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"Migrating is like dying and then being reborn in a different place": The Experience of Venezuelans in Peru

"Migrar es como morir para renacer en otro lugar": la experiencia de venezolanos en Perú

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of "suffering" in the migratory experience of displaced Venezuelans on their way to Peru, in the context of departure, during the journey, and the arrival context. Through a mixed qualitative methodology of participant observation and interviews, we seek to understand the significance of suffering in the different phases of the process. In the analyzed case, it was found that each phase corresponds to different motives and types of suffering and that others remain in the three stages. Although the concept of suffering is implicit in many recent academic contributions about the migration phenomenon, there is a need for adequate theoretical development of the suffering of Venezuelan displaced persons. This study contributes to the literature on migration and suffering, and at the same time, to the emerging literature on the Venezuelan exodus in Latin America.

Keywords: 1. migration, 2. suffering, 3. mental health of migrants, 4. Venezuelan migration, 5. migration in Peru.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo tiene como objetivo explorar el "sufrimiento" en la experiencia migratoria de los desplazados venezolanos en el trayecto hacia Perú: en el contexto de salida, durante el viaje y en el contexto de llegada. A través de una metodología cualitativa mixta, de observación participante y entrevistas, se busca entender la significación del concepto de sufrimiento en las distintas etapas del proceso. En el caso analizado se encontró que a cada fase le corresponden diferentes motivos y tipos de sufrimiento, y que otros se mantienen en las tres etapas. Aunque el sufrimiento está implícito en muchas de las recientes contribuciones académicas sobre el fenómeno de la migración, hace falta un adecuado desarrollo teórico del sufrimiento de los desplazados forzosos venezolanos. Este estudio aporta a la literatura sobre la migración y el sufrimiento, y a la vez a la emergente literatura sobre el éxodo venezolano en América Latina.

Palabras clave: 1. migración, 2. sufrimiento, 3. salud mental de migrantes, 4. migración venezolana, 5. migración en Perú.

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INTRODUCTION

The ongoing worsening of the political, economic, and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela since 2014 has resulted in a massive displacement of Venezuelans to various countries in the region. Despite the lack of accurate official figures, this severe crisis has led to the departure of over 7 million people from the country, the equivalent of over 15% of the population (Response for Venezuelans [R4V], 2022). Over 80% of Venezuelans settled in other Latin American countries (Selee, Bolter, Muñoz-Pogossian, & Hazán, 2019), Peru being the second largest receiving country, surpassed only by Colombia.

There is an ongoing academic debate on whether Venezuelans should be considered refugees according to the definition set forth in the Cartagena Declaration, which has been incorporated by most Latin American countries into their national legislation (Freier, 2015; Freier, Berganza, & Blouin, 2021). In 1984, this Declaration expanded the universal definition of refugee as a person (or group of people) fleeing their country in the face of a threat of generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order (Acosta, Blouin, & Freier, 2019; Blouin, Berganza, & Freier, 2020). The Venezuelan exodus does not constitute voluntary economic migration, but rather what Alexander Betts would call "survival migration", that is, a migration flow of people who leave their country of origin due to an existential threat for which they lack access to an internal remedy or resolution (Betts, 2013, p. 10).

A migratory experience with the characteristics of the Venezuelan case impacts on the migrant population by affecting their mental health, causing pain and even physical injury. According to Clay (2019), the crisis in Venezuela has caused feelings of sadness, fear, anger, anxiety, as well as symptoms of depression, which are increasingly common among the population. Along this line, a study by Caroll, Luzes, Freier, and Bird (2020) found high incidence of depression among those Venezuelan migrants who arrived at the border between Ecuador and Peru in April 2019: 19% among men, and 23% for women, compared to about 4% for a typical population.

Once in the country of destination, migrants face different challenges in terms of social integration, such as cultural shock, lack of support networks, job discrimination, mistreatment, xenophobia, and violence. Thus, the migration process impacts negatively on the psychosocial well-being of Venezuelans. At the same time, a forced migration experience can generate traumas that are in turn accentuated, through feelings such as the guilt migrants feel for leaving relatives and friends behind in Venezuela. It is important to note that the mental health of migrants can both improve and deteriorate throughout the different stages in the process of adaptation to the host country (Research Center of the University of the Pacific [CIUP, acronym in Spanish for Centro de Investigación de la Universidad del Pacífico], 2020).

Various studies have described and explained the phenomenon of forced displacement of Venezuelan citizens across Latin America, as well as political reactions to this displacement (Aron Said & Castillo Jara, 2020; Gandini, Lozano, & Prieto, 2019; Mahlke, Parent, & Yamamoto, 2017; Freier & Castillo, 2020). However, the emerging literature has not focused on the experiences of

migrants themselves; and there is a gap in terms of those aspects pertaining to mental health, generally, and specifically the concept of suffering.

This paper seeks to complement the migration literature by exploring experiences of suffering within a group of displaced Venezuelans in Peru. It investigates the manifestations of suffering within different stages of their migration journey: their departure from Venezuela, their journey by land, and their arrival in Peru. For this purpose, various interviews and ethnographic work were carried out; this work involved accompanying a group of Venezuelan migrants from the time they left their country until they arrived in the city of Lima, capital of Peru. Our research highlights the emotions of Venezuelan migrants, in relation to the concept of suffering, as they go through different migratory stages.

Our article is structured as follows. First, we briefly describe our methodology, presenting the characteristics of our case study and outlining the characteristics of Venezuelan forced migration to Peru (up until 2020), as well as the policies that the country has adopted in response to Venezuelan arrivals. Next, we explain our theoretical framework, which focuses on the relationship between migration and the concept of suffering. Following this, based on our ethnographic work and interviews, we present the testimonies and experiences of Venezuelan migrants, and discuss them in relation to suffering. Finally, in the conclusions, we lay out our research's contributions.

VENEZUELAN MIGRATION AND POLITICS IN PERU

According to Paez and Vivas Peñalver (2017), there have been three important phases in recent Venezuelan emigration: "looking for new opportunities" (2000-2012) (p. 13), "growing hopelessness" (2012-2014) (p. 16) and "migration of despair" (2015-present) (p. 22). The authors explain that most Venezuelan migrants who left the country during the first phase were high- or middle-income citizens who chose to move to the United States or southern Europe. During this phase, relatively wealthy and educated professionals migrated, bringing investment, entrepreneurship, and specialized skills to host countries. The increasing erosion of Venezuela's economic and political system brought about the second phase of Venezuelan mobilization, with a less homogeneous flow in terms of socioeconomic status. Although many still fled to the United States and Europe, during this second phase, more and more Venezuelans moved to countries in the region, such as Colombia, Panama, and other countries in the Southern Cone.

The current phase of mobilization, termed "migration of despair," began in the first half of 2015. Paez and Vivas Peñalver (2017) point out that these migrants flee in response to the growing humanitarian crisis characterized by shortages of food and medication, inflation, and a sharp increase in violence and political repression. In general, these migrants are poorer and less educated than those of the previous phases; they leave the country with little regard for the safety, stability, or even viability of their destination countries, and tend to have fewer resources when leaving the country.

This change in the profile of Venezuelan migrants is evident in the periodic reports published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, or OIM for its Spanish acronym) on the Peruvian case.[4] The data from the October 2017 document reveals that, at that time, the majority of the Venezuelan population in Peru was male, young and single; 81.8% of those surveyed were between 18 and 35 years old, 62.6% were men, and 75.9% were single (OIM, 2017). Contrastingly, the data published in February 2020, just before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, shows a distinctly different population: the majority were female migrants (55%) traveling with children; 45% of the people interviewed stated that they cared for at least one minor in their group (OIM, 2020). Thus, while the original profile was that of young, single people seeking opportunities in Peru, profiles changed towards women and children seeking family reunification.

The phenomenon of Venezuelan migration in Peru has become increasingly relevant due to the exponential growth of said population in the country. It is estimated that in 2015 there were 3 768 Venezuelans in Peru, yet by the end of 2020 their numbers had already exceeded the one million mark (R4V, 2021). Furthermore, the majority of Venezuelans entered the country in 2018 (76.8%), mainly in the February to October period; while only 19.6% entered in 2017, 2.7% in 2016, and 1% in the 2011 to 2015 period (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2019).

The steep increase of Venezuelan nationals brought about the creation of different regularization mechanisms. The Temporary Stay Permit (PTP, acronym in Spanish for *Permiso Temporal de Permanencia*)[5] was enacted on January 3rd, 2017 and ceased to be issued on December 31st, 2018. It was amended four times, and the first three amendments, extended both the deadlines for obtaining the permit and for applying for it. The termination of the PTP was due the country's change of government;[6] the new president took a more securitist approach to migration, implementing restrictive measures such as requiring a passport to enter the country, and later, a so-called humanitarian visa (Aron Said & Castillo Jara, 2020).

As for the PTP, while only 37 671 permits were issued in 2017, this number rose to 162 450 in 2018; that is an increase of 331% in the span of one year (Superintendencia Nacional de Migraciones, 2018). In terms of refugees and asylum seekers, the increase in the Venezuelan migratory flow led to Peru becoming the country with the most asylum applications of said nationality —followed by Brazil and the United States (Alto Comisionado de Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados, 2019)— with close to 1 500 000 applications by the end of 2020 (R4V, 2021).

[4] The IOM makes use of a modular system called the Displacing Tracking Matrix (DTM) to track and monitor the displacement of a given group in a situation of human mobility. Through this, aspects such as the migratory profile, the degree of vulnerability, displacement trends, among others, are measured.

[5] The PTP is a document issued by the National Superintendency of Migration of the Peruvian State so that Venezuelan nationals can regularize their migrant status in the country. This allows individuals to work legally in the country and to have access to education and health, among other fundamental rights.

[6] Pedro Pablo Kuczynski resigned from the presidency of Peru in March 2018, and Martín Vizcarra, then vice president, took office.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE SUFFERING OF MIGRANTS

The concept of suffering has been used and progressively enriched by disciplines such as sociology (Bauman, 1994) and anthropology (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1997; Sayad, 2004). The term is complex as it includes both personal experiences and diverse social processes that are often difficult to describe (Wilkinson, 2005).

When speaking of suffering and migration in sociological terms, Zygmunt Bauman (1994, 1995) conceptualizes the term in the sociopolitical field. The concept of suffering proposed by Bauman can be understood in two ways: (1) the relationships between human beings, in which there is a clearly identifiable perpetrator who causes suffering to another individual (relational suffering), and (2) particular life conditions derived from the social, economic or cultural environment that cause suffering (structural suffering) (Jacobsen & Marshman, 2008). Structural suffering is in constant dynamic interaction with the ruling elite, that is, with those who exercise power over a certain group or individual. Hence, it is understood that government actions (such as the making of laws and public policies) can increase the suffering of people.

Gender, ethnicity, nationality, and socioeconomic status are factors that can cause suffering for individuals and groups (Farmer, 1997). As Farmer argued, any distinguishing characteristic, whether social or biological, can serve as a pretext for discrimination and thus cause suffering. In the context of migration, this is fundamental, given that societies have many differences in their ways of socializing —way of dressing, language, accent, religion, etc.— which can therefore serve as triggers for discrimination.

On the other hand, Abdelmalek Sayad developed the concept of suffering within the anthropology of migration. In his book *The double absence: From the illusions of the emigrant to the sufferings of the immigrant* (2004), the author posited that to understand the migratory experience of individuals, migration must be analyzed both from the logic of the emigration society and from immigration society. Sayad (2004) states that the condition of being a non-national places the migrant in a position of immediate subordination vis-à-vis nationals, and therefore of inequality. Suffering must be understood as a feeling that is the consequence of different aspects of the migratory experience: discrimination, culture shock, detachment from what is one's own, among others.

A number of recently published studies relate social suffering and migration in the aforementioned terms. Parella, Petroff, Speroni, and Piqueras (2019) focus on return migration and developed a conceptual approach to the analysis of suffering in returning migrants using the *VIA* model, composed of the analytical axes of vulnerability, uncertainty and support. On the other hand, scholars have investigated social suffering within the context of migratory deportations; for example, Radiziwinowiczówna (2019) and Montes (2019), analyze the case of Mexican nationals from different perspectives, based on interviews with deportees. The first study emphasizes individual suffering within the context of unauthorized deportations, whereas the second focuses on the family level and seeks to expose the suffering that materializes in whole groups.

To our best knowledge, this is the first study in the Peruvian context, and specifically on Venezuelan forced displacement, that link the aforementioned concepts. The research of Caroll et al. (2020) is important in that they study the mental health of Venezuelan migrants in Peru; based on a validated psychological approach, the results show the negative impact that the migratory journey has on the mental health of Venezuelan nationals. Studies have also highlighted the heightened vulnerability and integration challenges of the Venezuelan population in Peru (Blouin & Freier, 2019).

Based on the above, our research is imperative because it seeks to demonstrate migrants' suffering throughout the three different stages of their journey: departure, travel and arrival. On the one hand, this approach attempts to expand the concept of suffering in migration studies, and on the other, it aims to demonstrate the vulnerability experienced by this population, highlighting the importance of national policies that take into account the mental health of migrants and refugees.

METHODOLOGY

Our analysis is based on a collaborative effort that included ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews carried out with Venezuelan migrants during 2018. This study is made up of three research phases with distinct characteristics that allowed for a broader understanding of the phenomenon at hand. Our empirical material was analyzed to identify patterns of behavior and shared experiences, as well as differential aspects at the various stages of the journey. This research used an inductive approach to investigate the experiences of our interviewees throughout the migratory process, based on open questions made during the field work. However, the concept of suffering was not directly addressed or even suggested in these interviews, rather the stories related to the topic arose spontaneously on part of participants. Based on the patterns found in their answers, the theoretical concept of suffering was chosen, given that it encompasses both individual and collective dimensions. This inductive approach was crucial to achieve unbiased results.

Table 1. Field work

	Place	Date	Methodology	Number of participants
First research experience	Tumbes, Peru	May 2018	Semi structured interviews	15
	Tacna Peru			8
Second research experience	San Antonio de Táchira, Venezuela to Lima, Peru	May-June 2018	Ethnographic work	6
			Semi structured interviews	20
Third research experience	Lima, Peru	June-September 2018	Semi structured interviews	20

Source: Own elaboration.

The first research phase was carried out in May. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 Venezuelans in Tumbes, a border region between Ecuador and Peru, and Tacna, near the Peru-Chile border. The main objective of these interviews was to understand the lived experiences of Venezuelan migrants throughout their journey.

In the second research phase, the ethnographic work relied on participant observation as a qualitative method to understanding the behavior, beliefs, and values of this social group, by means of immersion in their community (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). The work here consisted of accompanying a group of six Venezuelan migrants from San Antonio de Táchira, a Venezuelan city on the border with Colombia, to the city of Lima, capital of Peru. The journey took place between May 26th and June 7th of 2018. During the fieldwork carried out, semi-structured interviews were conducted with more than 20 other migrants to achieve a deeper understanding of the experiences, emotions and the challenges faced by this population during the journey from Venezuela into Peru.

Finally, our third research phase consisted of semi-structured interviews carried out in Lima between June and September of 2018. In this iteration, 20 Venezuelan migrants already established in Lima were interviewed; they were asked about their experiences related to issues such as social inclusion, insertion in the labor field, discrimination, feelings of nostalgia, among others.

In preparation for interviews, we developed a document with open-ended guiding questions. It should be noted that the development of the semi-structured interviews was not rigid and allowed for slight variations depending on the experiences that each migrant recounted. For example, in some cases the interviewees placed great emphasis on the nostalgia of leaving their relatives, especially the younger ones, while others focused mainly on the episodes of xenophobia they experienced in Peru. With prior authorization from the participants, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Further, we kept a research diary during the ethnographic work, in which the main experiences and perceptions of the participants throughout the stages of their trip were documented. The interviews carried out during the journey were not recorded, but key points were written down. The criteria for following such a methodology was that, since these interviews were conducted in the context of traveling, they could be done in a semi-formal, conversational setting.

The verbal or written consent of the participants was obtained for all three research experiences. All the names shown in the empirical analysis section were changed, so as to protect the identity of the interviewees.

EMPYRICAL ANALYSIS: SUFFERING IN VENEZUELAN MIGRATION

Based on the collected testimonies, we analyzed the suffering of Venezuelan migrants in the context of departure, during their journey, and in the context of arrival. This experience included traveling by bus all the way from Venezuela and passing through Colombia and Ecuador to arrive

in Peru. The journey involved passing six border controls, traveling more than 3 000 kilometers, queuing for hours, and even walking at times.

Suffering in the Context of Departure

We understand the context of departure as those situations that forced Venezuelan citizens to leave their country and to settle in others; Peru in our case. Making the decision to migrate generated suffering, as it was difficult for migrants to separate from relatives, loved ones, and from their familiar environment, to then undertake a difficult and uncertain journey. Paradoxically, the lack of certainty in Venezuela was a key factor of suffering that led to the decision to migrate in the first place; for this reason, upon crossing the border and arriving in Colombia, many migrants felt that, despite all difficulties, they had reached a safer and more bearable environment.

In the context of departure, we witnessed the consequences of the economic and social collapse of Venezuela in San Antonio de Táchira: dirty streets, constant power outages, abundance of beggars in search of food, among other indicators of a country in crisis. In May 2018, immigration control offices worked without clearly established hours, although around forty thousand people crossed the Simón Bolívar International Bridge that connects Venezuela with Colombia each day (El Nacional, 2018).

Rafaela's case exemplifies the desperation that led many Venezuelans to leave their country. She left Venezuela in March 2016, where she owned a small food business, worked as a taxi driver, and studied at night. However, her income did not suffice to pay for her food or the care of her mother who suffered from leukemia.

> "I can't take this… anymore," I told myself. "I kill myself working, studying. My brothers work. My father works, and still we couldn't cover our household costs." I said to myself "no, someone has to make the sacrifice. I'm going to do it." I sold everything. Do you want to know how much I managed to collect? 300 dollars. I made it to Colombia with 300 dollars. I had to come by bus because my passport had expired (Rafaela, personal communication, May 8, 2018).

Many migrants arrived at the border after having gone through great distress. This translated into feelings of despair, according to the testimonies of those interviewed. Caroline explained:

> First you get to San Antonio de Táchira [Venezuela] and cross the border to Cúcuta [Colombia]. I think that border is the most traumatic experience for all Venezuelans. It is a stretch that you must walk across with your bags and everything. The lines were endless. There were people crying, people fainting from the pressure, from the noise of all the people, from the sun that was beating down at that moment. I had to help a lady who said she was not going to make it, I encouraged her (Carolina, personal communication, June 3, 2018).

On the Colombian side, Cúcuta became the first door to "freedom" for Venezuelan migrants. However, many of those living on border did so under very difficult conditions, subjecting themselves to any type of activity that may provide them some income, from street commerce to selling their hair, to prostitution. Freddy, 22, was selling cigarettes that he bought in Venezuela at

a lower price. He stated that despite economic shortcomings, being in Colombia was better than being in Venezuela; arriving in Cúcuta already meant a certain relief due to the greater range of products and services available, and the greater predictability of daily life (Freddy, personal communication, June 5, 2018).

Thus, the suffering caused by leaving family members behind converged with that caused by economic precariousness. During our field work it became evident that several of the interviewees in San Antonio de Táchira suffered stress when raising the money necessary to travel. Likewise, all those who traveled alone suffered from having to leave their family behind, and many even stated that they did not have the courage to say goodbye. Rafaela stated:

> Migrating means leaving behind everything you are, your family. You carry them in your heart, but it's not the same. Nowhere you go will you feel truly accepted or understood. A part of you always wonders, am I doing the right thing by leaving my country? (Rafaela, personal communication, May 8, 2018).

Testimonies like Rafaela's and Carolina's show us the forced nature of Venezuelan emigration. Many made the final decision to migrate due to the worsening of the crisis, and not as part of a previously structured life plan, resulting in suffering. For many interviewees, the distress of unexpectedly leaving their relatives and their surroundings behind was accentuated by arriving in a new and unknown country. Most of those interviewed in the Venezuelan city of San Cristóbal hid their pain with cynicism and jokes, while others burst into tears.

The context of departure makes it possible to identify two main sources of suffering. First, the Venezuelan forced migrants we interviewed suffered due to the humanitarian crisis; they suffered from the deterioration of living conditions and the impossibility of a dignified life in their native country. Second, they suffered when leaving family members in Venezuela behind, both because of the separation itself and because of the knowledge that those left behind were staying in a country without opportunities, among growing violence and with increasing death rates.

Suffering Throughout their Journey

In the context of their journey, we identified two types of suffering among migrants: physical suffering due to exhaustion and deterioration of health— also experienced when leaving Venezuela— and psychological suffering linked to uncertainty in the context of leaving their families, not having anyone to lean on in difficult times, not having the means to continue their journey, and not knowing how they will be able to survive or how they will be treated by the native population in the country of destination. Adding to this, it is important to highlight the psychological impact of robbery among fellow travelers. As already seen in the previous section, the issue of uncertainty emerged as a crucial aspect of our study.

Doctors Without Borders (Médicos Sin Fronteras, 2013) points out that many of the physical and psychological problems evident among migrants are a consequence of their migratory experiences. The most common physical symptoms associated with difficult traveling conditions are dehydration and hypothermia; psychological suffering, on the other hand, manifests itself

through anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic reactions, just to name a few (Caroll et al., 2020). In addition to exhaustion and physical discomfort, migrants highlighted the lack of emotional support in critical situations during their journey. Additionally, there were frequent encounters with dishonest people who took advantage of migrants' vulnerability.

The testimonies of those interviewed on their way from Cúcuta exemplify one of the most significant psychological impacts of the journey: the loss of trust in people. People's behavior changes in the context of a crisis, and in their desire to survive cases of robbery among migrants traveling together are commonplace. Daniela, 18, was robbed by her travel companion:

> I arrived five days ago. I came with a girl from Maracay, I traveled with her, she's the friend of a cousin. She took everything, my clothes, my identity card, my ticket to Bogotá. Now I am here, stranded in Cúcuta. I sleep with five or six other people in a room, someone different every day because some can pay the rent for the room with what they earn that day, but we are not always the same (Daniela, personal communication, May 30, 2018).

Once the journey from Venezuela to Colombia through Cúcuta was complete, crossing Colombia to continue the journey to Peru was still a challenge for many. Even if they did get enough money to buy a bus ticket, the journey itself was often complicated. The road in this area is very curvy and the altitude varies along the way. Therefore, dizziness and vomiting are commonplace. Adriana, 24, is a bus attendant and shared her experiences supporting passengers:

> I have had to be a kind of psychologist, listening to stories and helping people feel better. It's common that entire families or women with children travel on the buses. I was displaced by the war in Colombia, I'm from Antioquia, but I have lived almost all my life in Cúcuta and that is why I identify with people who have to leave everything behind. Many people get very dizzy during this journey. This one time we had a 60-year-old man who fainted when we reached the slopes at 3,000 meters altitude. But I try to guide them and explain what's next at the border (Adriana, personal communication, May 30, 2018).

Crossing Colombia was the longest and most expensive stretch. It was probably nonetheless the best organized stretch in May of 2018, as the fare included three meals and the buses made stops so people could make use of restrooms. Once in Rumichaca —the border with Ecuador— the situation worsened. Long lines were formed on a border bridge at 2 900 meters above sea level; this altitude results in the characteristic humid cold of this Andean region, where temperatures reach zero Celsius degrees, conditions that most Venezuelans are not used to.

Due to the long lines, many had to spend the night at the border, where the wait was 12 hours or even days. According to our interviewees, the weather was the most exhausting factor; the sun burns harshly during the day, but late at night the temperatures drop drastically. In this context, taking advantage of people's vulnerability becomes even more alarming. For example, a blanket could cost ten dollars, which was impossible for most to afford. Franco, a 24-year-old nurse, said the following about the elevated cost of migrating, and the physical and psychological suffering involved:

> I sold all my assets to be able to come: my car, my motorcycle, my television, some furniture, and my telephone. For me, the main challenge has been the curves and the nausea, and the discomfort because we are not eating well. This is very hard, we leave our family on their own; I left my mother alone in my house (Franco, personal communication, May 29, 2018).

Once the passport was stamped by Ecuadorian authorities, many felt desperate to find how they could continue their journey. Devising a way to reach the border with Peru, the uncertainty of schedules, costs, and attempting to notify their families of their location along the way, resulted in high anxiety levels and desperation. Many had never left Venezuela before. Once again, the unknown breeds uncertainty, which can in turn become suffering. In that vein, the concern for family was constant, both in the context of departing and throughout the journey itself.

On the other hand, many saw how their savings were being depleted. Here, it is important to emphasize the consequence of the commercialization of migration: migrant transit had become a lucrative business for locals. Everything had a price, whether it was internet time in a cybercafé, a blanket for the cold, bathroom usage, or bottles of water (which double their original price). This phenomenon has been described as the globalization of suffering: the experience of suffering is used as a commodity to which a price can be attached (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1997). This is a symbol of the cultural transformations of the current era, where instead of seeing opportunities to support humanity, business opportunities are seen, as the testimonies show.

Roberto told us how the bus ride was very difficult for him, and that he did not have anyone to support him emotionally:

> It's not easy. You have to cross three countries on your own. It has been very hard for me. Leaving my family. Leaving my life. It's hard not to get sentimental and not to break down in tears. But the thing is that you leave your whole life behind. You cross three countries you don't know. I still don't know what will happen later. The toughest challenge is leaving my people there. Do you know what is the most difficult? I'm eating this or that here, but I don't know if they are eating over there (Roberto, personal communication, May 17, 2018).

Roberto's account exemplifies how the guilt for leaving their families behind was another cause of suffering for the Venezuelan migrants we interviewed.

Suffering in the Context of Arrival

In the context of arrival, we identify two types of factors that cause suffering for Venezuelan migrants: legal and economic obstacles; and social rejection. Both are part of the structural suffering identified by Bauman (1994, 1995). Regarding the first type of obstacles, labor informality goes hand in hand with precarious legal conditions. While the former is characteristic of Peruvian society at large, both are accentuated in vulnerable populations, such as incoming Venezuelans, for whom the possibility of achieving migratory regularization through the PTP decreased at the time of conducting our fieldwork. Another important factor that creates suffering was having to accept jobs that migrants were overqualified for and that did not do their educational degrees justice. Regarding social rejection, this was experienced through xenophobic acts both in

work environments and in public spaces. Most generally, migrants arrived with feelings of anxiety and fear because of being in a new and unknown place.

Interviewees experienced most legal and economic obstacles in the workplace. Peru is characterized by labor informality; it is estimated that eight out of ten women and seven out of ten men have an informal job (Centro Nacional de Planeamiento Estrategico [Ceplan], 2016). The pattern is even more severe in the case of Venezuelans in Peru, exacerbated by the conditions of vulnerability already described. Contract tenure among Venezuelan workers is five times lower than among Peruvians. Likewise, Venezuelans have longer working hours than nationals do, and constantly face complications related to not being paid (Banco Mundial, 2019). The difficult economic situation they faced was an obstacle to immigration regularization for many interviewees, since affording the PTP process (approximately 13 dollars) implied significant savings. Often, their salary barely sufficed to survive, and they still had to send money to their relatives in Venezuela. Although migrants were aware of the importance of regularizing their stay in Peru, this implied an expense that was difficult to afford.

One of the most recurring legal obstacles is the regularization of professional titles. As mentioned above, there is a significant gap between the qualification levels of the Venezuelan population in Peru and the type of jobs they perform (Banco Mundial, 2019). Dorismar arrived in Peru with an engineering degree; however, registering it would have cost her 700 soles and she did not have enough money. She took a position at a gas station, which she left immediately:

> I had never done anything like this, I felt very strange. I only went to work once and never came back. I didn't see myself in that job, I felt uncomfortable. I had to work 12 hours. So, when lunch time came, I told them to excuse me, that the job was not for me (Dorismar, personal communication, August 18, 2018).

On the other hand, social obstacles like xenophobic acts were especially prevalent in the workplace. While our case study does not refer to the suffering of having to adapt to a completely different culture, it can still be said that Venezuelan migrants experienced a shock when they are forced to accept a lower standard of living than the one they had in their country, especially in the case of professionals. This type of mismatch between migratory expectations and reality complicates the integration process (Parella et al., 2019). There is a significant gap between the skill levels of the Venezuelan population in Peru and the type of jobs they perform (Banco Mundial, 2019).

Jefferson and Becky, for example, had to accept jobs that they previously would not have imagined doing. This made Becky very uncomfortable; she never imagined that -as a doctor- she would end up washing bathrooms:

> First, I was taking care of their little girl, but later they told me to please tidy up the room of the lady who owned the home, and I did without a fuss. Then they asked me to clean the bathroom. That has been very... I don't know, I feel really bad about it. All work is good, but it hurts your… pride. It hurt me a lot the day I was cleaning the bathroom for the first time, because I find it disgusting... seeing all that hair that I had to touch with my hands. I

> cried as I was cleaning the bathroom. Five years for one degree, four years for the other, almost six months in a certification, so much studying to come and clean bathrooms... I told myself "I can't believe it." Later I thought "I am here today so, I can provide for my family tomorrow, to be able to rise, because I cannot do that in my country. So, I have to struggle, because that is what a migrant does, you find strength when it seems impossible to find it, and power through these situations (Becky, personal communication, May 22, 2018).

Despite these negative accounts, arriving in Peru was still an immediate relief for many. Not needing another stamp and taking the final journey from the border to Lima was comforting since much of the journey is along the coast. As was previously mentioned, not being able to contact their families was a source of anxiety for migrants that needed to communicate their arrival details, especially if someone needed to know where to pick them up.

It is noteworthy that once migrants reached their destination, their relief often turned back into fear. Before arriving, their main concern had been to continue with the journey; now they had to face the challenges of surviving and integrating in a new country. So, while it might seem that the journey was the most complicated phase, when they arrived in Peru, Venezuelan migrants came across unexpected situations, such as not finding a job for weeks or being discriminated against for their way of speaking.

Xenophobia against Venezuelan migrants often manifests itself in public spaces. To this regard, Naycore points out the following:

> One day on a bus I experienced an episode of discrimination. A street seller gets on the bus. When the man sees me get on the bus, he immediately said: "Here comes a Miss Venezuela." And then said: "you are a plague, you should leave my country, or maybe you married a Peruvian to have legal papers in my country. Be careful with stealing, because we have our eyes on you." When the man told me that, people only laughed. Nobody said anything to defend me. I think that if there had been Venezuelan men, it would have been different. They would have defended me. During that attack on the bus, I told the man: "I don't need to marry a Peruvian to be legal in your country and I'm not a thief." When he got off, I had a breakdown. I started to cry. I got to the room and told my friend: "I want to leave." Nobody did anything to defend me. But she told me to hold on, that I was not the first or the last person to be mistreated[7] (Naycore, personal communication, September 7, 2018).

Work environments, especially those that involve direct contact with the general population, are also a space where discrimination takes place. Any distinctive characteristic, whether social or biological, can serve as a pretext for discrimination (Farmers, 1997), and when Venezuelan workers speak, their accent reveals their country of origin. Dorismar worked as a receptionist at a university, but working in an academic environment did not protect her from discrimination:

> At my current job, I can't say I'm Venezuelan. It's a university and there are many people who do not accept that, as they told me when I did the interview. They asked me to hide my accent and to say that I'm Peruvian. Since I was born in the state of Trujillo, I say that I'm

[7] Also quoted in «Las migraciones son como el agua» (Freier, 2019).

> from Trujillo, Peru. If anyone notices my accent, I clarify that I lived several years in Venezuela. It's hard, I want to be myself but I can't. My boss sometimes yells at me to speak properly. I want to look for another job because I'm not going to allow such humiliation (Dorismar, personal communication, August 18, 2018).

CLOSING REMARKS

Venezuelan emigration represents an important challenge for Latin American governments, putting to test the liberalization of their immigration and refugee laws of the last two decades (Acosta Arcarazo & Freier, 2015; Cantor, Freier, & Gaucci, 2015). Given that Peru is a main destination for Venezuelan migrants, studies exist on the country's migration policies, and on the socioeconomic integration of Venezuelans. However, we still lack literature that focuses on the experiences of Venezuelan migrants themselves. In an effort to contribute to the literature on Venezuelan displacement in the region, this article explored the experience of Venezuelan migrants along their journey and upon arrival in Peru, by means of interviews and ethnographic work, through the lens of the concept of suffering.

To understand the migration experience and the role of suffering, it is necessary to conceptualize the different stages that migrants go through, and the feelings that these can arise in them. Our research shows that while there are some constant reasons for suffering, such as missing one's family and feeling guilty for leaving them behind in Venezuela, the reasons for and types of suffering do tend to be different at each stage of the migratory journey. The concept of social suffering contributes to a more thorough understanding of the migratory experience, to the extent that it sees the migrants individually, but also positions her in relation to society. Social suffering is a key concept in this sense, and its analysis must consider the psycho-social impact that different phenomena have on people (Parella et al., 2019). According to this conceptualization, the term suffering gains importance when understood as a consequence of the relationships between people.

Within the context of departure, it was possible to observe that the main source of suffering was the uncertainty and guilt of undertaking a difficult journey while family and friends were left behind in a country that had collapsed both socially and economically. Uncertainty arose and manifested itself in different ways, depending on the context of departure. Such a sense of uncertainty also arose as migrants continued traveling, not knowing how they would be received in the destination country.

Finally, disappointment prevailed among migrants in the context of arrival and settlement, as they were forced to accept jobs perceived as humiliating, and became victims of discriminatory acts. Socio-economic and cultural inclusion was a constant challenge as they tried to settle in Peru. As can be seen, the migration process consists of different stages and is not merely the departure of migrants from their destination country.

In the case study of Peru, the vulnerability of migrants has worsened over time, particularly in the context of COVID-19. Despite the recent introduction of the CPP (*Carné de Permiso Temporal de Permanencia*) recently introduced, there is no sustainable migrant regularization mechanism

available to Venezuelans in Peru; in fact, entry requirements like the humanitarian visa involve requirements difficult to fulfill for most. This, in addition to the impact of border closures due to COVID-19, has resulted in greater irregularity in the entry of Venezuelans into the country, and further increased their vulnerability (CIUP, 2020).

Our research shows the importance of considering the psycho-social aspects of migration, and encourages the use of social suffering as a core concept in the study of migratory experiences, especially in the case of the increasing vulnerability of Venezuelan migrants.[8] At the same time, our findings underline the vital importance for States to treat mental health as a priority in their agendas for the integration of Venezuelan migrants and refugees, and to implement public policies with a psycho-social approach.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

[8] While the prevalence of depression and anxiety symptoms among Venezuelans on the border between Ecuador and Peru was 19% and 23% respectively in April 2020, these percentages increased to 27% and 33% by August, after having gone through several months of quarantine and economic difficulties (Bird, Freier, Luzes, Bolivar, & Caroll, 2020).

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