



Universiteit Utrecht

MIGRANT (IM)MOBILITY: Navigating Regimes of Mobility in Chiapas, Mexico.



Photo Credit: AJ+ Noticias

Mark McKillop
4723295
Utrecht University
18 July 2022

A Thesis submitted to the Board of Examiners in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Conflict Studies & Human Rights

Name of Supervisor: *Thijs Jeursen*

Date of submission: *18 July 2022*

Programme Trajectory: *Research & Thesis Writing (30 ECTS)*

Word Count: 26,928

Abstract

This thesis examines the dynamics of the migrant trajectory in the southern state of Chiapas, Mexico. This takes into account State containment strategies, such as border militarization and institutional ambiguity, as well as the actions and strategies of migrants themselves in seeking to remain mobile. In analysing these components, this thesis attempts to answer the question of how migrants navigate regimes of mobility in this region. Qualitative research was conducted in the city of Tapachula, whilst working voluntarily in the local NGO CDH Fray Matias. This allowed for first hand insight into the experiences and perspectives of migrants, migrant civil society and local populations. Through using the analytic frame of regimes of mobility, valuable theoretical additions will be made to academic fields such as border studies, migration studies and mobility studies. In particular, this thesis will emphasise the need to move beyond the nation State as the sole unit of analysis, highlighting that regimes of mobility exist beyond the confines of territory and are manifested by multiple actors beyond State authorities. Secondly, the evidence presented will emphasise that actors involved under regimes of mobility may play both a mobility enabling and restricting role, often simultaneously. Lastly, this thesis will highlight the importance of migrant agency in navigating regimes of mobility, in particular through showcasing the importance of social capital in raising their potential for future movement.

*Migrar es tocar tierra
sin mi familia;
tierra donde extrañar se
vuelve tu apellido.*

*Abrazar un silencio sordo,
anidar una grieta,
volver a comenzar.*

*Migrar rompe los paradigmas;
es sembrar el alma, dejar de ser
de algún lugar
para ser de toda la tierra.
Es hacerse infinito hacia dentro.
Florecer.*

*Migrar es tocar tierra
y yo siempre he estado en el aire...
pero el aire no tiene
fronteras.*

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the migrants who agreed to share their stories with me. Their bravery and resilience were an inspiration when writing this thesis.

Thank you to the team at CDH Fray Matias for welcoming me into the organisation and through always showing patience when answering my many questions.

Lastly, a big thank you to my supervisor Thijs Jeursen who was always on hand with support and whose guidance was extremely valuable at all stages of the process.

Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	3
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	4
1. Introduction	6
1.1 Chapter Outline	10
2. Regimes of Mobility: A Theoretical Review	11
2.1 Addressing gaps in the literature	16
3. Methodology	18
3.1 Research Design	18
3.2 Data Collection	19
3.3 Trajectory and Place Based Approaches	23
3.4 Positionality	24
3.5 Research Limitations	26
4. Immigration Containment	29
4.1 Militarization	29
4.1.1Detection	32
4.1.2 Detention & Deportation	34
4.2 Institutional Ambiguity	38
4.2.1 Bureaucratic Delays	39
4.2.2 Obscurity.....	42
4.2.3 Discretionary Application of Law.....	44
4.3 Corruption	47
5. Immobility in Tapachula	51
5.1 Challenges in Tapachula	51
5.2 Networks	56
5.2.1 Migrant Networks.....	56
5.2.2 Local Population	57
5.2.3 Civil Society	60
5.3 Protests	64
6. Migrant Trajectories	69
6.1Crossing Borders	69
6.2 Regular Migration	72
6.3 Irregular Migration	73
6.4 Caravans	78
7. Conclusion	83
<i>Bibliography</i>	87
<i>List of Interviews</i>	90

1. Introduction

Whilst migration is not a new phenomenon, the subject of human mobility has arguably never been so polemic and highly politicised as it is in today's world. In 2020, it was estimated that there were 281 million migrants in the world, making up 3.6% of the total global population.¹ Recent decades have seen the likes of brutal wars in Syria and Afghanistan, political turmoil in Venezuela and natural disaster in Haiti, each representing a small glimpse into the myriad issues that have brought forced migration to the doorsteps of Europe and the USA. In 2018, in response to these perceived crises, 164 UN member states adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.² However, despite being steeped in language of rule of law, human rights and sustainable development, widespread abuse of migrants has continued to be detailed at the borders of the USA, Europe and Australia. Furthermore, as these migrant crises intensified, Western policies of externalising, policing or outsourcing borders have become more prevalent. In the European case, this can be seen through policies aimed at keeping migrants in Turkey or Libya. As for the Central American migrant corridor, as in the focus of this research, containing migrants at Mexico's southern border with Guatemala is a focus of strategy emanating from the United States.

Mexico has long been an important country for migration, acting as a country of origin, transit and, in more recent years, destination. Indeed, Mexico -USA has been one of the largest migrant corridors in the world for decades.³ Since the 1990's, the number of unauthorised Central American migrants in the US has risen sharply, with the majority originating from the northern triangle countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras.⁴ Many of these migrants embark on the risky journey north due to poverty, social deprivation, organised crime and pervasive violence within their home countries.⁵ Further, the political situation and economic collapse in Venezuela has led rise to the world's largest

¹ IOM. (2020). World Migration Report.

² IOM. (n,d). Global Compact for Migration.

³ IOM. (2020). World Migration Report. 97.

⁴ Camarota, S., Zeigler, K. (2018). Central American immigration population increased nearly 28-fold since 1970 (Report). Center for Immigration Studies.

⁵ Vega, L. A. (2021) Central American Asylum Seekers in Southern Mexico: Fluid (Im)mobility in Protracted Migration Trajectories, Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, 19:4, 349-363.

refugee crisis, many of whom seek to reach the USA by transiting through Mexico. Lastly, it should be mentioned that Haiti and Cuba have also contributed a significant number of migrants arriving at Mexican borders, due to reasons including violence, poverty, political instability and natural disasters.

For many of those who cross into the Mexican border state of Chiapas from Guatemala, the city of Tapachula is an important point of their trajectory. Crossing into Mexico via the Pacific route is the most often travelled route by migrants (see figure 1 below). When entering via this route, the first major city encountered is Tapachula. In 2021, 130,627 asylum requests were recorded in all of Mexico, an astronomical rise from 1296 in 2013. These asylum requests can only be filed in certain cities in Mexico, with Tapachula receiving 69% of all applications in 2021.⁶ Despite this high number of migrants, the city lacks vital infrastructure and is situated in the most impoverished state in Mexico, factors that ensure its unsuitability in providing adequate humanitarian response. Given its prominence on the route travelled by migrants moving northwards, Tapachula has also become the site of stringent containment policies and practices implemented by the State, such as border militarization and institutional ambiguity. As a result, despite having a population of around 350,000, at times Tapachula has held up to 100,000 migrants. However, despite efforts to keep them in the south of the country, migrants are still arriving at the northern border with the United States in record numbers. Thus, questions arise as to how some manage to remain mobile in the face of these movement restriction policies. In order to better understand how the migrant trajectory is shaped by such policies, as well as what actions and choices migrants make as a direct response, the following research puzzle was formulated:

How do migrants navigate regimes of mobility during their transit through the Mexican state of Chiapas between 2014 and the present day?

It should be noted here that ‘navigate’ in this sense is not to be understood as the classic definition of the verb. Rather, it is better understood as it is utilised in the academic

⁶ Government of Mexico. (2022). COMAR Asylum Statistics.

literature, as a process of motion through “social environments of actors and actants, individuals and institutions, that engage and move us as we move along”.⁷ In order to answer this question and allow for further insight into various aspects of the empirical complication the following sub questions were developed:

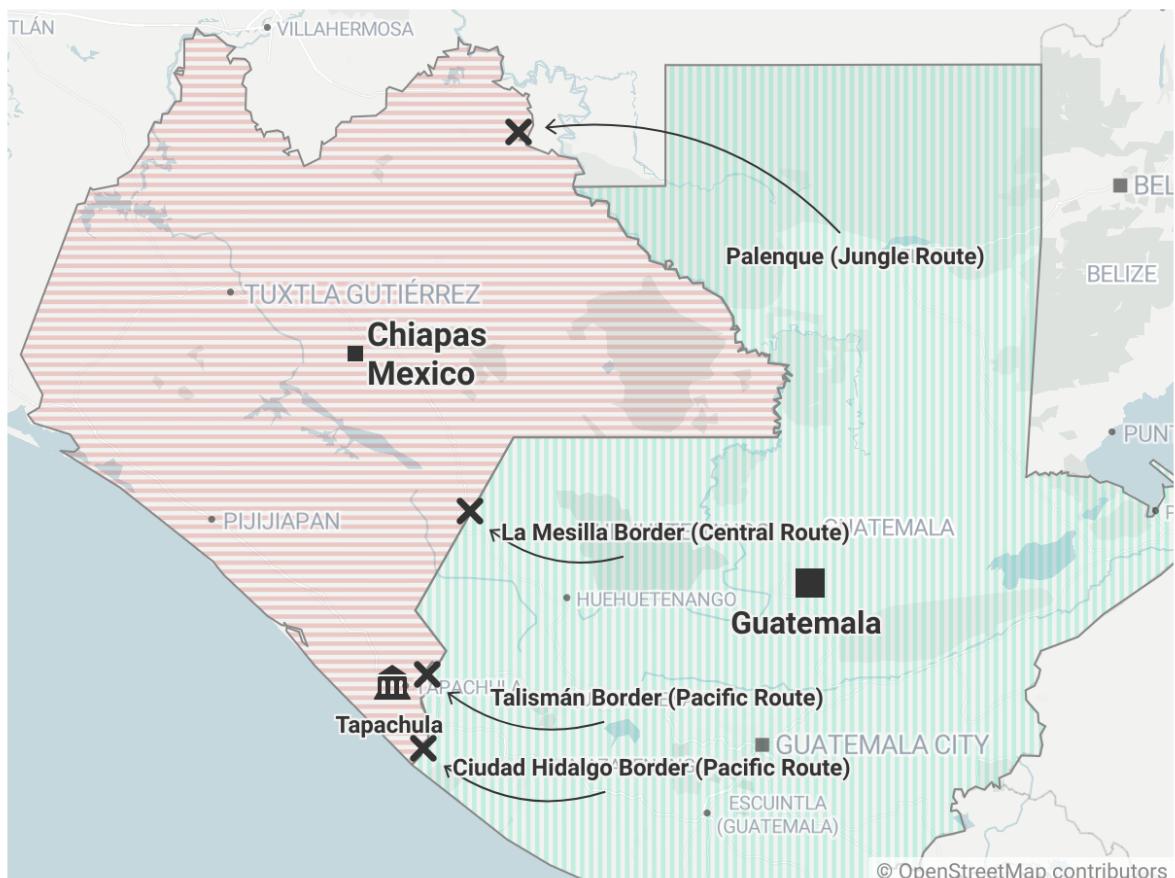
1. *How do regimes of mobility criminalize and entrap migrants in Chiapas?*
2. *What factors contribute to migrants’ potential for future movement during periods of immobility in Tapachula?*
3. *What actions and strategies do migrants utilise to continue their trajectory through Mexico?*

In order to answer these questions, qualitative research was conducted during a fieldwork period lasting from March-May 2022 in the city of Tapachula. During this period, I volunteered with the organisation CDH Fray Matias, an organisation offering various legal, psychosocial and advocacy services to migrants. This was an ideal setting from which to conduct my research as the organisation has over 30 years of experience in the city, ensuring a position from within the migration industry and with access to colleagues with extensive expertise on migratory issues in the region. This allowed for access to various information sessions attended by migrants, humanitarian observation missions and connections to other NGOs working in the city. Whilst living there, research was also conducted through engaging in conversations with migrants in public spaces, in particular within Parque Bicentenario. This park is a hotspot for migrants, with many unable to afford or access housing during periods of immobility in the city. Through living in the city and working voluntarily with CDH Fray Matias, I was able to observe, interview and converse with many different migrants, NGO workers and locals, allowing for a first-hand insight into how migrants navigate regimes of mobility.

The above questions were prepared through operationalising concepts contained within the literature relating to regimes of mobility, defined as intersecting systems that normalise

⁷ Vigh, Henrik. (2009). “Motion Squared: A Second Look at the Concept of Social Navigation.” *Anthropological Theory* 9, no. 4: 419–38. 420.

the movements of some whilst criminalising and entrapping those of others.⁸ Through drawing on existing academic debates, the evidence collected during the research period and the broader political context, this thesis will help to shed light on, key migration management policies, such as the policing and militarization of borders, and the strategies utilised by migrants to remain mobile. In doing so, important additions will be made to the theoretical scholarship pertaining to regimes of mobility. First, this research will move beyond the nation State as the sole unit of analysis, highlighting that regimes of mobility exist beyond the confines of territory and are manifested by multiple actors beyond State authorities. Secondly, the evidence presented will emphasise that actors involved under regimes of mobility may play both a mobility enabling and restricting role, often simultaneously. Lastly, this thesis will highlight the importance of migrant agency in navigating regimes of mobility, in particular through showcasing the importance of social capital in raising their potential for future movement.



Created with Datawrapper *Figure 1: Key Migration routes from Guatemala to Chiapas, Mexico.*

⁸ Glick Schiller, N. & Salazar, N. (2013). Regimes of Mobility Across the Globe, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 39:2, 183-200. 189.

1.1 Chapter Outline

Before embarking on the findings obtained during the research period, Chapter 2 will provide theoretical background on regimes of mobility. This will help situate some of the key themes presented in this thesis within the broader academic landscape. Following, Chapter 3 will detail the methodology used, providing details of how the research was conducted, positionality of the researcher and any research limitations. With Chapter 4, presentation of the empirical findings and associated analysis will begin by detailing key State policies and practices that contribute to overarching regimes of mobility in Chiapas. This chapter will also detail the institutional corruption underpinning these policies and the effect this has on migrant mobility. Chapter 5 will focus on an important point of the migrant trajectory – periods of immobility within Tapachula. Through analysing the key challenges faced, networks formed and responses by migrants, this chapter will provide important detail on how time in this city affects their ability to navigate regimes of mobility. Subsequently, in Chapter 6 attention will turn to another key phase of the journey, periods of movement. Through detailing the different strategies used by migrants to remain mobile in southern Mexico, a better understanding of the overall navigation process will emerge. Lastly, this thesis will conclude with a chapter discussing the overall findings, relating to the current academic literature and providing suggestions for future research.

2. Regimes of Mobility: A Theoretical Review

Given the Mexican government's use of diverse and sophisticated measures in efforts to contain migration and migrants' varied strategies to remain mobile, it is necessary to delve into theoretical debates within migration and mobility studies. In particular, a greater understanding of the theoretical construct of regimes of mobility will allow for the research puzzle above to be situated within the academic debate. Analysing the theoretical scholarship on this topic will allow us to pinpoint debates and concepts that can have value in making sense of the data collected for this thesis. This chapter will first introduce the concept of regimes of mobility, before turning to discussions relating to the relationship between mobility and immobility. Following, the concepts of spatial frictions and spatial dynamics will be introduced to aid understanding of factors that may limit or facilitate migrant mobility. Lastly, the important concept of mobility capital will be discussed to provide background to a crucial theme of this thesis – migrant agency.

Historically, within the fields of mobility and migration studies the condition of stasis has been normalised whilst mobility was treated as abnormal and thus something to be queried.⁹ However, given the centrality of mobility to the human experience, a critique of this view was introduced in the form of the “mobilities turn”.¹⁰ Although praised for helping the academic debate move beyond the treatment of sedentariness as the norm,¹¹ this development was said to romanticise the freedom of mobility¹² with a focus on “privileged forms of movement and borderless spaces”.¹³ Thus, Glick Schiller & Salazar’s concept of regimes of mobility is helpful here in recognising the unequal treatment of different forms of movement. Regimes of mobility are presented as intersecting systems that normalise the movements of some whilst criminalising and entrapping those of others.¹⁴ Indeed, Shamir highlights that mobility regimes function in a globalized society to “maintain high levels of

⁹Glick Schiller, N. & Salazar, N. (2013). Regimes of Mobility Across the Globe, 185.

¹⁰ Sheller M, Urry J. (2006). The New Mobilities Paradigm. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*; 38(2): 207-226.

¹¹ Glick Schiller, N. & Salazar, N. (2013). Regimes of Mobility Across the Globe, 186.

¹² Moret, J. (2020). Mobility capital: Somali migrants’ trajectories of (im)mobilities and the negotiation of social inequalities across borders, *Geoforum*, Volume 116, 235-242. 236.

¹³ Schapendonk, J. van Liempt, I. Schwarz, I. Steel, G. (2020). Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes, *Geoforum*, Volume 116, 211-216. 211.

¹⁴ Glick Schiller, N. & Salazar, N. (2013). Regimes of Mobility Across the Globe, 189.

inequality in a relatively homogenized world".¹⁵ Therefore, this approach helped the fields of migration and mobility develop from looking at movement not only as freedom but also as restriction.¹⁶ This idea of restricted movement leads us to questions of how regimes of mobility in southern Mexico manifest in order to criminalise and entrap migrants as well as which actors operate under such regimes. Thus, utilising regimes of mobility as an analytical framework will allow for the evidence presented within this thesis to be situated within broader academic debates on the restriction of mobility globally.

In discussing regimes of mobility, Glick Schiller & Salazar draw our attention to the role of individual States, but also to international regulatory administrations.¹⁷ The authors argue that when researching mobility "we cannot dismiss the significance of territory nor of governmental powers that are based in territory."¹⁸ This is compounded by Schapendonk et al who emphasise that we need to situate (im)mobility within "unequal globe-spanning relationships of power".¹⁹ In regard to the current research, this has important connotations for how we make sense of the situation as it unfolds in Chiapas. Rather than looking merely at how the Mexican government implements policy to contain migration, this thesis will draw on the broader political context to assess how relations with the US contribute to restriction of movement. However, whilst national actors and governmental relations at an international level are no doubt central when theorising regimes of mobility, it is important to recognise that a range of actors, beyond the nation State, may act and contribute within these regimes. As will be evidenced throughout this thesis, the migrant trajectory is shaped by multiple actors, each playing important roles that may change depending on the space and context. Thus, in order to fully grasp how migrants navigate regimes of mobility, it is necessary to move beyond the role of the Mexican State. Further, utilising the verb navigate implies migrant agency, emphasising that this research will not treat regimes of mobility as determining structures, as will be discussed further below.

¹⁵ Shamir, R. (2005). 'Without borders? Notes on globalization as a mobility regime'. *Sociological Theory*, 23(2), 199.

¹⁶ Glick Schiller, N. & Salazar, N. (2013). *Regimes of Mobility Across the Globe*, 190.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 191.

¹⁹ Schapendonk, J. et al. (2020). *Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes*, 213.

In order to understand how mobility regimes may restrict the movement of migrants, it is first important to observe the discussion within the academic literature on the nature of mobility and immobility. The inequality inherent to mobility has been recognised by Khosravi's discussion on "hierarchies of mobility"²⁰ and by Moret through her assertion that there is a differentiation between migration, meaning generally poor people moving to new countries, and mobility, which relates to the privileged with easy access to free movement.²¹ Further, Massa agrees with this inequality of movement and presents regimes of mobility as influential in theorising the interplay between mobility and immobility in a world which is simultaneously globalising and bordering.²² Whilst these arguments provide useful foundations by introducing the idea of a hierarchy of mobilities, they are limited in their scope. The arguments presented by these authors present a dichotomy between those whose movement is encouraged and those whose movement is restricted. Further, these arguments focus on the influence of class in determining mobility potential. This thesis will go further by highlighting an existing hierarchy even within those whose movement is policed, with race and nationality important factors beyond economic background.

Glick Schiller & Salazar refute the commonly held dichotomy between mobility and immobility that was previously prevalent in the literature on the topic.²³ This is backed up by Khosravi, who asserts that the two concepts should not always be represented as opposing.²⁴ For instance, as this thesis will show, during periods in which migrants are immobile in terms of territorial advancement, they may be socially mobile through acquiring legal status or developing important networks. This view is reflected in the work of Moret through her findings that immobility may be necessary for building up mobility capital that is required for future movement.²⁵ Moreover, Massa emphasises that periods of enforced immobility may be capitalised upon to gather the requisite resources to overcome the

²⁰ Khosavri, S. (2018). Afterword. Experiences and stories along the way. *Geoforum*. 1.

²¹ Moret, J. (2020). Mobility capital: Somali migrants' trajectories of (im)mobilities and the negotiation of social inequalities across borders. 235.

²² Massa, A. (2020). Borders and boundaries as resources for mobility. Multiple regimes of mobility and incoherent trajectories on the Ethiopian-Eritrean border, *Geoforum*, Volume 116, 262-271. 264.

²³ Glick Schiller, N. & Salazar, N. (2013). Regimes of Mobility Across the Globe, 190.

²⁴ Khosavri, S. (2018). Afterword. Experiences and stories along the way. 2.

²⁵ Moret, J. (2020). Mobility capital: Somali migrants' trajectories of (im)mobilities and the negotiation of social inequalities across borders. 239.

barriers emanating from mobility regimes.²⁶ Utilising a different terminology, Yildiz & Sert describe these periods in the journey of migrants as “mobistasis”, or moments of immobility within movement.²⁷ Given that fieldwork was carried out in Tapachula, a city in which migrants are often perceived to be stuck, this raises the important question of whether migrants can be considered truly immobile in the city, as well as pointing to the need to scratch below the surface of presumed passivity to ascertain what processes they may be engaging in to navigate their future movement.

In order to answer the research puzzle, it is important to look at a range of actors and policies that may limit or enable the movement of migrants. Therefore, the work of Schapendonk et al offers important insights on the functionality of regimes of mobility in through highlighting the interplay between spatial frictions and spatial dynamics.²⁸ Put simply, spatial frictions can be thought of as mobility limiting factors, whereas spatial dynamics are mobility enabling factors. When confronted with restrictive regimes of mobility, spatial frictions emerge in the form of barriers such as border enforcement measures,²⁹ visa restrictions³⁰ and processes of detention and deportation.³¹ Within an earlier article, Schapendonk and Steel observed how encountering such frictions can lead to enforced stasis for migrants in “territories of confinement”.³² Therefore, through producing such spatial frictions, regimes of mobility create societal marginalisation, enforced immobility and processes of ordering/othering.³³ This adds value to the current research through providing a conceptual lens through which to view important policies and practices

²⁶ Massa, A. (2020). Borders and boundaries as resources for mobility. Multiple regimes of mobility and incoherent trajectories on the Ethiopian-Eritrean border.

²⁷ Yıldız, U. Sert, D. (2021). Dynamics of mobility-stasis in refugee journeys: Case of resettlement from Turkey to Canada, *Migration Studies*, Volume 9, Issue 2, , 196–215. 197.

²⁸ Schapendonk, J. et al. (2020). Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes, 213.

²⁹ Anderson, R. (2014). Illegality, Inc. Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe. University of California Press.

³⁰ Satzewich,V. (2015). Points of Entry. How Canada's Immigration Officers Decide Who Gets In. UBC Press, Vancouver.

³¹ Kalir, B. & Wissink, L. (2016) The deportation continuum: convergences between state agents and NGO workers in the Dutch deportation field, *Citizenship Studies*, 20:1, 34-49.

³² Schapendonk, J.& Steel, G. (2014). Following Migrant Trajectories: The Im/Mobility of Sub-Saharan Africans en Route to the European Union, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 104:2, 262-270. 264.

³³ Schapendonk, J. et al. (2020). Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes, 213.

that may limit movement. In the case of Chiapas, the two most prominent issues under discussion in this regard will be border militarization and institutional ambiguity.

A further interesting perspective is added by Schwarz, who takes a different approach through highlighting how mobility regimes can be highly racialised, with the ensuing frictions experienced by migrants therefore racially motivated and targeted.³⁴ This provides utility by guiding the research into looking closer at unequal experiences and forms of treatment of migrants of different races in Chiapas. Whilst Schwarz emphasises this racial element, this research will also discuss the impact of nationality on a migrant's ability to navigate.

Despite these spatial frictions and their resultant effects, Khosavri highlights how migrant agency and wilfulness to disrupt the hegemonic political order often allows them to be mobile "despite all obstacles, walls, and racism."³⁵ Schapendonk et al shed further light on how this transpires through detailing how regimes of mobility often coproduce spatial dynamics along with spatial frictions.³⁶ These dynamics are often utilised in response to regimes of mobility and include the likes of social networks, multiple places of transit and transfer and networks of facilitators within the migration industry.³⁷ Indeed, Massa goes further than Schapendonk et al through showing how migrants can actually use encounters with mobility regimes to their advantage. This is evidenced through migrants' ability to subvert border controls by shifting through different legal and national statuses and thus cross symbolic boundaries at will.³⁸ This is of critical importance to answering the research puzzle presented. In order to determine how migrants navigate regimes of mobility, it is vital to assess the agency of migrants themselves. As mentioned above, regimes of mobility need not be determining structures, but rather a collection of laws, policies and practices that migrants may challenge and subvert in their pursuit of future movement.

³⁴ Schwarz, I., (2016). Racializing freedom of movement in Europe. Experiences of racial profiling at European borders and beyond. *Movements. J. für kritische Migrations-und Grenzregimeforschung* 2 (1), 253–265. 254.

³⁵ Khosavri, S. (2018). Afterword. Experiences and stories along the way. 2.

³⁶ Schapendonk, J. et al. (2020). Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes, 213.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Massa, A. (2020). Borders and boundaries as resources for mobility. Multiple regimes of mobility and incoherent trajectories on the Ethiopian-Eritrean border. 270.

Critical to understanding migrants' ability to be continuously mobile despite the regimes of mobility they encounter is the concept of mobility capital, as discussed by Moret. Building on Bourdieu's work on forms of capital, Moret identifies two forms of mobility capital that can help facilitate the onward movement of migrants. The first form pertains to the skills and know how built up through past experiences of mobility whilst the second refers to the potential for future movement when it appears worthwhile to do so.³⁹ As discussed above, the second may arise from the accumulation of different forms of capital when immobile, through making connections or acquiring resources or legal status.⁴⁰ The concept of mobility capital will be drawn upon throughout this thesis as a tool to analyse how migrants may raise their potential for future movement through capital acquisition. However, whilst Moret's work here is useful, it does not distinguish between the different types of capital - economic, social, legal etc., and how these may contribute differently to mobility. This thesis will shed further light on how migrants may mobilise these forms of capital in different ways and with varying results. Having assessed important debates and conceptual tools to be utilised within this research, let us now shift attention to how the evidence presented here will enrich the academic landscape.

2.1 Addressing gaps in the literature

The first important addition of this thesis will be to move beyond the nation State as a sole unit of analysis. This has two important connotations for how we theorise regimes of mobility. First, the evidence presented here will highlight how a range of actors beyond State authorities are important players in manifesting regimes of mobility. Secondly, it will highlight that there is a need to look beyond the physical border, with regimes of mobility not confined by national territory and manifesting at all stages of a migrant trajectory. In addition, this research aims to challenge the binary of factors that limit or enable mobility contained within the current theoretical landscape. The academic discussion currently presents a clear boundary between factors that constrain and enable mobility, split into the camps of spatial frictions or spatial dynamics. However, the line between that which limits

³⁹ Moret, J. (2020). Mobility capital: Somali migrants' trajectories of (im)mobilities and the negotiation of social inequalities across borders. 240.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 241.

mobility and that which assists it is often blurred. Thus, this research will add to the theoretical understanding by highlighting the ambiguous and contradictory roles that actors may play within regimes of mobility. Lastly, the work below will place a strong focus on migrant agency, in particular through highlighting the importance of mobilising social capital in order to navigate regimes of mobility.

Therefore, through answering the research puzzle outlined above, important additions will be made by assessing the how regimes of mobility are manifested, what factors limit and enable mobility and by analysing the agency of migrants in responding to and seeking to overcome barriers to their movement. In doing so, this research will hopefully contribute to addressing the “puzzling separation of migration studies, mobility studies and border studies”.⁴¹

⁴¹ Schapendonk, J. et al. (2020). Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes, 213.

3. Methodology

This chapter will first provide detail on how the current research was designed, taking into consideration the ontological and epistemological position. Next, the steps involved in the collecting of data will be outlined, including details of which data collection techniques were utilised and any ethical implications of collecting this information. Attention will then be turned briefly to a discussion on the merits of different approaches within mobility and migration studies, namely those of the trajectory and place-based approaches. The next subsection will reflect on the positionality of the researcher and how this may have affected the gathering and analysing of data included in this thesis. Lastly, limitations of the research will be considered, including discussion of how these limitations were offset as effectively as possible.

3.1 Research Design

This research follows a qualitative strategy, ensuring consistency with the ontological, epistemological, and theoretical nature of the research puzzle and its analytic framework. The ontological nature of my puzzle has been identified as ‘actions and interactions’. Actions has been chosen to study the behaviours of migrants throughout their trajectory and the strategies they choose to employ when seeking to remain mobile and continue transiting through this region. On the other hand, interactions refer both to the networks they avail of and their interactions with various actors within the regimes of mobility. Whilst many of these interactions with actors operating within the regimes of mobility will concern migration authorities of the Mexican state, they may also include civil society organisations, local populations and the private sector, as will be analysed in the subsequent chapters. The chosen qualitative strategy aligns with this ontological position through placing agency at the level of the individual and by seeking to answer how and why migrants act in different ways and make certain decisions. By placing the focus of the research on the trajectory of migrants themselves, regimes of mobility are not treated as determining structures⁴² but rather as products of national and international political discourse that can be navigated at an individual level.

⁴² Schapendonk, J. et al. (2020). Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes, 213.

In order to answer the fundamental question of how we know what we claim to know about the reality of the social world⁴³ it is important to uncover the underlying epistemological approach to the research puzzle. Broadly, the epistemological approach that this research will take is that of understanding. The reasoning for this is that the puzzle seeks to understand the navigation of the region through the perspective of the migrants and NGO workers themselves. The idea here is that through understanding the perspective of the migrants and those within the migration industry on their actions and interactions that relate to regimes of mobility, a better comprehension of both the empirical complication and analytical framework will emerge. More specifically, the epistemological approach chosen falls into the category of interpretivism. This approach “emphasises the sense people make of their own lives and experiences”.⁴⁴ This is consistent with the research puzzle and will help when seeking to understand how migrants act, make choices and employ strategies as they respond to regimes of mobility in the context of immigration containment in Chiapas. The interpretivist epistemological approach on how people engage in sense making of their own lives is consistent with the individualist ontological position that forms the basis of combining the categories actions and interactions. Conducting qualitative research aligns with the epistemological position as it will allow greater analysis of how and why migrants act and respond in specific contexts.

3.2 Data Collection

During the research period between March – May 2022, I worked as a volunteer with the organisation CDH Fray Matias. This organisation works closely with the migrant population within Tapachula, offering social support, legal consultations and research & advocacy services. CDH Fray Matias is one of around a dozen NGOs working on migrant related issues in Tapachula. These organisations often work in partnership, holding joint meetings to help coordinate response to issues faced by migrants relating to basic needs such as housing and health. CDH Fray Matias is the longest standing migrant NGO in the city, with over 30 years

⁴³ Demmers, J. (2017). *Theories of Violent Conflict*, London & New York: Routledge, 16.

⁴⁴ Mason, J. (2018). *Qualitative Researching*. (Third ed.) Sage Publications Ltd. 8.

experience. Given its prominent position, when working at the organisation I felt as though I was working from within the migration industry. I had an active role in providing legal information and planning events designed to give migrants information about legal processes in Tapachula. I regularly conversed with migrants who had arrived for legal consultations or to take part in activities planned by the organisation. For example, each Friday I helped facilitate a men's collective group, in which we engaged in sharing circles and information sessions. This allowed me to hear first-hand experiences of migrant stories, the challenges they had faced and their hopes for the future. It should be noted that as I was involved in a male only collective, with female members of staff involved in the female equivalent, the perspectives included were largely male. However, I found this extremely fruitful for data collection, as migrants tended to be more trusting of me when I was working with the organisation rather than when having conversations in public places. Given CDH Fray Matias' position as a longstanding NGO, migrants readily shared experiences and issues faced with me as they saw me as an employee. This could be a result of migrants seeing the research as more credible when linked with the organisation. When having conversations in public spaces outside of the context of the organisation, I noted that migrants were often more guarded and did not share information about their personal circumstances as readily.

Another important contribution to my research was my participation in human rights monitoring exercises. These exercises took place at the border, at road checkpoints and within the city's public spaces. As an example, I went to a nearby town with a group of 6 other staff during national guard clashes with migrant caravans, seeing first-hand how the state responds to organised irregular movement of migrants. Through being embedded within migrant civil society in Tapachula, it was possible to gain important insights into the how the migratory system works. In addition, it allowed consistent exposure to colleagues and their experiences and thus supplemented the personal accounts collected during interviews. Many of those I worked with in CDH Fray Matias had a wealth of experience working within this sector and provided valuable insights into how state response and migratory patterns have evolved over the years. The data collected through this method was recorded by taking extensive field notes throughout the research period. I updated a

diary every few days on the observations that I had made or of information shared by migrants and colleagues alike.

In total, 12 in depth, semi structured interviews were also carried out with migrants (n=7) and NGO workers (n=5). The migrant sample involved interviewees from Guatemala (2), Honduras (2), Nicaragua, and Venezuela (2). All of these migrants had vastly different backgrounds and reasons for migration. Some were fleeing poverty and lack of opportunity, whilst others had faced threats and violence from gangs or government in their home countries. All but one (Guatemala) of the NGO workers were Mexican. The interviews were conducted in diverse locations, including coffee shops, public parks and the offices of the respective NGO workers. For the migrants in the dataset, introductions were made with almost all interviewees while sitting in the central Parque Bicentenario. On days when I sat on a bench within this park, I was usually approached by a migrant who began to make small talk. After some time, I would ask if they were willing to carry out a more formal interview. For many, they were happy to converse but did not like the idea of moving to a coffee shop or being recorded. I got the sense that they were much more comfortable with keeping things informal and unofficial. Therefore, interviews were supplemented by numerous informal conversations with migrants in this park. Whilst some days these conversations would have no relevance to my research, on others migrants offered compelling information relating to their experience. All interviews were conducted face to face whilst all but one were conducted in Spanish. Indeed, my ability to speak Spanish was often a good conversation starter with migrants unused to seeing Europeans in Tapachula.

Semi structured interviews were chosen to provide consistency through following a topic guide whilst leaving the conversations open enough to lead to new forms of unexpected information. The topic guide was formulated by identifying certain key themes of interest. Some of these themes, such as border militarisation, were identified prior to the research period through analysis of empirical sources. However, I found that the questions I had initially prepared were too stiff and too guided by the information I had read during the document analysis stage. I found it more beneficial to first let the interviewees tell their story, picking up and enquiring further on particularly interesting points. As certain

important themes began to emerge, such as organised migrant protests or caravans, I developed new questions to gain better understanding.

The sampling approach involved both purposive and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was utilised when identifying migrant interviewees. At times, this was useful as further participants were willing to engage when a trusted contact facilitated the introduction. For example, my first interview was organised with a migrant who I had met in the park a few days prior. After conversing for an hour in a coffee shop, I asked him to pass on my WhatsApp details to any others who would be willing to speak with me. Having returned home for lunch, I received a voice message a short time after to tell me that another Venezuelan migrant would speak with me but that it had to be in the park and had to be immediately, thus leading to my second interview. The utility of snowball sampling was undermined by the turnover of migrants. At times they may only be in the city for a few days before moving to another location and so new connections would have to be made. Although this sampling does not seek to generalise the varied experiences of migrants, it helped to better locate and understand some of the actions and strategies employed in response to regimes of mobility.

Purposive sampling means that I intentionally selected my sample units according to significant aspects of my study.⁴⁵ This sampling approach was particularly useful when choosing the workers from local NGOs. This allowed me to identify individuals with expertise and experience in the migration industry that allows for valuable insights into several sub questions. As illustrative examples, I interviewed the head of research in CDH Fray Matias as she had years of expertise in militarization. On another occasion, after attending a legal advice clinic with migrants from the men's collective, I interviewed the facilitating lawyer due to his legal expertise and experience with the asylum system. Working with CDH Fray Matias also ensured I was exposed to representatives of many different organisations in Tapachula. For example, when holding an information fair in a suburb of the city heavily populated by Haitian migrants, there were 9 NGOs represented.

⁴⁵ Mason, J. (2018). Qualitative Researching. (Third ed.) Sage Publications Ltd. 4

Throughout the course of the event I was able to engage in numerous conversations and gain insights from different organisational perspectives.

Finally, it is important to consider the ethical implications of the conducted research. Many of the migrants in Tapachula found themselves in extremely vulnerable situations and therefore all research activities were conducted with respect for their precarious situation. When in Parque Bicenterario I never made the first approach and always waited until someone began a conversation with me. I knew that many of those staying in the park felt unsafe and did not want to cause alarm by approaching out of the blue. The research followed the ‘do no harm approach’ by respecting the wishes and privacy of all willing participants, including by ensuring anonymity for all involved. This was done through omitting the names of all participants and through allowing them to choose the locations in which we conversed. However, as discussed above, most participants preferred to speak in public places. Whilst only 2 of the 5 NGO worker interviewees explicitly requested anonymity, due to the sensitive nature of topics under discussion the decision was taken to keep all interviews confidential. Efforts were made to ensure informed consent was given by all participants through explaining my research and asking if they were willing to engage on the topic. At the beginning of every interview, I explicitly stated that it may be stopped at any time or that any question interviewees were not comfortable with could be skipped. All participants acknowledged this option but at no point did any interviewee request to skip a question or stop the interview. The option was given to all interviewees to not have the discussion recorded, an option that 3 of the migrant respondents requested.

3.3 Trajectory and Place Based Approaches

First, whilst the significance of the trajectory approach as an emerging methodological tool will be highlighted, it is important to note that there is significant merit to be found in using the place based approach. As the work of Massa⁴⁶ shows, this approach can enable us “to understand how various trajectories intertwine in places and intersect with mobility

⁴⁶ Massa, A. (2020). Borders and boundaries as resources for mobility. Multiple regimes of mobility and incoherent trajectories on the Ethiopian-Eritrean border.

regimes.”⁴⁷ Given the significance of Tapachula’s position on the migrant route and its prominence in the manifestation of mobility regimes in Mexico, this is especially true within the current research. Further, this allows for analysis of how migrants act during periods of forced immobility within the city. However, despite the merits of this place based approach, it should be recognised that within the fields of mobility and migration studies there has been a marked movement towards the trajectory approach. This methodological shift focuses on following migrants through places rather than researching at one set location.⁴⁸ This allows for a greater understanding of the uncertainty and changeability involved with migrant trajectories. Further, Schwarz argues that the geographical complexity of mobility regimes and the diverging ways in which they manifest in different localities means that the trajectory approach is well suited to add further knowledge to this field.⁴⁹ However, there are practical and ethical obstacles to this approach that made it unfeasible to utilise. First, many migrant journeys take place over a period of many months or years, time spans that far exceed the available research period. In addition, as highlighted by Khosravi, accompanying migrants during their trajectory increases visibility, which in turn could increase their likelihood of being detained.⁵⁰ A migrant’s ability to go undetected, especially those considered as illegal, is often of vital importance to their survival.⁵¹

3.4 Positionality

Very little social research can be truly unaffected by a researcher’s values.⁵² Thus, given all data collected and analysed throughout this thesis is subject to my interpretation, it is important to reflect briefly upon positionality and how this may affect the findings presented.

⁴⁷ Schapendonk, J. et al. (2020). Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes. 213.

⁴⁸ Schapendonk, J. et al. (2020). Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes.

⁴⁹ Schwarz, I. (2020). Migrants moving through mobility regimes: The trajectory approach as a tool to reveal migratory processes, *Geoforum*, Volume 116, 217-225.

⁵⁰ Khosravi, S. (2018). Afterword. Experiences and stories along the way. 3.

⁵¹ Khosravi, S. (2010). ‘Illegal’ traveller: an auto-ethnography of borders. Springer.

⁵² Carr, W. (2000). Partisanship in educational research. *Oxford Review of Education*, 26(3-4),

Holmes highlights that the researcher is “not separate from the social processes they study”⁵³ and this is evident within the current research. For instance, regimes of mobility are presented as intersecting systems that normalise the movements of some whilst criminalising and entrapping those of others.⁵⁴ Therefore, my privileged position as a tourist in Mexico is evidenced by the fact that my arrival and mobility throughout the country was welcomed and even encouraged. On one of my first days in CDH Fray Matias my supervisor referred to policies to restrict ‘foreigners’ before pausing and clarifying that he did not mean me as I was a tourist. This highlights that I interacted with such regimes from a highly different position than the research subjects. Whilst I tried to evaluate and be reflective of my positionality throughout the research, this divergence in experience means it is impossible for me to truly understand what it means to be an irregular migrant in Mexico. For example, as mentioned, I spent time each day in Parque Bicentenario which was located 5 minutes’ walk from the apartment I had rented for my stay. For the migrants this was the safest place they could stay for that stage of their journey and to leave would jeopardise their freedom. However, for me it was a daily excursion, a reality I could dip in and out of, free to move at will without fear of reprisal. It was notable that migrants were much more willing to speak within the park and much more reluctant to move further afield. Although initially I tried to organise interviews in coffee shops, I became more comfortable with conducting them in the park. I felt that insisting on a more formal interview in a coffee shop further amplified the imbalance of power and so remaining in an environment in which they felt more comfortable was preferable.

My position as an outsider also has potential connotations for the data collected. For instance, it is possible that a lack of trust could have resulted in the research participants sharing less about interactions with State authorities or about their strategies to remain mobile. I noted several times throughout the research period that migrants would initially tell me one thing before then divulging the truth when the conversation had moved on and they had become more comfortable. Further, as mentioned above, migrants were more willing to speak openly from the outset when speaking in the context of CDH Fray Matias.

⁵³ Holmes, A. (2020). “Researcher Positionality - A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research - A New Researcher Guide.” Shanlax International Journal of Education, vol. 8, no. 4, 3.

⁵⁴ Glick Schiller, N. & Salazar, N. (2013). Regimes of Mobility Across the Globe, 189.

They trust the organisation and know that they can speak freely as those present will be on their side.

3.5 Research Limitations

It is also important to recognise potential limitations to the research. First, the vast majority of the research was conducted within the city of Tapachula and its surrounding areas. As it would add valuable evidence to be able to travel to other cities in Chiapas and observe how/if the situation differs there, this can be considered a limitation. Although the research would be improved by allowing for a greater range of experiences throughout a broader geographical span within the state, this limitation was offset by discussing such matters with NGO worker interviewees and by leaving Tapachula to carry out humanitarian monitoring exercises with CDH Fray Matias. For example, travelling to the aftermath of a clash between the national guard and a migrant caravan allowed me to witness how migration authorities were more likely to use force when outside of the city limits and away from observers.

My positionality may also be a limitation. As touched upon above, I have no experience of being a migrant and am an outsider to the experiences the research subjects have lived. Practically, this may have an impact on the research due to migrants being less willing to divulge sensitive information to a foreigner. For instance, as many of these migrants are vulnerable and may have gone through traumatic experiences, they may not have been as quick to trust a foreigner with information about the experiences their interactions with State authorities. Although many of the migrants I talked to spoke candidly about their views, feelings and experiences, on other occasions I could tell that they were holding back. Further, although I speak Spanish fluently, it is not my native language, and it is likely that the meaning of certain words and phrases could have been misconstrued at times. Although I always tried to clarify any misunderstandings with participants, it is difficult to truly compensate for the difference in cultural and linguistic background.

In regard to the dataset, it would have been preferable to conduct more in-depth interviews with migrant participants. Each migrant has a unique and individual trajectory and

perspective and so including further participants would have enriched the data collected. This could potentially have uncovered further strategies utilised for movements or different methods for acquiring capital. Although this was the intention at the beginning of the research period, many migrants were unwilling to engage in a formal setting. Given their position of vulnerability whilst in Tapachula this was understandable and was offset through using informal conversations in public spaces and participant observation as data collection techniques.

Although the dataset was never intended to be representative of the migrant population in Chiapas, it would have benefitted from a greater divergence in perspectives. For instance, only one female migrant was interviewed. Further, female migrants were much less likely to engage in informal conversations. As mentioned above, I did not approach migrants in the park but always waited for someone to engage me in conversation. I was especially not comfortable approaching women, as I was aware that a white European approaching a female migrant could be particularly jarring. As those who approached were much more likely to be male, I had many more conversations with men. Although gender is not a primary focus in this thesis, female migrants face different challenges and adopt different coping strategies to men. As examples, women are often victims of rape during transit⁵⁵ and have been reported to utilise sex work⁵⁶ as a method of acquiring economic capital in Tapachula. Therefore, it is important to mention that while this thesis draws conclusions based on migrant perspectives, they are largely male perspectives. However, some female perspectives are also included from meetings and activities with CDH Fray Matias, where they were more comfortable with sharing their opinion. Migrants from Haiti made up a large proportion of those who were residing in Tapachula during the research period. However, given the language barrier no Haitians were included as interviewees. This was slightly mitigated through attending a diagnostic meeting attended by 9 national and international NGOs operating in Tapachula. This focused on key challenges and solutions for the Haitian community and was attended by Haitians who, through translators, could provide important insights into their experiences as migrants in Mexico.

⁵⁵ Diaz, P. (2020). ‘La Bestia’ — the train of violence and assault that takes migrants to US-Mexico border.

⁵⁶ Miranda, E. (2022). Sex Work Equals Survival for some Migrant Women in Tapachula, Mexico.

A final limitation is the lack of inclusion of questions relating to people smugglers included in the interviews. I had been warned by colleagues at CDH Fray Matias that it could put me in danger to ask the wrong person such questions. As a result, I was uncomfortable talking about these matters. Given their prominent impact on the ability of migrants to remain mobile, ideally greater attention would have been paid to this aspect. However, in a number of interviews the respondent brought up these *coyotes* unprompted. As a result, I was able to include certain, albeit limited, reflections relating to this theme in the subsequent sections. On this issue of safety, it should be noted that during my first few weeks in the city I was much more nervous of potential risks, given the warnings I had received and stories I had read before arriving. However, as time progressed I felt much more relaxed, allowing me to engage in more conversations with locals and migrants alike about the situation in the city.

4. Immigration Containment

This chapter will highlight the ways in which the Mexican authorities seek to limit the mobility of migrants within Chiapas. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide an exhaustive list or in-depth analysis of all ways in which the state has done so, focus will be on analysing the fundamental systems of border militarization and institutional ambiguity within the asylum procedure. Although these are central pillars of regimes of mobility in southern Mexico, it is vital to note that their strict limiting of mobility is not always black and white. Thus, analysis of the corruption underpinning these systems, and how this may contribute to the enabling of migrant mobility, will round off the chapter.

4.1 Militarization

*"Yes, well, in Mexico for several years migratory policies have been consolidated that focus on migratory control, based on the control, verification, detention and deportation of people. And this strengthening of these policies to control migratory flows, also over the years has increased the participation of various security forces, especially militarized ones."*⁵⁷

The most obvious and visible way through which the Mexican State seeks to contain the flow of migrants within Chiapas is through the militarization of the region. Whilst there are multiple views of what exactly constitutes militarization, a common definition derives from Dunn's seminal work on the topic: "the use of military rhetoric and ideology, as well as military tactics, strategy, technology, equipment and forces."⁵⁸ Although much of the militarized infrastructure concentrated in the area is relatively new, such as checkpoints, watch towers and detention centres, Mexico's militarized approach to public security is not. Under the presidency of Felipe Calderón from 2006-2012 Mexico increasingly relied upon a militarized strategy in a response to organised crime – in particular to deal with the

⁵⁷ Interview respondent 11 (NGO worker), interview conducted 3/05/22.

⁵⁸ Dunn, T. (1996). The militarization of the US-Mexico border, 1978-1992: Low-intensity conflict doctrine comes home. Austin: CMAS Books. University of Texas at Austin. 3.

country's powerful drug cartels.^{59,60} Therefore, whilst targeting these measures towards migration is a more recent phenomenon, many of the entities deployed, weapons and troops were already pre-existing.

Much of the militarization strategy emanates from the power relations between the US and Mexico, with more aggressive tactics being used at times of high pressure from the northernly neighbours. In 2014, after an estimated 60,000 unaccompanied minor children had arrived at the southern border of the USA, then President Barrack Obama issued a memorandum declaring an "urgent humanitarian situation".⁶¹ In response to what was deemed a migration crisis, and under pressure to act from the United States, Mexico implemented "*El Programma Frontera Sur*". Although the official language of this Southern Border Program talked of protection of asylum seekers and economic development of the regions concerned, the reality was that it amounted to a "smoke screen to enforce containment actions".⁶² In 2019, US rhetoric surrounding the arrival of migrants from Mexico was ramped up, with then President Trump threatening trade tariffs rising to 25% on Mexican goods if they did not control migrant flows. This resulted in renewed efforts on behalf of the Mexican authorities, with subsequent steep rises in migrant apprehensions and deportations along the southern border.⁶³ These threats also resulted in an agreement to implement the Migration Protection Protocols⁶⁴ and deploy the newly formed national guard to the southern region.⁶⁵ In Tapachula, on multiple occasions different NGO workers repeated that in Chiapas lies the true wall built by the Americans. This section will first provide an overview of some of the key State entities utilised to stem migration and their

⁵⁹ Sotomayor, A. (2013). *The State and Security in Mexico: Transformation and Crisis in Regional Perspective, Militarization in Mexico and its Implications*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

⁶⁰ Gustavo, F. (2018). *The Consequences of Militarizing Anti-Drug Efforts for State Capacity in Latin America: Evidence from Mexico*. Comparative Politics, Volume 51, Number 1, 1-20.

⁶¹ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. (2014). *Presidential Memorandum -- Response to the Influx of Unaccompanied Alien Children Across the Southwest Border*.

⁶² Vega, L. A. (2017). *Policy adrift: Mexico's southern border program* (Research Paper). Mexico Center at Baker Institute for Public Policy.

⁶³ CDH Fray Matias. (2020). *Memoria 2019-2020: Defensa de la Vida y La Dignidad*.

⁶⁴ The Migration Protection Protocols, commonly referred to as the 'Remain in Mexico program', stipulate that asylum seekers arriving at the US Southern Border are given a date for an immigration hearing before being sent back to Mexico to await this date. The program was first introduced under the Trump administration in 2019, before being suspended and subsequently reinstated by President Biden in 2021.

⁶⁵ WOLA. (2019). *The Wall Before the Wall: Mexico's Crackdown on Migration at its Southern Border*.

militarized nature. Following, the key strategies of detection, detention and deportation will be analysed, with a particular focus on how this affects migrants.

Trying to pinpoint exact roles and responsibilities for the many entities involved in migration control is a difficult task, with an alphabet soup of police, military and migration organisations all collaborating on the task. The State Police, Municipal Police, Specialised Police, Military Police, Marine Force, National Institute of Migration (INM) and National Guard are all involved to varying degrees. Indeed, all of these entities are highly visible within the region. This was reflected by one migrant interviewee who remarked that: “*Everywhere you turn it feels like they are there*”.⁶⁶ Further, these bodies are heavily armed and look more suited to a conflict scenario than to deal with asylum seekers. Within days of arriving in Tapachula it was obvious that the presence of these entities was more evident in areas of the city with higher concentrations of migrants. For example, due to large populations of migrants residing within Parque Bicentenario and Parque Central Miguel Hidalgo, various police and migration authorities would be seen to pass by multiple times per hour, usually with increasing regularity during evening and night time hours. They drove in fortified trucks and often with between 4-6 men standing in the back, heavily armed with body armour and automatic weapons. The different bodies were distinguishable through their uniforms and names written in bold on the side of their trucks. The national guard are dressed in military attire, whilst the various police forces are generally wearing black uniforms resembling a swat team. Their militarized appearance was not lost on the migrants themselves, with one interviewee stating: “*Imagine being an ordinary person with a backpack and seeing that is what is against you*”.⁶⁷ Almost all migrants encountered during the research period reported a feeling of fear when seeing these entities, clearly contributing to the criminalization of their mobility. Through ensuring their visibility, authorities contribute to a sense of almost constant surveillance. As will be discussed further below, migrants know they can be detained at any time and the sight of these entities is a consistent reminder that freedom of movement is a luxury that they are not afforded.

⁶⁶ Interview respondent 5 (migrant), interview conducted 07/04/22.

⁶⁷ Interview respondent 6 (migrant), interview conducted 19/04/22.

Given key roles in Mexico's migration management, the INM and National Guard both have militarized characteristics to varying degrees. The National Guard was established in 2019 to help protect public security. One NGO worker stated that since its deployment in Chiapas it has acted as if migrants were a threat to public peace.⁶⁸ Further, from the outset it has been a militarized body, with many of its members being transferred from the military or federal police.⁶⁹ Indeed, there has recently been a push to increase the proportion of members with military experience, with those with a civilian background being pressured to take compensation packages to resign or be reassigned.⁷⁰ Commonly working alongside the National Guard in efforts to contain migrants, the INM was described as "*a migration body with a military face... this was not meant to be a military organisation or even one that acts violently*".⁷¹ It appears that since teaming up with the National Guard after its deployment in 2019, the INM itself has become increasingly militarized. This has manifested through heavy handed tactics aimed at controlling the flow of migrants through the region.

4.1.1 Detection

When leaving Chiapas via bus at the end of the research period, the detection measures utilised were easily identifiable. In a span of 9 hours between leaving Tapachula and crossing the border into neighbouring state Tabasco, my bus was stopped 8 different times for checks. Some of these were fixed checkpoints, in which all passengers had to disembark, show our documents and put our luggage through a scanning machine. Others were nothing more than a few trucks at the side of the road, at which an official boarded the bus and checked identifications. One thing that all of these checkpoints had in common was the presence of armed officials. As figure 2 shows below, each stop would be manned by authorities such as the INM, national guard, military police or specialized police.

As evidenced by the above, one of the main ways in which the movement of migrants is controlled in Chiapas is through the use of checkpoints. Whilst they begin at the border with

⁶⁸ Interview respondent 11 (NGO worker), interview conducted 3/05/22.

⁶⁹ Interview respondent 11 (NGO worker), interview conducted 3/05/22.

⁷⁰ Interview respondent 11 (NGO worker), interview conducted 3/05/22.

⁷¹ Interview respondent 9 (NGO worker), interview conducted 28/04/22.

Guatemala, they continue right throughout the state and are made up of a mix of fixed and mobile checkpoints. Generally, these checkpoints are manned by the National Guard and INM and will check the documentation of all passengers on buses or other form of public transport passing through. The fact that these checkpoints are present hundreds of miles beyond the physical border with Guatemala highlights the need to reimagine what border control entails. Through militarizing the entire region, the border has become delocalised. As a result, passing physically into Mexican territory is merely one of many obstacles for migrants and does little to guarantee that they will be able to continue their trajectory. After crossing the border, the first city that migrants can reach to begin an asylum claim is Tapachula. However, the presence of checkpoints before reaching the city emphasises the Mexican State's intention to limit mobility before these procedures can be initiated.



Figure 2: Member of the National Guard manning a road checkpoint in Chiapas.

Another strategy utilised in migrant detection efforts is the use of raids. Whilst checkpoints are generally rurally based or on the outskirts of cities, raids are targeted at migrants who have already managed to make it to the urban environment of Tapachula.

These raids are usually conducted at hotels or shared living spaces that are occupied by migrants. They are carried out by agents from the INM and from the National Guard. Similar to the surveillance tactics above, migrants are aware that a raid could be conducted at any time. This provokes a sense of fear and anxiety amongst those in the city, including those who have applied for asylum and have a legal right to be there. As will be elaborated on below, correct legal documentation provides no guarantee that migrants will not be detained. Both the use of checkpoints and raids by military personnel reflect the use of militarization as a method of control over mobilities. This control is reflected within the academic literature on border militarization. Heyman & Campbell stress that the militarization of the southern US border is an “attempt to control complex social dynamics in highly coercive and authoritarian ways”.⁷² In addition, Jones & Johnson state that “borderlines now serve to protect against movement of individuals perceived to be threats”,⁷³ whilst Vives sees such measures as a method to “halt unwanted human mobility”.⁷⁴ However, as discussed above, whilst these assertions are clearly applicable to the context in Chiapas, we can also reconceptualise the spatiality of border militarization to include a broadening of the border beyond the mere crossing of national boundaries. Therefore, border militarization can be viewed as a way in which the Mexican State restricts movement not only when entering the national territory, but also when continuing to move through it.

4.1.2 Detention & Deportation

Migrants who have been detected by the authorities are often sent to migrant detention centres. Further, the manner in which they are detained and brought into custody often contributes to their criminalization. This is reflected in the following anecdote:

⁷² Heyman, J.; Campbell, H. (2012). The Militarization Of The United States-Mexico Border Region. *Revista de Estudos Universitários - REU, [S. I.]*, v. 38, n. 1. 75-94. 78.

⁷³ Jones, R. and Johnson, C. (2016). Border militarisation and the re-articulation of sovereignty. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 41: 187-200. 195.

⁷⁴ Vives, L. (2020). Child Migration in the US and Spain: Towards a Global Border Regime?. *International Migration*, 58: 29-44.31.

*"We saw them arrive, about ten patrol cars and we left running...but we turned down a dead-end street and that's where they got us. We were handcuffed and put in the back of the car."*⁷⁵

These acts of chasing down and applying handcuffs emphasise how migrants are treated like criminals by the authorities. Whilst discussing the National Guard's treatment of migrants, one interviewee expressed concern at how, despite dealing with a vulnerable population, many of whom would be entitled to protection under international law, the agents had little to no training on how to deal with them sensitively or on human rights more broadly.⁷⁶ Further, since teaming up with the INM, it was observed that there has been a blurring of lines between the two entities.⁷⁷ This has resulted in the INM acting in military fashion, often detaining migrants with forceable tactics and thus heightening the sense that their mobility is a criminal act.

The Mexican government has constructed '*Estacion Migratoria Siglo XXI*', the largest immigration detention centre in Latin America, just outside of Tapachula, with a maximum capacity of 960. Since its construction, there have been numerous reports of overcrowding and abuses within the centre, including torture of the migrants contained there.^{78,79}

*"There's the detention centre, which is a big tool that the Mexican government uses to arbitrarily punish people for migrating."*⁸⁰

Although only one migrant spoken to during the research period had been detained, and in a detention centre in a different state, almost all had heard stories about what conditions were like within these detention centres. When discussing detention conditions with migrants, they often relayed a horror story they had heard about mistreatment. Whilst many of these stories may be potentially embellished, it is clear that the documented

⁷⁵ Interview respondent 2 (migrant), interview conducted 28/03/22.

⁷⁶ Interview respondent 11 (NGO worker), interview conducted 3/05/22.

⁷⁷ Interview respondent 12 (NGO worker), interview conducted 9/05/22.

⁷⁸ Colectivo de Observación y Monitoreo de Derechos Humanos en el Sureste Mexicano. (2021). Autoridades migratorias torturan a personas migrantes y refugiadas tras protesta en Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI.

⁷⁹ CDH Fray Matias. (2018). Detención Migratoria y Tortura: Del Estado de Excepción al Estado de Derecho.

⁸⁰ Interview respondent 8 (NGO worker), interview conducted 22.04.22.

abuses within the centres, alongside the abuses and violence against migrants when they are being detained, helps to create an atmosphere of fear. When discussing her experience in a detention centre, one interviewee stated that “*it’s what you would expect for being in jail*”.⁸¹ Further, she added that the trauma of being treated as a criminal made her terrified of repeating the experience when seeing migration authorities after being released.⁸² Having started her journey in Venezuela, she added that she wishes she had gone to Ecuador instead,⁸³ underlining that her experience has in fact acted as a deterrent. This strategy of deterrence is evident within the academic literature. In their work on the US southern border, Slack et al argue that violence is an elemental part of border militarization and that the associated pain, suffering and trauma inflicted upon migrants is purposefully operationalised so as to act as a deterrent.⁸⁴

When abuses do come to light, the response has usually been to blame it on a few bad apples rather than admit any institutional culpability. For example, in August 2021 the INM attacked migrants in transit, before expulsing a number at the border with Guatemala without following due process. After NGOs operating to protect the rights of migrants drew attention to this issue, the INM suspended just two agents. Reflecting on the impunity enjoyed by security forces in Mexico, one respondent shared that judicial processes or spaces for reporting human rights violations committed by military bodies in Mexico, aren’t civil but are also military. This has led to a scenario whereby victims of such abuses are likely to reach a settlement agreement, often via coercion, rather than receive proper access to justice. In the case of abuses against migrants, they are unlikely to even get an agreement and are more likely to be ignored.⁸⁵ This impunity reinforces the ability of migration authorities to use forceable tactics to limit migrant mobility and contain them within the south of the country.

⁸¹ Interview respondent 2 (migrant), interview conducted 28/03/22.

⁸² Interview respondent 2 (migrant), interview conducted 28/03/22.

⁸³ Interview respondent 2 (migrant), interview conducted 28/03/22.

⁸⁴ Slack, J. Martínez, D. Elizabeth Lee, A and Whiteford, S. (2016). The Geography of Border Militarization: Violence, Death and Health in Mexico and the United States. *Journal of Latin American Geography*. Vol. 15, No. 1. 7-32.

⁸⁵ Interview respondent 12 (NGO worker), interview conducted 9/05/22.

A further way in which the onward mobility of migrants is managed by the Mexican State is through deportations. Many of those expelled from the country are done so without the official process being followed. Furthermore, whilst officially migrants should only be deported to their country of origin, a number of interviewees highlighted that migrants originating from countries such as El Salvador and Honduras have been sent to Guatemala.⁸⁶ In a similar vein to the processes of detection and detention, the idea of being deported provoked a strong sense of fear and anxiety within the migrant population within the dataset. This is especially true given that many are fleeing situations of grave violence. For instance, one Honduran migrant fidgeted with his hands and looked nervous as he relayed his terror that to be deported would mean being sent back to the mercy of the gangs he had fled from. Having been extorted, threatened and beaten in his home country, the prospect of having to return was not one that he could entertain.

Detection, detention and deportation, alongside the associated violence and abuse at the hands of migration authorities, can also be ways of limiting mobility beyond their role in physically stopping migrants from continuing their journey. They may also limit mobility through provoking fear and anxiety of being apprehended. When conversing with those who had decided to follow proper legal procedure I enquired as to why they had decided upon this course of action. Through describing how they wanted to avoid the authorities at all costs it became clear that migrants are terrified of falling into their hands. Therefore, they are less likely to try and evade them and more likely to engage with the proper legal channels. However, as will become evident in the subsequent section, obtaining the proper legal documentation required to move freely is no guarantee that this right will be respected.

It should be stated here that whilst ‘migrants’ have been treated as a whole in this section, militarization measures may affect them in different ways depending on their nationality. For instance, those originating from the northern triangle countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras are more likely to be deported, whilst those with Venezuelan or

⁸⁶ Interview respondent 12 (NGO worker), interview conducted 9/05/22 and interview respondent 8 (NGO worker), conducted 22/04/22.

Nicaraguan nationality are unlikely to face expulsion.⁸⁷ Moreover, there is a racialised element to the application of these strategies. This means that Black migrants, many of whom come from the likes of Haiti or Cuba, are more likely to be stopped at checkpoints and thus more likely to be detained. This hierarchy of mobilities ensures that the movement of migrants is not constrained equally. This is reflected in the work of Schwarz, who highlights how mobility regimes can be highly racialised through his analysis of how racial profiling is utilised to restrict the everyday mobility of migrants in Europe.⁸⁸ These racial connotations are also particularly noteworthy within the asylum procedure, as will be analysed in the following section.

4.2 Institutional Ambiguity

“Lets say that something administrations have learned a lot is to bet on social exhaustion. Wear the people down, hold up their processes, extend the process times, or don’t give any response to the applications people make.”⁸⁹

Whilst militarization is a key strategy in limiting mobility, it is only one side of the coin. Working as part of this dual system is the institutional ambiguity inherent in the asylum procedures in Chiapas. As evidenced by the previous section, it is extremely difficult to move undetected throughout the region. Given that many migrants' ultimate goal is to reach the US, it is a mammoth task to traverse the full expanse of Mexican territory without the journey being curtailed by migration authorities. Therefore, many see an alternative option as arriving to Tapachula and applying for asylum in Mexico. If granted asylum, migrants are granted refugee status, given permanent residency and allowed to move freely throughout the country.⁹⁰ Whilst the large numbers of asylum applications appear to paint a picture of Mexico as an emerging destination country, an alternative explanation is that migrants are increasingly using these procedures to be granted legal status and thus free

⁸⁷ Interview respondent 12 (NGO worker), interview conducted 9/05/22.

⁸⁸ Schwarz, I., (2016). Racializing freedom of movement in Europe. Experiences of racial profiling at European borders and beyond. Movements. J. für kritische Migrations-und Grenzregimeforschung 2 (1), 253–265. 254.

⁸⁹ Interview respondent 9 (NGO worker), interview conducted 28/04/22.

⁹⁰ Government of Mexico. (2011). Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político. Art. 48.

movement throughout the territory. When reflecting upon the idea of Mexico as a destination country, one interviewee stated:

*"If you look at these policies since 2014 or 2019 or whatever, what have these changes brought? People now think about their migration to the United States as longer. It hasn't made Mexico a destination. [...] You can't have a hard core enforcement strategy and integration – they aren't congruent."*⁹¹

However, if migrants manage to cross the border and reach Tapachula without being detained, they face numerous other challenges when engaging with these legal processes. As will be analysed throughout the section, many of these challenges can be viewed as intentional obstacles, utilised by the State to slow down and contain mobility within the southern region. Indeed, this entrapment is reflected by Tapachula's moniker as the 'prison city', commonly utilised amongst migrants, civil society and the media alike.

First, before analysing these specific challenges faced by migrants, it is important to highlight that the legal framework in which these asylum procedures are embedded can be considered as part of an international regulatory framework that operates as part of a global mobility regime. Namely, Mexico's legislation⁹² regulating who may be considered a refugee finds its basis in long standing global norms enshrined in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. This is noteworthy as even before turning attention to the difficulties inherent within Mexico's system, certain migrants may be deemed to be unworthy of mobility due to these persisting norms. As an example, migrants who are fleeing endemic poverty or climate displacement in Central America would not qualify under the definition provided by the UN Convention and thus not be granted the legal possibility of onward movement.

4.2.1 Bureaucratic Delays

⁹¹ Interview respondent 8 (NGO worker), interview conducted 22.04.22

⁹² The legislation governing Mexico's asylum procedure can be found under the 'Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político' and the Ley de Migración'.

The Mexican legislation stipulates that upon arriving in the national territory, any migrant wishing to apply for asylum must present their request within 30 working days at an office of the *Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados* (COMAR) or the INM.⁹³ Immediately, this creates a problem whereby the INM are one of the principal bodies seeking to prevent migrants arriving to Tapachula yet, upon arrival, they are expected to present themselves and ask for protection. Unsurprisingly, the majority of migrants choose to initiate their process at the office of COMAR. When pressed on their reasoning for this, the majority of migrants within the dataset cited a lack of trust in the INM as the major factor, with one stating that "*I try to avoid the migra (INM) whenever possible*".⁹⁴ However, whilst COMAR may be the preferable option, it is ill equipped to deal with the numbers of applications it receives. As mentioned, Tapachula registers over two thirds of all asylum claims for the total country. NGO workers included in the dataset emphasised that not only is COMAR underfunded and lacking in the requisite human resources to take on this task, but that they believed this was a purposeful tactic.⁹⁵ When compared with the huge investment in military infrastructure in Chiapas, it is difficult not to conclude that the underfunding of the asylum system is a deliberate measure aimed at entrapping migrants in the south.

These lengthy waiting times for migrants can stretch out to 9 months in some cases and are exacerbated by numerous factors. First, many migrants have difficulty in initiating procedures due to issues with getting an initial appointment. As shown in figure 3 (below), long queues are a regular sight outside the COMAR office in Tapachula, with people sleeping outside overnight to ensure they have a chance of getting inside the following day. Despite this, at times they only receive around 20 applications per day and only offer services until 1pm. One migrant who had recently gone through this process of attempting to initiate his asylum claim described his intense frustration at this hold up.⁹⁶ However, having heard that the INM offices had police guarding those in the line, he felt it was the lesser of two evils to wait at COMAR for an appointment.⁹⁷ In this sense, COMAR is seen as a safer space for

⁹³ Government of Mexico. (2011). Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político. Art. 11.

⁹⁴ Interview respondent 4 (migrant), interview conducted 4/04/22.

⁹⁵ Interview respondent 8 (NGO worker), interview conducted 22.04.22 and Interview respondent 10 (NGO worker), interview conducted 20.04.22.

⁹⁶ Interview respondent 6 (migrant) interview conducted 19/04/22.

⁹⁷ Interview respondent 6 (migrant) interview conducted 19/04/22.

migrants than the offices of the INM. A second major factor that has increased migrant waiting times and frustration is the suspension of official response times contained under the legislation. By law, COMAR was obligated to give a response within 45 working days of the application being received.⁹⁸ Despite this, these official timescales were suspended at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and have not been reinstated. One interviewee stated that whilst it didn't make that much of a difference given that the official waiting times were never adhered to anyway, it now meant that there wasn't even an official standard by which to hold the government accountable.⁹⁹

The lengthy waiting times and the lack of communication on when migrants may be expected to receive a response contributes to feelings of frustration and hopelessness within the migrant population who have decided to follow these legal channels. Many feel that they are stuck in Tapachula perpetually, unable to continue their journey for fear of being detained but unsure of when or if they may be granted legal permission to carry on. One interviewee highlighted the impact of these delays by stating "*this is something that we have noticed, it's not necessarily the detention and extortion that affect the most people and in the biggest way, but the very long periods for these procedures*".¹⁰⁰ Subjecting migrants to this period of liminality within the harsh living conditions of Tapachula forces them to seek alternative measures in response, as will be analysed in greater detail in chapter 5 and 6.

⁹⁸ Government of Mexico. (2011). Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político. Art. 24.

⁹⁹ Interview respondent 8 (NGO worker), conducted 22/04/22.

¹⁰⁰ Interview respondent 10 (NGO worker), interview conducted 20.04.22.



Figure 3: Migrants waiting in a queue outside the offices of COMAR in Tapachula. Photo
Credit: CDH Fray Matias

4.2.2 Obscurity

Engaging with the system is made more difficult by the lack of transparency and information relating to processes. Often, information emanating from COMAR and the INM is vague, ensuring that clear details on how to proceed is not available to migrants. Further, information from these two organisations can sometimes be contradictory, adding to the confusion. A major hurdle in understanding the process is the fact that it is consistently subject to change. For example, in 2021 three separate changes were made to the procedure within a period of three months. First, the process was changed so that applications and appointments had to be submitted and scheduled online. This was difficult for migrant populations without access to the internet. Moreover, scheduling an appointment with COMAR online is no mean feat, with appointments booked up months in advance.¹⁰¹ Again, this lack of ability to initiate their legal processes leaves migrants entrapped in Tapachula. Furthermore, until this process has been initiated migrants are not granted their '*constancia*', a legal document that recognises their asylum claim and, in theory, prevents them from being detained or deported whilst they remain in Tapachula. The second change to the process also resulted in a delay to receiving this *constancia*, as an extra appointment was added before it is emitted. The final temporary change that was established in 2021 involved creating an obligation for all migrants to register for an

¹⁰¹ Interview respondent 10 (NGO worker), interview conducted 20.04.22.

appointment at the stadium in Tapachula, creating a situation in which thousands of migrants had to wait for long periods in extreme heat.¹⁰² Each of these changes delays the emittance of the *constancia*, thereby denying legal status and leaving migrants vulnerable to being detained by the authorities.

The lack of clarity and changeability of these processes leaves migrants without a clear understanding of how the process works, contributing to a lack of trust in the system. One migrant interviewee, who had been in Tapachula for 3 months, was unsure of what stage of the process he was at and when asked how long he expected to wait before receiving a response he replied “*who knows? 18 months?*”.¹⁰³ Due to not receiving updates regarding their claims, migrants are left feeling stuck in the system, contributing to the feelings of entrapment and frustration whilst in city.

Although many migrants objective is to use their legal status to travel freely throughout Mexico, many do not understand that initiating a claim for asylum can have negative consequences for any future applications for asylum in the US.¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, many migrants do understand that when being interviewed for their asylum claim in Mexico they should not mention that they want to go to the US as it could harm their chances. This is reflected in conversations had with migrants, many of whom initially stated that their goal was not to continue north of the border, before subsequently admitting that they were indeed planning to enter the US, once they had become more comfortable in the conversation. This highlights that although there are numerous challenges when engaging with the process, many migrants have learned to play the system to maximise their potential for future movement. Similar to the militarization strategy, whilst the regime of mobility here manifests itself in Chiapas, it is clearly influenced by policy from the United States. As one interviewee stated: “*There is a morality filter of who's good and who's bad and being a bad migrant in Southern Mexico means wanting to go to the United States*”.¹⁰⁵ Given that the policy of containment is implemented due to US pressure to keep migrants

¹⁰² Interview respondent 11 (NGO worker), interview conducted 3/05/22.

¹⁰³ Interview respondent 3 (migrant), interview conducted 22/03/22.

¹⁰⁴ Interview respondent 11 (NGO worker), interview conducted 3/05/22.

¹⁰⁵ Interview respondent 8 (NGO worker), conducted 22/04/22.

from reaching its borders, the authorities are much less likely to grant asylum, and thus free passage, to migrants who admit wanting to go to the United States. This emphasises that whilst these policies and practices manifest in southern Mexico, they are very much the product of global power relations. The US does not want migrants arriving at its borders and pressures Mexico to contain migrants or face the consequences – such as Trump’s threat of tariff raises in 2019. Therefore, the US is outsourcing the policing of migration to Mexico, emphasising that regimes of mobility are not confined by national territory.

4.2.3 Discretionary Application of Law.

Throughout the course of my volunteer work with CDH Fray Matias it quickly became apparent that there was a disconnect between laws, policies and practices. When this observation was put to one interviewee he responded “*laws are quite generous, policies slightly less so. Practice is one big wildcard, how do you even deal with that?*”¹⁰⁶ An illustrative example is the migration authorities’ treatment of the ‘*constancia*’. As mentioned, the legislation provides that this document should allow migrants to move freely within the state of their application.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, migrants who have claimed asylum in Tapachula should legally be allowed to travel throughout the state of Chiapas in its entirety. However, in reality, the authorities often decide to restrict movement to Tapachula, meaning that those who leave the city with just their *constancia* can be detained.¹⁰⁸ The discretionary application of these policies was emphasised when one NGO worker informed me that at the time of our interview the authorities were allowing migrants to travel to nearby city Huixtla. However, he added that this could change day by day.¹⁰⁹ In addition, it is commonly known that authorities can rip up valid documents, including positive asylum claims, passports or visas. During a meeting at CDH Fray Matias, in an attempt to let those in attendance know what they were up against, my supervisor told a story concerning a Cuban migrant. Having been awarded a humanitarian visa that allowed free travel within Mexico for a period of one year, he had made his way to the US border

¹⁰⁶ Interview respondent 8 (NGO worker), conducted 22/04/22.

¹⁰⁷ Government of Mexico. (2012). Reglamento de la Ley sobre Refugiados y Protección Complementaria. Art 37.

¹⁰⁸ Interview respondent 10 (NGO worker), interview conducted 20.04.22.

¹⁰⁹ Interview respondent 9 (NGO worker), interview conducted 28/04/22.

unimpeded. However, upon arrival a border official had destroyed his visa, returning him to a state of being undocumented. When hearing this story the migrants attending were appalled that their fate may be left to the discretion of an individual official, even after a positive legal resolution to their case. Attempts at understanding when this may occur appear to be futile, with authorities seemingly acting arbitrarily. This creates an extremely volatile and unpredictable situation in which even the mobility of those with the legal authority to move may be constrained.

Unsurprisingly, this discrepancy between law and practice adds to the frustration migrants feel with the system. Within the information sessions provided by CDH Fray Matias a common query was whether they could move to another city to begin or continue their process there. However, by prohibiting this the Mexican State ensures that migrants have to engage with the overburdened COMAR in Tapachula rather than travelling to another office with greater capacity. Limiting the mobility of migrants in this way also creates an uncertainty that manifests in feelings of anxiety. These feelings are best encapsulated by an anecdote from one migrant who had previously been detained. Following her release, she was left in Tapachula and given an exit notice that required her to leave the country via the closest border within 10 days. However, after her traumatic experience in detention she did not want to risk travelling to the southern border as she felt she could be detained again during transit, thus feeling entrapped within the city.¹¹⁰

In a similar vein to the militarization strategies, institutional ambiguity and dealing with the asylum system affects migrants of varying nationalities in different ways. For instance, Haitian and African migrants find it extremely difficult to complete the required processes due to not speaking the language and there being no translators available. Further, migrants from Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua are more likely to be allowed to proceed, given that authorities know refugees from these countries have a higher success rate in claiming asylum in the US. This adds further colour to Khosravi's discussion of hierarchy of mobilities.¹¹¹ Whilst he differentiates between "qualified travellers (tourists, expatriates) and unqualified travellers (migrants, refugees)", the hierarchy runs deeper. Rather than just

¹¹⁰ Interview respondent 2 (migrant), interview conducted 28/03/22.

¹¹¹ Khosavri, S. (2018). Afterword. Experiences and stories along the way. Geoforum. 1.

a distinction between these accepted and unaccepted mobilities, in Chiapas there is also an existing hierarchy within the different nationalities of migrants being contained by regimes of mobility.

Although it is true that the scale of migrant arrivals ensures pressure on the asylum system that is difficult to manage, it is also evident that the Mexican response relies on institutional ambiguity as a deliberate method of confining migrants to Chiapas. Although applied to a different context, the work of Nassar and Stel highlights how institutional ambiguity can be utilised to maintain uncertainty and precariousness for strategic ends.¹¹² This is evident in the context of the current research, where Mexican authorities utilise “confusing communication, regular changes and arbitrary enforcement” whilst presenting the failings of the asylum system as an “unfortunate by product of limited resources”.¹¹³ In regard to their aims, institutional ambiguity is employed as a strategic vehicle for reinforcing mobility regimes and limiting the mobility of migrants seeking to reach the United States.

¹¹² Nassar, J. Stel, N. (2019). Lebanon's response to the Syrian refugee crisis – Institutional ambiguity as a governance strategy, *Political Geography*, Volume 70, 44-54.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

4.3 Corruption

The dual system outlined in the sections above provides important insights into how the State limits the mobility of migrants in Chiapas. However, both the militarization and asylum procedure are underpinned by pervasive corruption within the institutions involved. This corruption provides us the first insight into how migrants may navigate the restrictions they face in the region. It is evident that institutional corruption has developed in Mexico over time, with a 2011 report from the Mexican Human Rights Commission highlighting links between state actors and human smuggling and extortion carried out by public officials.¹¹⁴ In her work on the corruption of public officials in Guatemala, Sandoval highlights that a lack of institutional accountability over time allows corruption to become entrenched and eventually become an informal institution in and of itself.¹¹⁵ Given the growth in migrant flows since the publishing of this 2011 report, it is reasonable to assume a related growth in corruption within public institutions in Mexico. As will be shown throughout this section, institutional corruption provides a method through which migrants may bypass the strict restriction of their movement and continue their trajectories.

Sandoval states that the two main forms public official corruption relating to migration can take are transactions and extortions.¹¹⁶ Transactions include “commissions paid for illicit services and unwarranted fees for public services”¹¹⁷ and are most evident within the asylum procedure in Mexico. As mentioned, managing to make an appointment to begin the application is difficult, with migrants often being told they must wait two to three months when they try to schedule online. However, when done through certain private lawyers in Tapachula migrants can obtain an appointment within a week or two. This is due to public officials within COMAR and the INM having connections with certain private lawyers to sell

¹¹⁴ Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos. (2011). Informe Especial sobre secuestro de migrantes en México.

¹¹⁵ Sandoval, I. (2012). Public officials and the migration industry in Guatemala. The Migration Industry and the Commercialization of International Migration. Taylor and Francis Group. 220.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

appointment dates and speed up the process.¹¹⁸ In addition, there are public officials within the INM known as ‘*tramitadores*’, to which migrants may pay large sums to complete the whole process quickly and allow them to move on. One NGO worker shared the example of 120 recently arrived Cubans who were discovered in a hotel near the border and had paid huge amounts of money for this service.¹¹⁹ This emphasises the importance of financial resources to grease the wheels of the asylum system to quickly provide legal documentation and enable mobility.

Relating to the various militarized migration entities, the most common form of corruption is extortion, usually involving “a levy or toll”.¹²⁰ Within the migrant population in Tapachula the threat of being extorted by public officials is well known. One migrant described his experience of having to bribe border officials in Honduras and the subsequent fear he felt of having a similar experience in Mexico.¹²¹ This threat begins at the border, where border officials have been known to demand “*dollars, quetzals, lempiras or pesos – it doesn’t matter*”, in order to let migrants pass through.¹²² This example of paying bribes in Honduras and the effects this has on migrants in Mexico emphasises how regimes of mobility are not confined by territory, intersecting across borders and in different contexts. Similarly, these acts of extortion occur at the numerous checkpoints situated away from the border and throughout Chiapas, in order to grant migrants the ability to continue onwards. When they are not willing or able to pay officials, they are at a high risk of being detained or having whatever legal documents they are carrying ripped up. For those who have already been detained, release from the detention centre may be contingent on paying the officials in charge. Notably, those who carry the proper documentation also fall victim to this extortion. One interviewee highlighted how he had an American visa that should allow entry and transit within Mexico but was travelling with a group of undocumented migrants. Whilst his travelling companions avoided detection by crossing the river, he presented himself at an official, manned border crossing. However, despite his visa, he was forced to pay a sum

¹¹⁸ Interview respondent 8 (NGO worker), conducted 22/04/22 and Interview respondent 11 (NGO worker), interview conducted 3/05/22.

¹¹⁹ Interview respondent 11 (NGO worker), interview conducted 3/05/22.

¹²⁰ Sandoval, I. (2012). Public officials and the migration industry in Guatemala, 221.

¹²¹ Interview respondent 1 (migrant), interview conducted on 28/03/22.

¹²² Interview respondent 10 (NGO worker), interview conducted 20.04.22.

of \$4000 pesos to INM agents to enter the country.¹²³ Again, the regularity with which these instances of extortion are carried out means that having sufficient financial resources is vital for those seeking to remain mobile.

As discussed within the research limitations in chapter 3, organised crime and its links to migrant mobility were not included as a focus during the interviews. However, given its central importance, it was often raised without prompt. One incident that was raised repeatedly during the research period was the overturning of a truck in December 2021, killing 54 migrants who were being smuggled in the back. As the truck had already passed through several official checks, corruption within the migration authorities had likely contributed to the tragedy. Further, in April 2022 the husband of the head of the INM in Chiapas was arrested for suspected links to human smuggling operations. This institutional corruption manifesting in links to organised crime creates a high level of distrust of authorities amongst NGO workers and migrants themselves. Despite this lack of trust as “*they are allied with the cartels*”,¹²⁴ paying *coyote* people smugglers is one of the most efficient ways migrants can bypass the authorities. Therefore, whilst creating distrust, the corruption that allows these illicit activities to persist can be seen as a factor that contributes to the potential for migrants’ future movement.

It is evident that corruption, both at the level of the individual and institutional links to organised crime, can enable migrants to break through the regime of mobility in Chiapas. The corruption embedded in the system provides a chink in the oppressive armour of the State containment strategy, without which continuing travel towards the north would be more challenging. However, this does not mean that it is viewed as a positive factor amongst migrants. For those who do not have the resources to pay, corruption can act as a further barrier to movement, provoking anger among victims. “*It’s a violation of human rights. You wait three months to be given a legal document and they rip it up in one second and send you back. I don’t see that as fair.*”¹²⁵ On the other hand, even those who have paid the price and as a result been allowed to continue are angry with the process. Many

¹²³ Interview respondent 7 (migrant), interview conducted 26/04/22.

¹²⁴ Interview respondent 1 (migrant), interview conducted on 28/03/22.

¹²⁵ Interview respondent 6 (migrant), interview conducted 19/04/22.

migrants are politicised, aware of their rights and unhappy at having to pay for something they feel they are entitled to under international law.

This chapter has detailed the principal ways in which regimes of mobility are manifested in state policies and practices that constrain the movement of migrants in Chiapas. Through the policies and practices of militarization and institutional ambiguity, the Mexican authorities seek to restrict mobility of migrants to its southern region. This understanding of how regimes of mobility are manifested is vital in understanding how migrants navigate during their trajectory north. Corruption underpinning the containment strategies highlights the ambiguity involved in regimes of mobility in Chiapas. The illegality and collusion with organised crime mean that migration authorities are simultaneously implementing measures which restrict migrant mobility whilst also undermining these actions and facilitating their movement. These conflicting actions may not necessarily be done by different actors within the same system – both can be implemented concurrently by the same entity. This exposes the falsehood in treating limiting and aiding of mobility as mutually exclusive concepts and challenges existing presumptions within the academic literature. For instance, the work of Schapendonk et al presents a clear distinction between the spatial dynamics and spatial frictions produced by regimes of mobility.¹²⁶ However, the evidence presented in this section highlights the need to recognise that such clear categorisation may not always be possible, with the reality much more ambiguous and nuanced. The evidence of how regimes of mobility are manifested, as outlined in this chapter, is vital in understanding how migrants navigate during their trajectory north. Through analysing periods of immobility in Tapachula, the following chapter add further colour to the research puzzle through looking at the challenges, networks and responses involved during periods in the city.

¹²⁶ Schapendonk, J. et al. (2020). Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes, 213

5. Immobility in Tapachula

Having looked at how migration authorities enforce regimes of mobility in Chiapas through a dual system of militarization and institutional ambiguity, let us now turn our attention to an important stage of the migrant trajectory – periods of immobility within Tapachula. This will allow us to explore further the challenges faced by migrants during their time in the city. However, it also permits analysis of actions adopted by migrants in response, what networks they create, and ultimately how these factors contribute to their ability to navigate their journey. First, it is important to look at some of the biggest challenges migrants face in Tapachula and how these affect their potential for future movement. Then, analysis of key relationships forged by migrants will be included, namely those with other migrants, the local population and civil society. Finally, the chapter will finish with discussion on a significant migrant response to their situation – protests.

5.1 Challenges in Tapachula

“Not only does the system institutionally punish or do violence to people, but it also generates a scenario so that the entire environment, the entire context also punishes people.”¹²⁷

Living conditions for migrants in Tapachula are largely terrible, with many facing a continuous struggle to survive during periods waiting in the city. The first thing that struck me upon arrival in the city was the heat. Being outside during the harsher afternoon hours is a challenge in itself, with people taking cover in shady doorways wherever possible. Having previously heard that this city was bearing the brunt of one of the world’s largest migrant crises, I was shocked at the lack of infrastructure. It does not feel like a major city, and certainly not one capable of large-scale humanitarian response. Tapachula is characterised by its informality, with living rooms becoming makeshift restaurants and clothes shops and old converted minivans the city’s main form of public transport. As previously mentioned, the city is known as a prison city, partly because of the enforced nature of migrant entrapment within its limits, but also as a reference to the harsh environment to which

¹²⁷ Interview respondent 11 (NGO worker), interview conducted 3/05/22.

migrants are subjected. This environment creates a plethora of daily challenges for the migrant population, some of which will now be analysed in turn. These relate to needs of housing, security, and access to the labour market. Although migrants do their best to respond to these challenges, they can be difficult to overcome and their ability to build mobility capital is often negatively impacted.

Where migrants reside during their time in Tapachula varies and is largely contingent on the financial resources they have at their disposal. Those who have the option will often stay in cheap hotels within the city, preferring to use the money they have to ensure a roof over their head and added security. However, whilst many choose this option immediately after arrival, it is a difficult option to sustain as their resources dwindle. A less appealing but more common option is to sleep within the city's parks. When discussing his sleeping arrangements one migrant explained that, to stretch his resources further, he alternated between staying in hotels and sleeping in the park. However, when staying in the park he did not feel secure enough to properly sleep and was often left exhausted by the experience.

Parque Bicentenario is a popular option for large numbers of migrants, with blankets and tents regularly filling the shaded spaces. The migrant population in the parks fluctuates, depending on when groups of migrants have left in caravans. However, at times the park is cramped, with nowhere to sleep but the hard concrete ground. As can be seen in figure 4 (below), people do their best to provide comfort through bringing blankets and pillows. However, during conversations with migrants who had stayed in the park it was clear that sleep did not come easy in this environment. One reported being in a constant state of alert, prevented from deep sleep by the heat and almost constant presence of migration authorities in vehicles around the park. This is an unforgiving setting, with migrants dealing with temperatures consistently topping 35 degrees, heavy rainfall and a lack of access to basic services such as water and toilets. In response, they can regularly be seen disconnecting pipes running through the parks to fill bottles for drinking water, wash clothes or bathe their children. One interviewee stated that although he could put up with these

conditions at first, “*it really begins to make you suffer*”.¹²⁸ As discussed in the previous chapter, migrants can be entrapped in these conditions for months on end. During their stay they often have no access to medical services or education for children. Whilst certain NGOs try to assist migrants with pressing health concerns, the demand far outstrips the supply and so many are left with no treatment for their ailments. For those who are not in a healthy condition, continuing with a physically demanding journey through the country is difficult. During a meeting at CDH Fray Matias, one migrant was brought to tears as she shared details of her struggles finding medicine for the auto immune disease she suffered from. She explained how she felt that paying people smugglers to assist her travel was not possible as she did not trust her ability to survive in the back of a cramped truck. It was clear that this provoked a sense of hopelessness, with no option but to wait in Tapachula in the hope of a legal resolution that may never come.

A further issue that affects those who sleep in public places is a lack of security. It was a common concern within the dataset that having to stay in the park left them exposed to being detained by the authorities: “*I saw it when we first arrived, someone from the park left at night to go buy some food in the OXXO but was stopped on the road and taken away ... after that we stopped going anywhere without our documents*”.¹²⁹ In addition, the authorities sporadically decide to enforce measures that prohibit any migrant from residing in public places. Although unsustainable, these policies temporarily remove the last remaining sanctuary available to many and further complicate the struggle to survive in Tapachula. As could be expected, alongside the threat from the authorities is the fear of falling victim to theft or other forms of crime. To mitigate this risk, those present leave belongings together in large open spaces in the centre of the park so that they are easily viewable and difficult to steal undetected.

During a consultation at CDH Fray Matias, one migrant shared with those present that she had been a political activist in her home country and had to flee due to being targeted by the government. However, whilst waiting in the queue at COMAR in Tapachula, a fellow migrant compatriot had recognised her and greeted her warmly. She described the panic

¹²⁸ Interview respondent 6 (migrant), interview conducted 19/04/22.

¹²⁹ Interview respondent 3 (migrant), interview conducted 22/03/22.

this invoked, as through this greeting she was reminded of how easily accessible she could still be for those who had caused her to flee her country in search of safety. This emphasises that some migrants do not feel like they have the luxury of the option of waiting in Tapachula for legal recognition due to security concerns. Many who have reached the city are also fleeing violence from gangs, particularly those from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. As these gangs have international reach, some migrants still do not feel that Tapachula is a safe place to reside and thus do not feel comfortable waiting for long drawn-out legal processes to conclude. Crucially, Moret states that mobility capital also means having the option of not moving in order to build resources.¹³⁰ Given that migrants who feel unsafe may not feel like they have the option to stay in Tapachula during a longer period, this ultimately hinders their ability to acquire the necessary capital for future movement.

As evidenced in the previous chapter, sufficient economic resources are of vital importance during the migrant trajectory. Whilst being able to pay bribes to corrupt officials or to people smugglers allows some to ensure their ability to remain continuously mobile, these resources are also necessary to meet basic needs during the journey. For those stuck in Tapachula, long waiting times in the city can result in exhaustion of resources and lead to a lack of money for necessities such as food and water. Having already walked hundreds of kilometres to reach this point, one Venezuelan migrant approached me in the street to ask for my sandals, as one of his had broken on the journey. With much distance still to walk without proper footwear, this gives a small insight into the many difficulties a lack of resources can bring for migrants. For both those who have been granted legal status and those who seek to move without it, a lack of resources impinges on their ability to pay for the required transport through the vast expanse of Mexican territory before reaching the US border. Therefore, many migrants attempt to enter the labour market in Tapachula as a way of building economic capital that can be utilised for future movement. However, this is a challenging task, as the “*economic situation isn’t good here even for Mexicans. [There are] not many opportunities for work or study.*”¹³¹ The difficulty in finding employment opportunities was highlighted by one Nicaraguan migrant who was a trained mechanic and

¹³⁰ Moret, J. (2020). Mobility capital: Somali migrants’ trajectories of (im)mobilities and the negotiation of social inequalities across borders.

¹³¹ Interview respondent 10 (NGO worker), interview conducted 20.04.22.

spoke of his frustration at offering his services to 12 different employers within Tapachula to no avail.¹³² Furthermore, many of those who are successful in finding opportunities fall victim to labour exploitation, with little option but to accept low wages for long working hours. In response to these difficulties, many migrants try to insert themselves into the informal economy. As an example, one migrant explained that he spends time at the bank each day opening the doors for customers entering to use the ATM in exchange for tips.¹³³ Others sell food, drinks or crafts in public places in order to build resources. However, these attempts can be thwarted by the authorities who prohibit this activity and refuse to allow migrants to set up a stationary stall to sell such goods. As a result, I observed exhausted looking sellers moving continuously around the city to avoid the authorities, an activity made more difficult due to the harsh climatic conditions.

Many of those working informally within Tapachula are doing so to ensure their day-to-day survival, thereby not generating finances that can be put towards future movement. However, this acquisition of economic resources contributes to their ability to endure their time in the city. This ability to generate sufficient resources to endure a period of immobility is important when navigating regimes of mobility. Therefore, even when these resources are not being directly mobilised for the purposes of facilitating movement, they are assisting migrants in persisting with their trajectory during a period of stasis, until the opportunity to move again arises.

¹³² Interview respondent 1 (migrant), interview conducted on 28/03/22.

¹³³ Interview respondent 3 (migrant), interview conducted 22/03/22.



Figure 4: *Migrants settling down for the night in Parque Bicentenario, Tapachula.*

5.2 Networks

5.2.1 Migrant Networks

One of the key responses to the arduous situational factors present in Tapachula is the building of relationships and networks amongst the migrant community. This is evident through numerous daily acts of solidarity that contribute to navigating the situation. As examples, migrants often spoke of sharing food with others or keeping joint watch over rucksacks when spending long periods in public parks. One Venezuelan interviewee shared how she had met with a group of migrants from her home country who let her sleep for free in an apartment that they had rented in Tapachula.¹³⁴ Moreover, these networks extended beyond those who were present in the city. Many migrants have networks that exist transnationally, receiving financial help from friends or family in other countries or regions of Mexico. This assistance also moves beyond economic support, with information sharing commonplace among migrants and those who have gone before them and have understanding and experience of how best to navigate the journey. As an example of this information sharing, I overheard a phone conversation of one migrant explaining to another that he should pay for people smugglers at the US border, as if he crosses and

¹³⁴ Interview respondent 2 (migrant), interview conducted 28/03/22.

hands himself in to the authorities, he will have to pay bail anyway. It was also noteworthy that the solidarity shown between migrants also went beyond those with whom they had a personal relationship. This was highlighted by migrants expressing their desire to create an information trail for those who would arrive in Tapachula after they had moved on.¹³⁵

The networks formed by migrants when in Tapachula can be considered social capital. It is perhaps this kind of capital which contributes most to their future mobility. As will be analysed in the coming sections on protests and movement in caravans, the development of social connections with other migrants is a strong contributing factor that aids their ability to continue transit in Mexico. This highlights that although they are stationary, migrants often cannot be considered truly immobile as they engage in acquisition of capital that contributes to future movement.

5.2.2 Local Population

When attending a yoga class in the evening after migrant protests had occurred in the city, I listened in as one woman retold the story of what had happened with the rest of the group. The disdain in her voice as she lambasted the behaviour of migrants who had attacked the offices of the INM was hard to mistake. She believed that those who attacked were ungrateful of the assistance that Mexico was providing, and that whilst this behaviour may be acceptable in their home countries, it would not be tolerated here in Mexico. Although not as fervent in their criticism, the rest of the group largely appeared to agree with these assertions. This anecdote stresses the underlying tension that exists between the local residents of Tapachula and their temporary migrant neighbours. As this section will show, whilst relations between these two groups is often negative, there are instances in which positive associations are formed.

Due to the number of arrivals and extensive time periods that migrants spend in Tapachula, there are high levels of exposure with the local population. Given their proximity and frequency of interaction, it is important to assess how the relationship forged between these populations has connotations for migrants' ability to navigate their time in Tapachula.

¹³⁵ Interview respondent 7 (migrant), interview conducted 26/04/22.

Xenophobia and racism directed at migrants from the local community is widespread and there is a common feeling of dissatisfaction with their presence. When discussing the matter with locals or migrants, neither party appears to be satisfied with the relationship that has developed. This uneasy association often creates problems for migrants and may indirectly hinder their mobility. However, when scratching below the surface a less clear cut picture emerges, with acts of certain members of the local community actually facilitating migrant movement.

As the years have passed and migrants have continued to arrive in large numbers, the local population in Tapachula has become increasingly disillusioned with their presence in the city. Given their visible presence, some now feel unsafe within the city's public spaces. During the research period, it was notable that after the departure of a caravan left Parque Bicentenario empty, the benches and tables were quickly reoccupied by locals in the following days. As new migrant incumbents began to fill the spaces left by their predecessors, local residents again avoided the area. Further, residents of Tapachula who live near the offices of COMAR and the INM have written to authorities to request that the offices be moved from residential areas.¹³⁶ This feeling of dissatisfaction has led to a growing level of xenophobia and racism directed at those who are claiming asylum in Mexico. One migrant shared how locals discriminated against him due to his tattoos, which he believed caused them to associate him with gang membership.¹³⁷ Further, black migrants face racism within the city, with some locals refusing to permit them entry to businesses. This xenophobia is evidenced by the presence of "*no renting to foreigners*" signs displayed outside buildings for rent in the city. In addition, the price of those rooms that are rented to migrants are often hiked up or charged per person rather than the usual practice of renting the entire property for a set price.¹³⁸ Many of the taxi drivers operating in Tapachula refuse to provide services to migrants, especially when journeys extend beyond the city limits. The reasoning for this is that they are afraid to be accused of people smuggling by the authorities. Therefore, these taxi drivers are engaging in self-policing, afraid of reprisal for a crime which the authorities themselves are facilitating through corruption. Several

¹³⁶ Interview respondent 12 (NGO worker), interview conducted 9/05/22.

¹³⁷ Interview respondent 3 (migrant), interview conducted 22/03/22.

¹³⁸ Interview respondent 9 (NGO worker), interview conducted 28/04/22.

interviewees discussed how they believed the authorities fuelled racism against migrants by painting them in a negative light.¹³⁹ This emphasises how authorities may co-opt local communities into playing a mobility restricting role within the overall regime of mobility operating in Tapachula.

Despite being in the minority and therefore less visible, there have been certain acts by the local community that have assisted migrants during their time in Tapachula. As discussed in the previous section, migrants need to mobilise certain types of capital that contribute to their future movement in order to navigate regimes of mobility. Locals in Tapachula have aided this by helping with some of the challenges faced during this period of stasis. For example, soup kitchens have been set up that provide migrants with free food, thus easing their economic burden and making it easier for them to endure whilst waiting for the resolution of their legal process. Medical professionals, such as local doctors and nurses, have also provided migrants with free health care. Given the pressure on the local health system and the lack of resources to access such facilities, this is of great assistance to those who may not be in a suitable physical condition to continue with a demanding journey. Residents of Tapachula have also allowed migrants to stay on their properties whilst they wait in the city. This has also included rent free arrangements or only charging for the services used. These arrangements provide security for migrants that makes it more feasible for them to wait for the conclusion to their asylum claim.

Again, this relationship conveys the complexity with which mobility regimes operate. Whilst the academic literature correctly identifies that regimes of mobility coproduce spatial dynamics and spatial frictions,¹⁴⁰ there is little discussion on the possibility of these concepts overlapping. By highlighting how the local population in Tapachula can restrict and enable the mobility of migrants, the idea of a clear distinction between these concepts is further challenged.

¹³⁹ Interview respondent 8 (NGO worker), conducted 22/04/22 and Interview respondent 9 (NGO worker), interview conducted 28/04/22.

¹⁴⁰ Schapendonk, J. et al. (2020). Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes, 213

5.2.3 Civil Society

Each Friday as part of my volunteer role with CDH Fray Matias, I helped to facilitate a men's collective in a small air conditioned office in central Tapachula. Some of the activities included in its cycle, such as legal clinics, offered practical information that could directly aid those present with their journey. However, others involved sharing circles, carpentry workshops or a t shirt printing class. Whilst these do not directly contribute to the future movement of migrants, they offer temporary respite to the long days of waiting endured during time in Tapachula. There was a notable diversity of age and nationalities present at these meetings. A teenager from Haiti, a couple from Honduras and an elderly gentleman from Venezuela being amongst the regular attendees. However, where those present found commonalities was in their decision to go through proper legal channels. Those who choose to wait in Tapachula are much more likely to engage with civil society organisations, whilst those who seek quicker methods of departure see no reason to form such networks.

As evidenced up to this point, there is a complex web of interconnected networks that make up the migration industry in Tapachula. This network includes diverse actors such as multiple State authorities, local communities, private companies, criminal gangs and migrants themselves. A key part of Tapachula's existing migration industry is the various civil society organisations operating within the city. Migrant civil society includes international and local NGOs, shelters and faith-based organisations. As with all actors within the migration industry, the role adopted by civil society is not fixed and can shift or simultaneously fulfil contrasting functions. In order to understand the role of civil society it is necessary to elucidate some of the key means by which it contributes to migrants' navigation before situating its position within the overarching regime of mobility operating in Tapachula.

The framework of NGOs in Tapachula has grown as the number of people crossing the border has increased. In order to best meet the needs of migrants they attempt to coordinate response and work in alliances.¹⁴¹ In doing so, there are various ways in which

¹⁴¹ Interview respondent 11 (NGO worker), interview conducted 3/05/22.

they may enable the future mobility of those they assist. One of the principal ways in which they help is through providing legal advice. The legal system they are facing is riddled with institutional ambiguity and is cumbersome for migrants who have no knowledge of how the process works. Therefore, assisting migrants with their procedure provides more clarity and can contribute to the attainment of legal capital. This is done on an individual basis or through providing information sessions to larger groups (as shown in figure 5 below). As an example, CDH Fray Matias holds periodic sessions in which migrants are informed of the law, their rights and what challenges they may face during the procedure. For those in attendance, it is clear that they have a strong desire to be informed. Armed with pens and notebooks they jot down any information that may help with their process or future movement, asking questions relating to their specific case or predicament. However, the discretionary application of law makes it difficult for NGOs to provide concrete advice. As one interviewee stated: *“Really we can’t advise them what to do, we try to give us as much information as possible but they will have to make their own choice.”*¹⁴² When migrants arrive in Tapachula they are faced with a choice between validating their legal position through asylum or continuing as an irregular migrant. As mentioned above, NGOs will only be able to help with the former. Therefore, for those who have no interest in spending time in Tapachula to apply for asylum and see it only as a brief stopover on their journey, NGOs offer little and they are less likely to have any interaction. In contrast, those who stay longer term will be more inclined to avail of the services on offer.

Another way in which NGOs can be seen to enable the future mobility of migrants is through their work observing the actions of migration authorities and documenting abuses within the system. This is an indirect form of assistance that attempts to improve the system through exposure and advocacy. CDH Fray Matias conducts monthly visits to the detention centre *Siglo XXI* to monitor the conditions for those detained there, as well as monitoring of public spaces, checkpoints and border crossings. This has led to reports that document the abuses suffered by migrants and pressures the Mexican State to make positive changes. However, given the persistence of the militarized response and associated mistreatment, it is difficult to measure whether these efforts have had a positive effect on migrant mobility.

¹⁴² Interview respondent 9 (NGO worker), interview conducted 28/04/22.



Figure 5: Migrants attending an information session at the offices of CDH Fray Matias in Tapachula

Shelters also offer support to migrants in the form of food, shelter, medical care and information. Currently, the three operating in Tapachula are *Buen Pastor*, *Ejercito de Salvacion* and *Casa de Migrante Scalabrini*. The capacity of these shelters is limited and priority is usually given to those belonging to particularly vulnerable groups, such as women and children, disabled or LGBTQ. These spaces were described as “*a place to wash, recuperate after long journeys and build strength to go again*”.¹⁴³ Further, they are equipped with security cameras and don’t allow entry with any phone or weapon. As a result, they are viewed as safe spaces. Migrant trajectories are characterised by periods of mobility punctuated with periods of recuperation. Through allowing migrants to prepare for the next phase of their journey safely, these shelters directly contribute to their ability to continue moving. However, it is important not to present these shelters as a panacea. Although prohibited by law to conduct checks at locations in which migrants are sheltered by a civil society organisation,¹⁴⁴ raids have been conducted by the authorities at these locations. Following one such raid at *Buen Pastor*, one migrant lamented what he felt was a loss of the last remaining safe space he had in the city. The information provided by these shelters goes beyond the official legal processes. Instead, information is shared on where checkpoints are

¹⁴³ Interview respondent 1 (migrant), interview conducted on 28/03/22.

¹⁴⁴ Government of Mexico. (2011) Ley de Migracion. Art 76.

situated, where protection is available on key routes and which train routes to follow. Each migrant who stays in a shelter is given a map that can help for future navigation of the region. Lastly, shelters act as an important space in which connections between migrants are forged. This networking has important connotations for building social capital that may assist mobility, with many choosing to travel with those they have encountered along the way.

Although NGOs provide important services to migrants and work to promote their interests, it is clear they too are stitched into the fabric of the overarching regime of mobility. A lot of the funding that reaches these organisations comes from donors located in the US.¹⁴⁵ These donors supply funds to NGOs on the premise that they facilitate the asylum process in Mexico and help refugees integrate. Reflecting on funding being provided for NGOs to help migrants seek asylum and integrate, one interviewee stated: “*until they’re not cruelly forcing people to stay here and this massive militarization it’s just being invested in nothing, in a farce.*”¹⁴⁶ Migrants are given information on official processes, with those who choose to bypass these procedures unlikely to interact meaningfully with NGOs. There is tension evident here, at face value these organisations are working to facilitate the mobility of migrants but they are also fearful of radically challenging the system. By operating within the confines of a system that seeks to criminalize and entrap migrants whilst containing them in the south of Mexico, NGOs are validating the systems of control that are produced by regimes of mobility. It appears that the idea of migrants assimilating into life in Tapachula is unsustainable and unrealistic, with Mexico as a destination country being utilised as a smoke screen to deflect from the true aim of keeping unwanted arrivals away from the US border. In contrast, the information provided by shelters enables the mobility of migrants beyond those who follow the official legal process. The gifting of a map is a symbolic act that reveals a recognition that some migrants will navigate by avoiding detection from the authorities. The information outlined in this section further highlights that clear boundaries cannot be drawn between those actors that restrict or enable migrant mobility. Instead, we can observe the conflicting roles these actors play as migrants interact with them across different spaces and contexts.

¹⁴⁵ Interview respondent 8 (NGO worker), conducted 22/04/22.

¹⁴⁶ Interview respondent 8 (NGO worker), conducted 22/04/22.

5.3 Protests

*"Their first act of protest is deciding to leave their home countries"*¹⁴⁷

As a group of protestors march through the streets of Tapachula, draped in various flags of their home nations and chanting periodically, there is a clear outpouring of pent-up emotion. They carry placards and banners demanding freedom, dignity and a solution to their situation. The first stop is outside the Mexican Commission for Human Rights, where protest leaders address the crowd about the abuses faced at the hands of the migration authorities. Next, the crowd moves to the COMAR offices, the lengthy processes and lack of response the subsequent source of ire. Although this protest remained peaceful, the feeling of anger amongst the crowd hints that it would not take much to ignite a spilling over into a more forceful remonstration.

Having analysed the conditions in Tapachula and some of the key networks, it is now important to look at a key way in which migrants respond during periods of immobility in Tapachula. Therefore, this section will focus on migrant protests, with specific emphasis on the characteristics of these protests, why they protest and whether they help or hinder migrants' ability to remain mobile in the face of oppressive regimes of mobility. As is reflected by the opening quote above, protests begin long before they have reached Tapachula. Each act to challenge a system that seeks to contain them in their home countries can be looked upon as an act of protest and defiance. The simple refusal to engage with the official legal system in Chiapas is a method of showing their refusal to accept their position within a global hierarchy of mobilities.

Protests erupt sporadically in Tapachula. One NGO worker described how the first big protest a number of years ago was like "*an explosion*" that "*came right out of the migrants themselves*".¹⁴⁸ The protests are usually directed at the various migration authorities, with COMAR and the INM offices frequent sites of demonstration. Migrants are innovative in their forms of protest, as many often take on a performative aspect. These forms of protest

¹⁴⁷ Interview respondent 8 (NGO worker), conducted 22/04/22.

¹⁴⁸ Interview respondent 12 (NGO worker), interview conducted 9/05/22.

certainly grab the attention, offering up harrowing sights. For instance, protestors regularly sew their lips shut. Others have chained themselves to a cross in mock crucifixions or partaken in hunger strikes. When discussing protests with migrants I always asked why they participate. For a resounding majority of those responding the answer was the same - forcing the authorities to listen to their plight. Although the majority of these demonstrations are conducted peacefully, a number have escalated into violent interactions. On 18 March 2022, a group of around 500 migrants carried out road blocks and marches that culminated outside the offices of the INM. As shown in figure 6 below, when situated outside of these offices, the levels of frustration reached boiling point and the protesters began to throw rocks at the officials guarding the premises. Eventually, migrants broke into the offices and destroyed computer equipment and furniture. This highlights an extreme example of their refusal to accept the status quo and their commitment to demanding change that allows them to resume their northward trajectory.



Figure 6: Migrants breaking into offices of the INM in Tapachula. Photo credit: Alejandro Gomez: Diario Del Sur.

The protests that erupt in Tapachula are a product of the factors already detailed in this thesis. Lack of institutional response, harsh living conditions in Tapachula and the abuses faced when trying to navigate the region all contribute to a growing sense of frustration, anger and discontent.

“People protested for the lack of hope, the frustration at being a migrant and not being able to transit freely, because the situation is unmanageable sleeping in the streets and parks with nothing to eat. People had to take things into their own hands.”¹⁴⁹

Another factor that contributes to the outbreak of protests is the fact that by the time they reach Tapachula, migrants are already committed. They no longer have the option of turning back and so protests manifest as an act of desperation aimed at breaking through the quagmire of the city. Equally, given the scarcity of resources and opportunities, they don't have the option of accepting perpetual periods of immobility in Tapachula. In this sense, the operation of the mobility regime is somewhat paradoxical. The brutal containment strategies and living conditions that migrants are subjected to as a method of restricting them give them no other choice but to try and remain mobile and continue. Through protesting, migrants are taking an active role in defying the authorities and contributing to their own future movement. A common reflection amongst migrants during the research period was their belief in their right for a dignified and safe life. As this was not available to them in Tapachula, they believe they have the right to transit freely to a location where this objective can be attained.

When observing the long days spent by migrants in the various public spaces of Tapachula it would be easy to mistakenly attribute an air of passivity to their period of immobility. However, protests emphasise that they are engaging in strategic processes to navigate mobility regimes. The demonstrations carried out in Tapachula are highly organised, with leaders channelling popular discontent to demand the attention of the authorities. Information is shared through WhatsApp groups and meetings take place within the city's public spaces. Whilst the protests are largely migrant led, local activists are also involved in their organisation. This has important implications, as originally protests took longer to erupt as pressure and frustration grew amongst those entrapped in the city. However, as early protests provided a blueprint, local activists contributed to organising future demonstrations with migrants who may have been in the city for shorter timescales. This has also resulted in protests occurring at a more frequent rate. What becomes apparent

¹⁴⁹ Interview respondent 2 (migrant), interview conducted 28/03/22.

here is a picture of migrant agency in contributing to their future movement. During this period of immobility when they are restricted from acquiring the necessary legal or financial capital to move, migrants are building social capital through migrant networks and connections with local activists. This social capital is mobilised in the form of protests to gain the attention of the authorities and raise the possibility that they will be allowed to move on.

Judging the success of these protests in regard to whether they limit or enable migrant mobility is complex and may change on a case by case basis. For instance, during a presidential visit to Tapachula migrants conducted a large scale protest that resulted in dialogue with the government. Consequently, promises were made to process the legal applications of those present within a designated timeframe. Therefore, these protests can be seen as having a direct effect on the potential for future movement of migrants through ensuring quicker resolutions and the acquisition of the required legal status. However, after the attacks on the INM offices detailed above, all offices were closed and immigration processes suspended for several weeks. Therefore, the short term implications were that no legal processes were concluded and migrants had no option but to leave as an irregular migrant or wait for an even longer timescale. Kaufmann et al detail how mobility capital includes the “the option of non-action”, or the ability to remain stationary.¹⁵⁰ However, in this case migrants do not feel they have this option and so must protest to manoeuvre political leverage and speed up processes. Despite this, it is clear that on occasion this strategic decision enhances migrants’ potential for future movement. This emphasises that mobility regimes are not always determining structures, with migrant agency creating possibilities that may assist in their navigation of containment strategies.

This chapter has analysed dynamics involved during an important point in the migrant trajectory – their stay in Tapachula. Assessing the challenges faced by migrants has enabled us to see some of the factors that may impinge upon their capability for future mobility. In particular, access to adequate housing, security and labour market opportunities make it

¹⁵⁰ Kaufmann, V. Bergman M. Joye, D. (2004). Mobility: Mobility as Capital. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research. Volume 28.4.

difficult for many to acquire the necessary capital for movement or to endure the time in the city until they have legal permission to leave. As a result, many see no other option but to leave via alternate means, as will be discussed in the the following chapter. Through discussion of the different networks that migrants engage in during their time in Tapachula, it is evident that there is often a blurred line between actors who limit or facilitate movement. This has important connotations for migrants' ability to navigate regimes of mobility, as actors beyond the State can form part of the apparatus that constrains their movement. Lastly, through forging certain relationships, building social capital and engaging in protests during their time in the city, it is clear that migrants are active in shaping their own potential for future movement. Unprepared to accept the status quo and leave their fates solely in the hands of the power structures that entrap them, they engage in coordinated action to challenge systems of containment. Migrant agency will be further explored in the following chapter, where analysis of methods of remaining mobile will be undertaken.

6. Migrant Trajectories

The previous section has analysed some of the key challenges, networks and responses involved during periods of immobility in Tapachula. In navigating regimes of mobility in Chiapas, it is vital to take a more in depth look at the periods of movement undertaken. There are numerous ways in which migrants may remain mobile, with each individual making decisions along the way on which option best facilitates their objective of reaching their destination. As evidenced in chapter 4, the actions of the authorities create obstacles for the migrant trajectory. This often requires a flexible approach to movement, whereby migrants utilise numerous routes, strategies and tactics to continue. Although each trajectory is unique, this section will attempt to detail some of the key ways in which movement is maintained. First, the issue of crossing the territorial border will be assessed, before attention shifts to regular and irregular migration. Regular migration refers to those migrants who have obtained the necessary legal status in Mexico to travel freely. Irregular migration involves those who lack this legal status and thus seek to evade the authorities and travel undetected. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an important migrant strategy to remain mobile – movement in caravans. It should be noted that although caravans are also a form of irregular migration, their prominence as a mobility strategy means they will be treated separately.

6.1 Crossing Borders

The official entry points on the Mexico-Guatemala border in Chiapas do not feel like places in which sophisticated policing of borders takes place. During the research period, visits were made to the crossing at Ciudad Hidalgo and Talisman. In both of these locations there was a general feeling of organised chaos, with huge flocks of people crossing whilst currency converters and transport operators yelled for attention. Many Guatemalan locals who live close to the border have visa permissions to enter Mexico for work, and there was a steady stream of these day labourers passing into Mexico and having their card scanned by a bored looking border official. As this was observed, it appeared that occasionally someone would pass with no interaction and no scanning of any visa. All of this contributed to the feeling that passing undetected into Mexico would not be a significant challenge to migrants, many of whom are experienced in evading the authorities. This appeared to be at

odds with the highly restrictive strategies used by migration authorities throughout the rest of the state.

When the above observation was relayed to my supervisor at CDH Fray Matias, he shared that the policing of the border in Chiapas was inconsistent. At times security is rather lax whilst at others it is more heavily policed and aggressive. Again, he believed this largely depended on pressure from the US, with heavier handed policing of borders implemented in periods in which the Mexican state wanted to showcase their attempts at managing migration flows. During one interview, crossing the border was described as “*the first major obstacle faced by migrants*”.¹⁵¹ However, this is not necessarily true, and emphasises how perspectives can be rooted in imaginaries of national boundaries. As discussed in Chapter 4, the physical border is just one obstacle in the midst of many that will come before and after. In contrast, another interviewee felt that Tapachula was the real border, believing that breaking from the confines of the city was much more challenging than crossing into Mexico.¹⁵² However, these attempts at locating where the border truly lies does not reflect the lived reality of migrants. During the many conversations had with migrants about their trajectory until reaching Tapachula, they did not demarcate between the period before and after entering Mexico. For them, the hurdles they had faced in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, or whichever other countries they had passed through, were all part of the same journey. In trying to reach their ultimate destination, the border began as soon as they decided to leave home, emphasising the manifestation of regimes of mobility across borders.

There are three main routes through which migrants cross into Mexico from Guatemala, as shown in figure 1 (page 9). The first route is located closest to the pacific coast and contains both official border crossings discussed above. Given that this route usually leads migrants to Tapachula, the majority of those included in the dataset had crossed in this region. The other two main routes chosen are the central passage into Chiapas and a more northernly crossing through the jungle into neighbouring state Tabasco before re-entering Chiapas. One Venezuelan migrant who had spent three months walking with a small group from her

¹⁵¹ Interview respondent 10 (NGO worker), interview conducted 20.04.22.

¹⁵² Interview respondent 9 (NGO worker), interview conducted 28/04/22.

home country to Mexico discussed why she chose to enter via the more central passage at La Mesilla. Having spent months walking through the whole of Central America without engaging with the authorities in any of the countries she had walked through, she intended to continue with the same tactics upon arrival in Mexico. Many migrants choose the coastal route as it facilitates an easier arrival in Tapachula, and thus quicker application for asylum. However, although aware of this, she believed it sounded like bait to be captured by the authorities and decided to take her chances entering undetected at La Mesilla before continuing northward without the correct legal permissions.¹⁵³ After deciding upon this tactic she continued undetected to central Mexico, where she was detained before being returned to Tapachula. Lastly, in choosing the jungle route, migrants are less likely to be detained due to a lack of police presence. However, this is a physically demanding journey, with 5 days of travelling through the jungle required before arrival to the Mexican side of the border.

All but one migrant in the dataset had travelled to Tapachula through the coastal route, but they had utilised a variety of different strategies to cross the border. The first way that migrants may cross into Mexico is through the official entry points. This was the path chosen by one Honduran migrant who had fled his home country due to being threatened for being in a homosexual relationship. As he had been a successful businessman in Honduras he believed he was able to enter freely with his American visa. However, as discussed in chapter 4, despite this visa he was forced to pay a bribe to border guards. When discussing this it was clear that his pride had been dented by the ordeal, feeling that it was an injustice to have fallen foul of the corrupt system.¹⁵⁴

The majority of migrants crossing the border do so by stealth. This is usually done by picking a point away from the official entry points where there are less migration authorities policing the area. The border in the southern part of Chiapas, covering the coastal route, is marked by the river Suchiate. Therefore, migrants choose to pay for a raft or wade across shallower sections. When discussing this form of entry with a Guatemalan migrant he shared that he took off all of his clothes and waded across the river in the middle of the

¹⁵³ Interview respondent 2 (migrant), interview conducted 28/03/22.

¹⁵⁴ Interview respondent 7 (migrant), interview conducted 26/04/22.

night to avoid detection. When asked about the experience he appeared quite relaxed, explaining that he this was his third time making the journey to the US. He explained that crossing the river Suchiate was safer than the Rio Grande at the northern border, where the threat of drowning was much greater. In his view, the objective and most important consideration was to cross without being detected by the Mexican authorities.¹⁵⁵ Once migrants have successfully bypassed controls at the border between Mexico and Guatemala they must focus on how to continue their journey northward. The diverging strategies for doing so will now be analysed within the following sections.

6.2 Regular Migration

When migrants arrive to Tapachula, they often plan to follow the correct legal channels, apply for asylum then travel through Mexico once the official permissions have been granted. The first reason that they choose to follow this method is that factors beyond their control have made it difficult to choose an alternative option. For instance, as evidenced in this thesis, travelling all the way to the US border without being detained by the migration authorities is an extremely difficult task. During conversations with migrants, I always inquired why they chose to attempt to move legally. What emerged was a desire for peace of mind. They believed that having the correct legal permissions would mean a more stress free journey, during which they would not pushed into riskier hidden routes whilst trying to evade the authorities. Underlying this aspiration, it was clear that there was a desire to avoid the criminalisation associated with irregular migration.

The nationality of migrants often has an impact on the mobility strategies used. Many of the Haitian migrants in Tapachula have spent long stints in countries such as Chile or Brazil before arriving to Mexico. Their migratory practices involve waiting for longer periods to gain the necessary legal capital to move once again. This is no different in Mexico, with more Haitian migrants willing to wait for the long legal process to resolve before moving onward towards the US. However, given the discretionary application of law this can be a risky process. During a meeting with members of the Haitian community at the offices of CDH Fray Matias, one migrant spoke of the challenges she had faced with the system in

¹⁵⁵ Interview respondent 3 (migrant), interview conducted 22/03/22.

Mexico. Having arrived in Mexico and applied for asylum, she was granted a humanitarian visa that should allow her to move freely throughout the country. However, when travelling by bus she was stopped by officials who informed her that this visa only allowed her to travel with Chiapas and forced her to return to Tapachula. This highlights that although the official law and policies of the authorities preach equality of application, racism at the level of implementing officials can act as a barrier to mobility. Further, this emphasises the inherent risk in choosing regular migration as a strategy for movement, with no guarantees that authorities will uphold legal permissions.

During one afternoon in Parque Bicentenario, a Guatemalan migrant with sturdy looking walking boots and a backpack ambled into the vicinity. Having caught my eye he took a seat beside me and explained that this was his first day in Tapachula. He had already made the journey to the US once but having been deported, he was attempting it again. This time would be different, he asserted. The experience of being robbed in Mexico had convinced him that this time he would do things legally, with plans to make an appointment with COMAR the following day. We exchanged numbers and he agreed to meet for an interview in the coming days. However, within 3 days of our first encounter he informed me via WhatsApp that he had left Tapachula in a migrant caravan. This highlights the pragmatism involved in the migrant trajectory. Whilst many initially decide to go through legal channels, they are flexible enough to take a different option when opportunities arise or frustration with the system builds. Whilst the anecdote above points to an opportunistic decision to leave the city, for others this decision is taken as a last resort. Put simply, “*when people run out of resources and don’t have the option to obtain more – they move*”.¹⁵⁶ This leads us to analysis of methods of irregular migration, as will be discussed in the following sections.

6.3 Irregular Migration

Sitting across from a migrant interviewee in a busy Tapachula café, the dangers inherent in the well travelled route through Mexico quickly become apparent as he recounts his story. He informs me that this is the third time he has undertaken the journey to the US but that it

¹⁵⁶ Interview respondent 11 (NGO worker), interview conducted 3/05/22.

is just as fraught with peril as the first time. Amidst the bustle of the café, he is eager to tell his story and shares a number of terrifying accounts in quick succession.

*"I was leaving Querétaro along the nearby train tracks. Not one person at 22:00 at night, not one person was there. Suddenly a man approached and asked where are you from? From around here, I told him, for fear of kidnapping and all. Then, I turned my face. He took out a weapon. Deep down, deep down inside me, in my thoughts, a voice said to me, if this man kills you, do you think you will go to heaven? Get out of here, he tells me. I don't know why I looked back, but I see then he took out an R 15 and raised it. When he is lifting the R 15, I am putting my foot forward to push myself, to run. When I take the first steps and start running, I heard the weapon shoot. I hid and then they started looking for me with a few more. I stayed hidden until dawn."*¹⁵⁷

Other experiences included being robbed of all possessions and hiding in undergrowth at the side of train tracks as he watched men dispose of a body. Although these stories may seem extreme, the experiences that Luis shares in a five minute burst are not uncommon amongst migrants who have made the risky journey through Mexico. This section will shine further light on some of the strategies utilised by migrants when attempting to evade the authorities, remain mobile and reach their final migratory destination.

The heavy policing of migration and aggressive containment tactics utilised by the State force migrants into more risky routes to avoid detection. Travelling by public transport on the main roads through Chiapas is virtually impossible for undocumented migrants, with regular checkpoints making it highly unlikely they will be allowed to continue. Aside from the checkpoints, the State has conferred a policing role on the private sector as bus companies have to check for proper documentation before selling a ticket. Migrants are well aware of the dangers of travelling without documents but feel it is a better choice than waiting in Tapachula for an undefined time period. The most common fear relayed during

¹⁵⁷ Interview respondent 1 (migrant), interview conducted on 28/03/22.

conversations with migrants was that travelling by these more clandestine routes would force them into contact with criminal groups and leave them exposed to robbery. Many migrants opt to pay people smugglers as they know they will be under their protection. However, choosing this method of travel involves a high financial outlay and is also characterised by risk: "*they mount them in trailers, sometimes without air, without anything... perhaps a truck goes there for 20 - 36 hours and does not carry water, they can suffocate or die.*"¹⁵⁸

One of the main tactics used by migrant when moving through Mexico is to travel by the infamous train '*La Bestia*'. Taking this option involves mounting a moving cargo train to travel through the countryside. When discussing this with migrants their anxiousness was often visible, with the horror stories of the deaths, rapes and robberies aboard the train contributing to a sense of foreboding at having to take this route. One interviewee shared that although he understood the risks of travelling this way, the distances involved were too far to cover on foot.¹⁵⁹ A common tactic shared by those who travel undocumented was to travel through the countryside or mountains wherever possible. Avoiding main roads was also preferable. Whilst these strategies are common amongst almost all who choose this method of travel, there are also diverging preferences. For instance, one interviewee shared how she travels slowly and covers short distances each time. Her reasoning was that this allowed for stops in small towns to gather information on where the migration authorities were operating and where the checkpoints were located.¹⁶⁰ Through adopting these voluntary short periods of immobility, she enhances her potential for future movement through gaining a better understanding of the environment through which she travels. In contrast, another migrant shared how he preferred to move quickly, limiting stops and avoiding any longer periods of immobility. He believed that the longer he stayed in a town, the more time people would have to analyse him, deduce that he is travelling alone and thus leave him at risk of being kidnapped.¹⁶¹ Of vital importance to travelling as an undocumented migrant is the need for flexibility. While conversing with migrants who had

¹⁵⁸ Interview respondent 1 (migrant), interview conducted on 28/03/22.

¹⁵⁹ Interview respondent 3 (migrant), interview conducted 22/03/22.

¹⁶⁰ Interview respondent 2 (migrant), interview conducted 28/03/22.

¹⁶¹ Interview respondent 5 (migrant), interview conducted 07/04/22.

made the journey before, it was clear that there is a need to be pragmatic when travelling. The unpredictability of migration authorities, criminal gangs and arising opportunities meant that constant revaluations are carried out to decide on the option that maximises their potential for continued movement.

An important factor impacting on mobility is the networks created with other migrants. Those who travel without documents are apprehensive about the journey and feel that moving with a group provides a level of security they would not have if travelling alone. One migrant shared how he had been with the same group of Hondurans throughout their whole journey. As we talk on a park bench, he waves his arm at a group of about 4 or 5 migrants lounging nearby on a shady patch of grass to escape the afternoon sun. He explains that the group have slept outdoors together, shared food and continuously discussed strategy throughout their trajectory. In this instance the group knew each other before beginning their migratory journey, but in other cases migrants create alliances as they move. For example, many choose to move with those they have met when staying in shelters or during periods of waiting in public parks. Similar to the impersonal networks discussed in chapter 5, migrants also use WhatsApp and Facebook groups in periods of movement. These are used to provide tips such as where checkpoints are located, where there is space in shelters or locations offering free food. The relationship of solidarity between migrants is also reflected in the language they use, often referring to each other as 'migrant brothers and sisters' and talking of a shared desire for a safe and dignified life.

However, the solidarity shared when travelling with a group has to be balanced with its effects on visibility. Travelling in larger groups ensures it is more difficult to blend in and remain undetected by the authorities. One interviewee preferred to travel alone, always pretending to be a local and lying to those who ask by stating that he is from the proximity. Another told of how after crossing the border into Mexico he immediately took a minibus to Tapachula whilst trying to blend in with locals as much as possible. This ability to conceal their identity in order to facilitate mobility is not shared equally amongst migrants. For instance, those who come from Central America have closer linguistic and cultural ties, as well as a shared race, and so are more difficult to detect. On the other hand, black migrants from the likes of Haiti or the African continent are less likely to speak Spanish and easier to

detect due to their race. This was evidenced during a trip on public transport between Talisman border crossing and Tapachula, in which a stop at a temporary checkpoint resulted in identifications checks for only one black passenger.

As mentioned several times throughout this thesis, many of the migrants in transit in Chiapas have already made this journey before. Some had been settled in the US before being deported, whilst others had been detained during a previous attempt at moving through Mexico. It is important to analyse whether the migratory experience gained has implications for future mobility. Those who had made the journey before had a better understanding of the route. They knew where the shelters were, which are the riskier routes and how to avoid organised crime more effectively. One migrant shared that he had learnt that "*when I see something strange, I know instantly to look for a way out or somewhere to hide. I have a sense of when there is danger*".¹⁶² This ability to sense danger and to adjust his trajectory accordingly is likely to have positive implications for his ability to continue moving. This would appear to validate Moret's claim that a key component of mobility capital is past experiences of mobility. She asserts that "through movement, migrants (and others) accumulate technical and cognitive skills that are useful for crossing borders again, or rather to cross them in an increasingly fruitful manner."¹⁶³ However, in the context of the current research it is important not to overstate the effect this previous experience of mobility has on future movement. When discussing what they had learnt on previous journeys north, several migrants were keen to stress that the journey had not gotten any easier. Indeed, one shared that as the migration authorities had gotten tougher to evade, continuing the journey was more difficult now than ever. Further, migrants' ability to pick up a better understanding of how to navigate the systems designed to restrict them is impinged by the fact that Mexico's policies and laws are constantly in a state of flux. Lastly, NGO workers observed that migrants who were arriving for the second or third time were often jaded.¹⁶⁴ The constant battle to navigate the system is exhausting and those who

¹⁶² Interview respondent 1 (migrant), interview conducted on 28/03/22.

¹⁶³ Moret, J. (2020). Mobility capital: Somali migrants' trajectories of (im)mobilities and the negotiation of social inequalities across borders. 239.

¹⁶⁴ Interview respondent 8 (NGO worker), interview conducted 22.04.22 & Interview respondent 12 (NGO worker), interview conducted 9/05/22.

found themselves repeating such a journey are disheartened by how the process has become even slower and more challenging.

6.4 Caravans



Figure 7: Migrant caravan leaving Tapachula in 2022. Photo Credit: Forbes Mexico

In the period before a migrant caravan leaves the city, there is a palpable tension in the air. Public spaces become a hive of activity as migrants share details of departure, organise belongings and try to gather food and water for the journey. In the 5 days leading up to the first caravan leaving during the research period, it was visibly clear that there was a build-up of migrants in the parks of Tapachula. Although a sense of hope can be detected within the ranks of those destined to depart, there is also an uneasiness. In times before such departures, migrants are busy organising amongst their networks. As the gathering groups swell, people move between clusters passing information about what to bring, when to leave and where they are going. When analysing movement in caravans as a strategy for navigating regimes of mobility in the region, it is necessary to assess why migrants choose to do so. Further, the response of the authorities to these episodes of mass movement is also important. Once these factors have been considered, attention can then turn to how successful they are as a migratory tactic.

As mentioned, moving in caravans is also a form of irregular migration. In contrast to the methods discussed in the preceding section, movement in this way does not rely on remaining undetected. Instead, they are a highly visible form of mobility, with groups of between 500-5000 people choosing to leave the city together in an attempt to continue their journey. In doing so, these people are engaging in an act of defiance to the policies designed to keep them there. While movement in this manner is not a new phenomenon, the nature of these caravans has changed in recent years. In 2019 when migrant caravans gained international attention, they were forming in countries such as Honduras as a way for people to safely cross Central America in a large group. However, today migrants are arriving to Tapachula separately and organising such caravans from the city itself.

One of the main reasons migrants choose to move in this way is that they believe it gives them security: "*The migra (INM) aren't going to do anything. They don't want to lose their jobs by doing something when there are so many people. It would cause a lot of noise.*"¹⁶⁵ The idea that travelling in this way kept migrants secure from migration authorities is unfounded, as will be evidenced below, but nonetheless a key factor. People felt that there was safety in numbers, especially those without the money or confidence to travel alone. It was clear that having arrived in Tapachula in small groups or as individuals, coming together in such a large group gave migrants a sense of strength that they had not previously felt. Similarly, there was a strong sense of solidarity involved with moving in this way: "*We are more humanistic, more united, we have more humility and see ourselves as the human beings that we are. We are people with the same path, the same direction, without causing harm to anyone.*"¹⁶⁶ The camaraderie between migrants is evident in the days leading up to the departure of a caravan, with groups of different nationalities mixing and sharing information in the city's public spaces. The final important factor that contributes is the build-up of frustration. Migrants are no longer willing to accept entrapment in the city and so seek alternative methods to movement. They believe they have a right to a dignified life and the necessary transit required to achieve it. As a result, they do not accept their position of enforced stasis in a hierarchy of mobilities prescribed by global power structures.

¹⁶⁵ Interview respondent 2 (migrant), interview conducted 28/03/22.

¹⁶⁶ Interview respondent 1 (migrant), interview conducted on 28/03/22.

In regard to organisation, the mechanics are similar to those leading to the protests covered in chapter 5. Caravans are largely organised by migrants themselves, with the input of local activists. Utilising networks forged along the way and in Tapachula itself, information is shared on Facebook, WhatsApp groups and in person detailing when the caravan will leave, what to expect and what to bring. This represents another example of social capital that can be mobilised for movement. Whilst caravans are largely the result of a build-up of pressure from being entrapped in Tapachula, the timescale required before their departure has reduced significantly. In August 2021 a large caravan left the city as a result of almost 9 months of containment in the city. At that time, the migrant population of Tapachula was estimated to be close to 100,000 and living conditions were atrocious.¹⁶⁷ However, caravans are now leaving at a rate of more than one a month in 2022. This emphasises that now that a blueprint for movement has been established, some migrants are foregoing the lengthy battle with bureaucracy in the city and taking matters into their own hands as an alternative solution. Despite the high levels of organisation, for those who are not involved there is often uncertainty and confusion. As information is often passed by word of mouth, messages become skewed and expectations diverge. For instance, before the departure of a caravan in April, many migrants waiting in Parque Bicentenario believed that the government had granted them an amnesty that allowed free travel to the border of the US. Others believed that they were going to walk to a different city where their asylum applications could be processed quicker. Thus, whilst they may agree on the need to break from the confines of Tapachula, their perceived objectives of this manner of movement are not always congruent.

Following the exit of a caravan on 1st April 2022, the group was stopped forcefully by the national guard a short distance from the city. Clad in riot gear, the national guard refused to allow the group to advance further. Later that day, as part of a humanitarian observation with CDH Fray Matias, I was in attendance to witness the aftermath. Some of those involved in the caravan had been injured by clashes with the authorities and sat bleeding by the side of the road. Many more had taken up residence in the grounds of a church, where they were to spend the night. The optimistic air that had swept through the group as they left the

¹⁶⁷ Interview respondent 8 (NGO worker), interview conducted 22.04.22.

city was left in tatters. This emphasises the active response the authorities can take to movement in this way. Caravans are often violently broken up before migrants are put onto buses provided by the authorities and sent to different cities to process their asylum claims. Another response of the authorities is to make the journey as difficult as possible for those travelling on foot. Covering vast distances in high temperatures is challenging for migrants. This is exacerbated by the INM who travel ahead and tell restaurants and shops to close as the caravan is approaching. As a result, migrants cannot access the food and water required and exhaustion sets in.¹⁶⁸ Further, municipal leaders were told not to mount a humanitarian response whilst traffic behind the caravan was blocked to ensure migrants could not hitchhike.¹⁶⁹

“They broke the trap, they broke Tapachula – because they got out.”¹⁷⁰ This statement reflects a commonly held view that just getting out of Tapachula represents a success for migrants. The city has become such a focus as a site of entrapment that just leaving its limits can represent an achievement for some. However, it is important not to forget it is just one particularly challenging obstacle in a long line of many. One interviewee shared how after caravans have been broken up and migrants sent to other cities to have their claims processed, they are often penalised for having left Tapachula. Those who had initiated a legal claim for asylum in Tapachula are told that leaving the city has resulted in an abandonment of this process and they must now return.¹⁷¹ Therefore, whilst initially migrants may have thought they had gotten what they wanted by being transferred to another location with less pressure on the system, they are ultimately unable to escape the cycles of entrapment. This emphasises that although migrant agency in formulating coordinated action to challenge systems of containment may be considered a success, it depends on what parameters this success is judged by. Ultimately, success means reaching the objective of their overall trajectory. For many, this entails entering the US. Therefore, the success of caravans as a method of navigating regimes of mobility cannot be judged in

¹⁶⁸ Interview respondent 12 (NGO worker), interview conducted 9/05/22.

¹⁶⁹ Interview respondent 9 (NGO worker), interview conducted 28/04/22.

¹⁷⁰ Interview respondent 8 (NGO worker), interview conducted 22.04.22.

¹⁷¹ Interview respondent 11 (NGO worker), interview conducted 3/05/22.

isolation using only one phase of the journey but must be considered as its part of the overall picture of the migrant trajectory.

This chapter has highlighted the myriad ways in which migrants attempt to maintain their mobility. Crossing the border into Mexican territory can be approached through different strategies. Once advancing through Chiapas, migrants may choose to follow a path of regular migration, through acquiring the proper legal permissions. On the other hand, others may engage in irregular migration, either by adopting strategies to remain undetected or through partaking in coordinated group movements in the form of a caravan. There is no best practice to follow here, and migrants make decisions based on their personal circumstances, capabilities or preferences. The evidence presented in this chapter has also shown that the mobility strategies utilised are not static. For instance, the introduction of caravans as a method to leave Tapachula has resulted in shorter waiting times in the city for those who choose this option. However, this does not necessarily mean that this option is more successful than others, merely that the ever evolving dynamics have changed. This chapter has added significant evidence that helps answer the overall question of how migrants navigate regimes of mobility. Overall, what emerges is a picture of pragmatism. In order to maintain movement, they are constantly engaging in assessments and readjustments to choose the decision best suited to their needs in that moment. This flexibility reflects migrant agency during their navigation. They are not prepared to remain passive in the face of restriction of movement, but rather seek alternative methods designed to facilitate their overall objective of reaching their migratory destinations.

7. Conclusion

The findings presented in this thesis emphasise that when theorising regimes of mobility, there is a need to move beyond the territorial border of the nation state as a primary unit of analysis. Thus, whilst it is important to recognise the influence that the Mexican State has on the manifestation of regimes of mobility, it should also be noted that falling into the trap of methodological nationalism should be avoided. Methodological nationalism can be considered an “ideological orientation that approaches the study of social and historical processes as if they were contained within the borders of individual nation-states.”¹⁷² These regimes do not begin and end where these national boundaries lie, but instead are manifested by different polices and actors that interact and exist across borders. For instance, international power dynamics between United States and Mexico have a big part to play in the policies and practices that are implemented in Chiapas. Therefore, regimes of mobility are not constructs that can be confined by official borderlines. This has important implications for the fields of mobility, migration and border studies, as there is a need to look beyond the practices occurring at the physical border, instead looking at how regimes of mobility manifest in different environments throughout an overall trajectory. Therefore, whilst the militarization of borders may be the most visible manifestation of the overarching regime of mobility in this region, there is a need to shift attention to policies and practices that may be implemented internationally, far from physical borders and within urban environments such as Tapachula. This thesis has shown that these policies and practices may be affected by a wide range of actors beyond the State, including local populations, NGOs, criminal gangs and the private sector. In order to better understand how regimes of mobility shape the migrant trajectory, further research that utilises the trajectory approach to analyse migrant transit across borders and throughout different contexts would add important value to these fields of study.

The second major finding of this thesis emphasises the ambiguity of roles played by actors under regimes of mobility. As mentioned above, when analysing regimes of mobility and migrants’ ability to navigate, it is important to look at a wide range of actors. However, it is

¹⁷² Glick Schiller, N. & Salazar, N. (2013). Regimes of Mobility Across the Globe, 189.

often not possible to separate these actors into those who enable and those who limit migrant mobility. Instead, the evidence in this study suggests that actors can simultaneously facilitate and constrain mobility, or shift role depending on the time, space and context. Through looking at the State as a primary unit of analysis, it may be assumed that it is a homogenous actor. However, this thesis has shown the reality to be very different, with various state entities affecting migrants' capacity to navigate in contrasting ways. Whilst at times policies and practices contained under militarization and institutional ambiguity are primarily restricting actors, at others corrupt interactions with migrants ensures State actors may simultaneously play a mobility enabling role. This blurred line between the restriction and enabling of movement was further highlighted by the roles played by the local population, migrant civil society and the private sector. This has important connotations for the academic literature, highlighting that the clear distinction between spatial dynamics and spatial frictions presented by Schapendonk et al may not always be possible.¹⁷³ Instead, it is necessary to delve deeper into how migrants interact with such actors, shifting roles and affecting migrant mobility in different ways depending on the space and context.

A dominant picture that has emerged in this thesis is that of migrant agency. In this sense, regimes of mobility cannot be viewed upon as determining structures, with migrants challenging the policies that seek to constrain them as they navigate. In regard to this agency, the key conclusion that can be drawn from this thesis relates to the importance of building social capital in order to navigate regimes of mobility. Migrants raise their potential for future movement through creating networks with other migrants and activists or local populations. This social capital is mobilised in the form of the organisation of protests and caravans, or during other forms of irregular transit, all of which can assist migrants with their future mobility. It should be noted here that although legal capital may also contribute to the mobility of migrants, there is a need to differentiate between it and social capital. Mobilisation of legal capital allows migrants to engage in regular migration whilst mobilisation of social capital ensures migrants can move through irregular migration. Those who gain legal capital in the form of a positive resolution to their asylum claim raise their potential for future movement through engaging with and participating under the norms

¹⁷³ Schapendonk, J. et al. (2020). Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes, 213.

established under the prevailing regimes of mobility. Therefore, their ability to mobilise legal capital towards movement can only be done when deemed permissible by the authorities. When denied this legal permission, migrants mobilise social capital to directly challenge the overarching regime of mobility, taking matters into their own hands and moving in ways that are deemed unacceptable by those in power. This builds upon the work of Moret who asserts that different forms of capital - legal, social, economic etc.- may be mobilised to raise a migrant's potential for future movement.¹⁷⁴ However, she does not include discussion on how these diverse forms of capital may contribute to the very different forms of regular and irregular mobility.

The final point when assessing migrants capacity to navigate regimes of mobility relates to the inequality of movement amongst migrants. The evidence presented has shown that there is inequality of movement even amongst those whose mobility is policed. For example, it is politically preferable for a Venezuelan migrant to reach the border of the US than a Haitian. Thus, their position in this hierarchy has important connotations for how easy it is for the migrant to navigate regimes of mobility. This is evident in the fact that the mobility of migrants from the likes of Venezuela or Nicaragua is more likely to be encouraged in southern Mexico at times when it is politically preferable for the United States to accept refugees of this nationality. This evidence moves beyond the dichotomy between acceptable and unacceptable mobilities, as presented by Khosravi's discussion on "hierarchies of mobility."¹⁷⁵ This unequal treatment of mobilities also adds to the understanding of regimes of mobility. This thesis has provided evidence that strongly bolsters Glick Schiller & Salazar's definition of regimes of mobility as intersecting systems that normalise the movements of some whilst criminalising and entrapping those of others.¹⁷⁶ However, it also goes further to emphasise that the categorisation of those whose movement is restricted or normalised under regimes of mobility may be flexible. Whilst at times the mobility of a migrant of certain nationality may be criminalised and restricted, at others it may be encouraged when there is political utility in doing so. The field of mobility

¹⁷⁴ Moret, J. (2020). Mobility capital: Somali migrants' trajectories of (im)mobilities and the negotiation of social inequalities across borders. 239.

¹⁷⁵ Khosravi, S. (2018). Afterword. Experiences and stories along the way. Geoforum. 1.

¹⁷⁶ Glick Schiller, N. & Salazar, N. (2013). Regimes of Mobility Across the Globe, 189.

studies would be enriched by further research on the changeable nature of the restriction or enabling of mobilities depending on the political context.

In returning to answering the question of how migrants navigate regimes of mobility in Chiapas, let us remind ourselves of the definition of navigation as a process of motion through “social environments of actors and actants, individuals and institutions, that engage and move us as we move along”.¹⁷⁷ Through looking at the navigation process of migrants in Chiapas, this thesis has highlighted the importance of moving beyond the nation State as a sole unit of analysis. Furthermore, when analysing the different actors, individuals and institutions that migrants interact with during transit, this thesis has drawn out the ambiguous roles played, with key actors capable of both limiting and enabling movement. Lastly, this thesis has emphasised the importance of migrant agency in navigating regimes of mobility. The acquisition of social capital in order to challenge global power structures that seek to constrain their movement is a key method through which migrants navigate.

¹⁷⁷ Vigh, Henrik. (2009). “Motion Squared: A Second Look at the Concept of Social Navigation.” *Anthropological Theory* 9, no. 4: 419–38. 420.

Bibliography

- Anderson, R. (2014). Illegality, Inc. Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe. University of California Press.
- Camarota, S., Zeigler, K. (2018). Central American immigration population increased nearly 28-fold since 1970 (Report). Center for Immigration Studies.
- Carr, W. (2000). Partisanship in educational research. *Oxford Review of Education*, 26(3-4).
- CDH Fray Matias. (2018). Detención Migratoria y Tortura: Del Estado de Excepción al Estado de Derecho.
- CDH Fray Matias. (2020). Memoria 2019-2020: Defensa de la Vida y La Dignidad.
- Colectivo de Observación y Monitoreo de Derechos Humanos en el Sureste Mexicano. (2021). Autoridades migratorias torturan a personas migrantes y refugiadas tras protesta en Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI.
- Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos. (2011). Informe Especial sobre secuestro de migrantes en México.
- Demmers, J. (2017). Theories of Violent Conflict, London & New York: Routledge.
- Diaz, P. (2020). ‘La Bestia’ — the train of violence and assault that takes migrants to US-Mexico border.
- Dunn, T. (1996). The militarization of the US-Mexico border, 1978-1992: Low-intensity conflict doctrine comes home. Austin: CMAS Books. University of Texas at Austin
- Glick Schiller, N. & Salazar, N. (2013). Regimes of Mobility Across the Globe, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 39:2, 183-200.
- Government of Mexico. (2022). COMAR Asylum Statistics.
- Government of Mexico. (2011) Ley de Migracion.
- Government of Mexico. (2011). Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político.
- Government of Mexico. (2012). Reglamento de la Ley sobre Refugiados y Protección Complementaria.
- Gustavo, F. (2018). The Consequences of Militarizing Anti-Drug Efforts for State Capacity in Latin America: Evidence from Mexico. Comparative Politics, Volume 51, Number 1, 1-20.

- Heyman, J.; Campbell, H. (2012). The Militarization Of The United States-Mexico Border Region. *Revista de Estudos Universitários - REU*, [S. I.], v. 38, n. 1. 75-94.
- Holmes, A. (2020). "Researcher Positionality - A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research - A New Researcher Guide." *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, vol. 8, no. 4,
- IOM. (n,d). Global Compact for Migration.
- IOM. (2020). World Migration Report.
- Jones, R. and Johnson, C. (2016). Border militarisation and the re-articulation of sovereignty. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 41: 187-200.
- Kalir, B. & Wissink, L. (2016) The deportation continuum: convergences between state agents and NGO workers in the Dutch deportation field, *Citizenship Studies*, 20:1, 34-49.
- Kaufmann, V. Bergman M. Joye, D. (2004). Mobility: Mobility as Capital. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. Volume 28
- Khosavri, S. (2018). Afterword. Experiences and stories along the way. *Geoforum*.
- Khosravi, S. (2010). 'Illegal'traveller: an auto-ethnography of borders. Springer.
- Massa, A. (2020). Borders and boundaries as resources for mobility. Multiple regimes of mobility and incoherent trajectories on the Ethiopian-Eritrean border, *Geoforum*, Volume 116, 262-271.
- Mason, J (2018). Qualitative Researching. (Third ed.) Sage Publications Ltd.
- Miranda, E. (2022). Sex Work Equals Survival for some Migrant Women in Tapachula, Mexico.
- Moret, J. (2020). Mobility capital: Somali migrants' trajectories of (im)mobilities and the negotiation of social inequalities across borders, *Geoforum*, Volume 116, 235-242.
- Nassar, J. Stel, N. (2019). Lebanon's response to the Syrian refugee crisis – Institutional ambiguity as a governance strategy, *Political Geography*, Volume 70, 44-54.
- Sandoval, I. (2012). Public officials and the migration industry in Guatemala. *The Migration Industry and the Commercialization of International Migration*. Taylor and Francis Group.
- Satzewich,V. (2015). Points of Entry. How Canada's Immigration Officers Decide Who Gets In. UBC Press, Vancouver.

Schapendonk, J.& Steel, G. (2014). Following Migrant Trajectories: The Im/Mobility of Sub-Saharan Africans en Route to the European Union, Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 104:2, 262-270

Schapendonk, J. van Liempt, I. Schwarz, I. Steel, G. (2020). Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes, *Geoforum*, Volume 116, 211-216.

Schwarz, I., (2016). Racializing freedom of movement in Europe. Experiences of racial profiling at European borders and beyond. *Movements. J. für kritische Migrations-und Grenzregimeforschung* 2 (1), 253–265.

Schwarz, I. (2020). Migrants moving through mobility regimes: The trajectory approach as a tool to reveal migratory processes, *Geoforum*, Volume 116, 217-225.

Shamir, R. (2005). 'Without borders? Notes on globalization as a mobility regime'. *Sociological Theory*, 23(2).

Slack, J. Martínez, D. Elizabeth Lee, A and Whiteford, S. (2016). The Geography of Border Militarization: Violence, Death and Health in Mexico and the United States. *Journal of Latin American Geography*. Vol. 15, No. 1. 7-32.

Sheller M, Urry J. (2006). The New Mobilities Paradigm. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*; 38(2): 207-226.

Sotomayor, A. (2013). The State and Security in Mexico: Transformation and Crisis in Regional Perspective, Militarization in Mexico and its Implications. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. (2014). Presidential Memorandum -- Response to the Influx of Unaccompanied Alien Children Across the Southwest Border.

Vega, L. A. (2021) Central American Asylum Seekers in Southern Mexico: Fluid (Im)mobility in Protracted Migration Trajectories, *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 19:4, 349-363.

Vega, L. A. (2017). Policy adrift: Mexico's southern border program (Research Paper). Mexico Center at Baker Institute for Public Policy.

Vigh, Henrik. (2009). "Motion Squared: A Second Look at the Concept of Social Navigation." *Anthropological Theory* 9, no. 4: 419–38.

Vives, L. (2020). Child Migration in the US and Spain: Towards a Global Border Regime?. *International Migration*, 58: 29-44.

WOLA. (2019). The Wall Before the Wall: Mexico's Crackdown on Migration at its Southern Border.

Yıldız, U. Sert, D. (2021). Dynamics of mobility-stasis in refugee journeys: Case of resettlement from Turkey to Canada, *Migration Studies*, Volume 9, Issue 2, , 196–215.

List of Interviews

- Interview respondent 1 – Migrant – Interview Conducted 28.03.22
- Interview respondent 2 – Migrant – Interview Conducted 28.03.22
- Interview respondent 3 – Migrant – Interview Conducted 22.03.22
- Interview respondent 4 – Migrant – Interview Conducted 04.04.22
- Interview respondent 5 – Migrant – Interview Conducted 07.04.22
- Interview respondent 6 – Migrant – Interview Conducted 19.04.22
- Interview respondent 7 – Migrant – Interview Conducted 26.04.22
- Interview Respondent 8 -NGO Worker – Interview Conducted 22.04.22
- Interview Respondent 9 -NGO Worker – Interview Conducted 28.04.22
- Interview Respondent 10 -NGO Worker – Interview Conducted 20.04.22
- Interview Respondent 11 -NGO Worker – Interview Conducted 3.05.22
- Interview Respondent 12 -NGO Worker – Interview Conducted 9.05.22