

Memory policies of girls and boys in a caravan of Central American migrants**Políticas de la memoria de niñas y niños en caravana de migrantes centroamericanos**Oscar Misael Hernández Hernández¹

ABSTRACT:

This article explores the construction of memory policies for girls and boys who traveled with their families in a caravan of Central American migrants. Theoretically, it is proposed that memory has not only a cognitive function but also a political one, as it recalls and questions the social processes in which it is produced and signified. Methodologically, oral and visual narratives of two girls and four boys from Honduras and Guatemala who arrived at the Tamaulipas border in February 2019 were used in a thematic and dialogical analysis. It is argued that girls' and boys' memory policies are oriented to the enunciation of violence in their countries of origin, resistance to abuse experienced during the migration transit, and American migration policies' denunciation. Finally, we conclude that the study's findings contribute to discussions on the agency of migrant children and their relevance as social agents within Central American caravans.

Keywords: 1. childhood, 2. memory, 3. migrant caravans, 4. Central America, 5. Mexico.

RESUMEN

En este artículo se explora la construcción de políticas de la memoria de niñas y niños que viajaron con sus familiares en una caravana de migrantes centroamericanos. Teóricamente, se plantea que la memoria no solo tiene una función cognitiva, sino también política, al recordar y cuestionar los procesos sociales en los que se produce y significa. Metodológicamente, se utilizan y analizan de forma temática y dialógica narrativas orales y visuales de dos niñas y de cuatro niños de Honduras y Guatemala que arribaron a la frontera de Tamaulipas en febrero de 2019. Se argumenta que las políticas de la memoria de las niñas y niños se orientan a la enunciación de la violencia en sus países de origen, la resistencia a la vulneración vivida durante el tránsito migratorio y a la denuncia de políticas migratorias estadounidenses. Finalmente, se concluye que los hallazgos del estudio contribuyen a los debates sobre agencia de la niñez migrante y sobre su relevancia como agentes sociales dentro de las caravanas centroamericanas.

Palabras clave: 1. niñez, 2. memoria, 3. caravanas migrantes, 4. Centroamérica, 5. México.

Date received: June 7, 2019

Date accepted November 26, 2019

Published online: September 30, 2020

¹ El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Mexico, ohernandez@colef.mx, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5882-8789>



INTRODUCTION

One morning in February of 2019, I asked Fabiola if she had been by a river. She is a 10-year-old Honduran girl who, along with her parents and a 12-year-old brother, crossed the Suchiate river, which marks the western border between Guatemala and Mexico. Fabiola bowed her head, took a crayon, began to draw on a sheet of paper I gave her, and then she said: "We almost drowned." For a few seconds, she was silent and kept drawing. She then narrated that she walked across the river with her family and that the water went up to her neck. As she walked, she ran into the foot of someone who apparently had drowned. Her brother, who was by her side and two years older than her, intervened and pointed out that it was someone who had drowned because it was floating. After a pause, I asked Fabiola what she thought about having traveled to Mexico. Very serious at the beginning as if pondering, she expressed: "I think it was okay because if we had stayed longer in Honduras, they were going to kill us." Afterward, she continued drawing (O. Hernández, field journal, February 17, 2019).

The poverty and violence that persist in Central American countries, such as Honduras, form part of the causes of the migration of children and adolescents traveling alone or accompanied. A report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), for instance, states that 74 percent of children in Honduras live in households classified as poor, 68 percent in Guatemala, and 44 percent in El Salvador; it also states that for many families, migrating to Mexico or the United States is the only way to leave behind the danger of relentless violence (United Nations Children's Fund, 2018, pp. 5-6). However, little is known about their experiences, be it in their countries of origin or when they cross borders. The purpose of this article is to explore the memory policies of girls and boys who, like Fabiola, crossed the border between Guatemala and Mexico within the framework of Central American migrants' caravans; which since the end of 2018 and until the beginning of 2019 have redefined the logic of transit migration through Central and North America. This exploration seeks to contribute, on the one hand, to the awareness of migrant children in Central American caravans, and on the other, to their recognition as social actors with agency, produced in relational contexts and processes (Abebe, 2019) and used to challenge and reinterpret events and situations.

Narratives such as Fabiola's make the participation of some children in this new dynamic of transit migration tangible in the form of Central American caravans. However, it also makes visible their capacity to remember episodes about their migration when crossing the southern border of Mexico that could be different from other migrant children's experiences from Central America (United Nations Children's Fund, 2018). Finally, her narrative also reveals a process of remembrance that highlights the vulnerability of migrant children and their reflexivity to weigh family migration projects in the context of past and present social violence.

From this perspective, the argument in this study is that, for children who travel in migrant caravans, memory in general is an accumulation of cognitive, social, and political functions. This is represented by the recall and questioning of social processes in their countries of origin and transit. Additionally, memory is a constant act of remembrance that allows children to enunciate, denounce, and even resist past and present configurations, despite forgetfulness (Halbwachs, 2004). The memory policies of migrant girls and boys consist in recalling and narrating episodes of migration and presenting a parallel version of the narrative record of the adults who accompany them.

Methodologically, this article is supported by anthropological fieldwork carried out in two migrant shelters in the Tamaulipas border. In mid-February 2019, two groups of a Central American caravan arrived; they included adults and minors. Specifically, this article analyzes the narrative of two girls and four boys who traveled with their families in the caravan from the point of view of memory policies; these narratives have been taken as accounts of episodes in their nomadic life with a defined spatiality and temporality, but also as stories that reveal processes, relationships, and meanings (Bertaux, 2005).

The present study is organized as follows: firstly, the participation of Central American migrant children is contextualized based on migratory studies; secondly, the need for an epistemic twist is highlighted to return to memory as a political narrative located temporally, spatially, and linguistically; thirdly, a methodological strategy to research on migrant children is described which is suitable for reflections and empirical analysis; fourthly, the forms of memory policies adopted by girls and boys migrating with the caravan are analyzed based on the results; finally, conclusions and final comments are outlined.

Migrant children and memory

In the last decade, irregular migration of children from Central America to the United States has been immersed in heated migration policies. From the so-called "humanitarian crisis" with Barack Obama, before the arrival of more than 51,000 migrant children in 2014, to the criminalization of Central American migration with Donald Trump and the case of "caged children" in 2018; the central debate was that the US government considers child immigrants as immigrants *before* considering them as children. Furthermore, US migration policies selectively protect certain sub-categories of migrant children (Galli, 2018, p.2).

Beyond the infringement of Central American migrant children's rights, both in the United States and Mexico, approximately 60 percent of this population are unaccompanied minors between 12 and 17 years of age. This results in a high range of challenges for both countries regarding detention conditions, treatment in detention centers, and respect for basic rights (Cruz & Payán, 2018). On the other hand, accompanied children, that is, those who travel with their relatives, make up 40 percent of this population. Unfortunately, their migration experiences and how they enunciate, denounce, or resist displacement have been scarcely explored.

At least in the Mexican context, according to Mancillas Bazán (2009), until two decades ago, the lack of interest shown by social analysts in Central American migrant children traveling with their families was because the participation of minors in the Mexico-United States migration was not very significant, or rather, that its importance in this process was not as transcendental as that of adult migrants (Mancillas Bazán, 2009, p. 211). On the other hand, as recently stated by Thompson, Torres, Swanson, Blue, and Hernández (2017), the problem derives from a dichotomous notion of migrant children in North America and Europe: with perceptions that consider them either as victims or criminals.

However, these debates about the relevance of the narratives and experiences of accompanied Central American children traveling through Mexico and their status as victims or criminals have rarely been addressed by the social sciences. The existing reports are limited to journalistic works that attempt to provide an overview of their conditions. For example, a report from 2018 showed that just over 2 000 accompanied minors were traveling in the caravan and that they were exposed to physical and emotional health risks; this was reflected by their desire to return to their home and their lack of geographical notions about the place where they were (Notimex, 2018).

Another report, by *Diario del Sur*, stressed that Central American migrant children, accompanied or unaccompanied, were the most vulnerable in caravans, and that Mexican organizations and authorities disregarded child migration (Zúñiga, 2019). The victimization angle of the migrant children as they transit through Mexico can be noticed in both reports. The vulnerability of these populations is undeniable and especially true for unaccompanied children; however, in any case, migrant children build a memory that registers and transmits the conditions of vulnerability.

The individual and collective memory of migrant children from Central America—as well as that of young people in that region—has been explored by different social analysts using qualitative techniques and in-depth interviews. Even though not all studies have as an epistemic framework the memory or social construction of remembrance among this population—whether girls, boys, or young people traveling alone or with others—the stories, tales, or fragments of testimonies reveal individual and collective memories of their migratory journeys and routes, highlighting their vulnerability and the violence they experience, both in Central America and in transit through Mexico (Porrás Gómez, 2017).

Given this, the challenge presented in this article is how to conceive and comprehend the memory policies constructed by girls and boys who were traveling in a caravan of Central American migrants. For that purpose, three steps are presented to face that challenge. The first step is to envisage memory not only as the act of remembering the past but also as “a social process in which historicity, time, space, social relationships, power, subjectivity, social practices, conflict, transformation, and permanence are condensed” (Kuri Pineda, 2017, p.11).

The second step is to distinguish between individual memory and collective memory. In their exegesis of collective memory and social processes, Manero Brito and Soto Martínez (2005, p. 179) state that collective memory refers to shared “experiences and knowledge recovered from individuals who lived similar circumstances in the past” and not to “a mere summation of individual memories”. This distinction is conceptually and methodologically relevant to this study, which focuses on collective memory (re)constructed by migrant children in the caravan regarding shared experiences and knowledge.

Finally, the third step consists in defining and appropriating a notion of collective memory. Based on Halbwachs' approach (2011), we define collective memory as the memory of the members of a group who reconstruct the past based on their interests and current frames of reference. For this author, there is no unchangeable past of present experience, but a past that is always restarted and reconstructed. The idea is that memory, when exploring the past, is part of a retrospective journey in which the present forms a frame of reference or starting point from which to reconstruct and relate.

From this perspective, collective memory becomes a process of remembrance, interpersonal identifications, and group value. Additionally, memory operates within social frameworks; that is, it refers to past experiences as well as spatial, temporal, and linguistic coordinates. Therefore, a memory lacking these frameworks runs the risk of crossing the fantasy border, where one could not know whether it is a memory or something imagined (Halbwachs, 2011). The most compelling reason to fuse memory with social, temporal, and spatial frameworks is to show that these frameworks provide memory with stability and persistence. From this perspective, the narrative is the basic and necessary intermediary of memory. The narrative gives rise to the description, which is intended to convey the whole situation. In other words, the memory becomes narration supported by an assumed bygone past.

For this study, the memory of children from the Central American migrant caravan will be represented as a process of remembrance of collective events articulated with their past and the migratory journey; also as a collective memory, as they share experiences and knowledge located in temporal, spatial, and linguistic frameworks; and, finally, as political memory, given that such experiences and knowledge are articulated, denounced, and even resisted within social constraints and possibilities that encompass their lives at the structural level.

METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY

This analysis and reflection derive from anthropological fieldwork carried out in the Tamaulipas border, whose purpose was to develop a diagnosis of a caravan of 202 Central American migrants who arrived at shelters in the cities of Reynosa (110 migrants) and Matamoros (92 migrants) in mid-February 2019. Three-fifths of the migrants were from Honduras, while the rest were from Guatemala and El Salvador. The diagnosis was based on

a simple randomized survey consisting of a questionnaire given to 51.8 percent of the migrants who arrived in Reynosa and 48.9 percent of the migrants who arrived in Matamoros. Conversely, informal interviews were held with a dozen Honduran and Guatemalan parents waiting for their interviews to request asylum in the United States. The questionnaire was designed using questions that gathered sociodemographic information from the migrants, whereas the interviews included open-ended questions that captured part of the parents' migratory experiences and expectations (Hernández Hernández, 2019a). However, as expected, both adults and children traveled in the caravan.

From the results, the diagnosis identified more than two-fifths of migrants who arrived in both cities traveled with their families, made up of couples, sons, or daughters; the latter, mostly minors between 6 and 12 years of age. These data were very similar to those found in Tijuana, Baja California, and Piedras Negras, Coahuila, cities where the first caravans of Central American migrants arrived (El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2018; El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2019). Beyond the figures, the shelters' observations allowed the identification of the children in the migrant caravan as relevant social actors and not just another part of the population in transit.

In order to approach migrant children during fieldwork in Reynosa and Matamoros, which took place during the second half of February 2019, authorization was requested from the shelter coordinators to conduct interviews. The answer was affirmative, with the condition of the parents' prior consent. After that, the permission of ten parents was requested, mentioning that the intention was to learn about the migratory experiences of their sons and daughters. In Reynosa, permission was only granted to speak with the son and daughter of a Honduran mother, while in Matamoros, two Honduran parents gave permission to speak with their two sons and two Guatemalan parents to speak with a boy and a girl (a detailed record of the participating children is included below). The parents were also guaranteed their children's anonymity and the confidentiality of information (Anguita & Sotomayor, 2011).

Interviews with the children were done individually and were designed using open-ended questions, such as where they were from, what their place of origin was like, whom they traveled with, what called their attention during the trip, and so on. They were carried out in the shelters' patios within view of other migrants. However, when the interview began, the children gave very short answers; they only shook their heads or shrugged their shoulders, kept silent, or were nervous despite having made previous contact with them and asking them the questions in a straightforward manner. Given this, we proceeded to use a different technique from that of the interview: participant observation, which allows for interaction with the social actors and to grasp background meanings (Kawulich, 2005). Specifically, a drawing exercise was devised in the shelters' patios to converse collectively about their migration experiences, and at the same time, they made drawings of what they missed or remembered about the caravan trip.

This exercise was carried out in the shelters of both cities in the following way: they were invited to draw what they remembered about their trip or their country, they were given paper and crayons, they sat on the floor, and as they drew or colored, they were asked questions about what they were drawing, why they drew such a thing (for example, a river, people, and so on), what it meant, and whether it was different from other children's drawings or experiences. The exercise was recorded in audio format, and some photographs were taken of the drawings and the children drawing, without showing their faces. In the end, the following children participated in the exercise:

Table 1. Registry of participating children.

Alias	Age	Country of origin	Shelter
Fabiola	10	Honduras	Reynosa
José	12	Honduras	Reynosa
Jason	9	Honduras	Matamoros
Kelvin	9	Honduras	Matamoros
Edin	8	Guatemala	Matamoros
María	10	Guatemala	Matamoros

Source: Prepared by the author from fieldwork, February 2019.

The drawing exercise and collective conversations were used as a medium to capture the stories and memories of the migrant children in the caravan. Both the exercise and the conversations allowed the capture of episodes in their lives, situated in temporal, spatial, and linguistic frameworks (Halbwachs, 2004). Specifically, the accounts derived from the exercise were made visible through oral narratives (the conversations) and visual narratives (the drawings) that, together, gave form and content to the memory policies of migrant girls and boys in the caravan.

To analyze the narratives that make up the stories, a transcript was made of the audio recordings of the exercises (around two hours in each city) and the only interview (about half an hour). In the second phase, we identified themes that the children addressed in their oral narratives and framed them as relevant memories due to their spatial and temporal enhancement. Additionally, the meanings and contexts they gave to their memories when they mentioned episodes of violence were highlighted in order to minimize the "fictionalization" of events (Randall, 1992), or in this case, constructed memory. In the case of visual narratives (drawings), these were taken as social representations of events experienced (Hartog, 2011). Finally, the narratives as a whole were situated within social frameworks (Halbwachs, 2004), that is, in a spatiotemporal and linguistic production context.

Based on this procedure to analyze the collective memory of migrant children, three dimensions of memory policies were identified: 1) memory of enunciation and denunciation of violence in their countries of origin; 2) memory of abuse in the migration transit through Mexico; and 3) memory on denouncement and criticism of US immigration policy. The three

dimensions are jointed with each other and collectively constitute the memory policies of the caravan's migrant children.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

"It is better that you leave": The enunciation of social violence in Central America

In Reynosa, José and Fabiola, the Honduran siblings, ages 12 and 10, respectively, sat on the patio floor of the shelter, took the crayons and the sheets of paper I gave them, and began to draw. Both were serious, somewhat fearful at first. They asked me what they should draw, and I told them to draw what they remembered from the trip. José told Fabiola to draw when they crossed the river (the Suchiate). She did not want to at first, but she agreed because she saw that José had started. "We crossed here," said José, taking a blue crayon and tracing the river. "It was not nice to go through here," he added. Fabiola was making her own sketch and, without raising her eyes, complemented: "No, it was not nice, it was bad because there were cops and a helicopter, but it was better than staying in Honduras." José added: "Yes, better to come."

I asked Fabiola why it was better than staying in Honduras, and she pointed out, somewhat uncomfortable with the question, "Because of the gangs, why else?" and she continued to draw in silence. A day before, I had spoken with their parents, and they had told me how the gangs had stripped them of their house and threatened them with death; they even showed me a copy of a police report they made, but they also emphasized a policeman's response to the complaint: "It is better that you leave." José, Fabiola, and their parents shared this episode of violence and remembered it as something traumatic that had led them to the decision to join the migrant caravan (O. Hernández, field journal, February 17, 2019).

Jiménez (2016) recognizes violence in Central America as the cause of a tragic human mobilization, both internal and external (p.169), and of human exoduses, such as those of Central American migrants' caravans nowadays (El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2018; El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2019; Hernández Hernández, 2019a). Groppo (2002) states that, due to violence, the issue of memory becomes increasingly important, especially when addressing traumatic events like the ones expressed by José and Fabiola. In this regard, the author states that memory is perceived as an anchor point and as a guarantee for threatened identities (Groppo, 2002, p. 18). From this perspective, memory is an important conceptual element to record, enunciate, and denounce different events, but above all, it is useful to recall the past and avoid reproducing it, especially in the case of traumatic events experienced by migrants in transit in their countries of origin.

Although it may seem a cliché, the first anchoring of memory policies among the interviewed girls and boys from the caravan of Central American migrants refers to enunciating social violence in their countries of origin. These are not mere narrated memories, but rather the denunciation of that violence as the historicity of conflicts in Central

America that persist up to the present and, above all, that continues infringing migrant children. They are memories that, as expressed by Halbwachs (2011), are reproduced in time and space in order to reinforce or avoid threats to the sense of identity. In other words, children's enunciation of violence refers to a recent period of time and a specific space, such as their countries of origin, communities, and families.

Fabiola, along with her older brother, narrated her family's migration as a way to escape certain death in her country. As she drew, she explained the context a bit more: "My dad reported to the police that gang members kill people, so then they were going to kill us." And why did he report them? —I asked—, "First, my father had come to the United States to make a house there in Honduras, but since the gang members took it from him, we had to flee afterward, we went to Catacamas, then we built a house there" (O. Hernández, field journal, February 17, 2019).

Another child who recalled and enunciated social violence in their country of origin was Edin, from Guatemala. After drawing his house—which he drew symmetrically in black, with two windows and a door, against the background of a yellow sun and a green tree in the front—, I asked him why he had marked a window and part of the door with red. Edin, his face expressionless, his tone serious, and his crayon in his hand, replied: "Because they are closed, I don't want the police to come in." I asked him if the police had ever come to his house, and he told me: "Yes, they came for my brother, they said he had killed, but he wasn't there, and they shouted at my dad, and they wanted to take him to jail" (O. Hernández, field journal, February 19, 2019; Hernández-Hernández, 2019b).

In the first place, both narratives agree with Jiménez (2016) in that violence in Central America continues to be the common denominator, but it has taken place differently since the second half of the twentieth century; now, it is characterized by delinquency and crime without ideological purposes (Jiménez, 2016, p.170), since they represent accounts of social violence in Honduras and Guatemala, respectively. Both narratives are also collective memories insofar as they allude to Fabiola and Edin's shared experiences and knowledge, even though they were from different countries (Manero Brito & Soto Martínez, 2005). Both cases express the history of violence in Central America since the 1970s and is still occurring, with different undertones, where the police and gangsters are the main actors (Indigo Staff, 2019). Moreover, drug trafficking, homicides, youth violence, and gangs appear as fundamental concerns in Central America (World Bank, 2011).

Secondly, Fabiola and Edin's narratives contribute to the knowledge and recognition of memory; when recalling, their adopted stance is in itself a memory policy: "If we stayed, they were going to kill us" and "so that the police don't come in" are the two sides of an allegation: the threat of death and the latent police threat in their communities and families.

Thirdly, narratives such as those by Fabiola and Edin reveal the somewhat invisible categories of time and space that define memory policies. Although from different countries, they both lived in municipalities affected by the violence resulting from civil wars and forced

displacements in the 1980s: the first in Catacamas, northeast of Tegucigalpa, and the second in Santa Cruz del Quiché, northwest of Guatemala City. Although the parallels of this argument seems trivial, the truth is that it is about a migrant girl and boy linked by a historical past of migratory processes, refuge, and reorganization of Mexico's southern border (Bovin, 2005).

Perhaps one more narrative will make it possible to understand and in part situate this memory policy of migrant children in a temporal and spatial framework that oscillates between the 1980s and the present. While drawing with Kelvin and Edin at the Matamoros shelter, Jason from Honduras told me that his parents accompanied him in the caravan. I asked him where he lived, and he replied: "In Olancho" [a department in Honduras]. So, is your whole family there? I asked, and he said: "No, my grandfather lives in Guatemala." And why is he there? I insisted. "I don't know, he left long ago, my mom says that because of the war, and he stayed." What do you think about that? I remarked. "Well, he left because of that! but I want to meet him, to come back" (O. Hernández, field journal, February 20, 2019).

It is possible that Jason's grandfather participated in some clandestine political-military movement, such as those in the 1980s in Honduras, made up of Communist Party dissidents, or simply was part of the citizenry that was forced to move to other countries in Central America due to the armed conflict. It is evident that Jason built the memory on two articulated levels: on the one hand, the reference of his grandfather as a family absence, and on the other, the reference of war as the reason for that absence. In addition, it is also a memory that shares similarities with other narratives, denouncing historical displacement.

"I saw them too": the abuse in transit through Mexico

In Matamoros, Edin explained to Kelvin, with whom he traveled in the caravan: "I came with my parents from afar... and we passed where there were many police and people ran." Kelvin commented that he also came with his parents, and he remained pensive for a while; after asking Edin for a red crayon, he said: "I also saw them [the police], and many people, then they loaded some on pickup trucks, others ran" (O. Hernández, field journal, February 21, 2019).

The memory policies of girls and boys in the caravan reflect the nuance of enunciation and denunciation of the violence experienced by migrants in their countries of origin and the violence they experienced during their transit through Mexico. It is a collective memory that mediates between their transit through international borders and the arrival in cities on Mexico's northern border, making such violence visible. The politics of this memory, as traumatic memories, do not only attempt to report violence but also how migrant children avoid abuse.

The idea of abuse is proposed as an analytic category to transcend the cliché about the abuse of migrant children as if it were a "trait of the person and not of the structures in which people live" (Madrid, 2015, unnumbered). From this perspective, children in the caravan

were infringed by structures other than migration. Therefore, their memory policies are about abuse in different places and at different moments: both when leaving their places of origin and when crossing the Honduras-Guatemala and Guatemala-Mexico borders, being victims of different forms of violence that tinged their memories and tempered their capacity to withstand or reject the memory. Kelvin, for example, pointed out that his family stayed behind because he cried and asked his dad not to go on, while the rest of the migrants "broke the gates"; when José saw the police assaulting the migrants, he also returned with his family, although he had previously cautioned his father so that he could protect them.

The transit towards Mexico begins with the first type of abuse recalled by migrant children when they narrate their crossing through the border between Honduras and Guatemala. Kelvin, for instance, narrated: "Ah, we crossed; I remember we were there for a week, there in Guatemala, in that week when the migrants broke the gates of Guatemala." You as well? I asked him. "No, not us, we stayed behind, the others who were in the caravan. And then they broke the gates of Guatemala, there were lots of dead people" (O. Hernández, field journal, February 20, 2019). José even narrated the following: "The Guatemalan police threw tear gas at us for breaking the gates, and the Mexican police too, but we returned and told our father so that he could protect us" (O. Hernández, field journal, February 19, 2019).

Kelvin and José's narratives must be placed in the context of the Central American migrants' caravan in which they traveled. Their families—including all the children whom we spoke to in Reynosa and Matamoros—joined the caravan that left San Pedro Sula, Honduras, on January 15, 2019, as part of a summon made on social media, according to what other migrants said (O. Hernández, field journal, February 20, 2019). However, when they arrived in the Agua Caliente border zone between Honduras and Guatemala, they were confronted with a National Police checkpoint, where around 23 minors were secured, and there were different incidents of violence in the attempt to cross toward Guatemala (El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2019).

The second type of abuse remembered by migrant children is when crossing the Guatemala-Mexico border. Based on the drawing activity, different visual representations of the abuse were identified: a helicopter flying over the Suchiate river, drowned people floating in the river, police firing tear gas, and the surveillance and detention in "kennels." José's drawing is an example of the evoked event; he drew a helicopter and a blue river, and along the river, two erect human figures [a woman and a man]; followed by his description: "and here was when we crossed the river (sic)." Later, he drew another human figure: a man lying down and on top of that the legend: "here was when he drowned because they put him on the heliconter (sic)." Finally, in front of the river, he drew a small human figure, with something in his hand, to whom he referred to as a soldier (O. Hernández, field journal, February 19, 2019).

When I asked José about his drawing, he said: "I just remember they threw tear gas at us. With that stuff you can't see, you can't breathe either. We crossed the river, that's when they turned the helicopter on us, they lit the helicopter, and they put it low so that people would

drown. We were among the first to pass, and from those behind, one drowned." Is that what you remember most? I asked him, and he replied: "What I remember was that we entered Mexico, we walked for a week without bathing [...] that was the worst. We were walking, we were falling behind, and they were picking us up, the police, the federal police, the kennels as they call them [...] they'd put us in and take us back again. We never ended up in a kennel. They took those that stayed behind" (O. Hernández, field journal, February 19, 2019).

Both José's visual representation and his oral narrative envisage a memory of the abuse experienced by other children, as he did when crossing the Guatemala-Mexico border. However, it was his sister Fabiola who, after making a drawing similar to his, clarified how they bypassed the abuse: "I was telling my dad that we were already coming, going across holding hands because we had already traveled and we couldn't go back to Honduras, better here" (O. Hernández, field journal, February 19, 2019). As can be appreciated, the agency shown by girls such as Fabiola was in stage to restate the effort of the migratory trip, the strategy of crossing the river together as a family, and the disadvantages of returning to their country of origin as arguments to resist the abuse they experienced.

As some recent studies have stated, young migrants from Central America experience different forms of violence not only in their countries of origin but also when they travel through Mexico (Porras Gómez, 2017). However, as has been shown, such expressions of violence are not only experienced by young people but also by migrant children from that region. Thus, these expressions of violence are part of a collective memory constructed by migrant children, such as those in the caravan, but above all, they are forms of abuse that were resisted by an agency that resulted in the capacity to endure, to refuse, and to seek alternatives (Abebe, 2019).

"Disastrous because of Donald Trump": The denouncement of US immigration policy

During the fieldwork in Reynosa, I asked José, from Honduras, if he could imagine what the United States was like. Before responding, his sister Fabiola intervened: "Disastrous!". José turned around and said: "I think it's more beautiful than here." As if it were a children's debate on transnational migration policies, Fabiola intervened again: "I imagine it's disastrous because of Donald Trump." José and Fabiola began a dialogue as if they were two small adults. The first emphasized the pros and cons of the United States, compared with Mexico, and the second emphasized the cons. At that moment, both stopped drawing for a few seconds. Fabiola was the one who, after showing herself somewhat serious and crestfallen, raised her head and her voice to refute what her brother José was saying. At some point, José looked at me as if trying to get my support, but Fabiola continued to refute him and to reaffirm her thoughts (O. Hernández, field journal, February 18, 2019; Hernández-Hernández, 2019b).

A priori, narratives such as those by José and Fabiola lack social frameworks and cross the frontier of fantasy—she imagines the landscape of the United States. However, narratives

themselves represent a linguistic coordinate that adopts a political referent (Donald Trump) to imagine the (disastrous) situation of a country idealized by caravan migrants. Later on, the political referent and the situation in the country are given meaning and taken to temporal and spatial coordinates that refer to deportation stories.

If while exploring the past, memory, as proposed by Halbwachs (2011), embarks on a retrospective journey in which the present is known to be a reference point, then the memory policies among the migrant girls and boys in the caravan can also take a reference in the present to recall the recent past, as is the American migration policy.

This migration policy is a transnational phenomenon told to them, even one they have lived up close, but also one they appropriated as a story to be denounced. Another aspect of memory policies among migrant girls and boys is the United States' migration policy's denouncement in three areas: deportations, detentions, and family separation. The last two are intimately related, both in the narratives and the migration policy.

In the first case, deportations, Fabiola's narrative is illustrative. After she said that the United States was a disastrous country for her because of Donald Trump, I asked her why she thought that about the president, and she responded:

"Because he is very bad." But many people want to go there, I replied. After reflecting for a few seconds, she answered: "Ah, but those who have gone across are back in Honduras. As a friend of ours who went across and is already in Honduras. He came with the caravan again and stayed in Guatemala; he couldn't come across to here" (O. Hernández, field journal, February 18, 2019).

Fabiola's narrative is part of a memory that takes up an immediate past characterized by the recent deportations of migrants from the caravan; however, it is also part of a memory that is part of a not so recent past, but rather a long-standing one characterized by American migration policies from the second half of the twentieth century.

It is a past that, as stated by Massey and Durand (2009), is anchored in the 1960s and spans to the 1980s, during the so-called era of undocumented migration, during which migrants covered labor demand, employers demanded cheap labor without rights, and the government implemented forced repatriations along the border to silence the anti-immigrant population. However, it is also an immediate past in which mass deportations gained visibility once again in the United States' governments of the last decade of the twenty-first century.

Fabiola's narrative constitutes a remembrance, a memory of the denouncement of the deportations of migrants from the Central American caravan. However, at the same time, her remembrance is part of a history of mass deportations from the United States that precedes in decades the temporality from the one she remembers, narrates, and denounces. In addition, her narrative also has a historical reference of deportation in the family: her father was deported years before: "First, my father had come to the United States, I was five, to make a

house there in Honduras, but since the gang members took it from him, we were fleeing afterward" (O. Hernández, field journal, February 19, 2019).

As can be observed, the linguistic framework or coordinate enunciated by Fabiola is part of a memory that articulates different temporalities: the recent deportation of migrants from the caravan in which she arrived in Mexico and the not so recent deportation of her father. These are temporalities that are part of different American migration policies (Barack Obama's and Donald Trump's), but with the same result: deportations. Also, the memory itself articulates different spatialities that, in the end, are intertwined by a migratory process: the exodus from Honduras, the transit through Mexico, and the deportation from the United States.

Edin's narrative adds to this collective memory of denunciation against the United States; he mentioned: "My dad went there a long time ago, I was a kid, but he says that the government returned him and he couldn't go back [to the United States], that's why we are now going in the caravan." I asked Edin how long ago had his dad gone to the United States, and he answered again when I was a kid. "But you are a kid, Edin," I replied, considering he is eight years old. "Yes, when I was younger," he said, at the same time lifting his right hand to signal a height shorter than he was.

Edin's narrative, as well as Fabiola's, positions them as social actors capable of remembering and reflecting on the experiences they and their families have during the migration (Abebe, 2019). Such capacity also states and denounces the deportations experienced by their relatives or friends; this allows them to form a critical collective memory with an anti-immigration policy.

In the case of detentions and family separation, these two elements, as mentioned previously, are closely related because they refer to what the children have heard about the detention of Central American migrant children in the United States, and simultaneously, the separation of their families. María's narrative is a concrete example of memory policies focused on denouncing these aspects:

While she was at the shelter looking at a map of the United States and part of the northern border of Mexico, I approached her and asked her if she knew where we were on the map; she answered yes, at the same time pointing with the index finger of her left hand at the city of Matamoros. Beyond her ability to position herself geographically, I asked her if she wanted to go to the United States. Although somewhat self-conscious, María expressed: "I don't know, because they say that they lock up children there." María remained silent for a few seconds and continued to look at the map on the wall. I asked her again, who said that children were locked up in the United States, and she said: "My sister told me, but I saw on TV that they did lock them up, and that's why I don't know [if I want to go], but we are going with my mother" (O. Hernández, field journal, February 20, 2019).

María's narrative is part of a collective memory that, at least among families from Central America, points to the recent detentions and separations of undocumented migrant families in the United States. Such detentions and separations are part of a policy called "zero tolerance," which has separated hundreds of children from their parents and has locked them up in cages in detention centers in the south of Texas (Clarín Mundo, 2018).

During the fieldwork, minors such as María's sister, including adult migrants from the caravan, constantly recalled the family separation and the lock-up of migrant children in the United States. This was a precedent that made them falter in their decision to seek asylum in that country, as well as a record of a recent memory they used as evidence of the historical and transnational vulnerability of Central American migrants. It was also a frequent reminder of an immigration policy that disrupted migrant children's and families' lives during a government administration that was still in power.

For María, however, the record of the memory not only derived from what her sister said or from the news media, but also from her own experience in her community of origin. Shortly after observing the map on the wall, she told me: "Where I am from, in Verapaz, some children left with their parents some time ago, and then they [the children] came back without them [their parents], one of them went to school with me" (O. Hernández, field journal, February 20, 2019). Her narrative is a temporal and spatial-communitarian memory policy, which denounces the detention and separation of migrant children from their parents (Malkin, 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to explore the memory policies of girls and boys who traveled in a caravan of Central American migrants. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and the analysis of both oral and graphic narratives, our main findings identified that memory policies in this population are built around three interrelated dimensions: enunciation and denunciation of social violence in their countries of origin, resistance to the abuse experienced during their migration to Mexico and in Mexico, and denunciation and criticism of US immigration policy. In conjunction, these memories are collectively constructed, but these are also memories that question violence and resignify experiences of abuse.

Undoubtedly, as Moscoso states (2005), "migration becomes both an object of discourse and a context for remembrance" (Moscoso, 2005, p. 14). In other words, migration is a phenomenon experienced and narrated simultaneously. For the author, migration profoundly marks children's experiences so that when they recount them, they reactivate their memories and construct narratives that jump between temporalities and spaces. However, above all, when they recount their experiences, they place themselves as subjects and social agents in different situations and problems.

Migration, then, is a phenomenon and an experience described based on the context from which it is remembered, the narrator, the meanings attributed by the narrator, and the

narrator's silences or forgetfulness. In other words, the memories of the migratory experience are not chronological, but they do place a range of significant events for the subject in space and time, in this case, for Central American children traveling in a caravan.

The findings of this study should contribute to studies on Central American migrant children in transit through Mexico towards the United States (Porrás Gómez, 2017; Cruz & Payán, 2018; Galli, 2018) and to the debate on the subject of children's agency in general (Abebe, 2019) and Central American migrant children in particular (Thompson, Torres, Swanson, Blue, & Hernández Hernández, 2017). As has been shown, migrant minors are important social agents in contemporary migratory movements, such as the caravans, who also display capacities to recall, denounce, and criticize processes or events that have placed them as witnesses or victims of social violence.

The collective memory of migrant children from the caravans, as individuals with similar past circumstances who shared experiences and knowledge (Manero Brito & Soto Martínez, 2005), makes this population visible. Its remembrance process has a political undertone that is not limited to the mere narration of the memories: this process takes place in temporal, spatial, and linguistic production frameworks (Halbwachs, 2004). In other words, the memory policies of migrant children are collectively constructed and anchored at varying times, places, and meanings.

The analysis of migrant girls' and boys' memory policies takes on meaning and importance when placed in social settings. Otherwise, without comprehending the history of violence in Central America, children's enunciation and denunciation of the social violence in their countries of origin could hardly be understood. Nor can the resistance of the abuse experienced during the migration process be understood if the Mexican government's actions during the crossing of the migrant caravans are unknown. Much less could the denunciation and criticism of the United States migration policy by migrant children be understood without having the anti-immigrant context that ranges from Barack Obama's administration to Donald Trump's.

Translation: Miguel Ángel Ríos

REFERENCES

- Abebe, T. (2019). Reconceptualising Children's Agency as Continuum and Interdependence. *Social Science*, 8(3), 1-16.
- Anguita, V., & Sotomayor, A. (2011). ¿Confidencialidad, anonimato? Las otras promesas de la investigación. *Acta Bioethica*, 17(2), 199-204.
- Banco Mundial. (2011). *Crimen y violencia en Centroamérica. Un desafío para el desarrollo*. Retrieved from https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLAC/Resources/FINAL_VOLUME_I_SPANISH_CrimeAndViolence.pdf
- Bertaux, D. (2005). *Los relatos de la vida. Perspectiva etnosociológica*. Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra.
- Bovin, P. (2005). *Las fronteras del Istmo. Fronteras y sociedades entre el sur de México y América Central*. Mexico: CEMCA-CIESAS.
- Clarín Mundo. (June 19, 2018). Estados Unidos: niños inmigrantes encerrados en jaulas. Retrieved from https://www.clarin.com/mundo/unidos-ninos-inmigrantes-encerrados-jaulas_0_rkS8wjI-X.html
- Cruz, P., & Payán, T. (2018). Alone and Vulnerable: Unaccompanied Minors in the United States and Mexico. *Baker Institute Report*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328225666_Alone_and_Vulnerable_Unaccompanied_Minors_in_the_United_States_and_Mexico
- El Colegio de la Frontera Norte. (2018). *La caravana de migrantes centroamericanos en Tijuana 2018. Diagnóstico y propuesta de acción*. Retrieved from <https://www.colef.mx/estudiosdeelcolef/la-caravana-de-migrantes-centroamericanos-en-tijuana-2018-diagnostico-y-propuestas-de-accion/>
- El Colegio de la Frontera Norte. (2019). *La caravana de migrantes centroamericanos en Piedras Negras, Coahuila 2019. Diagnóstico y propuesta de acción*. Retrieved from <https://www.colef.mx/estudiosdeelcolef/la-caravana-centroamericana-de-migrantes-en-piedras-negras-coahuila-2019-diagnostico-y-propuestas-de-accion/>
- Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia. (August 17, 2018). *Desarraigados en Centroamérica y México. Los niños migrantes y refugiados se enfrentan a un círculo vicioso de adversidad y peligro*. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/lac/sites/unicef.org/lac/files/2018-08/20180817_UNICEF-ChildAlert-2018-CentralAmericaMexico_SPA.pdf
- Galli, C. (2018). *No Country for Immigrant Children: From Obama's "Humanitarian Crisis" to Trump's Criminalization of Central American Unaccompanied Minors*. C. R. Brief (Ed.) Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326877028_No_Country_for_Immigrant_Children_From_Obama's_Humanitarian_Crisis_to_Trump's_Criminalization_of_Central_American_Unaccompanied_Minors
- Grosso, B. (2002). Las políticas de la memoria. *Sociohistórica* (11-12), 187-198.

- Halbwachs, M. (2004). *Los marcos sociales de la memoria*. Madrid: Anthropos.
- Halbwachs, M. (2011). *La memoria colectiva*. Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila Editores.
- Hartog, G. (2011). La violencia que dibujan las niñas y los niños y la que pinta nuestro gobierno de su mano dura. *Revista Estudios Culturales*, 4(8), 97-109.
- Hernández-Hernández, O. M. (2019a). *Caravana de migrantes centroamericanos en Reynosa y Matamoros, 2019*. Matamoros: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.
- Hernández-Hernández, O. M. (October 26, 2019b). *Caravaneritos: niñas y niños migrantes*. Retrieved from https://www.cronica.com.mx/notas-caravaneritos_ninas_y_ninos_migrantes-1135511-2019
- Índigo Staff (July 6, 2019). La historia de la Mara Salvatrucha, la temible pandilla que nació en EU y ahora carcome Centroamérica. Retrieved from <https://www.reporteindigo.com/latitud/la-historia-de-la-mara-salvatrucha-la-temible-pandilla-que-nacio-en-eu/>
- Jiménez, E. V. (2016). La violencia en el Triángulo Norte de Centroamérica: una realidad que genera desplazamiento. *Papel Político*, 21(1), 167-196.
- Kawulich, B. B. (May 23, 2005). *La observación participante como método de recolección de datos*. Retrieved from <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/466/998>
- Kuri Pineda, E. (2017). La construcción social de la memoria en el espacio: una aproximación sociológica. *Península*, 12(1), 9-30.
- Madrid, A. (October 15, 2015). *Vulneración y vulnerabilidad: el orden de las cosas*. Fundación l'alternativa. Retrieved from <https://www.fundacioalternativa.cat>
- Malkin, E. (January 2, 2019). *Guatemala no quiere enfrentar a Estados Unidos por la muerte de menores migrantes*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2019/01/02/guatemala-menores-migrantes/>
- Mancillas Bazán, C. (2009). Migración de menores mexicanos a Estados Unidos. In P. Leite, & S. Giorguli, *El estado de la migración. Las políticas públicas ante los retos de la migración mexicana a Estados Unidos* (pp. 211-248). Mexico: Consejo Nacional de Población.
- Manero Brito, R., & Soto Martínez, M. (2005). Memoria colectiva y procesos sociales. *Enseñanza e Investigación en Psicología*, 10(1), 171-189.
- Massey, D., & Durand, J. (2009). *Detrás de la trama. Políticas migratorias entre México y Estados Unidos*. Mexico: Universidad de Zacatecas/Miguel Ángel Porrúa.
- Moscoso, M. F. (2005). *Niñez, migración y memoria: una introducción*. Ecuador: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana/Universidad Libre de Berlín-Programa Andino de Derechos Humanos.
- Notimex. (November 3, 2018). *Niños migrantes, el lado más vulnerable de la Caravana*. Retrieved from <https://www.jornada.com.mx/ultimas/2018/11/03/ninos-migrantes-el-lado-mas-vulnerable-de-la-caravana-1582.html>

- Porras Gómez, I. F. (2017). Entender las violencias: los jóvenes migrantes centroamericanos en sus lugares de origen y su tránsito por el sur de México. *Nueva Antropología*, 30(87), 107-130.
- Randall, M. (1992). ¿Qué es y cómo se hace un testimonio? *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* (32), 221-245.
- Thompson, A., Torres, R., Swanson, K., Blue, S., & Hernández Hernández, O. (2017). Reconceptualising agency in migrant children from Central America and Mexico. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(2), 235-252.
- Zúñiga, R. (April 15, 2019). *Niñez migrante la más vulnerable en las caravanas*. Retrieved from <https://www.diariodelsur.com.mx/local/ninez-migrante-la-mas-vulnerable-en-las-caravanas-3328257.html>