gupta (2002) about the importance of international organizations and actors in shaping state policy, affecting more diffuse spatiality of the neoliberal state. To take this a step further, I argue that by locating the state in its everyday work, we uncover a state that is in flux between prevailing methods of bureaucratic implementation, which includes using techniques of power, such as waiting, indifference, red tape, line forming, microaggressions, and the use of spatial forms to impart control among others—qualities that are not necessarily new—and

multicultural policy implementation in conditions of scarcity that are unique to the neoliberal governance. Scarcity due to cuts in funding exists alongside new policies meant to secure services for migrants. Low-to mid-level officials in Tapachula, however, simply do not have the tools, both in terms of capacity building and material resources, to implement these policies. For example, Chapter 6 confirms that officials stereotype the immigrants they serve, creating unfounded opinions and schema for deservingness and entitlement to services, which could be factors that cause “everyday restriction.” Capacity building, including sensitivity training could be a powerful tool in reversing some of these stereotypes, but the state has not provided courses on a large enough scale. Material scarcity, as discussed, is another major problem for bureaucrats: however, the neoliberal model, which has undoubtedly shifted and changed the way the state funds its projects, has caused the production of what Ferguson and Gupta have called the “entrepreneurial bureaucrat.” For example, we have characters like Juan, from Chapter 7, who is expected to meet the quotas (for the sake of his political, and not technocratic/civil service, career—a reminder that old-time political clientelism survives) on the merits of his individual creativity, many times absorbing the financial costs himself. In addition to material scarcity officials are also lacking in social capital needed to adequately do their jobs. For example, they may lack the connections, respect, clout or knowledge required to convince superiors or peers to work with them to achieve work-related goals. This was evidenced in the examples of officials who were made to debate the validity of paperwork with superiors, or receptionists who needed to convince doctors to see patients.

The borderland is one of the key sites for the maintenance of state power under the scheme of neoliberal globalization. The Mexico-Guatemala border, a space that was just 30 years ago largely absent of state intervention in the control of migration and the actual enforcement of physical borders, is now under increasing scrutiny not only from the Mexican state but from the U.S. government, Central American countries and international organizations. Now the Mexico-Guatemala border is the target of increased securitization, evidenced in checkpoints across the state of Chiapas, a new state-level border police, the introduction of new surveillance technology and biometric technology being used at border crossings. Still, a mere few hundred meters away from official checkpoints, people and goods cross freely, in the eye of the state, as it has for years. In Tapachula's government agencies, laws are also going unimplemented at the hands of low-level actors serving to continue the pattern of immigrant disenfranchisement that has always existed in the region. From these patterns surfaces of a neoliberalizing state that is fractured. This fracture presents an image of an embodied state that in practice resists the implementation of multicultural policies, working to enforce traditional codes of belonging in Tapachula. The Mexican federal government moves to control its borderland, and the movement of people through it—however low-level actors are those often most in control.

Broader Concerns Related to Policy

The study comes at a critical time for immigrants living in or passing through Mexico's southern border states. Despite legal entitlement to public goods such as

education and healthcare, and opportunities to obtain lawful status and nationality, Central American immigrants and their children are routinely denied these rights. Several official, news media and academic reports have documented these phenomena (see for example, Bustamente, 2009; Ballinas, 2009), but few studies have been conducted to understand the root causes and mechanisms of the exclusion and vulnerability that Central American immigrants and their children face. By understanding how low- to mid-level officials embody the power of the state, we gain insight into how to address these problems. Previous research on the topic also indicates the disproportionate impact that processes of exclusion have on women and children. This study's focus on the feminist ideal of "situating" power in its everyday operations, which will help to access a wide array of experiences and perspectives and therefore help to understand the power dynamics responsible for heightened abuse and vulnerability. Finally, the project also contributes to understandings of Central American migration to Mexico, a topic little studied despite the growing volume of migrants, and the direct linkages between migration on Mexico's southern border and its northern border with the U.S.

Attempting to understand the "big picture" will aid in the creation of more sound migration policy, grassroots action, as well as guidelines for better implementation of policies and curricula for capacity building for officials. Thus, the goals of this project include disseminating results beyond the academy, and working with community partners in Mexico and the United States to raise awareness of the consequences of unseen forms of violence against immigrants to hopefully influence international immigration debates.

In particular, this study provides a grounded understanding of how policies developed at the macro, or state level, pragmatically function at the scale of the everyday. As such, this research has clearly established that existing laws that protect migrants' rights, along with newer policies put into place by the government of the state of Chiapas beginning as early as 2002, plus Mexico's much anticipated 2010 *Ley de Migración* are not being implemented properly on the ground. There has been much criticism of these laws from human rights groups and other non-governmental organizations, as highlighted in Chapter 3, however I argue that many of the measures, when properly enforced, could make meaningful impacts in the lives of immigrant women, men and their families.

However, one important caveat is that these policies and policy recommendations can only produce benefits if the state is willing and able to invest adequate resources to effectively implement them. Based on my findings, one of the major factors that impedes proper policy implementation at the everyday scale stems from lack of resources and initiative to train and sensitize low- to mid-level officials and pervasive scarcity in human and material resources on the job. Limiting my scope to the state of Chiapas, and particularly the city of Tapachula, I recommend the following, broadly-outlined measures in order to continue the dialogue on how to improve service delivery and inclusion of immigrants in Tapachula.

Recommendation 1: Display all Requirements and Costs Clearly and Uniformly

This study has shown that officials routinely misinform immigrant and even non-immigrant clients about requirements for the services they offer. Here, requirements can include supplying identification documents (i.e. birth certificates), letters of

recommendation and/or proof of address, and providing witnesses, among other things. Some documents require a fee or payment. In addition to bringing in the appropriate paperwork, many agencies require more than one appointment with officials before services can be rendered. In many cases, the basic requirements for certain bureaucratic offices are painted onto a wall inside an agency, however it is rare to find *all* of the requirements listed. For example, in the case of the *registro civil*, from reading the information on the wall, or from even talking to a receptionist it is not immediately clear the steps necessary to complete the bureaucratic process to obtain a birth certificate. In addition, certain services are only provided during specific times. For example, appointments with the official to check documents occur between 10AM and 12PM on weekdays and customers may only pay for a birth certificate during the morning. This information is not communicated to the public in a uniform or complete manner causing confusion, frustration and loss of valuable time and resources for clients.

This problem can be remedied in three simple, and relatively inexpensive ways. First, all requirements, fees and schedules should be posted clearly inside of each agency. Many offices already have basic requirements posted, however important information on scheduling, how to go about getting an appointment and special fees are not available. At minimum, fees, schedules and basic steps and requirements should be posted. Second, since bureaucratic processes are complex with many steps, it may not be practical to post all requirements on walls in offices. Simple, yet detailed, pamphlets should be made available to clients seeking information. Pamphlets should be written in clear Spanish accessible to clients with low-education levels. Pamphlets could follow effective models

that employ illustrations and simple, question-answer formats. This would allow people information about their rights, and, even for non-readers, or sight-impaired clients, they are then empowered to bring the document to a trusted family member, friend or neighbor to help them to read the document. Third, all receptionists should be trained to attend to the public in a straightforward and complete manner: scripts should be provided and they should also always have on-hand a complete list of requirements to refer to in case they are unsure of information.

Recommendation 2: Capacity Building and Sensitivity Training

As I demonstrate throughout this dissertation and especially in Chapter 6, low- to mid-level officials in Tapachula subscribe to and perpetuate negative gendered stereotypes toward Central American immigrants, and women in particular. Though fear of immigrants and stereotyping is not always a predictor for negative behaviors, since immigrants are a group that is disproportionately affected by discrimination, we may assume that officials' negative perceptions could be one of the several causes of poor treatment. As such, in order to shift from a culture of discrimination that perpetuates negative stereotypes, I recommend that members of public service providing agencies participate in meaningful and professionally conducted capacity building in order to break down commonly held misconceptions on immigration, gender, race and socio-economic difference. To my knowledge, capacity building has been held in Tapachula for members of the INM and the police, however the majority of officials interviewed for this study have never undergone sensitivity training or capacity building. Effective and

uniform training that would teach best practices in service delivery and educate officials on the policies that apply to their specific jobs is needed.

I recommend that capacity building be implemented by a coalition of non-profits, immigrants, academics and government representatives (representatives from the organizations in question) so that the most comprehensive curriculum may be created. I suggest that trainings be participatory, based on a workshop model where dialogue is encouraged in order to better break-down stereotypes and have officials' voices acknowledged throughout this process as well.

Recommendation 3: Information/Help Booths

One of the recommendations emerging from participatory workshops with immigrant women called for the presence of human rights officials in agencies highly frequented by immigrants and especially in the INM office. Participants expressed that their presence would discourage incidences of discrimination by serving to keep authorities accountable while also providing an outlet for complaints and information for immigrants. This study has shown that immigrant women have little access to accurate information detailing their rights or how to go about procuring those rights. Despite the existence of the special police station for migrants, and human rights organizations (both non profit and the state-run *Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos*, CNDH), it is difficult in general to report microaggressions or everyday restriction, because of the mundane and not clearly "illegal" nature of this type of power. Women participating in the workshops suggested that information booths, staffed by a human rights organization

worker would provide both a point of contact for information and reporting mistreatment as well as serve as a deterrent.

Recommendation 4: Streamline Processes for Getting Visas

The director of the southern border's most important human rights organization, the *Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Matías de Córdova* (CDH Fray Matías), Diego Lorente, recently told reporters at a press conference that Mexico's new *Ley de Migración* is "elitist" and "not made for the migrants we see on a daily basis" (Heraldo de Honduras, 2013). Lorente, along with other activists and immigrants in Mexico, argues that the requisites to regularize immigration status are out of reach for many Central American immigrants. Lorente is referring to the fact that the costs have been raised (see Chapter 5 for a relevant discussion) and that new paperwork proving employment is now required. Before the *Ley de Migración* went into effect, regularization was more accessible through loosening paperwork requirements, and waiving fees. Before the law was passed, the INM also began requiring that all paperwork be filed using a particular computer system. In addition, new conditions imposed by officials at higher scales of the INM no longer allowed third parties, such as the CDH Fray Matías or the consulates to file applications on clients' behalf for fee waivers, and instead placed this responsibility in the hands of the INM officials. This move complicated immigrants' ability to file for a visa, as many may not have necessary experience with or access to computers and/or the Internet. This means that a third party would need to be involved in order to file for documents. With this in mind, I recommend

that the INM in Tapachula return to the previous system, which while not perfect, at least allowed immigrant applicants to work more closely with local non-profit organizations and their consulates in order to file for visas, a measure which could prevent abuses.

Recommendation 5: Address Scarcity

Material and human resource scarcity are major impediments to officials' correct implementation of policy. It is also a major cause of stress. Material and human resource scarcity, as outlined in Chapter 7, are linked to low- to mid-level officials' increasing discretion. Lack of available funds is a major reason for this institutionalized scarcity, and this is a problem that is not easily addressed. Finding a way to properly staff and fund public service providing agencies daily operations would go far to ensure that residents of Chiapas, including Central American immigrants, receive the treatment and service provisions that they are entitled to.

Areas for Future Research

While ongoing and with a long history, there is still a relative lack of diversity in studies on Central American migration to Mexico. Work in the past has dealt with short-term labor migration of both men and women, mostly from Guatemala. Other research has been dedicated to understanding transmigration. Emerging scholarship, including this study, deals with permanent migration of Central Americans to southern Mexico. Regardless of these advances, the studies are specific to certain sites, namely Tapachula and the Soconusco region of Mexico. Importantly, there still have been no large-scale

ethnographic, quantitative or mixed-methods studies on the phenomenon. A multi-method, multi-sited study on long-term Central American migration in Mexico is important in order to: 1) Estimate population; 2) Understand immigrants' decisions for settlement in Mexico; 3) Gather information on the root causes of migration; 4) Generate data for comparison between sites; 5) Qualify immigrants experiences across sites; and 6) Identify needs of population in order to craft public policy.

Future qualitative and ethnographic research should also investigate the different contexts in which everyday restriction takes place. Additionally, studies should also aim to focus more deeply on the role of officials in this restriction. Future work should include more lengthy ethnographic research with bureaucrats using innovative methodologies crafted especially to tease out the complexities of the intersections between officials' perceptions, performance and institutional norms and power schemes that shape them.

Mexico's passage of the *Ley de Migración* in 2011 represents the country's most comprehensive immigration law to date. The law has been implemented since November of 2012 and the impacts of the new regulations are only beginning to be perceived. It would be important to understand how the passage of the *Ley de Migración* has specifically impacted both Central American transmigrants, seasonal and temporary labor migrants and longer-term immigrants. Effects on access to regularization services; the efficiency and value of the new types of visas; perceptions of immigrants and the perceptions of low- to mid-level officials should all be considered.

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