

The Digital Journey on Facebook: *Ethos* and Memories of People in Transit through Mexico

El andar digital en Facebook: *ethos* y memorias de personas en tránsito por México

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to unravel how the digital social network Facebook constructs a favorable discourse to migration and migrants in transit through Mexico. To this end, a discursive and semiotic-multimodal analysis of pro-migrant Facebook accounts is carried out, inquiring into emotions, metaphors, narratives, and recurrent argumentative topics. Two central *ethos* are detected: that of the migration manager, who conceives migration as a phenomenon that must be organized through bureaucratic procedures, and even promotes a change of legal status (from migrant to resident); and that of the facilitator-participant, who promotes a more humane, supportive, and understanding image. These pages may contribute to the reflection on a less studied discourse, alternative to the securitizing, rejectionist, or xenophobic one. Preliminary results show that even within the pro-migrant discourse and among supposedly like-minded accounts, there are discordant voices and conceptions about migration.

Keywords: 1. migration, 2. Facebook, 3. Mexico, 4. discourse analysis, 5. multimodality.

RESUMEN

En este trabajo se busca desentrañar cómo la red sociodigital Facebook construye un discurso favorable a la migración y a las personas migrantes en tránsito por México. Para ello, se lleva a cabo un análisis discursivo y semiótico-multimodal de cuentas promigrantes, que indaga en las emociones, metáforas, narraciones y tópicos argumentativos recurrentes. Se detectan dos *ethos* centrales: el de gestor migratorio, que concibe la migración como un fenómeno que debe ser ordenado mediante trámites burocráticos, e incluso propicia un cambio de estatus legal (de migrante a residente), y el de facilitador-partícipe, que propicia una imagen más humana, solidaria y comprensiva. Estas páginas pueden contribuir a la reflexión sobre un discurso menos estudiado, alternativo al securitista, de rechazo o xenófobo. Los resultados preliminares muestran que, aun dentro del discurso promigrante y entre cuentas supuestamente afines, hay voces y concepciones discordantes sobre la migración.

Palabras clave: 1. migración, 2. Facebook, 3. México, 4. análisis del discurso, 5. multimodalidad.

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INTRODUCTION

Public discourse on migration has been studied from negative perspectives: understood as a catastrophe, invasion, or usurpation (Gutiérrez, 2022); addressed from xenophobic, aporophobic, and racist hate speech; approached from the necropolitical management of migration “flows” (García, 2020, 2022; Herzog, 2023; International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024; Van Dijk, 2006, etcetera), or coming from polarized digital discourses (Toudert, 2021). Few works focus on counter discourses (such as those by De Fina, 2020; Navarro-López, 2021; Parrini & Alquisiras, 2019; or Rosales, 2024) or analyze the linguistic and multimodal resources that construct other migrant identities. What image of migrants in transit through Mexico, en route to the United States, can be observed on Facebook, in pages and profiles identified with migrants or that seem sympathetic to them? What other subjectivities emerge in and through the resources available on the platform? What are the characteristics of their discourses?

This work aims to describe and explain the forms of pro-migrant social discourse, which provides positive views or representations of migration and migrants,² paying special attention to those on the move throughout Mexico, a country of transit, expulsion, and reception of migrants, considered a stopper in relation to the United States: “a kind of deadlier human wall, [...] the second nation-State in expelling migrants worldwide [...] [that] has signed international treaties and laws that securitize the management of this volume of people in transit” (Varela, 2019, p. 54). To this state of things should be added the difference between welfare discourses (typical of NGOs and religious organizations) and those of human rights (Parrini & Alquisiras, 2019).

The *pro-migrant* discourse category is framed within the revaluation of migrant identity and the discourses produced by self-identified individuals or by organizations that are not always assimilable to welfare and human rights, the two poles typically identified in previous studies. This study follows the line that seeks to “amplify the voices of migrants [...] to explore counter-hegemonic discourses [or] [...] to counteract the effects of hegemonic discourse on the identities and interests of migrants” (Moreno, 2023, p. 251).

The discursive and semiotic analysis of voices and identities on digital social media platforms like Facebook, focusing on migrant “representational work,” helps us understand how migrants and their allies construct a worldview about migration and a collective identity (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 33). This is expected to contribute to the development of a less-explored line of research, which contrasts with the focus on exclusionary representations (Ivanova & Burón, 2023, p. 4). This study shares the objective of other works (such as Piñeiro & Bouhaben, 2023, p. 3), concerned with explaining how migrants move from the traditional role of “subjects of the statement”—or even objects of it—to that of “subjects of enunciation”—those who voice the statement—.

² Although this term refers here to all types of people, regardless of the reasons that motivated their displacement or the degree of volition involved—a clarification that has also been made in other works (Torre & Mariscal, 2020, p. 2)—whenever possible, the distinction in this work will focus on people in transit or who show no signs of wanting to stay in Mexico.

It is assumed that pro-migrant pages and profiles turn Facebook into a reflection of the physical journey undertaken by migrants, but without borders or exclusionary procedures, or into an *onlife* environment (Floridi, 2015),³ in which other identities and forms of socialization and commitment emerge, rather than in “ghetto” conditions, as occurs in other circumstances (Castañeda & Baca, 2020, p. 110).

Contrary to the dominant view that links migration to pain, victimization, or the “lack of documentation or rights” (Varela, 2015, p. 154), the online profiles and pages analyzed circulate compassionate, supportive images of struggle and resistance (to economic hardship, nature, governments, security forces, crime). These images do not constitute a mere “aestheticization” of a complex and critical reality (Piñeiro & Bouhaben, 2023, p. 13), but rather an act of re-cognition of the migrant community.

There are three *narratives* about *mass migration* in Mexico. This concept is understood as “a political act of walking en masse along the roads of a country that, without being at war, is experiencing the death toll typical of a country in open conflict” (Varela, 2019, p. 51). According to Varela (2019), the *narratives* speak of victimization, criminalization, and vulnerability. This allows for the tracking of discourses that foster or manifest the agency of migrants, and that separate them from those who represent them as “assailants and invaders” (Domenech, 2018, p. 41), avoiding the dissemination of a prejudiced image of these groups. Thus, migrant “caravans” or “exoduses” are understood as political movements of “strengthening” (Aquino et al., 2013; Cordero & Garibo, 2020), based on dissent and the desire to “walk en masse [...] apart from any human trafficking and smuggling networks, challenging immigration laws” (Varela, 2019, p. 53) as also expressed by Torre and Mariscal (2020), and they make up a physical-political movement with a digital correlate.

NOTES ON THE CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study is to identify argumentative topics, emotions, identity (and identities), and ethos in Facebook profiles and pages related to migrants or presented within the movement. Table 1 lists the research questions, pertaining three levels of analysis: referential or ideational, contextual and interpersonal, and ideological.

³ Digital ethnography has revealed that the *real-virtual* dichotomy is insufficient to capture our contemporary world, constantly permeated by technology (Baker, 2013), in spaces where the boundaries between the physical and the digital become blurred.

Table 1. Levels, Dimensions, and Questions Guiding the Analysis

Levels of analysis	Characteristics and dimensions	Questions
Referential or ideational	Focus on meaning: Discursive modalities Indices of subjectivity Types of images and composition Mode of circulation	How is the reality of migration represented in pro-migrant Facebook pages? What are the main topics? What images (memes, photos, videos, etcetera) do they use? How are they transmitted? What are the main discursive modalities?
Contextual and interpersonal	Focus on social relations: Nature of the pages and intended recipients Ethos, "voices", or assumed roles Indexes of otherness/polyphony Narratives Indexes of subjectivity Social practices Position of the gaze	Who communicates on Facebook through pro-migrant pages? What voices or ethos emerge? How do they perceive themselves in relation to migrant identity? What relationships do they establish with each other? How is a possible opposition between "us" and "them" expressed? What possibilities are there for constructing a counter-discourse or alternative narrative? What indices of otherness/polyphony emerge? What social emotions develop? How?
Ideological	Focus on values, beliefs, and representations: Survey of positive and negative critical statements Detection of explicit or implicit belief systems Evidence of legitimization or delegitimation of migration and migrants	What representations of migrants and migration circulate in these pages? What does Facebook seem to contribute as a "social network"?

Source: Own elaboration based on Gutiérrez (2023, pp. 119-120).

This corpus, compiled between February 9 and 13 of 2024, using screenshots to preserve the multimodal (verbal and visual) nature of the heterogeneous publications, brings together linguistic and audiovisual posts and comments, photos, drawings, memes, and emoticons (or emojis), which constitute a "scrapbook" of migrant discourse in Mexico. The corpus amounts to a total of 525 publications (Table 2).

Table 2. Corpus Composition

Corpus	Number of posts	Type of post	Total
#CaravanaMigrante #ÉxodoDeLaPobreza	50	Posts with photos and videos	525
Pro-migrant pages: AM, HM, EJ, and HC	475	112 posts + 363 user comments	

Source: Own elaboration.

This work stems from a broader, ongoing investigation that explores other social media platforms (such as Twitter/X and TikTok). To compile this corpus, we began by exploring X and Facebook using the hashtags #CaravanaMigrante (Migrant Caravan) and #ExodoDeLaPobreza (Exodus from Poverty), identifiers of two high-impact mass movements. We then decided to focus on Facebook, given the multiplicity of cultural artifacts circulating there, as well as its seemingly more horizontal nature: not only are the posts there free of space restrictions, but they also offer the same functions and technological possibilities to everyone for free (unlike X).

Previous literature has pointed out the “iconic” nature of Facebook, similar to the university albums from which it was ideated (Herring, 2013), or its nature as a “private club” (Pérez-Savater, 2012). Thus, the choice of this platform to begin the analysis was due to the interest in studying the multimodal aspects that define it as “a kind of illustrated log of everyday life” (Qués, 2020, p. 216) —in this case, that of migrants—, and in order to explore the communicative features of pro-migrant groups.

After tracing profiles and pages searching for the words “migrant(s)” and “migration,” we proceeded to discard posts that approached migration from an “outside” perspective, as a problem to be attacked or a trigger for conflicts (similar to the “system of governmentality” described by Varela, 2015, pp. 149-150), to then focus on pro-migrant posts, mainly from NGOs and other humanitarian aid groups⁴ that showed signs of an alternative perspective: *Agenda Migrante* (AM, Migrant Agency), with more than 6 000 000 followers and more than 5 000 likes; *Historias de Migrantes* (HM, Migrant Stories), with only 592 followers and 262 likes;⁵ *El Jaguar* (EJ, The Jaguar), with 205 000 followers and 115 000 likes; and *Albergue de Migrantes Hermanos en el Camino* (HC, Brothers on the Road Migrant Shelter), with 19 000 followers and 18 000 likes.

There are many ethical challenges that an analysis of this type entails when studying discourses in contexts of vulnerability, the first of them the possibility of naturalizing such vulnerability or losing sight of people’s humanity; hence our choice of a qualitative methodology and of *situated ethics* (Tijoux et al., 2023, p. 165) tending toward reflexivity and responsibility, and oriented toward “overcoming victimist and criminalist perspectives” (Ruiz, 2023, p. 159). The aim was to confront any established pejorative representations and to revalue discourses that have not been studied yet.

The broad framework for addressing the corpus was netnography, or “mobile and multi-sited” digital ethnography, mediated by technology, “which traverses geographic spaces” (Hine, 2004, p. 20), in tune with the migrant identity (or identities) in transit, both physical and digital

⁴ Personal profiles of people explicitly identified as migrants were not contacted yet, because, as pointed out by Castañeda and Baca (2020, p. 110), they likely gather in groups closed to the general public, with restricted and controlled access.

⁵ On TikTok, however, this page has nearly 58 000 followers and 410 500 likes.

displacements, or that also unfold along technological “pathways,” echoing Baker’s (2013, p. 136) ethnographic distinction on Facebook.⁶

Although Mexico is a country of origin, transit, and destination for migrants, the discourse addressed here is that of people apparently of other nationalities who are moving toward the United States, not that of Mexicans in that country. Also, we selected posts that were visible to anyone and did not reveal sensitive personal information. The analysis is based on interpretation and explanation, and seeks interdisciplinarity: it arises from the convergence of disciplines that understand discourse and emotions as social practices: French discourse analysis (Arnoux, 2006; Bakhtin, 2005; Ducrot, 2001) and multimodal social semiotics (Bateman, 2014; Jewitt, 2009; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021; Wong, 2019), inscribed in systemic functional linguistics (Martin & White, 2005; Oteíza & Pinuer, 2019; White, 2000), for which all communication involves a system of available options and three levels (referential, interpersonal, and ideological).

This convergence seems appropriate for accessing both ideological positions (of legitimation or delegitimation) on migration and migrants, as well as the emotional component, understood as a social construction (Oteíza & Pinuer, 2019, p. 213).

The detection of explicit indices and signs of subjectivity (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1986), including metaphors (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 2004), contributes to understanding how emotions crystallize. To approach images, we begin with the “places” described by Rose (2016, p. 25): circulation, audience, production, and image.

The relationship between text and image was studied based on Bateman (2014, p. 7), Wong (2019, p. 6), and Kress and Van Leeuwen (2021), focusing on what is represented (participants or processes) and on the presence/absence of actors, social actions, and legitimations. The analysis of the videos incorporates contributions from Flewitt et al. (2009, p. 49), Gutiérrez and Plantin (2010, pp. 57-58), and Wong (2019, p. 99), who, despite their differences, agree in breaking them down into sequences, according to the represented context (or the change of setting) and to certain levels or planes: sound, visual, verbal, and kinesthetic.

Considering the evidenced levels (semantic, interactional, and ideological) and the spheres of meaning of the image, which are also “entry” routes to the discourse, successive, inductive, and non-linear immersions in the corpus were carried out, starting from the hypothesis that Facebook crystallizes other migrant identities, *alternative* to the extent that they establish a more compassionate view, which conceives migration as the experience of subjects with rights, feelings, and humanity, a representation opposite to that which displays them as “non-subjects, deprived of agency, opinions, subjectivation... they are simply not there” (Olmos, 2018, p. 56), or as an abstract social phenomenon: an indistinct, uncontrollable, violent, and even non-human mass.

⁶ From this perspective, Facebook can be approached ethnographically as a means of communication, as a source of data or information, or as a tool for observing communicative interactions in context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Facebook, a Melting Pot of Voices and Images

Understanding that discourse is “a form of social practice in which language plays a central role” (Cameron & Panović, 2014, p. 2), investigating how pro-migrant discourses are constructed on Facebook can contribute to understanding their specific actions on this platform, which in its inception prioritized certain imperatives: “sharing,” “liking,” and “making friends” (Van Dijck, 2016, pp. 49-50). These social practices do not appear to be a priority in the analyzed corpus, which tells of a collective more oriented toward staying informed and in touch (Van Dijck, 2016), solving pressing problems, and building one’s own image (Gurevich, 2021), while also breaking down discrediting stereotypes.

Facebook supports two types of publications: posts or main publications, and comments, which keep semantic and textual relation with the former, similar to that of the traditional commentary as described by Foucault (1973) and Fuchs (1994). The polyphony or dialogism of such publications responds to their very enunciative constitution: other social discourses resonate in them through quotations, negations, questions, ironies, assumptions, and inferences (Ducrot, 2001, pp. 34-35), through which multiple perspectives, points of view, or ethos are manifested: “the image of the speaker that emerges as an effect of uttering in the occurrence of the enunciation” (Zoppi, 2023, p. 46). The voice or ethos should not be equated with the empirical user: “They are not people, they are ‘abstract points of perspective’ within the enunciation” (García & Tordesillas, 2001, pp. 177). This concept is linked to the extensively studied concept of “identity,” understood here as a historically and culturally positioned category (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, pp. 9-10), relational and dynamic (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 11), which can manifest itself narratively, through stories that make the experience of migration intelligible (De Fina, 2003, p. 17) and that (re)construct alternative memories (Jelin, 2002, pp. 17-41).

Migrant ethos or identities are also configured multimodally, by means of digital photography (Van Dijck, 2008, pp. 57, 70), which conveys stories (Barthes, 1979, p. 9), and of a counter-hegemonic argument, different from the passivizing and “miserabilizing” one that associates migration with disorganization, illegality, and criminality. Word and image respond to a different visual “grammar” and social conditions, and their connections also differ: the linear syntax of language is confronted by visual parameters such as color, intensity, plane, or framing (Kress, 2012, pp. 46-47).

Discourse, a Source of Emotion and Memory

Two predominant discursive modalities were found in the profiles and pages analyzed: argumentative, expressed in topics, formulas, or schemes (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 34) that generate consensus on migration and present migrants from a human perspective; and narrative, understood

not merely as the relationship between narrators, personalities, and readers (traditional definition by Ducrot & Todorov, 1983, p. 370), but as a “mode of understanding” of the experience that implies a retrospective look from the present and, in this way, the understanding of a reality broader than that of individual stories (Freeman, 2015, p. 21).

Digital photography still holds the function of safeguarding social memory, typical of its analog counterpart, even though, due to its immateriality and the fact that it is stored in virtual space and recontextualized, it no longer circulates in private spheres: on the one hand, it safeguards individual migrant identity, bearing witness to some notable event, be it a cause for joy (such as a wedding or a baptism, in HC) or, on the contrary, a distressing or mournful occasion (an accident, disappearance, or violent death, as in HM); on the other hand, it provides a more friendly view of what it means to be a migrant, an experience shared with others, and not only among migrants. The photo constructs an “exemplary” and inclusive memory, which, through individual testimony, acts as an exemplary and generalizing device, from which “a lesson is drawn both for the present and for the future” (Vitale & Minardi, 2020, p. 24).

Argumentative topics, descriptions, and narratives promote a certain image of being a migrant, which normatively contrasts with that of other people (De Fina, 2020), and stage generally positive emotions, constructed linguistically, through explicit markers or indicators of subjectivity (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1986), such as affective and evaluative axiological terms, but also through images that portray higher-level actions (Norris, 2009, pp. 81-82), such as photos showing migrants caring for children, conversing, or sharing a meal or celebration, which forge camaraderie and solidarity. In other instances, which involve lower-level actions, such as gestures and postures (Norris, 2009, p. 82), migration appears dynamic, empathetic, and human, as people are presented smiling, walking, or resting in open spaces, yet not exempt from organization and care.

Metaphors are also devices at the service of emotion, as in the conceptualization “life is a journey,” in which an abstract and complex concept is represented through a more concrete and physical one (Semino, 2008, p. 6), or as the action of walking. This metaphor, derived from the name of one of the NGOs analyzed, HC, foregrounds how migrants connect on the roads, supporting each other and sharing food, shelter, and diverse knowledge. It also allows us to imagine life as a surface where a directed movement unfolds, consisting of phases (Johnson, 1987, p. 114; Semino, 2008, p. 7). It reinforces the humanity of migrants, presented not from a perspective of difference/strangeness, but rather from an ontological trait that seems inherent to humanity: the journey through life, something that is not exempt from adversity.

Thus, migration is framed within shared and habitual experiences, based on a framework or script of known actions (Johnson, 1987, p. 20). Conceptualizing it more concretely, as a shared journey, can generate new associations by providing it of a meaning in terms of a universal experience.

DISCURSIVE AND MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS

The Institutional Voice

Two of the pages, AM and EJ, belong to NGOs. AM's ethos is institutional, as evidenced by its profile (the very name of the organization preceded by a hashtag inviting people to post and search for information) and the cover photo, a cutout of a larger image of a migrant group on a train, in pastel tones and with a certain blur (Marzal, 2007, p. 188) that gives it a pictorial tone and prevents focusing on a particular face. The low-angle shot highlights the subjects, who look at the camera as if addressing the viewer, but the perspective is external and oblique: neither the photographer nor the viewer aligns or engages with the people in the photo (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021, pp. 134-135) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. AM Profile



Source: Agenda Migrante (2024).

In January 2024, AM defined itself as a “coalition of diverse organizations and institutions that seeks the empowerment and visibility of migrants in various regions and states, both in Mexico and the United States” (Rendón, 2024). Its purpose was “to listen to the voices of diverse migrant communities, in order to understand, make visible, and support in relevant problems, challenges, and opportunities, and thus build joint proposals and solutions” (Rendón, 2024). This page includes videos about activities and communications, in general, pertaining bilateral agreements and

proposals to regularize migrants. It also features news deemed relevant to the collective: a shooting in the United States; a U.S. bill to release migrants; the secretary of Homeland Security being on trial for “allowing migrants to enter, thus affecting citizens” (Rendón, 2024); the Mexican Senate’s reform to require the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH, acronym in Spanish for *Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos*) to oversee immigration detention centers and thus prevent “irregularities” (overcrowding, lack of medical and food services), and a new record of “irregular crossings,” among others news. The focus here is on the United States (US), not on those in transit through Mexico.

In “Highlights”, Facebook pins posts that are intended to be visually prominent, so they are the first thing read; here, they are copies of press releases in which the NGO calls (plural: “we call”) “for the urgent implementation of five comprehensive, humane, and well-organized measures to address the migration phenomenon in the region” (Agenda Migrante, 2023, para. 1). These documents speak more about the “migration phenomenon” as a problem than about the people themselves. In its statement posted on October 10, 2023, Agenda Migrante stated: “In view of the recent deaths of migrants in road accidents in their attempt to reach the Mexican border with the United States in precarious transportation conditions, increasing the risks and dangers of their journey” (Agenda Migrante, 2023, para. 8).

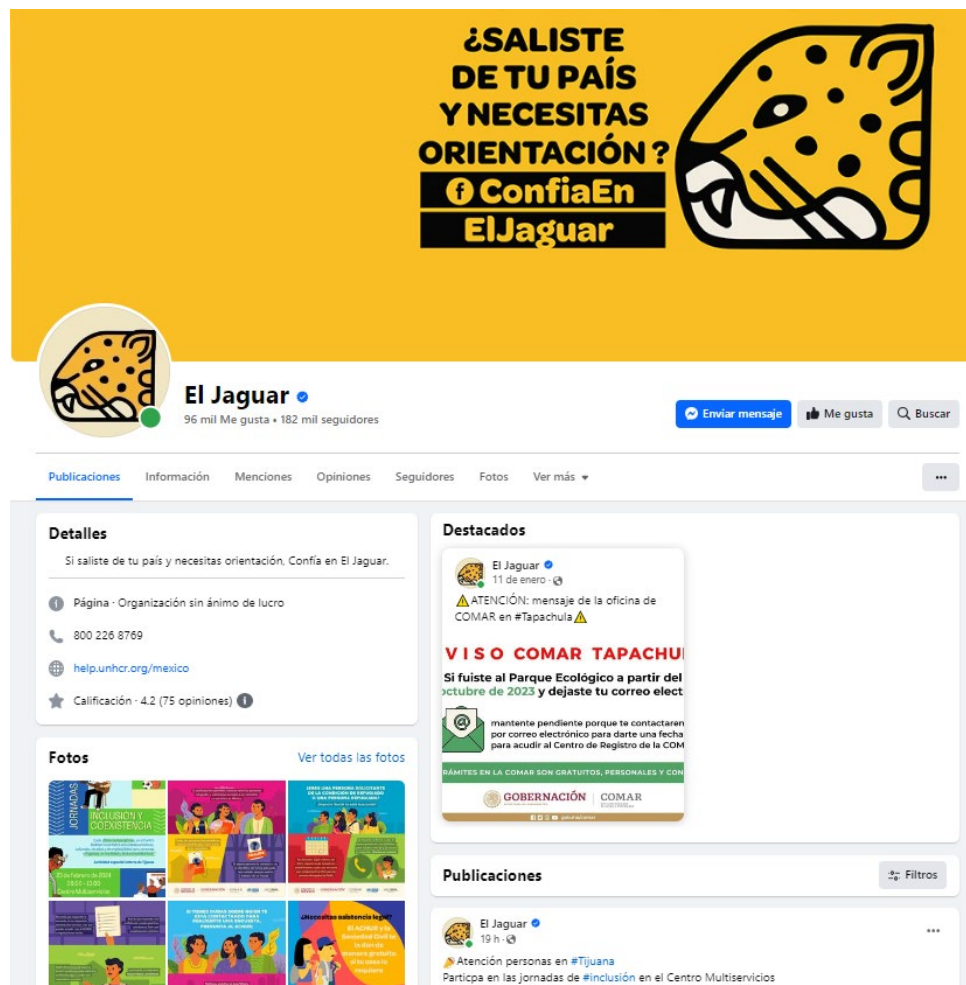
This paragraph, in an objective, depersonalized style, allows for two readings: one in which migrants appear as victims of accidents, and another, more agentic, due to the gerund (a non-personal form of the verb that prevents identifying an agent of the action), in which the “deaths” are a consequence of “the attempt to reach the border [...] in precarious transportation conditions, increasing the risks and dangers of their journey.” The accidents are presented as a result of the decision to travel “in precarious transportation conditions,” which “increases the risks and dangers,” and not as a danger independent of the act of migrating. This shift in meaning leads to two conceptions of migrants, who in some user comments are portrayed as intrepid, if not straight irresponsible (for example, when questioning their traveling with children).

The central argumentative topic is to “humanize” the treatment of migrants (from a human rights perspective) and make migration “productive,” which inserts it into an economic dimension and one of governmentality or control, and in the condition of potential workers (Varela, 2015, pp. 151-156).

The posts tend to show two very different participants: the one providing assistance (a coalition of NGOs), and the figure of the migrant, presented in the plural and with a split article (“*los y las migrantes*,” equivalent in Spanish to saying “migrant men and women”; dissident identities are not taken into account), a group that is there to be heard or supported, and which poses “problems.” In a new syntactic ambiguity, it could be interpreted that the focus is not on such groups, but on “the relevant problems, challenges, and opportunities.” This is a particularity of nominalizations or “grammatical metaphors” (Halliday & Martin, 1993, p. 23; Halliday, 1994, p. 441), nouns derived from another grammatical category (generally, verbs), frequently used in AM and EJ posts, which condense information and hide the agent of the action.

EJ exhibits more interaction with followers, many of whom reveal they are migrants, responding to the NGO's offer of free advice and support processing, an intermediary between them and other organizations, such as UNHCR, or with State bureaucracy (such as the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance [COMAR, acronym in Spanish for *Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados*]). Unlike AM, EJ also promotes inclusive cultural activities. Its assistance-based orientation is evident from the front page itself, which, through a direct question using the informal “tu” (“you”), addresses migrants, defined by their need for “orientation” and having left their country. There is also a request for trust, structured as a hashtag, to facilitate content searches and amplification: “#ConfíaEnElJaguar” (“Trust El Jaguar”) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. El Jaguar Profile



Source: El Jaguar (2024a).

We can also see several messages featuring the NGO's *alter ego*, a jaguar mascot, sometimes in the form of a logo, which confers an institutional character, and sometimes as an illustration or caricature. In these cases (for example, in Figure 3), the message is directive ("always bring your documents with you") and the voice is authoritative, but the drawing acts as the equivalent of a linguistic marker of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 177): it mitigates the force of imposition.

Figure 3. EJ Alter Ego Posts



Source: El Jaguar (2024b).

Both pages display a bureaucratic tone, but while AM's is essentially institutional, EJ's features some comments from migrants, whose experiences are also related, although the stories are in line with the institution's central thesis: it is advisable to change one's status from migrant to refugee, and even settle in Mexico (or not continue journeying towards the US). This topic is also raised in audiovisual terms, for example, through videos such as "Human Smuggling by Land" (El Jaguar, 2024c) that depict stereotypical situations: a migrant leaving their hometown, meeting a smuggler, and facing a series of adversities.

A careful observation of the video was carried out applying the methodology of Gutiérrez and Plantin (2010, pp. 57-58), thus identifying the narrative sequences and the shots (sound, visual, and verbal), with which EJ negatively assesses migration, both due to its causes (a context of economic hardship) and for its consequences: violence, death, the possibility of being detained by “la migra” (the U.S. border patrol). By means of visual metaphors (such as a truck transporting migrants that turns into a scorpion) and certain colors (red and black, especially) and sounds that signal fear or loneliness (screams, labored breathing, broken glass), the dangers that migrants face in their transit to the US are emphasized. Migration is represented as an individual act of volition, motivated by the dream of economic well-being, which is judged negatively. EJ’s thesis is dissuasive, not only because of what it explicitly states (“Migrant smuggling is a deadly business that strengthens organized crime”), but also because of what it implies: it is not advisable to cross (illegally) into the United States.⁷

A Dialogue Between Equals

HM and HC are also problem-solving NGOs, as evidenced by the verbs they use, which focus on material actions or actions involving aid, but their ethos is not as evidently institutional. Furthermore, neither advocate discouraging the goal of journeying on to the US. HC’s very name implicitly assumes displacement, and that this is not exclusive to migrants (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Hermanos en el camino Profile



Source: Hermanos en el camino (2024).

⁷ The detailed multimodal analysis can be found at: https://itam2-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/maria_mazzuchino_itam_mx/EVbwfAmmJU5LlvGUlzc16Y4BPuuSp-SCEujHsIVZ3FUQzA?e=aUBgVW

On HC's cover and profile photo, people are seen on the move, on the train tracks or getting off "La Bestia" (The Beast), as the freight train network that runs through Mexico en route to the US is known. This page frequently posts about national or religious celebrations, uniting those who need help and those who provide it, blurring the lines between them: everyone is shown in an attitude of collaboration and solidarity.

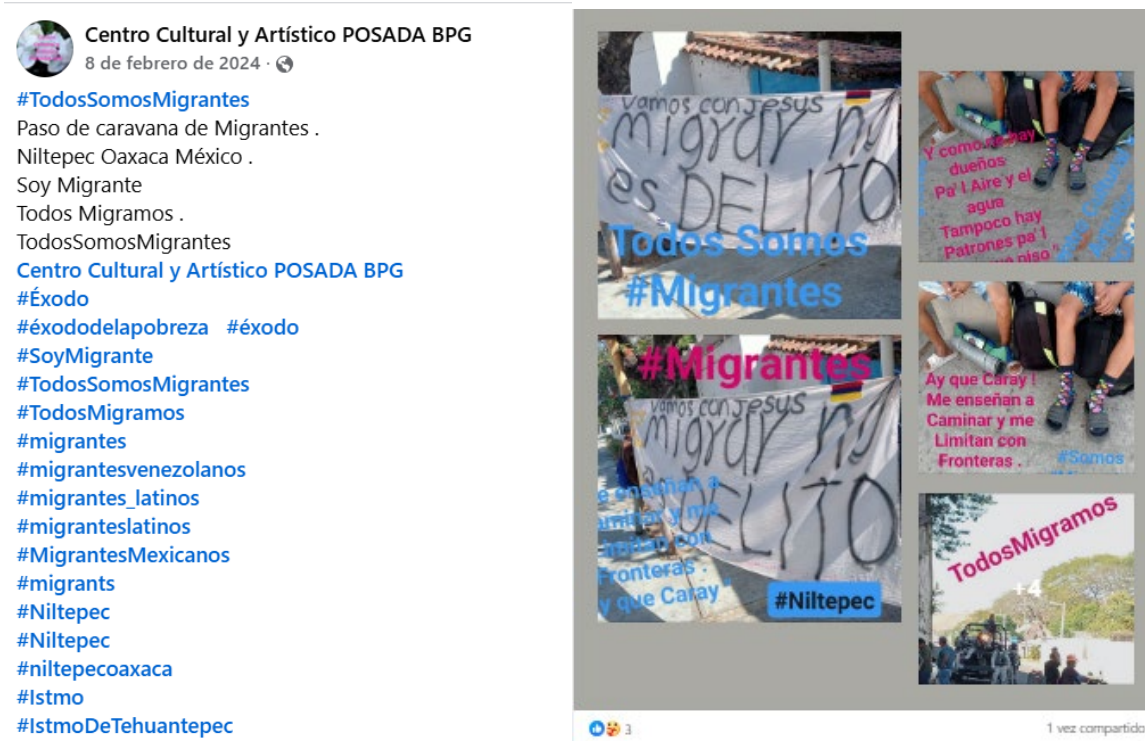
The photo albums serve as an archive of itinerant life, recording everyday events with which everyone can identify. This framework also includes publications containing the hashtags #CaravanaMigrante and #ÉxodoDeLaPobreza which, in contrast to those of AM and EJ, have the body as their protagonist (Finol, 2015, p. 42) and show migrants in open natural spaces (contrary to their representation walking or crossing walls or fences), in a relaxed attitude, cleaning or refreshing themselves, playing, showing each other affection, and even with pets. The gaze is expressive and conative (Finol, 2015, pp. 50-52), because it is directed at the viewer or to a child who is being held or cared for, which creates intimacy and complicity (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 72), in contrast to the racist, xenophobic, or securitizing and criminalizing representation. The images engage with positive axiological evaluative terms, such as "hope," "dignity," "a space for coexistence and cultural exchange," as well as with metaphors and personifications that summarize the feat of migration, such as the river being "a friendly refuge for washing clothes, cleaning, and recharging one's energy" (Cielo Sur, 2023).

In other publications, the contrast between frameworks relating to migration (discriminatory or dehumanizing versus compassionate or humanizing) is more evident, as evidenced by the use of negation, which presupposes an adversary who links immigration to pain, vagrancy, loneliness, or heartbreak, and who views migrants as inferior beings. The syntax is oppositional, with correlations and negations pitted against another line of argument: "Those who travel also take their laughter wherever they go [...] Not just their pain"; "They don't need pity, prejudice, discrimination, xenophobia, or aporophobia. They only need to be treated and seen as equals. They long for a little encouragement and a land to share." The nominalizations ("compassion," "prejudice," "discrimination," "xenophobia," "encouragement") and impersonal verbs ("to be treated and seen as equals") avoid directly addressing the agents of the condemned actions, suggesting a desire for conciliation.

Migrants are designated as "those who travel," an open-ended occurrence, active, but one that implies transit or direction to another place, contrary to the stigmatizing view that affirms that they "came to stay," or that they "steal" from the natives. There is, therefore, a social critique, albeit indirect, and a revaluation of migrants as people rich in experiences, which contrasts the materialistic values of today's capitalist society, which seeks to expel them, with values sustained by the immaterial. The photos often show them from the front, thus highlighting their individuality and their human condition. The children do childlike things; the adults care for them; they caress and hug each other. Their clothes are clean; their bodies too. Despite precarity, dignity is not lost.

Other posts (Figure 5) include albums on the banners or "sheets" carried by migrants with protest slogans.

Figure 5. Post with the Hashtag #TodosSomosMigrantes



Note: The post was edited for ease of inclusion: the written portion, on the left here, appears on top in the original (to see this and other details, access the provided link).

Source: POSADA BPG Cultural and Artistic Center (2024).

These posts are polyphonic because their thesis interweaves slogans, poems, and hashtags that amplify voices of protest, which could be summarized in the initial hashtag: “#TodosSomosMigrantes” or “#TodosMigramos.” The first-person plural, or inclusive “we,” engages the recipient and opposes the distinction between migrants and non-migrants. The writing is relaxed and colloquial, with errors and typos, as might be expected in the context of walking and fatigue, which is not conducive to writing.

This context could also be attributed to the large number of videos posted, especially in HM. Much has been studied regarding the convergence between social and digital networks (Jenkins, 2006; Van Dijck, 2016), whereby Facebook allows the sharing of videos (*reels*) generated on the platform itself or “exported” from another platform, such as TikTok. This is HM’s preferred option, which speaks to an empirical interlocutor with little time to read or produce purely linguistic text from their mobile phone while performing other actions, such as walking. Cell phones are essential for migrants, even before leaving their country, to identify potential dangers and to amass a digital archive, among other functions (Alencar, 2020; Cascone & Bonini, 2024; Gillespie et al., 2018). The videos seek to move people in order to obtain concrete help, so they display narratives by or about migrants, usually from the perspective of a witness narrator, or they ask questions or make

requests. Hence the emphasis on identifying them by first and last name, stating their nationality, and providing any other information that allows them to be located.

The act of walking is there, explicitly or implicitly, throughout the pages, and is the focus of HM, starting with the profile image and the cover, which depict people on the move trying to cross a river in a jungle setting, or on train tracks.

The use of long shot for the photographs emphasizes the magnitude of the migratory challenge. Altogether with the page name, photos like these construct a narrative of migration as a collective experience marked by struggle and resistance, even in spite of nature (especially against “the dangerous Darién jungle”): migration emerges not as an abstract, sociopolitical phenomenon, an object of administrative management (as in AM and EJ), but rather as a set of stories told by its own protagonists or that only they could experience, because they are inherent to the act of migrating.

Contrary to what might be expected, the page is not configured as a collection of loose anecdotes, but as a non-institutional place of memory (Nora, 2008, p. 19). Photo albums and especially videos can “strengthen the sense of belonging to groups or communities” (Jelin, 2002, p. 9), as well as facilitate identification with what is narrated, since they focus on history “from below.” These narratives that build memories serve as an example from which it is possible to draw a conclusion and configure an exemplary memory, thanks to testimony, and thus understand reality (Vitale & Minardi, 2020, p. 24).

In its “Highlights,” HM archives specific stories, such as that of a missing person, and that of a man who, while expressing gratitude for the help he received in Nicaragua, takes the opportunity to recommend the hospital that treated him. The first is similar to other videos about missing persons, especially in Darién: through the use of informal conversational tone, it directly addresses the user, who is invited to click and immerse themselves in the story; the second, however, offers a blessing to the recipient, another migrant (“may you arrive safely at your destination”), defined by displacement.

These types of videos, polar opposites in the migrant experience (a story of loss and another of solidarity), were first published on TikTok (Historias de migrantes, n.d.), a platform that may be used by migrants while traveling or resting, as it acts as an audiovisual testimony, an aspect we will need to investigate in the future. The “scenography” is journalistic, and oscillates between crime and journalistic reporting, in the understanding that “scenography” does not equal simple sets, but “scenes constituted in the text [...] [that] legitimize statements and allow for the presentation of new perspectives that challenge the reader” (Maingueneau, 2002, p. 14).

Some posts also constitute a resurgence or transmedia projection of the obituary, when users are informed of the discovery of a wanted person. This genre, indebted to ancient epideictic rhetoric, praises or honors the deceased to unite the community; hence, it rescues individual facts and qualities that should endure in the collective memory (Barthes, 1982, p. 60). Although videos, like traditional obituary journalism, have an informative component (the person’s biography and the

events leading up to their death), they also present an assessment or argument, as they are “texts published in the wake of a death that is not newsworthy,” as Pardo González-Nandín (2015, p. 13) defines the traditional genre. It could be argued, then, that what for mainstream media is at most a number, “death statistics,” in HM is a person who deserves to be valued and remembered.

HM also deploys a setting reminiscent of radio: posts and reposts contain valuable news content for the community. According to Tabing and UNESCO (2002, p. 11), community radio stations are democratic spaces where any member of a community can initiate communication, and which are not oriented toward commercial issues, but rather toward well-being and the resolution of social problems. Thus, HM conveys values similar to those identified with the migrant “feat”: struggle in the face of adversity, persistence, solidarity, strength, etcetera. And its counterpart: crime, natural obstacles, false friends, or people who abandon those in need in the worst of circumstances.

These types of posts, much like conventional community radio stations, create “personal and collective images of reality, which prompt imaginations [...] allowing one to think that one is part of the collective dialogue [...] [and] promote stories to construct popular mythologies (those stories that will be passed on by word of mouth).” (Rincón, 2005, pp. 155-156) In reality, unlike radio communication, HM’s oral communication is always deferred, and audiovisual media prevails over it, in the form of images that accompany a story. However, the collective sense, imagination, and the revaluation of personal stories prevail as a way of building social dialogue and a non-stereotypical image of the migrant. There is a desire to give visibility to the protagonists or those close to them, to minor stories, which coexist with other voices that convey opinions and affections (Rincón, 2005, p. 159).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In line with Thimm and Chaudhuri (2019, p. 2), who note that migrants are considered “within a continuum: from objects of development whose actions are structurally determined, to cultural subjects,” this analysis reports two contrasting ethos in the pro-migrant pages analyzed and, therefore, two underlying conceptions of migration.

First, we observe the ethos of the migration manager, embodied in AM and EJ, whose style tends to be monoglossic, bureaucratic, and specialized, as it appeals to “institutional forms of solidarity [that] imply technical languages and professional knowledge” (Parrini & Alquisiras, 2019, p. 15). This ethos distinguishes between migrants in need of help (characterized as collective, indefinite, and passive, based on lack or suffering) versus legal experts (NGOs). This figure could be equated with the “humanitarian actor,” or State or non-governmental intermediary (Fassin, 2016, p. 373), which would explain the emphasis on events and the establishment of a hierarchical relationship.

Then we found the facilitator-participant ethos in HC and HM; although also oriented toward aid, this ethos does not assume a hierarchy among interlocutors. Instead, with positive evaluative

and affective terms, and through the narration of a conflict (disappearance, kidnapping, accident, etcetera) or a solidarity or celebratory event (wedding, baptism, popular festival, etcetera), it constructs a closer and more egalitarian identity (even that of a “brother”). Here we observe another construction of identity, one that reinforces migrant humanity based on the “good immigrant” versus “bad immigrant” contraposition (Moreno, 2023, p. 245), which is common in HM, although not from a securitization perspective. This representation arises from stories of evil and betrayal by another migrant—generally presented as a “friend”—not in order to criminalize migration, but to emphasize that in society—even among migrants—there are bad people who attack their peers.

Another difference can be found in the verbal processes involved: while in AM and EJ, most posts consist of “evaluations [...] [in] the form of rules and regulations, or social expectations and value systems [...] moral or immoral, legal or illegal, socially acceptable or unacceptable” (Martin, 2000, p. 7), HM and HC are oriented toward emotion or affection, and specifically toward understanding and solidarity. The photos reveal these two divergent perspectives: AM and EJ tend to favor an outsider’s view, which draws a line between the migrant experience and that of NGOs and the viewer, unlike HM and HC, that present everyday events of migrant life from the perspective of a witness or participant, and portray migrants who look into the eyes and engage the viewer. In this sense, the violence that HM denounces (accidents, hunger, illness, assaults, disappearances, kidnappings, etcetera) contrasts with AM and EJ’s emphasis on “the agenda,” meetings, agreements, or procedures.

Audiovisual content appears in unequal proportions, and is HM’s preferred resource in the form of direct, emotional, and dynamic videos exported from TikTok, probably easier to “consume” than a long Facebook post. This suggests an audience with limited time or internet connection, whose emotional reaction is sought by means of movement, voice changes, and music, that way seeking their concrete help or an immediate response. TikTok’s algorithm facilitates viralization and reaching a broad and diverse audience, including young people and people outside of Latin America, beyond the circle of followers (without the requirement of “being Facebook friends,” or any subscription or follow).

These images avoid the migrant stereotype, as they present people individually, often with their first and last names (to emphasize their identity) or in small groups (to highlight their humanity), performing everyday activities (such as bathing or sleeping), albeit in unusual settings (a river, a park, or a basketball court). Especially in HM, a more human narrative is created, based on “the unquestionability of personal experience” and aimed at “making the audience ‘feel’ and value the experience that only the narrator possesses and can transfer” (Carranza, 2020, p. 206), which builds an identity easily understandable for all audiences. Through the *exemplum*, the experience is assumed to be unquestionable evidence, the basis for arriving at the generalization (Perelman, 1997, p. 147) that migration is not an abstract and dangerous phenomenon: it is embodied in real people, endowed with humanity. Table 3 presents the central features of both ethos.

Table 3. Types of Pro-migrant Ethos Detected by the Analysis

Types	Purpose	Linguistic and multimodal features	Concept of migration	Concept of migrants
Migration management	Assistance: Processing of bureaucratic procedures Discourage crossing into the US	Institutional, expert image Rather monoglossic style Nominalizations and other impersonality resources Specialized genres, such as the communiqué (or release) Outside view	Abstract and sociopolitical phenomenon, which must be organized through bureaucratic procedures	Collective involved in problems that the NGO must resolve (asymmetric relationship: expert/non-expert or “in need”)
Facilitator-participant	Broader support: solidarity and compassion Support along “the journey”	Non-institutional image: focus on migrants and their stories and experiences Polyphonic style Metaphors and other resources that vindicate migration Posts, photos, and videos focused on the stories and emotions of migrants Insider view	A human event, involving specific people A set of stories told by their own protagonists	Brother on the road: a peer, equal or similar, identified by name (symmetrical relationship)

Source: Own elaboration based on the analysis carried out.

Now, “giving voice to those who don’t have one, with the same frequency, may or may not reproduce the power relations that sustain the status of an individual or a group [...] The act of narrating does not necessarily change the conditions of marginalization” (Shuman, 2015, p. 41, cited in Carranza, 2020, p. 274). Furthermore, an analysis such as the one presented here raises other dilemmas: on the one hand, it studies migrant voices mediated by technology (Facebook); on the other, migrant interventions are rare, surely due to the record of intimate interactions on which Facebook is based (Srnicsek, 2018, p. 46): migrants could fear being monitored and even geographically located when publishing on this platform, in a transit considered illegal from a securitist or anti-immigration perspective.

Future work will require a deeper examination of the complex relationship between migrant and pro-migrant profiles and pages, given the tension between humanity and governmentality, which

was not expected to be found in the latter. It will also be necessary to delve into the ethical implications of giving voice to migrants in a context of vulnerability such as the one they are going through: do social media platforms really contribute to this end, or are they just another capitalist instrument of exposure and exploitation, if not stigmatization?

CLOSING REMARKS

This analysis reveals a heterogeneity of voices and perspectives in pro-migrant Facebook pages, where, despite their nuances, two central ethoses unnoticed by previous literature converge. Of these roles, the one circulating through AM and EJ is striking, as it advocates for a change of legal status from migrants to refugees, not as a “strategy to continue on their journey” (Rosales, 2024, p. 4), but rather to keep them in Mexico.

Although these accounts do not promote images of misery or criminalization, they still do not focus on individuals, but rather on the migration phenomenon, which they seem to understand as a chaotic and illegal action that must be channeled according to the “global border regime,” against which they rebel (Varela, 2019, p. 101; Varela & McLean, 2019, p. 167). To our knowledge, previous studies have detected this vision in legal, securitizing, or control discourse, or in that which rejects migration (Moreno, 2023, pp. 245-246). The “containment” they promote—for example, in legal and economic matters—reveals other implicit nuances, linked to policies of deterrence, materialized in narratives and argumentative topics aimed at discouraging border crossing. As such, to be a migrant is to be “an unauthorized but recognized political subject” (Domenech, 2018, p. 47), or an inferior type of subjectivity.

In HC and HM, on the other hand, a “politics of compassion” is discerned that recognizes the other as equal (Fassin, 2016, p. 12), and in which metaphors favorable to human displacement emerge, in addition to a collective, vindicative, and self-recognition ethos: being a migrant is a source of pride, a sacrifice, and even a feat, a “strengthening” similar to what previous studies have detected in the journey on foot (exodus or caravan), as well as a confrontation (not violent, but subtle) with deep-rooted prejudices. Thus, emergent memories surface, striving to record a journey full of obstacles and needs, but not devoid of joy, companionship, and solidarity. The dialectic of short stories confronts, like David faced Goliath, the dehumanizing narrative that seems to prevail in our times.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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