

Yearnings of the Venezuelan Immigrant Population in Colombia: A Vision from the New Dynamics of Human Mobility

Anhelos de la población inmigrante venezolana en Colombia: una visión desde las nuevas dinámicas de la movilidad humana

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ABSTRACT

The Venezuelan migratory movement is one of the greatest human mobility phenomena in Latin America. The object of the study is to reveal the desires of the Venezuelan population that is in immigrant status between Cúcuta and Villa del Rosario in the Department of Norte de Santander, Colombia. The methodology used focused on qualitative research through the application of semi-structured interviews. The analysis of the information was carried out with grounded theory and the Atlas.Ti software. Among the findings, four categories emerged: yearning for security, documents and identity, social yearnings and yearning for mobility. These results contributed to constructing a profile for this group of immigrants. In conclusion, it was possible to characterize immigrants' desires as an input for designing public policies that allows to satisfy human needs.

Keywords: 1. yearnings, 2. human mobility, 3. immigrant population, 4. Venezuelans 5. Cúcuta and Villa del Rosario border (Colombia).

RESUMEN

El movimiento migratorio venezolano es uno de los fenómenos de mayor movilidad humana en América Latina. El objeto de estudio es develar los anhelos de la población venezolana que se encuentra en condición de inmigrante entre Cúcuta y Villa del Rosario, municipios del departamento de Norte de Santander, Colombia. La metodología empleada se centró en la investigación cualitativa a través de la aplicación de entrevistas semiestructuradas. El análisis de la información se realizó con la teoría fundamentada y el software Atlas.Ti. Entre los hallazgos surgieron cuatro categorías: los anhelos de seguridad, anhelos de documentos e identidad, anhelos sociales y anhelos de movilidad. Estos resultados aportaron en la construcción de un perfil para este grupo de inmigrantes. En conclusión, se logró caracterizar los anhelos de los inmigrantes como insumo para el diseño de políticas públicas que permitan satisfacer las necesidades humanas.

Palabras clave: 1. anhelos, 2. movilidad humana, 3. población inmigrante, 4. venezolanos 5. frontera Cúcuta y Villa del Rosario (Colombia).

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INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the Colombian-Venezuelan border has been involved in a variety of events, among which it is worth mentioning its closure since 2015, when by provisions of the Venezuelan government the complete and absolute closure of borders was decreed. Eventually, a partial opening was granted (pedestrian only), and then, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, the border was completely closed again so as to protect the health of the inhabitants of the area, this resulting in an atypical situation that modified the daily life of those who visit the border, and of those who cross it to reach other nations with the aim of improving their living conditions. This reality—not a secret for those knowledgeable on the liveliest and hottest border in Latin America—has brought with it unpleasant situations for those who travel through that area on a daily basis.

Hence the need to delve into the subject of the yearnings of the Venezuelan immigrant population, based on the research developed by Zambrano Miranda, Galvis Rodríguez, Sierra de Rodríguez, and Toloza Martínez (2020), who in their work on human mobility in the Colombian-Venezuelan border managed to display the yearnings of Venezuelan immigrants in the municipalities of San José de Cúcuta and Villa del Rosario, both within the Cúcuta Metropolitan Area, in the Norte de Santander Department, Colombia. Also, and according to data issued by Colombia Migration (Migración Colombia, 2021), by January of that year, more than 133 000 Venezuelan migrants were living in the aforementioned cities in this cross-border region with the municipality of San Antonio del Táchira, of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

In view of this, and taking into account our subject matter and the aim of this theoretical approach, it is worth bearing in mind that *yearning* can be defined as a deep and vehement ambition for a particular state of things; a combination of desire and aspiration. As a matter of fact, yearnings can turn into the interests the individual. The Royal Spanish Academy (Real Academia de la Lengua Española, 2014) defines yearning, in its second meaning, as a “melancholic sadness caused by the memory of a lost happiness” (p. 1), turning into yearning when the sense of having lost that happiness bears more heavily on the individual than the experience of having lived such. The yearning for times past helps keeping emotional balance.

Venezuela is currently facing a severe economic crisis without precedent in the contemporary history of the country. The government discourse explains the economic crisis under the excuse of an “economic war,” sustaining the thesis of international blockade and sabotage; this argument is supported by the official spokespersonship, who argue that this crisis is the cause of the current situation in Venezuela. From another perspective, Gutiérrez (2017) points out that:

Currently, binational trade relations are governed by a Partial Scope Trade Agreement, which represents a setback in the integration level to the CAN (acronym in Spanish for Andean Community). At the border, restrictions on vehicular traffic and on land transport of goods are still in force. Moreover, profound differences have once again emerged between the governments of both countries (p. 116).

On the other hand, those international organizations that have managed to monitor the crisis in Venezuela present to the public a discouraging outlook for the country in economic matters, as evidenced in the World Economic Outlook report issued by the International Monetary Fund (Fondo Monetario Internacional, 2018), where the inflation projection for the country in 2019 was estimated at 10 000 000%, with a GDP reduction of 5%, and a GDP fall of 18%. This perspective of the economy has negatively impacted on and significantly impoverished the conditions and quality of life of Venezuelans. In this regard, the Venezuelan National Survey of Living Conditions (Encovi, acronym in Spanish for Encuesta Nacional de Condiciones de Vida) carried out by the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB, acronym in Spanish for Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, 2018) stated that by 2018, 48% of the households surveyed in Venezuela would be considered poor households, and it stands out that 94% of those surveyed within such context stated that their income was insufficient to cover their basic needs. This situation, along with the complicated political reality and the social polarization in Venezuela, evidences a complex picture that can undoubtedly influence the decision to migrate of people who seek the satisfaction of their various human needs.

In the same order of ideas and according to the Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict (Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social, 2018), Venezuela has undergone an exponential increase in internal conflict: for the year 2018, a total of 12 715 protests and an estimated of 35 daily demonstrations and public acts were registered compared to the previous year, which translates into an increase in conflict by 23.03%. This, coupled with the economic crisis, has increasingly complicated the situation in Venezuela, the result of which has generated a migration process of huge proportions, in the search of better living conditions and opportunities.

The International Organization for Migration (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones [OIM], 2006) defines migration as a “population movement towards the territory of another State or within it that includes all movements of people regardless of their size, their composition or their causes; it includes the migration of refugees, displaced persons, uprooted persons, economic migrants” (p. 38). Due to the social and economic conditions described above, the Venezuelan population began to emigrate to various countries, this reaching considerable and worrying levels for the international community. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR, 2018), about three million Venezuelans are estimated to be scattered throughout the world, out of which there are about 2 400 000 in Latin America alone; this organization’s projection of Venezuelan migrants for the year 2019 was approximately five million migrants.

Of this considerable number of migrants scattered throughout the Latin American region, Colombia is the country where the largest number of Venezuelans are concentrated, this due to its geographical proximity and the historical ties of brotherhood between both nations. Still, it was not until March 21, 2018, under Decree 542 issued by the Presidency of the Republic, that the first census of Venezuelans in Colombia was conducted, called the Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants (RAMV, acronym in Spanish for Registro Administrativo de Migrantes Venezolanos) in Colombia (Poder Ejecutivo Colombia, 2018; Migración Colombia, 2018). This census made it possible for the first time to quantify the Venezuelan migration phenomenon in

figures and to characterize the demographic profile of the population, in order to design public policy guidelines and proposals for the humanitarian care of said population.

According to the figures issued by Decree 542 in March 2018, it was possible to quantify for the first time that the number of Venezuelans reached a total of 442 462 people, out of which 219 799 were women and 222 330 were men (Poder Ejecutivo Colombia, 2018); these preliminary results for 2018 made it possible to obtain an outlook of this migration. However, according to Koechlin and Eguren (2019) it is “estimated that in Colombia the figure would be close to one million migrants” (p. 25).

The reasons for Venezuelans to leave their country are many, yet they are essentially psychosocial for the most part. In this regard, Bermúdez, Mazuera-Arias, Albornoz-Arias and Morffe Peraza (2018) point out that among the causes for migration, 72.3% of the Venezuelans surveyed stated having left the country due to safety reasons; 63.1% stated that it was due to hunger; 62.9%, due to high levels of stress on a daily basis; and 56.3% due to lack of medication for medical treatments.

When it comes to economic reasons, this same report showed that 82% left the country to look for better and new job opportunities; 70% to help a family member financially; 58% because of no prospects of a prosperous future in Venezuela; 44.9% due to not having enough money to pay the rent; and 39.4% stated being unable to maintain their quality of life (Bermúdez et al., 2018). According to Colombia Migration (Migración Colombia, 2018), out of the total of Venezuelans living in Colombia, taking into account the information from the RAMV (Poder Ejecutivo Colombia, 2018), 18.60% were concentrated in the bordering Norte de Santander Department, which is why it is of interest to know what the aspirations of this population of Venezuelan immigrants in Colombia are; that is, what are their yearnings. Per Gómez de Silva (2009), yearnings are understood as that which is intensely desired. Thus, understanding these aspects of Venezuelan migrants is deemed important, in order to make use of this knowledge to contribute to the elaboration of social intervention initiatives that result in public policies able to satisfy the needs of this population group.

Therefore, the objective of this research is revealing the yearnings of the migrant population of Venezuelan origin in different places in Cúcuta and Villa del Rosario, Colombia. This aspect is addressed by means of epistemological and gnoseological descriptions supported by a qualitative methodology. The results are then presented, and finally a series of closing remarks related to established and emerging categories are made, which will bring us closer to the object of study.

Theoretical Aspects on Migration and Human Needs

The different migration flows of human beings are a matter of growing interest for both governments and society in general today. According to the glossary of the International Organization for Migration (OIM, 2013), migration is defined as the “population movement towards the territory of another State or within it that includes all movements of people regardless of their size, their composition or their causes; it includes the migration of refugees, displaced

persons, uprooted persons, economic migrants” (p. 38). The IOM World Migration Report (OIM, 2018) estimated that there were 244 million international migrants worldwide by 2015, that is, 3.3% of the world population.

Despite the fact that the causes of migration are many, such as “economic factors, governance and public services, demographic imbalances, conflicts, environmental factors, transnational networks” (OIM, 2013, p. 34), it can be stated that in the case of Venezuelans forced migration due to political conflicts and economic factors is the predominant driving force. According to UCAB (2018), the main reason for emigrating, as expressed by 60% of the people surveyed, is the search for employment. In their report on human mobility, Bermúdez et al. (2018) informed that from among the causes for emigrating, 72.3% of the Venezuelans surveyed left the country due to safety reasons, while 63.1% stated that it was due to hunger. These circumstances brought about the forced emigration of Venezuelan population, as the situation in their country compromises their basic living conditions and their human needs.

Many Venezuelans leave their country in the search for better living conditions, as supported by the previous data; to satisfy the human needs that allow the development of their existence. From this context it can be pointed out that the circumstances of the migrant revolve around a common expectation: to improve their living conditions and further their aspirations. The foregoing is based on the theory of human needs proposed by Maslow (1954), needs that motivate human behavior and are ordered hierarchically, that is, they range from the most basic to the most complex. According to Ríos (2015) a need is:

A more or less intense state of tension due to the lack of something, which may correspond to physiological demands, to superfluous requirements transformed by habit into necessities, to psychological imperatives perceived as essential for self-fulfillment, or to social demands learned environmentally (p. 61).

This conceptualization focuses on the well-being of migrants; when the needs they experienced are not satisfied, a state of alertness is triggered that makes them decide to relocate by means of some human mobility process, so as to satisfy said needs. Along this order of ideas, Elizalde Hevia, Marti Vilar, and Martínez Salvá (2006) state that human needs are experienced in stages:

a) The first of them is the feeling or perception that something is missing, b) then, a desire arises to search for a solution to the lack; c) this implies a physical effort, that is, the work done to satisfy the perceived need and unfulfilled desire; d) finally, satisfaction is achieved when the need is fulfilled (p. 10).

According to such need-satisfying structure, the needs identified by Maslow (1954) in his theory of human needs are identified:

1. Physiological needs: considered the priority of the individual, related to his existence, innate from birth; these are hunger, thirst, sex drive, temperature regulation, sleep, breathing, avoiding pain.

2. Security needs: here we find the needs for stability, order and protection, among others. These needs are related to the fear of individuals of losing control of their lives; closely linked to the fear of strangers, anarchy and chaos.

The Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (PNUD, 1994, p. 28), states that “the list of threats to human security is long, but most of them can be grouped into seven main categories”:

a) Economic security: pertains everything related to the risk involved in not having a sufficient income to allow subsistence through employment or government support.

b) Food security: this is the risk of not having timely access to food, in terms of access “both physical and economic to buying basic food items” (p. 30).

c) Health security: this is linked to the risk of not having access to health systems for disease prevention and treatment, among other needs.

d) Environmental security: refers to all actions that transgress the right to live in environment free of risks and of degradation the natural resources.

e) Personal security: refers to the risks of an environment threatened by agents that cause violent acts and terrorism.

f) Community security: refers to the risk of confrontations or conflicts due to the lack of respect and tolerance that must exist among diverse ethnic groups and within a community.

g) Political security: refers to the risks due to the lack of respect for human guarantees and rights.

From the above, a set of aspects that match the propositions of León Blanco (2021) can be identified:

The migration of Venezuelans to Colombia has turned into a social and economic problem; in the last five years it has increased due to the same circumstances in Venezuela under the government of Nicolás Maduro. The high levels of hyperinflation there would be close to 200 000%; economic loss, the lack of electricity and public services, the shortage of food and medicines, and the scarcity of basic living conditions have resulted in a humanitarian crisis and further increased the migration of Venezuelans to other countries (p. 2).

This reality evidently is an atypical situation that responds to the multiculturalism observed at the border, since people from different geographical latitudes converge there and have temporarily taken over this border context. On top of that, situations resulting from drug trafficking, prostitution, gender surveillance, intrafamily violence, among others, are experienced in this space. From one perspective, the border becomes the stage where an infinite number of problems converge, and from another, the border is a necessary step in seeking for new horizons and better living conditions.

*From the Human Needs Theory to the Capability Approach
in International Migration*

Although it is true that the causes associated to the migration process of Venezuelans are multifactorial (Bermúdez et al., 2018; UCAB, 2018), it is also evident that they are predominantly framed in economic and political factors that generate instability in the lives of this population, altering their natural dynamics and therefore impacting on their quality of life. This scenario allows migrants to identify such an alteration in their state of well-being, a realization that stimulates their decision to migrate.

Under these circumstances, migrants recognize their individual needs and those of their family environment, as well as their capabilities to move and obtain the satisfaction of those human needs. For Nussbaum (2012) such capabilities “are the totality of the opportunities available to the individual to choose and to act in their specific political, social and economic situation” (p. 38). Along this line, the author defines the capability approach as “a particular approach to assessing the quality of life and theorizing about basic social justice” (p. 38). This perspective of human development ascribes to States a fundamental role by stating that it is from the encouragement and development of the individual’s capabilities that a higher quality of life would be achieved. Likewise, this approach stands out in its understanding of people as an end in themselves, assessing the opportunities of each human being. It also is pluralistic, and focuses on the freedom of choice that societies must promote in individuals.

According to the author, the capability approach represents the minimum threshold of respect for human dignity, based as it is on the theory of social justice. It could also serve as a complementary explanatory framework to the yearnings that Venezuelan migrants hold in Colombia, as migrants seek a more favorable social, political and economic context that will allow them to achieve their goals and desires; that is, being able to develop their capabilities. In terms of this, Pineda and Ávila (2019) point out that:

Latin American, currently and in the past, has characterized by being economically motivated, that is, the majority of migrants from countries with severe economic crises and scenarios of political instability mobilize in search of employment and better income, which would allow them to meet their needs and those of their families in the face of deteriorating living conditions (p. 61).

Table 1. Capabilities According to Martha C. Nussbaum's Approach

Life	Living a normal length human life; not dying prematurely
Bodily health	Health; proper nourishment
Bodily integrity	A place to live Able to change locations freely Protection against violent attacks (sexual assaults and domestic violence) Choice in reproductive matters Opportunity for sexual satisfaction
Senses, Imagination and Thought	Basic education including literacy and science Use of one's imagination and thought for cultural and artistic creation Freedom of political and artistic expression
Emotions	Enjoying pleasant experiences; avoiding unnecessary pain Love to oneself and other people; feelings of grief, longing, gratitude
Practical Reason	Life planning; freedom of conscience; religious observance
Affiliation	Able to live with and for others; developing self-esteem; avoiding discrimination of any kind (racial, sexual, ethnic, religious)
Other Species	Respectful relationship with other beings and with the natural world
Play	Enjoyment of recreational activities
Control over One's Environment	Political participation, freedom of association and expression; right to look for work; right to own property on equal terms; legal protection against unauthorized detention; labor relations under mutual acknowledgement

Source: Own elaboration based on Nussbaum (2012).

It is evident that migration has become an issue that should not be ignored when analyzing the border's social fabric. This opens way to reflecting on possible satisfactory means to aid improving the conditions of immigrants and the social well-being of those who stay at the border and become actors of the social dynamics experienced there on a daily basis. In this sense, it is important to analyze the elements that come together in the imaginary line dividing Colombia from Venezuela, where a few meters marked off by a river set apart one nation from the another.

METHODOLOGY

The study was framed within the qualitative approach, which according to Piñero and Rivera (2012) “provides us with the possibility of producing knowledge based on meanings ascribed by people themselves, meanings that are part of the realities made visible through their beliefs, intentions and motivations” (p. 32). Additionally, our research process was determined by the interpretive paradigm, which for Martínez Godínez (2013) arises “as an alternative to the positivist paradigm and takes as its starting point the idea of understanding social reality from quantitative logics, which is why it is based in subjectivities and makes room for understanding the world” (p. 5). It should be taken into account that for Gurdíán-Fernández (2010), a paradigm is:

A dominant theoretical system in science in each period of its history, which organizes and directs scientific research in a certain direction, also allowing the emergence of certain hypotheses and inhibiting the development of others, as well as focusing the attention of those who investigate on certain aspects of their object of study, and obscuring others (p. 60).

Indeed, due to the qualitative nature of this research, a script of questions was applied through the semi-structured interview modality, which was addressed to informants: 20 women and 2 men, whose ages range from 20 to 39 years, in Cúcuta and Villa del Rosario, who verbally and voluntarily expressed their consent to answer the script of questions. In the case of open questions related to yearnings, these were processed making use of the grounded theory of Strauss and Corbin (2002) as an analysis technique that follows these steps: a) information transcript; b) open coding; c) axial coding; d) selective coding. By using the qualitative data analysis tool Atlas.Ti, semantic networks emerged for the theoretical processing of what was found in the collected information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

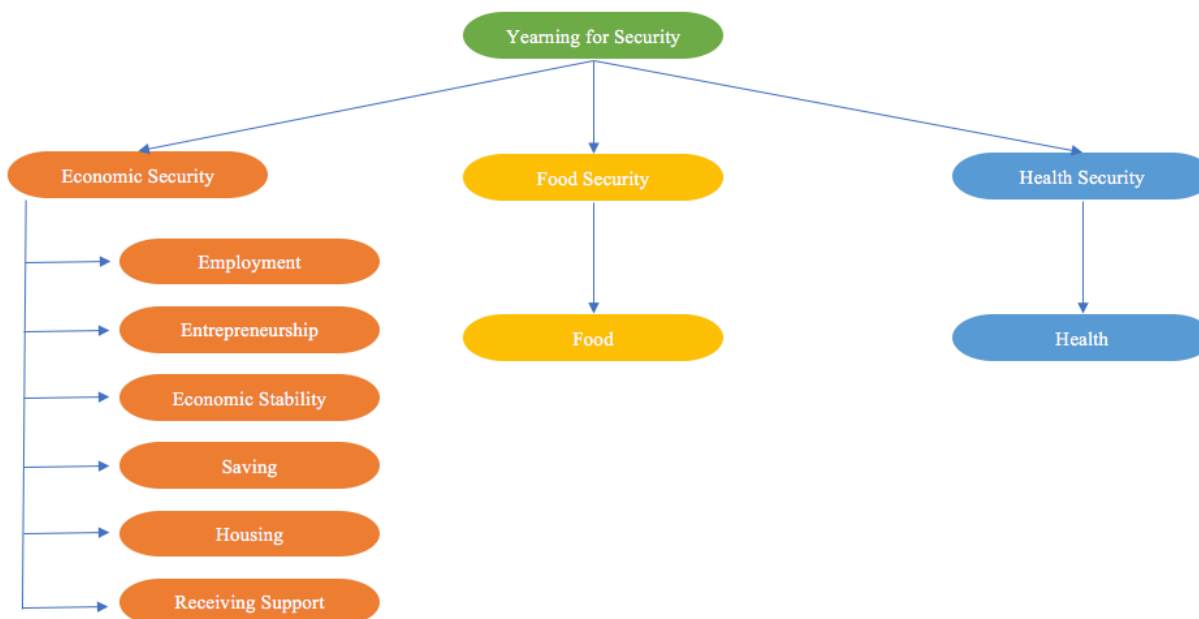
Category I: Yearning for Security

The data analysis in this research consisted of selecting, grouping, codifying, and contrasting the information collected in order to obtain a global vision of the reality under study. For this, the procedure set forth by the grounded theory was followed in three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The open coding phase, according to Strauss and Corbin (2002), “is an analytical process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data” (p. 110). This is a process of connecting with the reality under study, where the process of building categories begins. For the purposes of our analysis, code was classified under certain properties expressed in four main categories: yearning for security; yearning for status documents and identity; yearning for social validation; and yearning for mobility.

In the process of analyzing and interpreting information, inductive action was employed to identify the constituent parts of the whole. In this sense, the first category deals with the yearning for safety expressed by Venezuelan migrants, understood as the need for stability and protection in the different spheres of human life. From this category, the yearning for economic security

emerges as an emerging subcategory, which is grouped according to the emerging codes identified inductively (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Yearning for Security of Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia



Source: Own elaboration based on the results of the questionnaire.

In this sense, the yearning for economic security respond to the interests of immigrants to improve their living conditions. It is in fact these conditions that encourage people to continue on their way or, failing that, to stay for a while on the Colombian-Venezuelan border. In this regard, Paz Noguera, Alpala Ramos, and Villota Vivas (2021) point out that:

The World Bank defines recent Venezuelan migration as mixed, as it is made up of Venezuelan economic migrants, Colombians returning to their country of origin, and refugees, to a lesser extent. This study draws attention to the complex socioeconomic conditions that migrants endure in Colombian cities, especially irregular migrants (p. 81).

As can be seen, the quote above supports the subcategories emerging from the four main categories analyzed that will allow a closer look at the phenomenon studied.

Employment

In the case quoted next, the category of employment is brought up; employment that migrants yearn for in order to cover their needs:

Getting a job is my main goal, I'm sure it will be a different job, and really, a stable one would be the best; with a job you can achieve many things that we no longer had, with a job you can get things that are unattainable (female informant no. 045, personal communication, May 10, 2019).

The economic factor is one of the fundamental causes of Venezuelan migration. According to UCAB (2018), 94% of the migrants surveyed state having earned insufficient income, this matching with the increase in the recorded unemployed population rate, which went from 9% in 2017 to 10% for the year 2018. And as a last relevant piece of data that justifies the reasons for emigrating, more than 60% of the households surveyed stated that the main reason for their relatives to emigrate was the need for employment (Bermúdez et al., 2018).

Entrepreneurship

This reality accounts for statistical data of great relevance, as part of the migrants surveyed expressed their wish for entrepreneurship:

It would be great to have my own business, being able to have my own little company as was fought for so much in Venezuela, starting again here to achieve the company I had, I hope I get the chance to do that and to make a good living (male informant no. 031, personal communication, May 16, 2019).

Despite their situation, Venezuelan migrants expressed the need to start own businesses that would allow them to obtain resources; that is, they hold an interest in undertaking a business activity of some sort. This echoes what was stated by Ríos (2015), who pointed out that economic security refers to the need to generate own income. From this, a resilient attitude can be deduced in this group of people, who are willing to undertake business activities. In this regard, Pineda and Ávila (2019) pointed out that:

Faced with the severe crisis that Venezuela is going through, an important part of its population has opted for migration as the main mechanism to alleviate and overcome the accelerated deterioration of their living conditions, the precariousness of wages, underemployment, as well as the difficulties in accessing food, health, education and public services. In this context, the destination par excellence has been and still is Colombia, due to its geographical proximity to Venezuela, lower transportation costs, cultural similarities, and the history of migration shared by both countries (p. 68).

Economic Stability

Also, within the *yearning for security* category and linked to the economic field, migrants expressed their need for economic stability:

Well, we are looking for economic stability, having good stability is needed, as well as having better income in pesos that can improve the economic situation for me and my family, and so saving money for all the things we need (female informant no. 048, personal communication, May 16, 2019).

The great Venezuelan economic crisis is expressed in hyperinflation, which according to estimates will reach 13.864%, which will place the country as the one with the highest inflation in the world (Fondo Monetario Internacional, 2018). This situation, altogether with the increase in

poverty that went from 46% in 2017 to 48% in 2018 (UCAB, 2018), results in uncertainty, crisis, and conflict in Venezuelan households, as their economic security is impacted and they are unable to earn the minimum basic income for subsistence. In this regard, Article 23, paragraph 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations [UN], 1948) sets forth that “everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection” (p. 48).

Saving

Likewise, and due to the aforementioned, Venezuelans yearn to be able to save:

You have to save what you can, we are passing through and we have to save a lot to be able to achieve what we want, working and little by little saving what is needed to continue on our way and travel to another country, to Ecuador or to another nearby (male informant no. 019, personal communication, June 16, 2019).

The critical economic situation of Venezuelan migrants leads them to look forward to and yearn for saving economic resources for mobility. This situation of them is also linked to the economic security of the migrant, depending on their family group case.

Housing

On the other hand, with few resources and great expectations, Venezuelan migrants express their need to have access to housing:

Many times it is a dream, but you have to have them, you have to keep your hopes of being able to get a house of your own, even if it's small; wow I wish I could work and work until I can have a house for my children, I always ask God with great faith, that we can make it one day (female informant no. 038, personal communication, May 16, 2019).

The need for shelter and physical protection is essential in human beings. In the case of Venezuelan migrants, one of their main yearnings is to have a place to live: according to a study on the New Dynamics of Human Mobility in Colombia, it was found that 30% of Venezuelans sleep in public spaces, that is, in the streets (Sierra de Rodríguez, Toloza Martínez, Zambrano Miranda, Galvis Rodríguez, & Fernández, 2018). Furthermore, according to the World Bank, cited in the Conpes 3950 Document, “the high demand for housing, and the inability to meet it, resulted in the occupation of public spaces and the emergence of informal settlements in risk areas” (Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social [Conpes], 2018, p. 58). Based on this, it is necessary to highlight that this situation is a direct expression of the high vulnerability conditions resulting from the economic limitations to access housing in better conditions. And so it can be stated that Venezuelan migrants begins to saturate the existing options for housing already available in Colombia, mainly so at the border.

Receiving Support

Venezuelan migrants also expressed their yearning to receive support: “I hope to receive support from the Colombian State” (female informant no. 057, personal communication, May 16, 2019); “we have many needs and we need to receive care due to the bad situation we are going through” (female informant no. 153, personal communication, May 17, 2019). These testimonies confirm the degree of vulnerability endured by this population, being the Colombian State the most affected one in the region by this diaspora of compatriots, for which reason it has resorted to various international organizations, in order to channel humanitarian aid that can cover the needs of people.

To this effect, through its National Planning Department, the National Council for Economic and Social Policy (Conpes, 2018) designed a Strategy for the Attention of Migration from Venezuela. In addition, within the framework of opinions on the matter, a yearning emerged expressed in the need to improve the living conditions experienced by Venezuelan migrants due to social imbalances and the systematic worsening of social conditions in Venezuela.

To summarize, the yearnings manifested through the emerging codes grouped in the economic security subcategory reflect that Venezuelan migrants in Colombia yearn for aspects that are part of their needs, as proposed by Maslow (1954) in the theory of human needs. However, as a complement to our explanatory framework, according to Nussbaum (2012), these yearnings could be explained by the difficulty of the Venezuelan State to guarantee the essential capabilities for these yearnings to be fulfilled, since by not being able to deploy their control capability over the environment itself through the possibility of accessing jobs that allow them to satisfy their economic needs, a feeling of insecurity arises in migrants, which affects the development of their capabilities as human beings.

Food

The need for food security is also included among the yearnings of Venezuelans, conveyed in the desire to have a better diet as expressed by the informants:

Being able to eat twice a day, God willing, is something that many of us need, as well as being able to get food and have a better diet in order to have strength, and seek greater stability and help our families (male informant no. 173, personal communication, November 21, 2019).

The conditions of vulnerability of Venezuelans in terms of food are alarming, since 21.06% of all registered Venezuelan migrants stated that their household ran out of food in the last three months before leaving the country (Poder Ejecutivo Colombia, 2018). In addition, according to the Venezuelan Human Mobility Report of the Jesuit Refugee Service Venezuela, 61.03% of those surveyed stated that one of the causes for emigrating was hunger (Bermúdez et al., 2018).

Health

The need for health security is also to be accounted for among the yearnings, as expressed by a small group in their aspiring to health both for them and their loved ones: “to continue with my mother’s treatments” (male informant no. 059, personal communication, June 16, 2019).

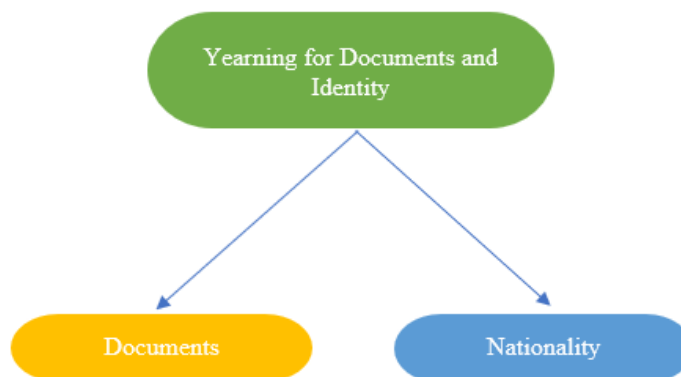
The needs of Venezuelan migrants are many, for which various international organizations (International Red Cross, UNICEF, Doctors Without Borders, UNHCR, among others) have organized days of medical care, vaccination and free medication. In addition, according to the National Council for Economic and Social Policy, in its Conpes 3950 Document, medical care increased by 202.06% in 2018, by offering emergency services, hospitalization, consultations and other procedures (Conpes, 2018). On the other hand, the Comptroller General of the Republic of Colombia, Felipe Córdoba, stated that the debt with public hospitals for emergency care for Venezuelan citizens as of October 2021 exceeded 407 billion Colombian pesos in the last three years (Contraloría General de la República, 2021).

These yearnings for food and health are framed within the need for food and health security expressed by Venezuelan migrants in Colombia. This reveals the violation of their capabilities as human beings, specifically the ability to develop physical health through adequate nutrition, as stated by Nussbaum (2012), given that in the specific case of the Venezuelan State, and despite expressing such obligation in its magna carta, it does not guarantee security in the fulfillment of these human rights.

Category 2: Yearning for Documents and Identity

This category expresses another of the emerging yearnings of Venezuelans in Colombia, reflecting their desire to access the necessary documentation that will allow them leaving the threshold of migratory irregularity, so as to be able to insert themselves into the legal framework of the host country, thus gaining access to better jobs and to academic activities.

Figure 2. Yearning for Documents and Identity of Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia



Source: Own elaboration based on the results of the questionnaire.

Documents

Some Venezuelan migrants in Colombia express that in order to improve their social conditions they need to obtain documents:

Being able to get documents is definitely necessary, so as not to have any problems and being able to do something here, you have to legalize the papers that will allow you obtaining better jobs, and also, whenever I can bring my children, being able to obtain the papers so they can study here (informant woman no. 029, personal communication, May 15, 2019).

The vast majority of Venezuelan migrants were in Colombia in irregular status at the time of the interview. Due to this, the Colombian government implemented an initial stage in 2018 to grant the Border Mobility Card (TMF, acronym in Spanish for Tarjeta de Movilidad Fronteriza), a mobility instrument that allows inhabitants to transit into border areas to make purchases or into Colombia when aiming at other destinations. However, it does not guarantee other rights for pendulum migrations, constantly in transit. According to the Conpes 3950 Document, this instrument had been granted to a 1 624 825 people by February 2018 (Conpes, 2018).

On the other hand, there is another migratory category that includes people with a Special Stay Permit (PEP, acronym in Spanish for Permiso Especial de Permanencia), who were registered in the Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants (RAMV), this granting them a special status for a two-year term that allows them to work and study in Colombia. According to Colombia Migration (Migración Colombia, 2018), 383 358 Venezuelans had obtained this PEP document to regularize their stay in Colombian territory by September 2018.

Likewise, a small group of these migrants expressed their wish to be able to obtain Colombian nationality: “Being able to become a national, because of my son” (female informant no. 044, personal communication, May 13, 2019).

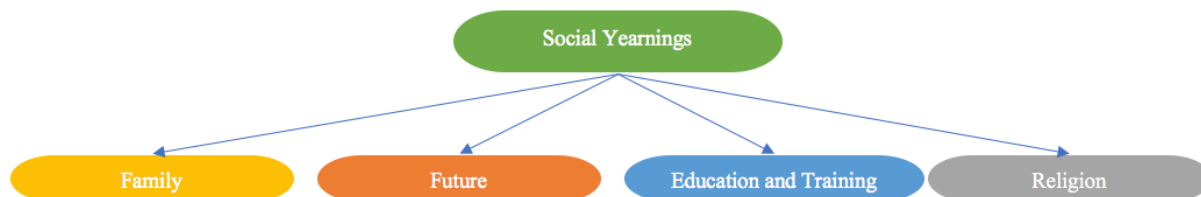
This could be due to the fact that a substantial number of Venezuelan migrants are descendants of Colombian citizens; however, it is likely that this population, being relatively new to the territory, was unaware of the administrative procedures defined in Law 43 of February 1st of 1993 that had to be met in order to obtain said benefit (Congreso de Colombia, 1993). This law establishes the regulations to the obtaining, resignation, loss and recovery of Colombian nationality. Moreover, in order to aid migrants fully develop their capacities as human beings, the Colombian State should try to regularize their situation because, because, as pointed out by Nussbaum (2012), “combined capabilities are the totality of opportunities available to choose in a given social and economic situation” (p. 40). In this sense, access to regularization and identity documents would allow migrants to access administrative procedures more expeditiously, thus developing the potential of the basic skills they have as a population group faster.

Category 3: Social Yearnings

Furthering the process of data analysis and interpretation, the yearning for social validation category of Venezuelans in Colombia emerges, yearnings that are driven by precariousness

pertaining their need for love and belonging, to feel supported by other human beings, as well as the explicit intention of migrants to be able to cover the various subjective needs that fulfill their well-being.

Figure 3. Social Yearning of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia



Source: Own elaboration based on the results of the questionnaire.

Family

In response to the inductive development of information, the code linked to the family emerged, in terms of which most of the informants focus on the possibility of helping and supporting their families. This can be analyzed and explained from two angles: first, given that the family represents the fundamental pillar of any human being in society, and second, because as expressed in article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948), “the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State” (p. 34). In addition, according to the 2009 international seminar Families in the 21st century (quoted by Moreno Olmedo, 2016) “the family is deemed the primary group for human coexistence, safety, protection, and affection” (p. 55).

In the first place, this code comes to focus the need of migrants to protect their families, since exceptionally strong affective bonds are established inwardly that result in a feeling of well-being and love. This matches Nussbaum (2012), who from the capabilities approach, stated that the family should guarantee human beings a sense of affiliation, based on “being able to live for and to others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings” (p. 54). Secondly, the need for economic security can be identified in the yearning for “helping” their families and thus protecting their main nucleus of affection, since, within the roles of the family, attempts are made to satisfy all needs according to resource availability.

Future

The code future emerges inductively, also directly linked to the prospective visions and the perspectives towards the family of the person who assumes the role of household head, whether male or female, depending on who is in charge of such:

This is an opportunity, to be here and truly being able to strive every day to achieve better future for the family, especially for my children, they are children just starting out in life and need support to have a better future, a good future (female informant no. 061, personal communication, May 16, 2019).

From the testimonies of Venezuelan migrants, the outstanding role of optimism and vision of the future upheld by them in the current situation of their country is of vital interest. This relates to the motivation for the achievement obtained as a family. Ríos (2015) stated that the motivation to seek success in tasks is characteristic of the roles of parents or of individuals who have family roles, since it is part of the security needs for the successful persistence of the family nucleus.

Education and Training

Education and training have a leading role when addressing family roles, as pointed out by Fontana Hernández, Alvarado Valverde, Ángulo Ramírez, Marín Valverde, and Quirós Salas (2009), since the family strives to contribute significantly to educational processes, helping the individual to fully overcome the multiple challenges and setbacks they are to face. Hence, migrants expressed in terms of yearning the need to value education and training. The desire for their children to continue studying is a common denominator reported by our informants.

From the testimonies expressed, it is clear the need to recover and continue the educational process of the infants in their care. According to the RAMV, in 2018 there were a total of 118 709 children and teenagers registered with their family nucleus, this without the unquantifiable number of children who entered Colombia with their parents irregularly (Migración Colombia, 2018). It should be noted that in several cases children had to drop out of school upon undertaking the migration process. However, according to Conpes (2018), despite the ease of access to the Colombian educational system, students still find it difficult to request study certificates, taking tests, and then graduating, given their lack of regular immigration status. This follows along the line of Nussbaum (2012), who pointed out that the ability to develop reasoning and thinking through proper education is within the scope the capabilities approach. This is an aspect to take into account if the Venezuelan migration phenomenon expands, so as to facilitate the full incorporation of migrants into the educational system, as set forth in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948).

Religion

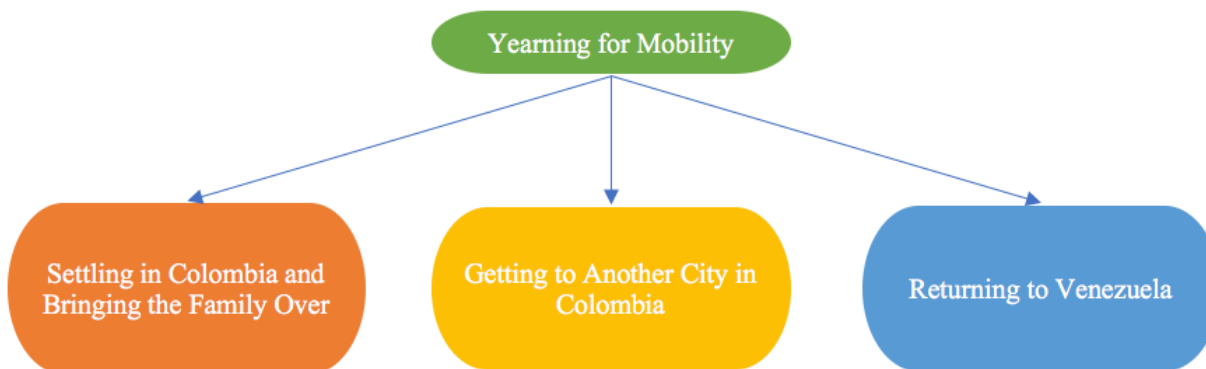
Finally, a group of these Venezuelan migrants in Colombia expressed words of resignation and self-sacrifice, possibly due to them being in the twilight of life, words linked to the notions of God. Some verbalizations focused on expressions such as: “giving myself to God” (female informant no. 111, personal communication, May 26, 2019); “none really, I already lost everything, I want to die in peace” (female informant no. 096, personal communication, May 26, 2019); and, among others, “living my last days in peace with God” (female informant no. 084, personal communication, May 26, 2019).

These statements rest upon a spiritual background in which, without delving into religion, migrants can be understood as expressing a connection with a supreme being.

Category 4: Yearning for Mobility

The last category addresses the displacements of human populations due to grouping needs and diverse interests. In this case, the wishes of migrants are clearly expressed in the three priorities described in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Yearning for mobility of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia



Source: Own elaboration based on the results of the questionnaire.

Bringing the Family Over

A sizable number of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia expressed interest in settling in Colombia and bringing their family thereafter, this due to the need to regroup their family, thus improving their living conditions.

Family, my family, that is what drives us to search for new opportunities, I dream of being able to settle myself for good and being able to bring my family here, my children, and being able to build a better future with them, to settle down and being able to stay together, because it is very hard over there (female informant no. 029, personal communication, May 15, 2019).

Family reunification is a human need linked to the social need of affection, love and the company of other human beings that complement personal well-being. UNHCR (n. d.) acknowledges the importance of “bringing together the child and the family or previous care provider for the purpose of establishing or re-establishing long-term care” (p. 467).

Getting to Another City in Colombia

The need to travel and reach another city in Colombia was also expressed in a code. The idea of traveling outside of Cúcuta is generally associated with employment: “getting to Bogotá because they have a job for me there” (male informant no. 180, personal communication, June 16, 2019); “getting to the city of Medellín to work” (female informant no. 077, personal communication, May 16, 2019); “getting to Bogotá and start working” (female informant no. 043, personal communication, May 13, 2019).

According to the RAMV (Migración Colombia, 2018) the largest number of Venezuelan migrants is concentrated in the departments bordering Venezuela: Norte de Santander (18.60%), La Guajira (16.92%), and the capital, Bogotá (9.83%), among others. In many cases, this comes to show that bordering departments are a window of opportunity to then continue with the journey; there are even some very specific cases of internal migration flows of Venezuelans crossing Colombia on foot.

Returning to Venezuela

Finally, the code that manifests the intention of a number of migrants to return to Venezuela was analyzed. This intention was reported as such: “reuniting with all my family” (male informant no. 180, personal communication, June 23, 2019); “to return to my country with my family” (female informant no. 67, personal communication, May 16, 2019); “to return to my country, see my family again” (male informant no. 105, personal communication, May 30, 2019).

The yearning of Venezuelans for returning to their country of origin leads us to reflect on what was defined by the International Organization for Migration (OIM, 2006) in its Glossary on Migration: “reintegration is key in the return process, since refugees and displaced people return to places affected by disasters, sometimes after a long time, and they may have lost their property and their family and social ties.” Such is the case of the Venezuelans surveyed in the Venezuelan Human Mobility Report of the Jesuit Refugee Service Venezuela (Bermúdez et al., 2018), from among which 45.3% stated having had to sell properties, homes, clothes, vehicles, furniture in order to fund their emigration project, while 62.1% had to quit their job. These factors position this population in a highly vulnerable situation when aspiring to return. Despite being a personal decision, the issuing State could generate a public policy to facilitate the return to the country of origin and to aid the reintegration of migrants into society.

Based on the above, there is no doubt that this human group vehemently aspires to achieve their individual goals, a fact that, from Nussbaum’s (2012) capability approach, can be framed within the main capability of physical integrity, expressed in being able to move freely within the country in order to regroup the family and return to Venezuela.

It should be noted that it is expected for Venezuelan migrants to fulfill their stated yearnings. In March 2021, Colombia issued a plan to regularize around 1 million undocumented migrants who arrived in the country fleeing the crisis in Venezuela, a decision signed by President Iván Duque (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2021). Decree 216 of 2021 brought about the so-called Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants, which allows them to transit in Colombia and gives them a period of 10 years to acquire a resident visa, appealing “to solidarity,” according to the statements by President Duke. According to Colombia Migration (Migración Colombia, 2021), as of December 31 of that year there were 1.72 million Venezuelan migrants in Colombia, of which about 1 million are of irregular status (Cancillería de Colombia, 2021).

CLOSING REMARKS

Venezuelan migration in Colombia is a phenomenon of growing interest for Latin America and the world, which is why this research aimed at unveiling the yearnings of Venezuelans who are immigrants in various parts of the cities of Cúcuta and Villa del Rosario, in Colombia. Once having approached the phenomenon studied according to qualitative methodology, and inductively analyzing the responses provided by the population, four main categories emerged.

Within the explanatory framework of human needs, the category *Yearning for security of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia* reflected the extreme conditions of vulnerability of this population, holding basic yearnings such as employment, entrepreneurship, economic stability, saving, housing, food, health, receiving support, quality of life, documents, and citizenship. This is parallel to the rapid decomposition of social, economic and political conditions, as it is a migration process forced by socioeconomic factors.

The category *Yearning for documents and identity of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia* evidenced the presence of a group of Venezuelans in Colombia who lack the documents necessary to carry out the administrative procedures that would allow them improving their quality of life. Some of these migrants also yearn for Colombian citizenship, given that they are descendants of Colombians who lived in Venezuela and then returned to Colombia with their offspring. Along the same line, some Venezuelans whose children were born in Colombia also aspire to obtain Colombian nationality.

By means of the category *Social yearning of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia*, the need for the affection of and to protect their families that these human groups hold was revealed; these factors are related to the future of the family, and to schooling and training, wherein emotional and security needs are a constant.

In the last category, *Yearning for mobility of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia*, the intentions of settling in Colombia, bringing the family, traveling on to another city in Colombia, and returning to Venezuela were expressed. These yearnings go along with a theme of affection that includes the desire for mobility, either to regroup the family, to return, or to move to another city.

Finally, this categorization of the yearnings of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia allowed establishing an approximate profile of this human group, with the purpose of it serving as a complementary input for the design of public intervention policies aimed at this population. Migration has come to leave a mark on the border societies of Colombia and Venezuela, and so it is important to take into account that the elements addressed hereby are meant to become points of reflection for new research on the topic.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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