Borders for profit:
Transnational social exclusion and the production of the NAFTA border

Luann Good Gingrich and Julie E.E. Young

Abstract

The focus of this paper is the production of the "NAFTA" border that defines a trans/national social field and directs the day-to-day lives of migrant women who organize their livelihoods around the Mexico-Guatemala border. We document and investigate emerging transnational spaces and practices of social exclusion and symbolic violence (Bourdieu) that boost domestic economic interests, externalize social responsibility, privatize social risk, and reinforce national boundaries. We argue that policies and practices in this transnational social field are directed by market logic and that, accordingly, trade agreements and migration management regimes organize place and space to make the most of global inequalities through the simultaneous facilitation and restriction of mobility. Crucially, the coordinated ambivalent control of borders in this transnational marketized social field produces an entrepreneurial context that makes possible a range of profits through the selective symbolic dispossession of nation-states, nationalities, and migrant bodies: economic, political, social.

Keywords

Borders; symbolic violence; social exclusion; transnational social field; NAFTA; Mexico-Guatemala border; North America.

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Santiago [**1**] is a small dispersed town nestled in the hot, humid lowlands between the mountains of Guatemala and the highlands of central Chiapas. Located about 20 kilometres from the Mexico-Guatemala border along the Pan-American Highway that runs through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) corridor, this population cluster is a stop-over location offering services such as gas, food, and lodging. Santiago also sits at the edge of the so-called "free zone" for nationals of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua aiming to pass through Mexico on their way to the United States, as it is here that they encounter the first in a series of checkpoints that, for many, marks the end of their northward journey. And it is here where Ana, Gaby, Olivia, and Carmen eke out a life for themselves and their children.

A primary objective of free trade agreements, including NAFTA, is to promote the internationalization of production and consumption through facilitating the flow of goods, finances, media, and information. The international flow of people, however, is paradoxically both tightly regulated and encouraged by individual nation-states, which boosts domestic economic interests, externalizes social responsibility, privatizes social risk, and reinforces national boundaries. The empirical and theoretical focus of our research is these inherent contradictions in the state-led bordering practices that are collaboratively implemented across the NAFTA corridor. While we begin from the standpoint of migrant women from Central America who organize their lives and livelihoods in the in-between space of the Mexico-Guatemala borderzone, the de facto

border that defines their opportunities both here and in their home communities is one we refer to as the *NAFTA border*. We theorize that the management of migration within and across the boundaries of the NAFTA corridor produces the NAFTA border that structures this social space, and that the town of Santiago – as well as the people who inhabit it – functions as a key node. We make use of Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of social fields and symbolic power to analyse the social relations defined by the NAFTA border and the dynamics of social exclusion. Thus, we situate the NAFTA border as a transnational social field [**2**] – an extension or sub-field of the three nation-states organized by the same logic that frames their free trade agreement.

Our analysis, then, addresses the official procedures and unofficial practices that produce the transnational social field of the NAFTA border and specifically assign Central American migrant women to devalued and dispossessed social positions. Our starting point is the daily realities of migrant women whose day-to-day is entangled with the political economy of the context in which they attempt to survive. Through their narratives, we explore the ways in which the logic of the global market serves as "a kind of orthodoxy, a set of rules of the game" (Bourdieu, 2014, p.4) that coordinates practice and structures this social space. We examine the ways in which market logic makes possible extreme value differentials and corresponding profits within the NAFTA corridor and the border regions that scaffold and shape it. Borders exist at the intersection of the global and the local, and we focus on the interplay between these two levels of analysis: the simultaneous containment and facilitation of migration (both legislated and ground-level, explicit and disguised); and, the ways in which people organize their lives in relation to and despite nation-state-imposed borders (Young et al., 2017) [**3**]. The

scalar integration of our analysis reveals the specific ways in which market logic produces the NAFTA border and reinforces dynamics of transnational social exclusion.

Methodology

The analysis we develop here emerges from a community-based pilot project with migrant women from Central America living in southern Mexico. For reasons of confidentiality, we use pseudonyms to identify the town and the participants. The work builds on collaborative relationships forged over eight years between the two authors and our co-researchers (Adrienne Wiebe and Miriam Harder), our key informants Maria and her husband Alejandro, and the migrant women we have come to know in the area since the first author's initial visit to the border region in 2008. Given that a key research objective was to make visible the social structures and systems that link the everyday realities of our lives as North American researchers with those of migrant sex workers from Central America, our methodology is consistent with Bourdieu's reflexive sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In keeping with this approach, theory development and empirical research are integrated in the research process.

Our analysis draws on qualitative data generated through seven interviews with four migrant women; three formal research interviews, several recorded consultation meetings, and hours of informal conversation with our key informants (in person and online); as well as ethnographic observation data generated over the course of four field visits between 2008 and 2015. The analysis is also informed by informal conversations with an additional eight women from Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua who were living in Santiago. We utilized an iterative, collaborative, and primarily inductive

approach to data generation and analysis. The interview and ethnographic data from each research trip were reviewed to identify questions to be pursued in each subsequent site visit. We conducted follow-up interviews with two women (Olivia and Gaby) to explore aspects of their narratives in more depth. Follow-up interviews and consultation meetings with Maria and Alejandro focused on clarifying details about their observations of migrant women and their daily lives; examining social, political, and economic shifts in the border region; and discussing ethical and security concerns arising from our work together.

The space of the research is a town we call Santiago in Chiapas, which is one of the poorest states of the Republic of Mexico, with among the highest population of Indigenous peoples. The collection of some 30 homes and businesses that comprise the community of Santiago is part of a municipality where approximately 57,600 people live in clusters close to the highway, on *ejidos* (collective lands historically owned by communities), in small towns, or on privately-owned plantations. Most residents are small-scale farmers, day-labourers on cacao, sugar, or corn plantations, or small business owners. There is a long history of seasonal migration from Central America to this area of Mexico for agricultural work. More recently, sex work emerged as a thriving sector with a series of bars and motels situated along the highway. Our analysis focuses on the narratives of some of the migrant women that have worked in these bars.

Two core concepts emerge in our analysis and theory development: transnational dynamics of social exclusion (Good Gingrich and Köngeter, 2017), and the NAFTA border defining a transnational social field. We draw on a social exclusion framework and Bourdieu's model of the state as a social field, or arena of contest and struggle, that

reproduces itself through the "categories of perception, the schemata of classification" that it imposes (Bourdieu, 1989, p.20). We trace the emergence of a *transnational* nation-state social field with its own institutionalized boundaries, barriers to entry, and bureaucratic authority that, paradoxically, extends its symbolic power – the "capacity for consequential categorization, the ability to make the world" (Wacquant and Akçaoğlu, 2017, p.39) – beyond its own political borders. We focus on manifestations of the dynamics of social exclusion within the transnational social field of the NAFTA border and the procedures and practices through which migrant women's bodies become sites of profit generation.

Border crossings

Born in Honduras, Olivia has lived in Santiago for over 10 years, and her dream to reach the United States is all but lost.

> They [local immigration officials] came to talk to me and I told them, "I'm sorry, I am not going to tell you that I'm Mexican. I am Honduran and tomorrow I will come back. I will be in front of you; that is how fast I will return. Why don't you give me a chance to live here a year or two, I don't know. I will try to arrange my paperwork but I will not leave this place. My son is buried here and the other son is in therapy. I am not doing any harm, and furthermore I have my gravesite. I am going to stay here with my tomb." This comment made them laugh because they thought it was funny that I have a grave ready for when I die here. [July 2013]

Olivia's words capture the ways in which the border is intimately tied into the choices that she feels are available to her. A key feature of her life is her precarious legal status in Mexico, producing the conditions for exploitation and violence; and yet, Olivia navigates this border space in ways that make it possible for her to provide for her family and herself. We call these "choices of necessity," as they are more instrumental than aspirational. We learn from Olivia's story about the dual practice of the border in this

region: it is simultaneously highly controlled and relatively porous, since this is not the first time she has been faced with the possibility of deportation, and both she and the Mexican officials understand how easy it will be for her to return. Olivia participates as an effective economic agent in this social field in various ways – as a regular but "deportable" (De Genova, 2002) border crosser, as a mother and caregiver, as a bar owner, as a sex worker, as a drug addict. These roles that Olivia occupies are both enabled and impeded by the NAFTA border that runs through her daily life.

The composition of businesses in Santiago and surrounding region has changed many times over the past decade in response to shifting border control policies and practices. In addition to providing cheap labour for agriculture and other industries, the vulnerability of migrant workers is profitable for a range of informal yet highly organized local enterprises, including the bars that have proliferated in the border region. These bars employ *ficheras*, women who are paid to drink beer with men – and are paid more if they provide sex. The first bars were established in Santiago in the late 1990s. Human smugglers and traffickers are intimately involved in the operation of these establishments; many are also bar owners. These powerful interests allow the bars to remain open for business, despite legal and social concerns about their operations. Initially, there were only a few large bars that employed eight to ten young migrant women each:

> These bars belonged to the *polleros*. These *polleros* trafficked people [from Central America] and selected women to stay in the bars. They had the opportunity to select who stayed and who did not. Many women were tricked. They told the women: look you will go to the USA, but first earn some easy quick money here. Work six months, and you can take away good money. [Maria, April 2013]

Gaby described her experience with one bar owner, who treats her employees like property:

> They know that we are not from here and we are not going to have money to rent a room because we have nothing. It's like we were living in her own house. She demanded that if we went out to the store we had to return quickly, within 10 minutes. [July 2013]

In this context, almost every aspect of their lives is controlled by the bar owner. In some cases, women are managed by another migrant woman. They described being indebted to – even owned by – bar owners and *polleros*.

At first, the work entails serving beer to patrons. Ana described her initiation into bar work:

> She [the bar owner] said: "You know, daughter, I need you to give me a hand …. It is nothing more than passing out beer. The client orders from you, and you give it to him." "Anything more than that?" "Yes, it costs the client this much for a beer. You don't drink, do you?" "Yes, I drink, I like to drink." "That's good. That is better. Look, your beer costs this much and the client's costs this much." I said, "Oh, I will earn even for drinking with the client? That's good." So, I said yes. [April 2013]

The more beer a woman consumes, the more money she can earn. There is even more income to be gained from moving beyond drinking with customers to accompanying them to a room behind the bar or one of the local motels for the night. The women's narratives underscored that the bars are one of the more lucrative workplaces in Chiapas where the minimum wage is low [**4**], especially for someone without Mexican documents. Many women accept this work to fund their migration journeys and to support their families. Part of its appeal is that room and board are usually provided by bar owners, which cuts down on living expenses. Yet women pay a high price in other ways. In addition to the risk of physical and verbal abuse by clients, their health is often

compromised by poor nutrition, lack of sleep and exercise, alcohol and drug consumption, and the infrequent use of condoms. Substance addictions are common, as stimulant drugs, such as cocaine, help maintain a demanding work schedule. Initially, drugs are offered for free, but over time many women end up addicted and deeply indebted to their employer. Such exploitation with impunity is made possible through the devaluation and dispossession of social exclusion, especially its subjective form. As we examine below, these dynamics of social exclusion are made necessary in this transnational social field.

The production of the transnational social field of the NAFTA border

Santiago is similar to dozens of communities along the NAFTA corridor connecting Central America, Mexico, the United States, and Canada. These roadside communities have become key points in the official and unofficial management of the movement of people and products. Southern Mexico is now recognized as a place of origin, destination, and transit for international migrants (Kimball, 2007; Rojas Wiesner and Ángeles Cruz, 2008), and border-control policies have increasingly made Mexico the key to regional migration management strategies and practices. Indeed, in 2012, Alan Bersin, then Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security for International Affairs, declared, "The Guatemalan border with Chiapas is now our southern border" (Isacson et al., 2014, p.5). Similarly, Young (2018) traces the construction of a de facto "Mexico-Canada border" over the past decade through the selective imposition of visa requirements, the designation of Mexico as a "safe" country of origin, and the long-distance control of Mexico's borders through the Anti-Crime Capacity Building Program. As these

declarations, policies, and practices suggest, North American border control has been recast as a regional and indeed transnational imperative, with Mexico constructed (materially and discursively) as the lynchpin of these efforts.

The transnational nature of this space is clearly exhibited in the regulation of movement in and through the NAFTA corridor. The 1994 NAFTA reconfigured North America's economic, political, and cultural spaces. While it focuses on trade and investment across the continent, NAFTA remains silent on questions of labour mobility and migration more broadly (Gilbert, 2010; Fernández-Kelly and Massey, 2007). In the intervening years, however, there has been a move towards harmonization of border and immigration policies among Global North governments, with specific attention to the need for a North American security perimeter to maintain regional trade (Abu-Laban, 2005). This has also been a period of new and expanding international trade agreements (e.g. CETA, TPP), even as we see the trend toward more extreme expressions of protectionism and nationalism. In the present example, both the US and Canada are expanding and intensifying their extraterritorial policing of Mexico's borders in response to the movement of people through the free trade circuit defined by NAFTA. More than 33 percent of US Border Patrol apprehensions in 2013 were of non-Mexican nationals: "The overwhelming majority of these 153,055 'other than Mexican' apprehended migrants came from Central America" (Isacson et al., 2014, p.3). Expanding their 'hard' infrastructure of extraterritorial policing, the US recently invested in the construction of five multi-agency customs and immigration processing facilities (*Centros de Atención Integral al Tránsito Fronterizo*), one near Santiago at an important crossroads (Isacson et al., 2017, p.7).

As with all social fields, the NAFTA border is *produced* through practices that conform to a precise "common sense" or logic of reproduction. According to Bourdieu, a field, similar to a field of play in a competitive sport, is defined by its own structure of capital, both material and symbolic, as individuals and groups compete for available resources that are effective and valued in that social field. The state is the "*culmination of a process of concentration of different species of capital*: capital of physical force or instruments of coercion (army, police), economic capital, cultural or (better) informational capital, and symbolic capital" (Bourdieu et al., 1994, p.4; emphasis in original). In this sense, we argue that a border region is not only an extension of the nation-states divided by it, but also a transnational social field that is produced and regulated by multiple nation-states, some immediate and others distant, with its own "nexus of distinct institutions and agents" who elaborate the relevant terms of capital accumulation and exchange for consumption by others (Wacquant and Akçaoğlu, 2017, p.45).

Bourdieu's examination of the social structures of the economy shows that the economic social field and the social field of the state are intrinsically linked and mutually productive. This fused market-state social field forms a self-contained and self-containing unit that operates according to a singular structure of capital or logic. Consequently, market objectives, expressed in a wide range of policies and practices of several nation-states, direct the political, economic, and social contexts and the daily life circumstances of the residents of Santiago. The function of market logic in the NAFTA social field is apparent in official and unofficial terms. As Fernández-Kelly and Massey (2007) assert, "the purpose of NAFTA was not merely to facilitate trade and open markets, but to

expand opportunities for capital investment" (p.99). The Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP), announced in 2005 and referred to by some in the media as "NAFTA Plus," enhanced and entrenched this market-state fusion. Gilbert (2007) argues that the concept of "partnership" mobilized through the SPP signalled a new rationality of governance of citizenship and mobility in North America, in that it "offers state-directed initiatives but relies heavily upon market players for implementation and guidance. The idea of partnership thus captures the increasing role for the market in this process" (p.82). Moreover, profit-generating opportunities for large holders of capital in this social field are boosted by its unevenness. Thus, in contrast to the EU, which emphasized labour in its economic integration project, NAFTA "utterly ignored international labor mobility and took no steps to equalize different levels of economic development among the participating countries" (p.105). Dynamics of social exclusion are spontaneously set in motion when a social field's material and symbolic structure of capital is organized exclusively by the principles and values of the "free" market.

Social exclusion and the symbolic power of the nation-state

The term 'social exclusion' was popularized in social policy by Tony Blair's UK government in the late 1990s. Policymakers recognized that conventional terms such as poverty and low income are inadequate to describe processes of persistent material deprivation. Yet social exclusion language is routinely applied without definition, referencing familiar concepts such as poverty, unemployment, and homelessness – social

problems that are consistently managed *within* the nation-state as a unified and bounded container.

The transnational movements of goods, information, and people pose a constant challenge to this conception – or aspiration – of the state as a stable and secure sovereignty with a clearly-defined citizenry "whose collective identity was expressed in a national politics" (Clarke, 2005, p.410). In a world on the move, the regulation of migration and citizenship, and the production of borders, becomes necessary to define and enforce the terms of inclusion and exclusion – who gets in, and who is entitled to state protection and resources. The classification of people as they cross nation-state borders assigns vastly disparate rights and privileges, or symbolic capital. Bourdieu (1989) defines the state as the agency that possesses the power of legitimate naming, which produces (and assigns value to) classifications of people. In the context of the NAFTA border, state policies that define the terms of inclusion and exclusion are key to the management of migration, and agents of the state routinely struggle for symbolic power, "this power of constitutive naming" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.55) through which "social fictions become reality insofar as they rest on shared categories and common beliefs that ground consonant action" (Wacquant and Akçaoğlu 2017, p.39). Bourdieu (1989) identifies such "world-making" (p.22) as *symbolic violence*, as it renders other types of violence – economic and physical – inevitable, even necessary. Symbolic violence is the making of subordinate classifications of people "that are divested of legitimate means of accumulating all forms of capital [material and non-material] from the dominated social positions to which they are consigned" (Good Gingrich, 2010, pp.164-5), and all avenues for upward mobility in social space are cut off.

Symbolic power, then, is the social energy of social exclusion. Our analysis makes use of Good Gingrich's (2016) conceptual model of social exclusion as "the official procedures and everyday practices that function to draw individuals and groups inside to devalued and dispossessed places, and thus (re)produce, reinforce, and justify economic, spatial, sociopolitical, and subjective divides" (p.12). Extending Bourdieu's concepts of social fields, structures of capitals, and symbolic power, Good Gingrich (2016) theorizes that mechanisms of social exclusion systematically deny full access to legitimate means of acquiring and exchanging the various types of resources (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) that are ordinarily available through participation in a social field, thus preferentially limiting the volume (dispossession) and functional quality (devaluation) of assets held – both material and symbolic – and thereby impeding advancement. This theory of social exclusion is not only about individuals and groups who are left out or even cast out; rather, it turns our attention to the relationships between people who are variously engaged with or *inside* social institutions and systems, and the processes and practices through which social and economic divides are realized. In the present analysis, we focus on the mechanisms of transnational social exclusion that are produced by a collective of nation-states through their collaborative bordering practices. The transnational social field of the NAFTA border draws migrant women from Central America inside its boundaries and strips them of material and symbolic capital. These processes play out within, across, and in-between the NAFTA border.

Social exclusion within

Social inclusion for people on the move is often equated with protection of human rights, legal status as citizens or permanent residents, and economic, social, and cultural

integration in local communities. Yet in contemporary transnational contexts, systems of citizenship are demonstrated to work in ways that are hierarchical, heavily gendered, and racialized, and make certain individuals and groups non-existent according to state classifications and even international conventions (Baxi, 2016; Calavita, 2006). Moreover, immigration has been recast as an issue of criminality and risk. This has been most blatantly revealed through the shift in US and Canadian contexts of many immigration-related matters to the Department of Homeland Security and the Canada Border Services Agency, respectively. As Fernández-Kelly and Massey (2007) note, "Homeland Security was established with a clear mandate to protect the nation from terrorist threats, but its principal effect has been to terrorize immigrant workers from Mexico and Central America, many of whom were displaced by NAFTA and its more recent counterpart, the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA)" (p.108).

In our case example, while state officials and illicit entrepreneurs/predators [**5**] are the most powerful forces in the production of the NAFTA border, governance and management committees in rural Mexican communities (*ejidos)* have significant control over land use and business permits in their collective territories, and thus play a key role in enforcing the symbolic valuation of migrant women. Community members decide who and what is permitted in this zone, as well as who to report to state authorities, who to ignore, and who to assist. Because these are relatively small communities, Maria explained that residents often look the other way rather than report incidents of trafficking or even violence: "It's a very small town and the people can't talk. They can't speak out against it, because it would be very risky. Everyone knows how things work" [July 2013]. The composition of bars and other illicit businesses in Santiago has shifted

over the past five years due to increasing control and often arbitrary interventions by local and national authorities that have forced larger bars to close. Now a series of small establishments, many owned and managed by women who arrived in the area as migrants, operates clandestinely, further marginalizing and criminalizing migrant women.

Women working in Santiago are vulnerable to the violence of drug dealers, immigration officers, bar owners, *polleros*, local residents – even one another. Beyond their lack of Mexican documents, attempts to find other work are also impeded by their non-Mexican-ness: locals and potential employers intuitively recognize subtle differences in facial features and dress and assume they work in one of the bars. The criminality associated with the category of "non-Mexican" leads local employers and residents to deny access to other forms of employment:

> *Adrienne*: Is the reason that the women that work in bars can't work in other places because they don't have the papers to be here in Mexico?
> *Carmen*: One is that, the other is the discrimination of the Mexican people toward the young women who work in the bars.
> *Adrienne*: Then if the women want to leave the bar…
> *Carmen*: They [community members] already know that they work there, and society does not accept them. Here there are times that in the town they say that no, that they are bad women.
> *Adrienne*: Then the papers wouldn't help them much, because nobody would employ them?
> *Carmen*: No, nobody would want to employ them. [Maria & Carmen; July 2013]

Carmen goes on to explain how her Honduran identity is read and devalued by people in Santiago and Comitán, a larger population centre further into Mexico:

> They could be naturalized Hondurans, but nobody would give them work in a store, in a grocery store, in a clothing store, much less in a restaurant.... Because when they see me and later discriminate against me, they ask me, "Which bar do you work in?" ... And in Comitán, they don't give me work anywhere, in any house. Not in a house, nor anywhere. Only because of the fact that I am Honduran. [July 2013]

Indeed, even Ana, who is from another part of Mexico but arrived in Santiago without her identification papers, is similarly classified:

> I am capable of anything, but even so I can't get out of this ... Here, my problem is that I can't get a good job because I made a mistake when I came here. I didn't bring my documents, not my birth certificate or my identification card.... But they always say, "No you can't get it, because you are not from here." … That is what I want, that they see me as a Mexican, because I have lived and suffered like those who are from Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, well, from other places. [July 2013]

While Ana is a Mexican national, the ways in which the NAFTA border plays out in Santiago function to disallow legitimate means for accumulating material and non-material assets in this social field and exclude her within the borders of her native country.

Depicted and dismissed as criminal, migrant women are also denied the legal rights and protections ordinarily afforded to citizens. For example, our data revealed that women are murdered or disappear without notice from authorities or the community. Even more effective, in symbolic terms, is that Central American migrants have been constructed as individual and collective security threats. The symbolic power of classification of migrant women as alien and criminal is extraordinarily complete in stripping away even the most basic of human qualities and entitlements, achieving in effect economic goals. The dispossessed position is made lacking in monetary value, as well as social and legal worth. Dispossessed of all types of capital, a woman's labour is discounted to next to nothing, and her body is devalued to erase social and legal obligations. She is made exploitable, with impunity, and the revenue she generates for local entrepreneurs and business owners is all profit.

Vogel (2007) argues the NAFTA corridor is "the backbone of the North American alliance of capitalism" to facilitate the South-North movement of not only raw materials and finished goods, but also to expedite "human traffic" in the form of deportable, exploitable, and temporary/guest labourers (p.24). As such, the selective dispossession of symbolic capital is a key feature of NAFTA bordering practices, as the production of low-value labour and disentitled labourers is necessary for profit-generating trade practices. This is symbolic violence, and the reach of this mechanism of social exclusion stretches well beyond Mexico's southern border into Central America and sites further afield.

Social exclusion across

NAFTA produces a transnational social field that is ironically reliant on the reinforcement and organization of the national social field. This is the paradox of border-bound boundary-less nation-building, as nation-states stretch past their own borders to externalize risk and need. For example, a June 2017 WOLA report finds a dramatic increase in Central American migrants deciding to remain in Mexico, rather than continue northward: from 2014-2016, there was a 311 percent increase in asylum claims lodged by Central Americans in Mexico (Isacson et al., 2017). Over the same period, Mexican Department of the Interior data indicate that Mexico has deported more than 500,000 Central Americans since the implementation of the *Programa Frontera Sur* (Southern Border Plan) in 2014 (Fredrick, 2018). This externalization of risk and need is worth billions to the US and Canada. Indeed, the Mérida Initiative has guided over US$2.3 billion in US security "aid" to Mexico since 2008. Thus, immigration laws and

labour programs use national borders to extend beyond, *as if* the nation is without borders, as if its reach and its right to reach is boundless, but simultaneously entrench the nation's boundaries and enrich its interests.

The stories of the women we have come to know in Santiago reveal the ways in which the borders of individual NAFTA nation-states are highly regulated so that certain social, economic, and environmental realities are made and kept foreign, outside the boundaries of the nation, in order to protect and bolster the social and economic interests inside the boundaries of the nation. At the same time, national borders within NAFTA are made precisely porous to facilitate the flow of profit and profit-generating resources. In this way, persistent global social and economic disparities can be used to generate local profit. This occurs, for example, through the importation of discounted labour without officially importing human beings. This economic form of nation-building works through a logic of divide and profit.

The selectivity of the NAFTA border is made evident in Santiago through periodic interventions by state officials to crack down on illicit businesses. These demonstrations of force invigorate the "deportable" status and symbolic dispossession of migrant women. As Maria notes:

> The law has become stricter – [government officials] have to have the number of deportations – I feel that the most vulnerable are these women…. Yes, because of everything that is happening in the USA now, because the idea is that Mexico needs to control its borders so that they [the migrants] don't go there. So, on television they typically say, "This is good, 5,000, 2,000, or 100 undocumented in this border town," for example, in order to show that Immigration is working. The immigration agents are doing their job. Remember that I told you that immigration officers used to come and say, "Today in the afternoon we are going to come and do a 'round-up.'" … They would say: "They are putting pressure on us because we are not deporting anyone. So, figure out how you will do it, hide your girls because we are going to come." [April 2013]

Maria's description of local immigration enforcement practices highlights the "politically successful policy failure" of border control measures (Andreas, 2003, p.4): the political imperative to be seen to have control over state borders bumps up against the economic need for permeable borders. Far from ambivalence, the simultaneous openness and closure of borders is a necessary component of the functioning of the NAFTA border, as it draws migrants from the south *inside* the NAFTA corridor, yet keeps them stuck in place.

As nation-states extend their economic activities and influence well beyond their own national borders, we see the formation of a *global economic field*, whereby differentials at all scales become potential profit-generating opportunities. A precise worldview and range of policies and practices are exported and imposed on states, territories, and populations that are – by design – "not equally prepared and equipped, culturally and economically" (Bourdieu, 2005, p.223). These very power differentials are played out in border regions to generate new forms of social exclusion and violence that reduce certain bodies to commodities and relegate whole regions and national territories to sites of economic and symbolic profit.

The relationship between NAFTA and Central America is key to this strategy. NAFTA nations capitalize on the social and economic unevenness that exists within their boundaries and beyond. The nation-states to the south of the NAFTA border have been made relatively more dispossessed and devalued, providing a proximal supply of dispossessed labourers and devalued labour, as well as sites for resource extraction and land appropriation. The substantial wage differentials between countries factor into migration decisions. While Gross National Income (GNI) per capita per year in Central

America ranges from $2,000-4,000, it is over $9,000 in Mexico, and jumps to almost $57,000 in the US (World Bank, 2017). Terrazas, Papademetriou, and Rosenblum (2011) refer to this as the "opportunity differential" (p.2), presenting the prospect of earning more the further north you go. Similarly, as poverty and landlessness increase to the south of the NAFTA border, new prospects for exploitation by drug cartels, employers, and trade agreements are generated. Accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2004) is the well-worn strategy of increasing and capitalizing on economic and social asymmetries.

Social exclusion in-between

The economic unevenness of NAFTA is further entrenched and exploited at Mexico's southern border. Through the Mérida Initiative (2008) and reinforced by the *Programa Frontera Sur* (2014) – both under the "guidance" of the United States and Canada – Mexico has ramped up border control efforts along this frontier over the past decade. Meanwhile, the Guatemalan, Salvadoran, Honduran, and Nicaraguan governments agreed in 2004 to allow freedom of movement to one another's citizens. As such, migrants from these countries encounter an enforced border only when they attempt to enter Mexico. However, the border is not effectively regulated at the international boundary line but rather through a series of mobile and permanent checkpoints that operate in concentric rings – or "belts of control" – further into the country's territory (Isacson et al., 2014). While it is relatively easy to cross the Mexico-Guatemala border without documents and remain in the "free zone" that extends about 20 kilometres into the country, movement further into Mexico is aggressively policed (see Figure 1). As a result, the legal status of migrants in this border region is ambiguous: not having formal documentation to be in

Mexico restricts their opportunities for paid work in the local community and impedes movement further north. Yet this enforced immobility opens possibilities for a wide range of entrepreneurial activities, including the nefarious (extortion, human trafficking, drug smuggling, etc.).

[**Figure 1**]

In other reports of this research, we discuss the tactical ways in which the women we have come to know navigate their lives in this borderzone (Young et al., 2017). Here we emphasize that the paradoxical openness and closure of the Mexico-Guatemala border is crucial to the workings of the NAFTA border, producing a physical place and social space *in-between* nation-states – a social space defined outside legal protections and social welfare concerns of any nation-state. In this sense, the NAFTA border, enforced through the regulatory reach of both local and distant nation-states, continuously generates a space that is in between borders. Such spaces of social exclusion are achieved and justified through the symbolic work of constructing and classifying identities in public discourse, laws, policies, and practices. Performing a sort of social alchemy, the dispossession of symbolic capital makes social classifications of disentitlement, which in turn, consecrates and justifies the original (mis)recognition. Bourdieu (1989) describes the circular work of symbolic violence this way: "Owing to the fact that symbolic capital is nothing other than economic or cultural capital when it is known and recognized, when it is known through the categories of perception that it imposes, symbolic relations of

power tend to reproduce and to reinforce the power relations that constitute the structure of social space" (p.21).

In our case example, the convergence of nation-states and markets (global and local, formal and informal, legal and illegal) imposes a singular market logic that structures a social space in which individuals and groups are simultaneously drawn inside yet kept outside national and international boundaries and laws that might protect them. Furthermore, free trade agreements regulate deregulation, actively preventing governments from assuming social obligations by prohibiting policies and laws that put people and the environment ahead of profits. The result is the production of a steeply uneven transnational social field that functions according to the logic of the global market, setting into motion new and profound dynamics of social exclusion and dispossession.

Conclusion

Analysis of the production of the NAFTA border illuminates the procedures and practices through which "power relations render specific bodies objects of surveillance and discipline" (Hyndman, 2012, p.244), and in this case, render certain bodies outside systems of regulation altogether, positioning them in social and physical spaces of non-existence, erasure. Yet, we argue, it is important to recognize that Olivia, Carmen, Ana, and Gaby are also drawn *inside,* situated *within* a social field that is fundamentally exclusionary. Devalued and dispossessed, they are necessary comparators to activate the rules of valuation, the rules that direct the distribution and exchange of material and symbolic capital in global markets, national social welfare and legal systems, and

everyday interactions. The transnational movement of people – especially labour migrants and often refugees – provides a convenient "other" onto which to project the collective insecurities of a community or society (Hoggett, 1992). This is dispossession through inclusion, or the symbolic violence of social exclusion.

Other scholars describe the positions of individuals and groups made marginal in the divided social spaces of the global economy as "unfavourable inclusion" (Sen, 2000), "subordinate and disadvantaged insertion" (Munck, 2005, p.72), or "differential inclusion" (Espiritu, 2003; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013). To the contrary, the stories of migrant women in Santiago demonstrate that exclusion (or dispossession) through inclusion is the essence and potency of social exclusion by design, whereby calculations of profit and growth are based on producing and expanding social divides at all scales – interpersonal, regional (within Mexico), and international (along the NAFTA corridor and deeper into the Global South). Bourdieu (2005) asserts that unification and integration of national and global markets results in a concentration of power, meaning that "integration into the state and the territory it controls is in fact the precondition for domination (as can be readily seen in all situations of colonization)" (p.223). Moreover, official procedures and everyday practices that categorize, criminalize, and commodify people produce the value differential required to generate profits. Such processes of symbolic violence are effective even at the national level, as Alejandro explained: "The US can remain that model country, the good country, but at the same time it sustains itself by feeding on the countries that are corrupt and illegal. Mexico … does the dirty work" [July 2013]. Corruption and illegality are thus disavowed and projected by the north to the south. Once drawn inside the field of struggle, dispossessed individuals,

groups, and even nations can be exploited to increase the one-way flow of material and symbolic assets and reinforce the selectively advantageous rules of accumulation and exchange. The economic utility of an "included" devalued other is apparent in the systems of predation generated by multinational free trade agreements alongside transnational border controls.

The transnationalization of market logic not only works within and across nation-state boundaries, but also *through* these boundaries by shaping new zones in-between nation-states. The production of the NAFTA border is the means through which several nation-states (both near and far) enact their political and legal decisions about who bears responsibility for providing services and protections and who is entitled to access them. The market demand for austerity means that many nation-states abdicate responsibility for the needs of their residents to the private sector, including the market, non-government agencies, and individual families.

There are at least two intersecting levels of analysis that are valuable here, as the transnational social field of the NAFTA border defines and circumscribes the social, political, and economic contexts through which everyday life unfolds. First, the case of Santiago helps us trace, with some specificity, the mechanisms that classify and evaluate individuals and groups as either deserving or undeserving. At a local level, the NAFTA border social field is organized according to market logic that positions those with limited economic capital as profit-generating opportunities. Second, taking a wider vantage point, this case provides insight into the taken-for-granted assumptions, illusions, and rules of valuation that direct the differential protection of individuals within transnational border social fields. Such contests for the recognition of human-ness take place at inter-

personal, national, and global levels, and reinforce processes and practices of social exclusion, thus permitting – even inviting – predation and exploitation of the most dispossessed. The dynamics of social exclusion are thus self-perpetuating as the logic of the market-state social field justifies the disentitlement of particular individuals and groups.

The outcomes of social exclusion in transnational contexts are manifested as local and global social, economic, spatial, and subjective divides. These social fractures set the necessary conditions for profit generation in the global economic field. Moreover, the market-state social field works to justify the disentitlement of individuals and groups, making the denial of legal rights and protections appear self-evident, natural. The intersecting and compounding nature of transnational social exclusion is made clear in the spiralling progressions into deeper precarity, invisibility, and isolation experienced by those who fall (or are defined) outside of nation-state boundaries, classifications, and protections. The border as a transnational market-state social field thus effects a positive feedback loop, a self-perpetuating system of structural – and personal – accumulation through insecurity and violence. "In the end," Maria and Alejandro reminded us, "everything is connected. … We are part of the same capitalist system. … We see how in some ways those from the North have a good economy, but it is because we, Latin Americans, suffer the opposite. … All that is good there [in the north] is all that is bad here, on this side" [July 2013]. Free trade agreements – and the borders they produce – weave together disparate lives, compressing these seemingly discrete and distant worlds into a steeply uneven yet interdependent transnational social space.

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Notes

[**1**] Note that all names used are pseudonyms, including the name of the town.

[**2**] In their work on clandestine migrant journeys, Mainwaring and Brigden (2016) refer to migration corridors as transnational social fields to capture "the geography of origin, transit, detention, deportation and destination" (pp.251-252).

[**3**] Walker and Winton (2017) similarly argue for the importance of working through the scalar complexity of a given border.

[**4**] Ana reports that minimum wage in Chiapas is “barely 50 pesos [$4] per day” (July 2013).

[**5**] We note that the distinction between the two is often not readily apparent.

Figure 1

(Source: Isacson et al., 2014.)