Migrants as social subjects in border contexts

Migrant voices and narratives: humanizing deportation

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Between global exclusion and cross-border human mobilities

Massive irregularized and cross-border migrations are one of the most reliable faces of the processes of exclusion from globalization and are present in various regions of the world (UNHCR, 2016; CONAPO, 2020, 2019 and 2020). These human mobilities, although they have had a long historical character and have been related to the expansion of capitalism and colonialism in previous times (Mezzadra, 2012; Delgado et al., 2009; Castles, 2008 and 2003), have increased notoriously in recent years (CONAPO, 2020, 2019 and 2018; Bretell and Hollifield, 2015), and are the result of various neoliberal structural changes and dynamics of regional economic integration and the free market (Robinson and Santos, 2014).

Neoliberal globalization, and its related processes (accumulation of capital, increase in inequality, concentration of wealth, increase in poverty, productive deterioration in southern countries, economic crises and contraction of the labor market and labor supply, among others), have been the basis of the production of different contexts of expulsion in various places around the world (Castillo Ramírez, 2020 and 2018) that, for decades and year after year, have expelled thousands of people out of their homes and communities , and force them to migrate to countries (in the global north), in search of better living conditions (De Genova, Picozza and Castillo, 2020). And, without a doubt, one of the most numerous groups of migrations, precarious and exposed to various risks and dangers, is the one that, from different parts of Latin America (particularly from the Central American region), goes to the United States (mainly through the northern border of Mexico) (Castillo Ramírez, 2020).

Within the sectors of academia, social organizations and civil society, these migrations have been explained from different points of view. Some of these approaches have emphasized how these dynamics of human mobility are related to economic, political, environmental factors and frameworks, etc., highlighting the structural and macro character of these processes.

There are also other perspectives that, from local and micro frameworks, and from anthropological and sociological perspectives, focus on individuals in cross-border mobility. However, although there are different visions focused on the people who migrate (such as those previously mentioned), approaches are necessary that not only make the narratives and different stories of the migrants more visible and present, but also do so in their own terms and words of these social subjects.

Humanizing deportation: migrant voices, testimonies, and narratives

In this context, the bi-national, bilingual (Spanish / English) and communitarian project of humanizing deportation is a clear commitment to making migrants and their experiences visible and at the center of the stage. It is a large digital archive, with free and open access, which has more than three hundred documentary short films of a narrative and testimonial nature from various groups of migrants. This project began in 2017, is coordinated by Professor Robert Irwin, and is a collaborative exercise between

different groups of migrants and several American (UC Davis) and Mexican (COLEF, U de G, UACh, ITSEM) universities.

The axis of the project is the production, editing, archiving and dissemination of short audiovisual narratives, which make it possible for migrants to describe their experiences and stories, and, above all, from their own voices and narrative languages. This vast archive, whose axis is the registry of the testimonies of the migrants (from their words and expressions), has a variety of themes: separations of family nuclei and their different consequences, routes and migratory journeys across the border (s) (s), deportations and their repercussions, procedural irregularities in immigration procedures, obstacles and difficulties for migrants in countries of transit and destination, criminalization and stigmatization of migrants in border contexts, among many others. The link for humanizing deportation is: http://humanizandoladeportacion.ucdavis.edu/en/.

In the current context, this project serves as a key device to show, denounce, and make visible the experiences of migrants (from their own voices) and the processes of exclusion and violence to which they are exposed. It is a very useful, accessible, and up-to-date reference material, both for activists and academics, as well as for the general public and pro-migrant groups and organizations. In addition, these types of proposals serve as a criticism of the official views of the national states (of origin, transit, and destination), which try to naturalize, make invisible and normalize migration (and its containment). In this sense, they show the gap and contradiction between government discourses that depoliticize migration and the policies of (restriction and control) of cross-border mobility (and its related dynamics of criminalization of migrants).

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