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Articles

Guatemalan young domestic female workers in Soconusco, Chiapas: Their experiences and imaginaries

Jóvenes guatemaltecas del sector doméstico en el Soconusco, Chiapas: Sus experiencias e imaginarios

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Abstract

In this article, I describe the subjectivities of Guatemalan female workers who participate in the domestic sector of the region Soconusco, Chiapas, México. Especially, I will focus on their motivations to work in foreign country as domestic worker. Through ethnographic dates and the analysis of their narratives, I will present the imaginaries they have as a representation of their subjectivities and have a bearing on the migration and labor practices of young Guatemalan worker. There are three imaginaries that I analyze: the urban life, family and about their future, which explain the particular character of this border dynamics what I will define as micro-social and temporary mobility. My objective is to evidence that migratory and labor dynamic of female young is not economic phenomenon, but is the social process in which they seek their particular forms to be young and to make youngness.

Keywords: work migration, social mobilities, subjective imaginaries, southern border.

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Resumen

En este trabajo, se rescatan las subjetividades de las trabajadoras jóvenes guatemaltecas que se desempeñan en el sector doméstico del Soconusco, Chiapas, México. El enfoque está en sus motivaciones para salir de Guatemala con el propósito de trabajar en el sector doméstico. Mediante datos etnográficos y análisis de las narrativas recopiladas, se describen sus imaginarios y la manera en que inciden en sus prácticas migratorias y laborales. Se analizan tres imaginarios: el de la vida urbana, de familia y sobre su futuro que posibilitan explicar las características particulares de esta dinámica fronteriza, la cual definimos como movi-

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lidad micro-social y temporal. El objetivo es poner en evidencia que las dinámicas migratoria y laboral de las jóvenes no es un fenómeno meramente económico, sino que es el proceso social en el que ellas buscan su forma particular de ser y hacerse jóvenes.

Palabras clave: migraciones laborales, movilidades sociales, imaginarios subjetivos, frontera sur.

Introduction[1]

The main dynamics of female labor migration between Guatemala and Mexico are historically shaped by young Guatemalan women aged approximately 13 to 20 years of rural origin and some of indigenous origin who work as domestic workers in Soconusco, Chiapas, Mexico, and have Mexican women as their employers (Arriola, 1995; Rojas & Ángeles, 2003). The aim of the presents study is to reveal, through the analysis of the narratives of young female Guatemalan workers, the subjectivities that these workers develop regarding their migratory and labor experience and to identify the particular characteristics of the dynamic into which they are immersed as protagonists.

The purpose of this article was to identify the reasons why Guatemalan women continue to choose to enter the labor market in Mexico despite recognizing the deficit in terms of the economic disadvantages inherent in the exchange rate between the Guatemalan quetzal and the Mexican peso. In compiling the narratives of women of several generations, I realized that, especially among young women, there are three imaginaries involved in their migratory and work experience: those of urban life, the family, and the future. These three imaginaries are what motivate them to leave the local setting to enter the foreign labor market. However, the analysis of these imaginaries make me possible explain that their migratory experience is a way to create and experience their youth, and even reveal that the characteristics of this cross-border movement and this stage of their life are based on uncertainty and temporariness.

With the term "imaginaries", I do not refer to "social imaginaries" such as socially legitimized ideas about reality that provide the basis of group identity; nor do I refer to symbolic representations that "make reality plausible" to ensure social cohesion and consensus (Cegarra, 2012). Rather, I use this term to address the subjective ideas individuals possess that reflect their values, ideals, and desires in the present. This is what might be referred to as the "subjective imaginary," which I consider to be a type of image or symbol through which I can approach ideas or thoughts that affect the practices of women workers. These imaginaries are based on subjectivities, although this is not to imply that the inner world of these women is free and independent of the social; rather, this imaginary is constructed on the basis of the sociocultural contexts that delimit them with regard to desires: the hegemonic, social and family norms and cultural values they embody in their daily lives. The intention is to observe how these imaginaries influence the women's migration and labor practices and how they build their experience as young people.

[1] This document is the product of the project "The Mexico-Guatemala cross-border region: The regional dimension and bases of its integral development" (www.rtmg.org). Coordinated by Dr. Carolina Rivera Farfán and funded by Conacyt, Centro GEO, CIESAS, Colef, CIDE, Ecosur, Instituto Mora, Flacso/G, Usac, 2018.

The premise is that the condition of being young is not a universal one; rather, it is distinct and connected with the sociocultural context. In the social sciences, youth has been considered a special position that requires attention to make visible the presence and agency formation of young people (Castro & García, 2015). Although a theoretical discussion of the concept of youth is not the subject of this article, the ethnographic data of young workers and its analysis describes the particular conditions of their experiences of youth.

A number of studies exist on the labor dynamics of the border that primarily focus on the vulnerability of women workers (Martínez, Stern & Vertiz, 2010; Stern, 2010, among others) or their agency formation in labor situations (Blanco, 2012; Ramos, 2016, among others). However, few studies have addressed the subjectivities and meanings of the migratory experiences of young people at this specific stage in their lives.

Based on the findings, it was possible to observe that the women workers are immersed in an imaginary aimed at urban life in Mexican cities, mainly Tapachula: walking through the streets and buying clothes or shoes, having one's own room with internet service, and accessing other goods and experiences that they have failed to acquire in their hometown. The other imaginary is that of the family. Young women possess naturalized ideas regarding their traditional role and duties as daughters in the family under the authority of their parents. However, the labor context makes it possible for them to circumvent socially assigned roles and distance themselves from their parents' authority by crossing the border to enter the sphere of Mexican urban life and work. The last imaginary is about their future, which is characterized by the absence of expectations. In other words, young women come to spend a period of time in their life in Mexico and have no notion beyond the idea of being *me, the worker* in the present. They also do not consider that domestic work might become a long-term option in their lives, nor do they visualize concrete ideas regarding what they intend to be and do when they are older or after their stay in Mexico.

This last imaginary is a key to understanding the labor and youth dynamics of this population, particularly because it allows us to postulate the concept of *microsocial and temporary mobility* to analyze the fundamental characteristics of their experiences as migrant workers and youth.

As I will discuss in the section on the theoretical approach, the work of these women in the domestic sector does not allow them to achieve social mobility (Girón, 2010); however, it does enable them to momentarily exit their microsocial structure —that is, their ties with family and the community— to experience a different social status outside the local context, even if it is somewhat temporary and uncertain. This condition of being "outside" of the local area for a certain period of time enables women to construct their urban youth. That is, their particular way of "being and becoming young people" (Castro & García, 2015, p. 24) is conditioned by their migratory and labor experiences in Mexico.

This study is about researching migration not as an economic process but, rather, as a social process that occurs in the lives of each of the workers. To achieve this, I begin with descriptions of the methodology used for this work. Subsequently, I present the general data on the labor migration dynamics in the domestic sector: its characteristics in the region of Soconusco, working conditions, and some transformations in recent years. Finally, I present the findings —the three imaginaries that influence the women's migratory practices and their experiences as young people— to analyze them from a *microsocial and temporary mobility* approach.

Research Methodology and Its Limitations

During the field work I conducted from July to December of 2018[2], I devoted myself to collecting the narratives of female Central American domestic workers, as well as those of their Mexican employers, with the aim of deciphering this migratory flow of labor from their perspectives. In total, I conducted 11 in-depth interviews with Guatemalan workers ranging in age from 15 to 45 years; of these workers, nine performed temporary work, and two had permanent residence in Mexico (Table 1). At the outset, women over 40 years of age were also included in the interview as the main purpose was to identify changes in the labor market (conditions, actors, etc.) and the reasons migrants work in Mexico despite the economic disadvantage of the exchange rate between the Mexican peso and the Guatemalan quetzal. As one of the characteristics of ethnographic research, which is based on the inductive method, the analysis of the narratives of the young female workers was a product derived from the systematization of the interviews. Through this analysis, I realized that generalizable imaginaries existed among the young participants, and I was able to use these to determine a series of motivations that are inherent to their condition. To this end, the narratives of the elder women were also useful to me because they allowed me to compare working conditions in Mexico and those of family members in Guatemala between young people and adults, current conditions and previous , among other aspects.

Whenever possible, interviews with workers and employers were conducted separately and by appointment, with a few exceptions. Field notes were taken on all occasions because attempts to record our conversations arose suspicion in many interviewees. To begin the dialog process, I asked generating questions with the intention of encouraging the interviewees to summarize most of their life history as well as their expectations for the future.

During the analysis of the narratives obtained in the interviews, specific ideas emerged about the young people that were positioned as constants because they appeared in almost all of the interviews, not just a few. I considered them ideas or thoughts about *1)* urban life, *2)* family and *3)* the future that influenced decision-making processes, practices or justifications. As I mentioned in the introduction, I define these elements as "imaginaries" not because they are false ideas, fictions, or fantasies but because they are based on idealized or desired images of reality that mark the subjective and emotive dimension of the individual and direct her practices. "Subjective" imaginaries are methodological concepts with which I seek to decipher the inner world of each individual, which we call subjectivity.

I was interested in knowing what types of imaginaries affect the migratory experiences of each individual. This does not imply that their subjectivities can be analyzed separately from the sociocultural context that surrounds them. As I describe later, the imaginaries that I present here are the products of an interpretation of hegemonic or idealized values.

[2] It is worth mentioning that I have carried out fieldwork in the city of Tapachula and the surrounding municipalities on a constant basis since 2011. On this occasion, I was able to access young female workers through the women I had already met during other stays.

Table 1: List of interviewees

	Name*	Age	Origin
1	Elena	20	Malacatán, San Marcos, Guatemala
2	Susana	16	Tacaná, San Marcos, Guatemala
3	Adela	16	Tacaná, San Marcos, Guatemala
4	Angélica	42	(No town data), San Marcos, Guatemala
5	Jessica	22	(No town data), Huehuetenango, Guatemala
6	Fátima	20	Jalapa, Huehuetenango, Guatemala
7	Luisa	15	Jalapa, Huehuetenango, Guatemala
8	Maria (anonymous)	Approx. 35	Malacatán, San Marcos, Guatemala
9	Cande	41	Malacatán, San Marcos, Guatemala
10	Fernanda	27	Almolonga, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala
11	Monse	43	Tecún Umán, San Marcos, Guatemala

Note: *Names are changed to protect the identity of interviewees.
Source: Created by the author based on data collected in 2018.

For this work, I focus on only seven interviewees out of the 11 who are young people between the ages of 15 and 22 years since it is at this stage that young women undertake their immigration and labor process by crossing the border, alone and unaccompanied by family, to be integrated into the available labor force. Therefore, in their expressions, it will be possible to identify the factors that encouraged them to make that decision. The process itself led me to examine how the youth they are experiencing is constructed, as it is related to their labor and migratory dynamic.

The interviewees are young, unmarried women whose main condition continues to be that of daughters in a family, having very little education and coming from the rural sector. They have little immigration and work experience; in fact, for some interviewees, their travel to Mexico was the first time they had left home to work. Considering as a premise that youth is not a universal and natural condition but rather a social and cultural one that is transformed by space and time (Castro & García, 2015), the analysis of the imaginaries led me to ask the following questions: How do they experience their youth within the migration dynamics? What are their expectations about their youth? Are there changes in their status as young people through the migration experience?

Before I move on to the analysis, I must clarify the methodological limitations encountered during the compilation of the data to deepen the "subjectivities" of the actors through the ethnographic fieldwork. During this period in the field, all interviews were conducted with the prior "permission" of Mexican employers, with one exception,[3] and were conducted at the interviewees' workplace; that is, in the home

[3] I was able to personally approach only one interviewee, whom I met by chance on the street in Tapachula, to conduct an interview.

of the employing family. This way of approaching the Guatemalan women workers meant that I would introduce myself as a friend or acquaintance of their employers; thus, it was natural to assume that there was a psychological barrier that affected the interviewees' willingness to freely express their feelings about work and life in general in Mexico.

The "subjectivities" I was able to capture were expressed under these conditions. To offset these disadvantages and establish a more personal connection with some workers, I returned frequently to visit them for informal conversations, although this was not always possible because the employers did not always allow it or because the young women were no longer working for the same family.

Another methodological limitation of this work was that I did not gather data at the women's places of origin to gain access to a more complete picture of their domestic, labor and migratory dynamics. I consider it necessary to investigate the social life of each of the workers in their home location, their family life, and the general socioeconomic and cultural context of Guatemala because, as I mentioned above, imaginaries and subjectivities are not an individual construction but rather a social one, with social symbols and meanings. Moreover, I have found few studies (Girón, 2010; González, 2005) addressing the lives of young female migrant workers' lives in Guatemala. One of these that proved relevant was authored by Girón (2010). The data from her research was of great help in complementing the information gathered in the field and developing the present work.

Establishing a personal connection and trust with young migrants in the domestic sector involves many methodological barriers that result in a need for more work to be done. However, the narratives and life histories that were shared with me certainly provide a key to opening up additional questions on this topic from different approaches, situating these women as the main drivers of the flow, the protagonists of their own youth.

Labor Migration by Young Guatemalan Women in the Domestic Sector

The presence of female domestic workers from Central America, mainly Guatemala, is not a recent phenomenon in Soconusco, nor are these exceptional cases; rather, they are part of the regional context (Arriola, 1995; Rojas & Ángeles, 2003; Rojas, 2007; Blanco, 2012; Rivas, 2011; Ramos, 2016, among others). The current labor dynamics are characterized by the massification of this service in the region, particularly in the city of Tapachula, by foreign women. Some studies report that, since the 1990s, the flow of labor has changed direction, going from farms (rural areas) to the city, and the types of work have also been diversified (Castillo & Toussaint, 2015; Rojas & Ángeles, 2003). It was in this period that it was observed that women migrants were no longer the companions of men working mainly in the agricultural sector; they are now the protagonists of their mobility, seeking job opportunities.

With regard to quantitative records, almost all the studies reviewed so far on the subject draw on the figures reported by the Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Matías in 1999 or EMIF-SUR, which estimate the volume of workers. For example, the report prepared by the Colegio de México and UN Women in 2015 analyzes the results of EMIF-SUR 2012.

According to that document, "Cross-border women workers are primarily employed as street vendors (65%), followed by domestic workers (27%); meanwhile, temporary workers[4] work primarily in domestic work (48%), as agricultural workers (29%) and street vendors (8%)" (Colmex/ONU Mujeres, 2015, p. 28). The same report mentions that "[of] women born in Guatemala and residing in Mexico, about half, 49%, are employed in domestic services" (Colmex/ONU Mujeres, 2015, p. 22).

The majority of domestic workers are from Guatemala, particularly the departments of San Marcos and Huehuetenango, which are close to the border (Rojas & Ángeles, 2003; Colmex/ONU Mujeres, 2015). According to these studies, these domestic workers are also characterized by being young women as young as 13 or 14 years old, with an average age of between 19 and 20 years old; they generally have low schooling (often elementary only; at a maximum, they have completed high school); they are single or are single mothers; their families live in rural areas and are engaged in small-scale agriculture or work as day laborers, which implies a precarious household economy; and some are of indigenous origin. Previously, this ethnic characteristic was prominent in the labor market (Arriola, 1995), along with the use of traditional clothing and a lack of Spanish language competency, a situation that placed these women in conditions of greater vulnerability to mistreatment at work (Stern, 2010; Arredondo, 2006).

During the fieldwork carried out in 2018, I noticed that such evidence of indigenous identity are not currently a prominent feature. In the central park of the city of Tapachula, where Guatemalan women workers gather every Sunday to meet their friends or relatives, I noticed that there were few young people who wore the traditional indigenous style of dress and/or spoke an indigenous language. This does not guarantee that they do not do these things in their home location; however, compared to data gathered in the 1990s by Aula M. Arriola (1995, p. 90-92),[5] I found the difference notable. The young interviewees clarified to me that they no longer wear indigenous clothing or speak indigenous languages in their place of origin in Guatemala.

In general, migrant domestic workers' immigration status is irregular. In other words, they do not possess any type of immigration status; some lack the Regional Visitor Card that would allow them entry for a maximum stay of up to seven days on each visit to the border states of Mexico, but without authorization to obtain paid employment. Those with this status enter Mexico using the official crossing point and return every 15 or 30 days by the same route. According to the women's experience, even when their stay in Mexico was longer than permitted, when they returned, the papers they used to enter Mexico were not checked, nor was there a record of when they entered the country. Those who do not have visitor cards use another route and another method to cross the border unofficially, such as entering by the river.

[4] In this report, "cross-border workers" refers to those who remain in Mexico for less than 24 hours, and temporary workers are those who stay for more than one day. This classification is based on the variables used in EMIF-SUR (Colmex/ONU Mujeres, 2015).

[5] Arriola describes the landscape of Tapachula's central park as follows: "On this day, the center of Tapachula is 'occupied' by female domestic workers and Guatemalan and Central American workers […]. In the Park, sometimes in impressive numbers, groups of three or four girls walk through the square, holding hands, wearing typical costumes from different places in Guatemala […]. Others already dress as *Tapachultecas*, but all speak their different languages, or if they speak Spanish, they do so with an indigenous accent" (Arriola, 1995, p. 90-92).

These young ladies work in the "*planta*" mode; that is, they live in the home of the employing family. They are employed without a written employment contract, and hence, their working conditions are generally as follows: working more than eight hours a day without established work hours, i.e., they must be available whenever they are needed, with rest on Saturdays or Sundays (afternoons or all day); payment is in Mexican pesos and is between 1 200 and 1 500 pesos every two weeks; in the case of the "*planta*" modality, food and daily necessities are provided by the employing family; and no access to public health services is provided (no social benefits) (Field notes collected in 2018) (Blanco, 2012; Ramos, 2016; Rivas, 2011). The activities they must carry out during their work day vary, but basically consist of general house cleaning, washing and ironing clothes, food preparation and, in some cases, childcare. The working conditions of domestic workers are not exclusive to my interviewees; documents on women workers in other contexts, such as Latin American migrants in Spanish cities or rural indigenous people in Mexican cities, report more or less the same working conditions, the same precariousness and similar risks (e.g., Oso & Martínez, 2008; Durin et al., 2014). The risks I refer to include verbal or physical abuse and/or the withholding of wages by employers. For example, Rojas & Ángeles state that:

> It is common for domestic workers to experience some sort of abuse in the homes where they are employed, which is basically verbal; there is excessive work, low wages, or insufficient and inadequate food. Various testimonies by the workers themselves or by other people who have witnessed the treatment they are subjected to coincide in pointing out the appalling working conditions they face (Rojas & Ángeles, 2003, p. 16-17).

Other studies, such as those by Arredondo (2006), Martínez, Stern and Vertiz (2010, p. 16-17), Álvarez (2010) and Stern (2010) describe the difficult social and employment situations faced by Guatemalan workers in Mexico and the structural vulnerabilities in the country of origin that force them into a precarious labor market at an early age. These authors report that female workers between 13 and 15 years of age, usually the eldest daughter in the family, must leave home to help support their family financially and do not have the opportunity to study (Arredondo, 2006; Girón, 2010). The violation of their human rights, particularly labor rights, and the absence of authorities dealing with this situation of course remain critical factors that must be studied and addressed at both the national and international level and in the political and academic sectors.

During fieldwork, it was determined that there is no significant economic advantage to this migration; when I asked the women why they came to Mexico to work, they all mentioned the economic factor, indicating that there is no work at home or that even when jobs exist, they pay poorly, etc. However, they also stated that there are not many differences in salary given the exchange rate; in Mexico, 10 pesos equates to approximately four quetzales (November 2018). The current salary has increased nominally, ranging from 2 500 to 3 000 pesos per month, sometimes up to 5 000 pesos, however, in Guatemalan terms, this ends up being 1 000-1 200 quetzales per month.[6] Additionally, four informants —20-year-old Elena, 16-year-old Susana, 15-year-old

[6] The minimum wage in Guatemala in 2018 was 90.16 quetzales a day, which means that income from domestic work in Mexico amounts to less than the Guatemalan minimum wage (Official website of the Ministry of Labor. www.mintrabawork.gob.gt/index.php/dgt/minimum wage#2018. Last accessed March 23, 2019).

Luisa, and 22-year-old Jessica— mentioned that their parents opposed their decision to work in Mexico, saying that they did not need to earn an income. However, the women ultimately argued that they wanted to leave home because they found it very boring to do household chores and help with the crops (Elena, 2018; Susana, 2018; Luisa, 2018; Jessica, 2018).

This suggests that, in the 21st century, this labor market continues to be reproduced under precarious and discriminatory conditions for young Guatemalan women, without providing significant economic advantages. For this reason, I considered it necessary to expand on the women's personal motivations based on their experiences and subjectivity. The research revealed that there are three imaginaries that affect the decisions and labor and migration experiences of this generation, and they characterize the dynamics of this border labor market as well as the project of "being and becoming young people."

The Imaginary of Urban Life: a Desired Style

Previous studies on the area agree that the positive image of the city of Tapachula, due to its material conditions and tropical climate, has been a significant factor in female workers' decision to leave their homes (López, 2012; Arriola, 1995; Blanco, 2012; Ramos, 2016). According to the data collected, this city and the surrounding municipalities not only signify a place of work but also represent the fun and convenience of urban life and interacting with friends without parental supervision. Workers enjoy shopping, changes in their personal image, and, in some cases, better material conditions in daily life, if only momentarily.

For example, Luisa (age 15) told me that her parents showed her pictures of the city and described Tapachula as very nice and cheerful. Likewise, Elena said her dream was to go there to work because it had been recommended by her friends and family:

> It was my dream to come to work and stay here for a few months because my friends and my female cousins talked about the city a lot. I thought, "How nice…". I also saw lots of photos on Facebook, and I wanted to see the city. Now I've been to a lot of places. I'm very curious and I walk to a lot of different places. I'm not afraid anymore. I take risks because I go out walking alone, and I could get lost. But I just ask people, and they tell me. In this way, I'm getting to know more places and more people here (Elena, 2018).

This excerpt from Elena's narrative was obtained when I asked her if she had wanted to come to work in Tapachula or elsewhere. Of note is her desire to see this city, which differs from the motive described by Cande, 41, who began working in this field when she was 13 years old and whose main reason for working was to support herself economically:

> I decided to work because of poverty. My parents didn't say anything to me. But I did it; I decided to help my parents. I didn't speak much Spanish, only *Mam*. I liked working in Mexico. I liked it because the *señora* (lady, employer) treated me very well. She treated me with affection. She bought me clothes and shoes. My parents never bought me things because they had no money (Cande, 2018).

Contrary to this testimony, which speaks of imminent need on the part of workers, Susana, Fatima and Luisa clarified that the salary they earned for their service was for themselves and not so much for their families. They said that for them, it was not so necessary to go to work for financial reasons as some of their relatives are in the United States and send remittances. They need to work to buy themselves clothes, something they enjoy (Susana, 2018; Fátima, 2018; Luisa, 2018). Of course, this desire to change their personal image is intimately related to financial motives because without earnings, they cannot acquire the things they desire.

Thus, young people are seeking the opportunity to experience another type of lifestyle in the city. They negotiate the conditions of the rooms in the family homes where they will stay during their employment. "*Planta*" workers live in the home of the employing family in their own room or a shared one. While this condition implies that there are no set working hours and that women work all day with few hours of rest, the interviewees expressed that they liked having their own space. Luisa, Fatima, Jessica and Elena stated that they did not have their own room in their family homes; the bedroom was shared, and there were no "private" spaces. In Mexico, however, they have their own bedrooms with a bed and, in some cases, air conditioning, TV and internet access. These material conditions give them the sense of a better quality of life than in Guatemala (Luisa, 2018, Fátima, 2018, Jessica, 2018, Elena, 2018).[7]

In addition, internet service is regarded as an essential condition. The use of smart phones, mainly the applications Facebook and Whatsapp, among women workers has become common in recent years. Some bring devices from Guatemala with their phone numbers from there, while others bring their devices and buy a chip with a Mexican number; alternately, they may buy a device and a chip in Mexico. Having internet access is a very important condition for the workers: they told me that in their leisure time during the day —about two to three hours— (between 4 p.m. and 6 or 7 p.m.), they enjoy chatting with friends or family working in the same city or in Guatemala, watching videos on YouTube or playing videogames installed on their devices. Fátima, Luisa and Elena told me that they very much enjoyed being online because internet service is not widespread in Guatemala (Fátima, 2018; Luisa, 2018; Elena; 2018). In my observations in the park in Tapachula, the use of smart phones is very widespread. On Sundays, female workers gather there, as described in the book by Arriola (1995), but I noticed that now, young women take pictures with their friends or listen to music on their mobile phones. Some workers showed me how they used messaging to decide when and where to meet on Sundays, planning where to go ahead of time. Elena told me, "I have my space here…. I have my place. I like that" (Elena, 2018).

The employers agree that young workers would not accept to working without internet access. They are aware that it is an essential condition, one that cannot be restricted. Upon being hired, the workers inquired about the general conditions and their room, even whether or not there is air conditioning. They ask these questions well before being hired because, according to the employers, Guatemalan women are now "more in demand" in the market, and hence, "they are the ones who choose the job" (Cecilia, 2018). Above all, the women in Central Park ask about the conditions of the work in advance to decide whether or not it suits them. Cecilia went on to tell me:

[7] These conditions cannot be generalized to all workers as they depend on how they are treated by the employing family.

> For approximately 10 years here, the girls have been *in demand*.... Before, they were more humble and had a desire to work, but since the quetzal went up, they no longer have to work. When I need someone to help me, I go to the park. I speak to them, but before I can explain, they ask me, "How many people are in the house? How big is the house? Is there AC? And how much do you pay?" And if it doesn't suit them, they leave. That's how they act. It's because they're in demand. These days, they're less humble. I have to be very nice to them (Cecilia, 2018).

The expression "in demand" does not mean that their wages have risen due to lack of supply; rather, it refers to the attitudes of women workers who are not willing to work regardless of the working conditions, as Mexican employers expect. The testimonies of Mexican employers demonstrate that what young workers are seeking is not only monetary income but also the daily working and living conditions in Mexico that imply a lifestyle that they cannot obtain at home.

The Family Imaginary: Authority and the Daughter Role

In the narratives of the women workers, it can be noted that the family is one of the determining factors in their labor dynamics. This is not because their parents send them away to work but because young people seek a viable way to distance themselves from parental authority and their duties as a daughter. They are aware that obeying and helping their families is their primary duty. This aspect was apparent when they expressed that they needed to get "permission" from their parents to leave home and work in Mexico. The interviewees commented that their parents did not agree with them leaving the country to work. These women are not the eldest daughters, nor do they come from homes with numerous siblings, as was previously the case; in fact, they are the middle daughters or even the youngest. Additionally, their brothers and sisters are already working, either in Guatemala, Mexico or the United States. Because of this, parents prefer for their younger daughters to stay at home to help them. However, the young women stated that if they had to do housework, they preferred to leave home and earn money.

According to the descriptions in other studies (Girón, 2010; Colmex/ONU Mujeres, 2015; Arriola, 1995) and the testimonies shared with me (Exfuncionario público [Ex-public official], 2018), previously, parents "sent" their daughters to work or the daughters "accompanied" their parents to work. Even in 2011, during my first fieldwork stint in Tapachula, I noticed that on weekends, parents visited their daughters to collect their wages, leaving very little money for them, the ones who were working. However, what I observed in my research in 2018 was that young women are now the ones who decide to leave home after negotiating with their parents to gain permission and with Mexican employers to agree on working conditions, and they also manage their income for their own goals.

Parental permission is key in understanding the young women's migratory dynamics. Luisa explained that domestic work is the only activity for which her parents gave her permission to leave, which was why she was working in this sector.

> I worked in Guatemala, in a house. But it didn't last long because domestic work is harder in Guatemala because of the kitchen. They had to make tortillas by hand. I also worked in a restaurant. I earned well, 500 quetzales per week. I liked it very much, but my parents didn't give me permission to continue working. To work here, my parents gave me permission–well, just for three months. I'll go home in December and see if they give me permission again to continue working. Because if not, all I can do is help my parents in the house (Luisa, 2018).

As this explanation demonstrates, working in Mexico was not the only job option in the interviewee's life, but it was a viable choice for her both economically and socially. Socially, domestic work in Mexico was an option for Luisa because her parents gave her permission (while they did not allow her to work in restaurant) on the condition that she would go to work with her 15-year-old cousin and on the recommendation of a local neighbor, who had been working in the border region for many years. Only under those circumstances did she get permission, and then only for three months. Both Luisa and her cousin stated that they wanted to stay longer, but there is a great deal of work to do at home in December, so it was essential that they return and help their parents and then see if they are given permission to leave again to work. In short, labor motivation is not synonymous with an economic calculation; rather, it is an escape from family life and the role of the daughter. This implies a need for the young women to negotiate with authority figures (their parents) to obtain employment in the domestic sector in Mexican border cities, which, in this sense, is a viable option given the labor traditions that exist in this border area and are based on social networks.

Considering that the majority of the workers are minors, parental authority is not a unique feature of this social context. However, what is particularly notable is that the local condition of being a daughter, which implies certain duties in the home and obedience of parental authority, stands in the way of the young women's construction of desires or decisions to work in another city and another country. This is precisely where we can observe their way of being and becoming young people. The family imaginary, specifically that of parental authority, is foundational for women workers because it influences their inspiration to oppose that authority and thus to construct and experience their youth. In the study cited above, Girón mentions that migration and labor processes in Mexico have an impact on the family structure and authorities within this group. She affirms that migration is a strategy children use to free themselves from the authority of their parents and to mature as independent adults; thus, for many young people, it is a process of emotional and psychological growth and maturity of which they are not necessarily aware (Girón, 2010, p. 274).

This process of construction during the phase of youth affects their work behavior, clearly showing that what is sought is not stability with which to mitigate economic precariousness but the opportunity to experience a lifestyle that differs greatly from that of the rural area from which they come. These cases evident that their migratory and labor experiences are based on the aspiration to be and become young people escaping family authority.

The Imaginary of the Future: Missing Expectations

When I asked the young women about their future, it became clear that, for them, this work and migration experience is simply one stage of their life. In response to questions about the future, only one young woman, who had completed a degree to be a preschool teacher, had a clear intention to seek work through the call issued by the Guatemalan central government. The others, who were temporarily working in Mexico, indicated that they had no idea what would happen next because they were working with their parents' permission. They were aware that work in the domestic sector is not meant to be a lifelong way to survive economically; instead, as I clarified above, it is an employment aspiration that can be considered a distraction and a way to take better advantage of their youth. In the narratives of the majority of the interviewees, the absence of expectations for the future was very obvious: they did not know specifically what they wanted to do later, including even whether or not they would continue with their current work. For example, Elena said, "I haven't thought much about what I'm going to do. I have a boyfriend over there, but nothing serious.... I'm going to think about it for a year. I'll think while I'm here, working. I think I'm only going to stay here for a year, and I don't know about after that. Perhaps I'll be married in five years' time" (Elena, 2018). On the other hand, Fátima said that she was interested in going to the United States, where her father lives, but she did not know how, and moreover, her mother and father would not give her permission to migrate (Fátima, 2018). Similarly, Luisa, age 15, did not express any ideas or desires about the future (Luisa, 2018).

In my view, this absence is due to the uncertainty that naturally exists in this labor sector and its social conditions. In other words, if these women do not obtain parental permission, they can no longer work; if something occurs in their family, such as a parent falling ill, they must return to Guatemala; if they make a mistake in their work, or if something happens in the employing family, they may be dismissed at any time without any recourse. Due to the lack of written contracts, the labor sector in which they participate has no legal formality; there is no security or guarantee of continued work. The interviewees are also aware that going to the United States is a complicated process not only because of the logistics of reaching the north but because of the need to obtain parental permission. As I discussed in another section, as daughters, they are expected to return home and help their parents and perhaps one day marry and reproduce the life cycle as their parents did, although this family imaginary is not always accepted by young people.

The uncertainty of the work and social context contributes to young peoples' lack of specific expectations, and this fact, in turn, influences migration and labor practices. For example, the study by Blanco (2012) explains that when working women face mistreatment or working conditions they dislike, they simply leave the home of the employing family and the job without giving notice. This may occur during the first few weeks of employment or after a couple of months. The author explains that this is the protection and negotiation strategy available to women workers in an employment context with few protections. My interlocutors also told me that they had left jobs after a couple of weeks or a month and looked for another employer or returned home. Mexican employers also report these practices; they state that, in the past, it was normal for a worker to remain with a family for three to five years, but now, a year is a long time (field notes collected in 2018).

However, if one is lucky enough to find an employer who offers decent working conditions and with whom they are in sync emotionally, the period of work may be extended indefinitely and, in some instances, becomes a life-long relationship. For example, Cecilia told me that her employee Mary had become like her eldest daughter and that she appreciated the work she did very much. Thus, Cecilia helped her process her immigration status so that she could go to Cancun legally. At the time of the interview, Cecilia was still in contact with Mary. There are several cases similar to this in which the employee-employer relationship transcends a mere work relationship. Of course, I have also encountered cases of violations of the rights of women workers, such as verbal abuse and wage withholding, among others. This implies that the labor experiences of young Guatemalan women are largely dependent on the nature of their employers, an issue about which they have very little room to negotiate and fight. This uncertainty does not help them to build expectations for the future, and hence, when they dislike their working conditions, they opt to stop working and seek out another "worthy" family or return home.

Microsocial and Temporary Mobility: The Labor and Migration Dynamics of Young Women

The three imaginaries presented above through ethnographic data explain that young female workers seek to change their lifestyle through the experience of migration and labor; they aim to cease to be simply the "daughter in a family" in the rural context and become independent workers in an urban setting. This is a life transition, an agency-formation experience, but it is conditioned by subjective imaginaries. This act represents agency formation because the women design their practices, calculating how to exit local contexts in which they feel oppressed by the role of rural women and daughters. At the same time, this initiative is conditioned, because the same imaginary of parental authority and uncertainty about the future makes their transition in social status and lifestyle temporary rather than definitive.

In the other migratory context, that between Mexico and the United States, Aquino (2012) reports that young people in the community of Yalalag, Oaxaca, also decide to migrate in search of a new lifestyle (Aquino, 2012, 47-48). The author states that above all, women leave the community to create a new model of the family and marriage (Aquino, 2012, p. 50), which implies a rejection of traditional gender roles. Referring to the work of Mezzadra (2007, cited in Aquino, 2012, p. 51), the author calls this strategy a form of "escape" from the community (Aquino, 2012, p. 51); however, the goal is not to abandon the community but to build a different relationship with the home environment in Yalalag.

Unlike in the study by Aquino, the Guatemalan workers referenced in the present study remain outside their community for a certain period of time with the permission of their parents, and hence, their escape is temporary and conditioned. I believe that there is insufficient data to investigate whether young women's relationship with the family and the place of origin changes following their migratory experience. Some previous studies report on this aspect: for example, Girón describes that changes in clothing and personal belongings involve changes in social status within Guatemalan society and therefore serve as motivation for young people (Girón, 2010, p. 255).

On the other hand, Barraza (2015) presents the transition in corporality among Guatemalan workers in Tapachula during their work and migratory experience and comments on the same phenomenon presented here: the change in personal image. However, his study reveals that, upon returning to their families and communities, women resume using the traditional dress of their town as otherwise, they would feel a certain rejection (Barraza, 2015, p. 41).

What could be demonstrated based on my findings from the field and previous studies is that these young domestic workers experience a momentary rupture with the local context and their status in the society of origin. While social mobility is defined as a change in social status within a broader cultural context, what they experience could be defined as "microsocial and temporary mobility." I refer to it as microsocial because their social status does change, although within a small structure, at the level of family and community organization. In other words, domestic work in Mexico does not make it possible to the young workers' nuclear families to overcome poverty. Domestic work, even though it is a feasible and recurrent option for many young rural women in Guatemala, is not conceived as a solution that gives families upward social mobility (Girón, 2010, p. 274). Rather, it is viewed as a temporary change in the environment of daily life that allows these women to explore another possibility for social and work life. I am referring to the fact that domestic sector work is regarded as momentary rather than as a tool to enable young people and their families to make a significant socioeconomic transition.

The important thing to emphasize is that this microsocial and temporary mobility is closely linked to small-scale geographic mobility: the distance between the border cities of Mexico and the young women's place of origin is short, and in some cases, they may go and come back within the same day. However, this small degree of geographical mobility involves crossing the border, a process in which women workers can construct their own urban youth to the extent possible, with a view to experiencing another lifestyle and thus generating a new identity, albeit temporarily.

The already classic study by Kearney (2006) regarding the border explains that crossing the dividing line is a movement that changes a person's identity and even his or her position and class relations. I understand the latter to mean the unequal relationships created by the classifying power of the border, which are frequently shifting (Kearney, 2006, p. 48-50). The ethnographic data presented here demonstrate that crossing the border does indeed change young people's identities, particularly in a subjective sense. Thus, although the journey across the border is short, transcending geographic boundaries allows young Guatemalan women to experience a change in position or a degree of freedom with respect to local class relations. The border could be defined as the young women's fourth imaginary: for them, the border between Guatemala and Mexico represents a rupture in both time and space; hence their desires to "escape" are deposited there.

Under this approach to subjectivities, although the women's labor and migration dynamics imply involvement in unequal labor relations (Kearney, 2006), they weigh those inequalities and the disadvantages of the labor market–such as the lack of written contracts, unestablished hours, and emotional relations with employers– as "advantages" (Barraza, 2015, p. 45). This is another aspect of agency formation: recognizing limiting conditions and reshaping them through practices or even resignifying them as positive. In this case, market uncertainty allows flexibility of

working without assuming responsibility and increases the margin for negotiation (both with parents and employers) regarding employment conditions, the period of work and salary, among other things; additionally, it guarantees freedom of choice in work, allowing the young migrant workers to return home and rejoin family life whenever they decide to do so.

Final Reflections

The ethnographic data focused on the subjectivities of young female workers presented here help us to understand employment and migration trajectories not as mere economic strategies but as a part of the life that these women create as this phase in their life cycle unfolds. The imaginaries associated with urban life, family and the future that I have highlighted based on the young women's narratives are key to identifying the factors that motivate them to cross the border, even though they must work in precarious conditions.

Analyzing their imaginaries highlighted what I call "microsocial and temporary mobility," a term I use to refer to a change in social status in a local and temporary context. I believe that experiencing this mobility is the young women's purpose in seeking work in Mexico, along with the characteristic of "being young" in that context.

In this regard, cross-border geographic mobility is key because when young people cross the border, they experience a change in identity based on some type of rupture with the local rural context of origin. This is not a definitive distancing, however, but a temporary one: they are aware that their parents will not allow them to be away for a long time, and precisely for this reason, they do not view leaving a job when they feel uncomfortable or when the need to return home arises as a serious problem.

Temporariness is another key element in analyzing this market. It is a traditional flow; however, there is continuity in the uncertainty for both the female workers and their employers, although this is not necessarily a negative. The condition of "being young" implies using market uncertainty as an advantage; given the short duration of jobs, work is not conceived as a definitive way of making a living but only as a way to spend a certain period of time. Thus, for these workers, youth is one of the factors that condition their labor dynamics and, therefore, the way in which they relate to employers and the characteristics of the labor market.

The labor market of the border, in turn, incorporates the availability of young Guatemalan women as temporary cheap labor, taking advantage of young people's imaginaries and the particularities of their social and cultural arena that coincide with this market, namely, uncertainty and temporariness. This mechanism does not contribute to a permanent improvement in women's socioeconomic status, nor does it enable them to build expectations for a better future.

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