Migrant Voices in the Digital Sphere: Life Narratives from the US-Mexico Borderlands

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Voces migrantes en la esfera digital: Narrativas de vida de la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos

Martín Camps
University of the Pacific, Estados Unidos
Orcid: https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1409-5330
correo: mcamps@pacific.edu

Resumen. La frontera de tres mil kilómetros que divide Estados Unidos y México ha sido descrita como una "zona de contacto" de fricción cultural y relaciones de poder desequilibradas, según la definición de Mary Louise Pratt. Este artículo busca contribuir al estudio y la comprensión de las vidas en la zona fronteriza entre Estados Unidos y México mediante el análisis de una plataforma digital que recopila narrativas autobiográficas de migrantes. Partiendo de la pregunta fundamental de si el subalterno puede crear una autobiografía (Spivak, 1988), se centra en la siguiente cuestión: ¿Cómo pueden las tecnologías y plataformas digitales facilitar la difusión de las narrativas de vida de los migrantes? La mayoría de las historias de los migrantes no están documentadas y se borran del registro histórico, ya que su estatus migratorio es inestable. Los recursos digitales facilitan el registro de narrativas de y sobre personas cuyas vidas suelen estar ocultas bajo la sombra y los estereotipos xenófobos. Este artículo se centra en el proyecto digital Humanizing Deportation, un proyecto narrativo digital comunitario que documenta las consecuencias de la deportación. Muchos migrantes deportados comparten sus experiencias personales en esta plataforma, cuyo objetivo es empoderarlos en el desarrollo de sus historias de vida. Este artículo examina cómo este proyecto digital realiza trabajo de archivo y análisis para crear un repositorio de recursos digitales aplicables al campo de los Estudios Fronterizos (Anzaldúa, 1987). La metodología consiste en un análisis cualitativo de cuatro autobiografías de migrantes que describen las consecuencias de la deportación. Seleccioné estos testimonios tras revisar muchos otros, ya que presentan los dilemas de las familias separadas y de los padres que tuvieron que hacer sacrificios para dejarlas atrás e intentar reunirse con ellas, lo que demuestra la motivación familiar de ciertos migrantes y familias transfronterizas separadas por la politización del desplazamiento humano. El medio digital permite una narración rica y multimodal para los migrantes, fomentando la conexión global, la interactividad y el apoyo comunitario. Potencialmente, puede fomentar el anonimato y el archivo a largo plazo, contribuyendo a preservar las historias de los migrantes y promoviendo la empatía y la concientización.

Palabras clave: Estudios sobre la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México, narrativas migratorias, plataformas digitales, Humanizando la deportación.

Abstract: The two-thousand-mile border that divides the United States and Mexico has been described as a "contact zone" of cultural friction and unbalanced power relations, as defined by Mary Louise Pratt. This paper aims to contribute to studying and comprehending lives in the US/Mexico borderlands by analyzing a digital platform that documents migrant autobiographical narratives. Starting from the fundamental question of whether the subaltern can create an autobiography (Spivak 1988), it centers on the following question: How can digital technologies and platforms aid the

dissemination of life narratives of migrants? Most migrants' stories are "un-documented" and erased from the historical record as they are fluid citizens. Digital resources facilitate the recording of narratives by and about individuals whose lives are typically hidden under the shadows and xenophobic tropes. This paper will focus on the digital project Humanizing Deportation. This is a community-based digital narrative project documenting the consequences of deportation. Many migrants who have been deported share their personal experiences on this platform, which aims to give them agency over their life stories. The paper examines how this digital project undertakes archival and analytical work to create a repository of digital resources that can be applied in the field of Border Studies (Anzaldúa 1987). The methodology will be a qualitative analysis of four migrant autobiographies that describe the consequences of deportation. I selected these testimonies after perusing many others because they present the dilemmas of separated families, and the parents who had to make sacrifices to leave them behind to try to reunite with them, proving the family-oriented motives for certain migrants and transborder families separated by politicization of human displacement. The digital medium enables rich, multimodal storytelling for migrants, fostering global connection, interactivity, and community support. It can potentially foster anonymity and long-term archiving, helping to preserve migrant histories while promoting empathy and awareness.

Keywords: US/Mexico Border Studies, migrant narratives, digital platforms, Humanizing Deportation.

Introduction

On March 26, 2024, the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore collapsed after a container ship lost power and collided with a supporting pier. The only victims of the incident were six crew workers filling potholes on the bridge's center span. The workers were from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico, countries that have historically been significant sources of labor. The tragedy of this collapse served as a poignant reminder of the contributions of migrant workers to jobs that others avoid, as well as the immense risks they face making a living and sending money back to their families in their home countries. The life of a migrant often entails being excluded from the national narrative of the receiving country, where their contributions to the economy are frequently overlooked or downplayed. Instead, they become the subject of scapegoating. Their life narratives become invisible and irrelevant concerning other life narratives, buried under xenophobic rhetoric that controls a plot of demonization of migration, border fortification, and the expulsion of those workers. This article aims to examine digital projects that provide a platform for silenced voices and the life narratives of workers and migrants who have traveled to the United States on perilous journeys to seek refuge, employment, and a better life for their families. Moreover, I examine the digital platform *Humanizing Deportation* created to address the study and comprehension of life narratives in the borderlands. I selected this project because it presents a significant corpus of testimonies that provide firsthand accounts of the consequences of deportation. The project is well-organized, up to date, supported by scholarship, and is becoming a crucial transdisciplinary resource for unfiltered migrant voices. Digital technologies aid the creation and dissemination of life narratives in previously unavailable ways for people in mobility situations. According to Robert Irwin, their "method consists of an innovative adaptation of digital storytelling, a form of community participatory audiovisual production [...] with stories of suffering and trauma, of lives torn apart, of the callous everyday violence of a massive infrastructure built upon virulent nativism and racism" (4). This paper describes how this digital storytelling project engages in archival and analytical work to build a repository of resources, links, and digital tools connected to Border Studies.

The border that divides the United States and Mexico was demarcated after the US-Mexico War in 1847. The region comprises the Southwestern states (California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas) and the northern states of Mexico (Baja California, Sonora, and Chihuahua), which are geographically larger than the central European region. This symbolic political line at the 32nd parallel separates the Global North and the neighbors to the Global South that embark on a dangerous journey to achieve the American dream while running away from poverty, political instability, gangs, climate

change, and drug cartel violence. Mary Louise Pratt defined this cultural friction and the unbalanced power relations as a "contact zone." She writes: "I use this term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (Pratt, 1992, 34). The asymmetrical power relations at the border accentuate the economic disparities in Latin American countries that see migration as the only way to achieve social mobility, safety, and humane conditions to protect their well-being.

The digital era has permitted the digitization of group biographies and individuals in mobility situations. Most migrants' stories remain un-documented and erased from the historical record as they are not protected by the citizenship of the country they leave and fall into the limbo of "not citizens" of the host country. Being migrants in constant movement, they lack a permanent address to be contacted or to register their journey. If they cross the border, they remain in a state of continual residency change as they follow the work available in different states or engage in seasonal agricultural work, depending on job availability or crop harvest.

Gloria Anzaldúa refers to the border as an open wound that has not healed. She writes "The U.S.-Mexican border es *una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages against the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture" (Anzaldúa, 1987, 25). Anzaldúa writes in a style that crosses boundaries of language, poetry, and theoretical discourse, providing a visceral image of a border that affects migrant bodies that are being cut by barbed wire, and where children are separated from their parents as a form of punishment. The interstice between the two countries is what Anzaldúa also calls a Nepantla, an in-between zone, where Spanglish (also a linguistic border) is a hybrid language. Nepantla, for Anzaldúa, is "the place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question your basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures" (Anzaldúa, 2015, 127).

The lives of migrants have been documented in foundational fiction such as *Y no se lo tragó la tierra* (*And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*, 1971) by Tomás Rivera and recent books such as *Solito: A Memoir* (2022) by Javier Zamora, which narrates the journey of a Salvadoran child seeking to reunite with his parents in the United States, or *Lost Children Archive* (2019) by Valeria Luiselli, among many others. These narratives also extend to documentaries, such as "*Which Way Home*" (2009), directed by Rebecca Cammisa, and fictional films like "*The Golden Dream*" (2013), directed by Diego Quemada-Díez. Migration has been a recurring motif in Mexican cinema since the

1950s, yet *El Norte* (1986) remains one of the genre's masterpieces, addressing the struggles of migration, displacement, and deportation. Cultural products offer a dramatized interpretation of the circumstances surrounding migration, producing compelling narratives that occasionally feature in Latin American literature and even some English courses. The structure of the paper examines digital projects that address border cultures, focusing on four testimonies from the *Humanizing Deportation* project. This ongoing interdisciplinary and multi-institutional project is generating considerable scholarship, for example, a chapter by Castro Ricalde and Rocha de Luna in the recent book *Digital Culture and the US-Mexico Border* (2024), emphasizing the voice of the subaltern and the intersectional experience of migration, deportation, and transborder lives.

Survey of Digital Platforms: Narrating Migrant Lives Online

Several digital projects help tell the story of the lives at the border. For example, *United fronteras* ("United fronteras") compiles several projects, some inactive and others ongoing. *United Fronteras* covers digital projects that engage with various types of source materials, including literature, historical records, oral histories, and sound recordings. The collection surveys 95 projects, ranging from a visual anthology of book covers in Chicanx literature to newspaper archives and the history of Braceros (labor farm workers). Among them, the site *Dacamented: Dreams Without Borders* (DACAMented, 2025), whose title refers to DACA, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, is dedicated to the experience of the children brought undocumented by their parents, who have been in a legal limbo waiting to be admitted as citizens of the only country they have known. One of the sites featured in the project that deals with violence against women is *Ellas tienen nombre* [They Have a Name"] ("Ellas tienen nombre") (which has built a map that pinpoints the exact geographical locations where bodies of young women were found in Ciudad Juárez from 1985 to 2019. This femicide tragedy has affected this border town and was also depicted in Roberto Bolaño's masterpiece novel *2666* (2004) and has been the subject of documentaries and movies. The project *Ellas tienen nombre* tackles challenges related to border towns. A project highlighting the literature (novels, poetry, chronicles) of Ciudad Juárez is titled *Juaritos Literario* [Literary Juarez] ("Juaritos literario"), created by Carlos Urani Montiel. It maps the literature and art of what was considered the most dangerous city in the world during the war on drugs initiated under the term of Mexican President Felipe Calderón in 2006. The project helps visualize the active cultural production of a city, in a desert referred to as the "laboratory of our future" by Charles Bowden (1998), marked by the drug war or the border passage. It helps to explain that the border is also a vibrant space

with its own culture and transborder citizens, and not only a policed demarcation overlooking a so-called "invasion" of Latin Americans.

Similarly, *Borderlands Archives Cartography* ("Borderlands Archive Cartography") features visualizations and maps, providing access to materials on the border phenomenon, including marginal literature and biographies. Like the previous project, it also draws on archives and resources to study a territory by displaying geographical locations where newspapers from the US-Mexico Border have been published in a way that does not emphasize the political line divisions but the historically and economically intertwined region. As the authors of the project mention: "*BAC* responde ante esa violencia colonial integrando archivos de ambos lados para cuestionar ideologías imperialistas, hegemónicas y divisiones geopolíticas que delinearon la región fronteriza" (Quintanilla & Maira E. Álvarez, 2021, 599). [BAC responds to colonial violence integrating archives from both sides of the border to question imperial ideologies, hegemonies and geopolitical division that delineated the border region]. Thus, it aims at making the cross-border context of exile migration and deterritorialization visible.

A project that contextualizes the digital production related to the border phenomenon is *Torn Apart Separados* that uses digital tools for social awareness to "mobilize humanities faculties, libraries, and students with relevant language, archival, technical, and social expertise to produce curated and applied knowledge" ("Torn Apart/Separados"). The site has a bibliography and credits the creators and contributors, and the open technologies that power the site (such as Leaflet, Bootstrap, Jekyll,), information difficult to find or not entirely disclosed in other projects accessed. Another significant feature is the "reflections" ("Torn Apart/Separados") section, where historians, writers, and activists reflect on the curated data visualizations. For example, Daryl Meador says about his digital project: "Appropriately dark and oblique shapes mark the powerful, dynamic imposition of these forced displacements. This map's aesthetics garner an appropriately menacing perception of these removals, evoking the violence of the action itself" (Meador). This is an essential step for a digital project as it balances data and numbers with an interest in carceral geographies of detention centers. The project adds another layer to the visualization: tracking the money allocated to congressional districts and government contracting to support and maintain the detainees while they are in government custody. The project is an ambitious and well-executed mapping of the different levels of border challenges and human mobilization; it tracks detention centers, the number of people reported, and the funds that fuel political careers and the deportation industry. The project is a

multilayered cartography that pinpoints the coordinates of crossing migrants and the business of border fortification.

Another project that deals with the realities of migration is *Colibrí Center for Human Rights* (Colibrí Center for Human Rights).an initiative dedicated to identifying the remains of thousands of migrants who have died crossing the Arizona desert. Collaborating with families of disappeared migrants, the center employs forensic science, providing DNA mail kits to help relatives locate and identify their loved ones. The center also researches the consequences of "chase and scatter," which forces migrants to get lost and die in the desert by trying to run away from the Border Patrol. The project reports on the destruction of 3,000 gallons of water by the US Border Patrol, which interfered with humanitarian aid efforts aimed at saving lives. *The Colibrí Center* offers hope to families by helping them locate their loved ones through the Missing Migrant Program. This program, in partnership with forensic experts, provides secure online meeting spaces to facilitate connections and offer support.

***Humanizing Deportation*: Voices of humans in transit**

Humanizing Deportation provides a platform to document the migration stories of hundreds of individuals. Migrants share their personal experiences on this bilingual and open-access platform. The migrants become the copyright owners of their testimonials. Exploring this project helps to understand the human tragedies in borderlands and the potential of digital platforms. The life narratives featured offer a glimpse into the approximately two million border crossings that occur each year along the US-Mexico border. These videos document lived experiences and testify to the countless voices lost—those who perished and whose stories remain untold. The project provides samples of life narratives pertinent to this article and gives first-hand accounts of the implications of human displacement and forced expulsion.

The index of *Humanizing Deportation* includes an array of key terms that include Activism, Country of Origin, DACA, Discrimination, Feelings (Acceptance, Dehumanization, Support), Governmental Institutions (Border Patrol and Governments), Green Card, Health and Wellness (Addiction, Cancer, Depression, etc.), Historical Events (Amnesty, War on Drugs), Homeland Security, Homophobia, Living Arrangements, Occupation (Call Center, Education), Migration Circumstance, NGOs, Primary Language of Narration (mainly in Spanish), Racism, Shelters, Tijuana. The index organization reflects the wealth of information and the intersectional factors of migration that converge in the narrations. The project's original title is in Spanish. It implies the continual dehumanization that characterizes migration and the expulsion

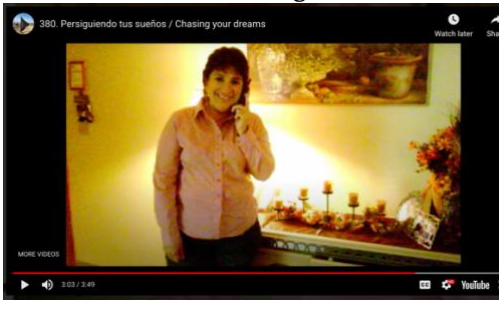
of individuals who, in some cases, are not recent migrants crossing the border but workers who have contributed to the economy and have done jobs that no one wants. The project documents digital narratives of "las consecuencias humanas de los regímenes contemporáneos de control fronterizo y migratorio" [the human consequences of the contemporary regimes of border and migration control] ("Humanizando la deportación") since 2017 with the support of grants and institutional assistance from the University of California, Davis, as well as Mexican universities, such as Tecnológico de Monterrey, Universidad de Guadalajara, Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua, and El Colegio de la Frontera Norte. The open-access platform provides migrants with a voice to share their experiences of migration and repatriation in a bilingual setting. The site offers visibility to the migrant experience, providing technical support to produce short video testimonials of the devastating consequences of forced displacement. The site incorporates over 500 digital community archives that allow individuals to speak for themselves, creating and intellectually owning their narratives. In their overview the project creators state: "The archive demonstrates great breadth, bringing together stories of a range of profiles of migrants, as well as the great diversity of often devastating consequences of forced displacement. Our archive presently houses over 500 digital stories by over 400 different community storytellers. It is the world's most robust public qualitative archive of its kind" ("Humanizando la deportación"). By allowing the participants to own their materials, the projects resist the effects of academic extractivism, that is, the neo-colonial removal and utilization of subaltern histories to gain cultural capital in the Global North.

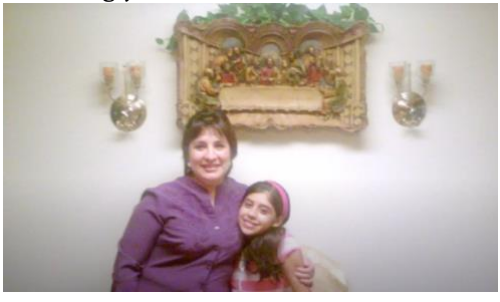
The findings of this project range from the devastating effects of family separations at the border, particularly for minors, separation trauma, and identity dislocation for deported migrants, who are forced to integrate into a Mexican society they do not entirely comprehend, to the amplification of migrant problems during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially for refugees for whom the border was sealed in 2020. Many migrants see irregular reentry after deportation as a right to mobility because they worked in the US and is justified "por los lazos que tienen con el país del norte, como por ejemplo, sentirse ciudadanos de Estados Unidos o que sus hijos hayan nacido en aquel país, para otros tiene un sustento moral y político que nace de la disputa imaginada del territorio originario de México" [Because of the ties they have with the northern country, such as feeling like citizens of the United States or that their children were born in that country, for others it has a moral and political basis that arises from the imagined dispute over the original territory of Mexico.] (Calvillo Vázquez 18).

The site also addresses different issues, such as migrants who seek asylum from organized crime that has pushed them out of their countries, homophobic violence in patriarchal societies, deported parents, domestic violence, mental health and family separation, deported veterans, and criminalization of migrant infants. These stories have been used as evidence in immigration court cases and have helped inform policy at UC Davis's Global Migration Center. As Leetoy and Castro Ricalde had written, the archive "serves as a technopolitical space for creating agency through the audiovisual production of participatory narratives." (3)

The archive of *Humanizing Deporation* is organized according to themes of activism, shelters, amnesty, years migrants spent in the US, police brutality, detention centers, migration courts, crimes, and criminalization. In the short life narrative, "Chasing your dreams" (Magda, 2017), we hear from Magdalena, who left behind a three-year-old daughter in Acapulco on the coast of Mexico due to her economic situation to pursue her dreams in Los Angeles. She got married and had two more sons, but after moving to Oregon for work, her husband died. She found strength in her religious beliefs and her children, which helped her bring her daughter from Mexico to provide them with better opportunities. Eventually, her children were able to find good jobs, and she was able to legalize her migratory status and stay in the United States. She says that being in the US was a moment of reeducation, learning a new language, respecting the laws, and being positive, and that is the way to achieve goals. Her only regret was not having brought her daughter from Mexico sooner.

Figure 1.
Screen shots from "Persiguiendo tus sueños/Chasing your Dreams"





Another life narrative titled "El sueño de unos ciudadanos sin papeles" (Palma & Mandujano 2018) [The Dream of Citizens Without Papers] relates a failed attempt at relocation. A man who had worked as a clown in Livermore, California, was deported after leading an exemplary life and building a community for 12 years. and was kidnapped in Mexico and could not find a good job. He expresses that the US is the best

place for him to have the chance to work and build a future. He had brought his family to the US, where he employed a smuggler, who paid him a significant sum. His wife had to cross hidden in a car trunk, and his kids in another vehicle in a traumatizing and dangerous passage to reunite their family. She then worked in a hotel and started learning English. They had a car, a house, a boat, and opportunities not available to them in Mexico. But their dream ended when they were deported, as they say, "cuando nos cayó la mala suerte" [when bad luck fell upon us], and they had to abandon their dream of a better life and return to their home country.

These two sample narratives, collected in this project, exemplify the human perspective on migrants who are unable to migrate lawfully to the US. The recounting of their experience shows their contributions to a host country that later disposes of them after benefiting from their work without considering their value to society or even if they had legal grounds to support an asylum case. Without this project, their stories would have remained untold and been just an unsympathetic statistic. It also tells the story of the children who are birthright American citizens but must return to live in Mexico, which is foreign to them, so they become foreigners in two societies. This legal principle is currently in discussion after President Trump signed an order to deny recognition of citizenship of children born in the US if neither of the parents were lawful citizens, but an appeals court rejected it (Raymond, 2025).

In her study of *Refugee Tales*, Sandra Mayer highlights the modes of autobiographical narration and how they bring our attention "to the inherently polyphonic nature of life storytelling as a process that shifts and evolves, and that gains its potency as an instrument of socio-political activism from the acts of sharing, repeating, and retelling among, and between, individuals (well-known and obscure) and communities" (Mayer, 2023, 128). The life stories collected in "Humanizing Deportation" show the uniqueness of every migrant's life story and the devastating consequences of deportation. The narratives highlight the need for a comprehensive migration reform that considers each case individually and values the contributions of migrants to American society. Despite demonizing campaigns against migrants and the debasing epithets of "illegals" or "aliens;" migrant workforce constitutes a dynamo for the American economy as shown by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (Sherman, et al. 2025).

In *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions*, Gillian Whitlock examines how life narratives, particularly testimonials, operate within postcolonial contexts. She explores their political and ethical dimensions, especially those written by or about marginalized and oppressed individuals. Whitlock highlights how these narratives serve as acts of witnessing, advocacy, and resistance, shaping public discourse and

influencing human rights campaigns. She investigates how life writing conveys both personal and collective trauma in postcolonial societies, examining how these narratives circulate across audiences and raise critical questions about the construction and validation of authenticity in global contexts. She writes: "Testimony takes us to worlds where the boundaries of the civilized and the strange are perpetually a work in progress, repeatedly returning to that 'global heritage' of postcolonialism: the struggle to imagine new humanisms and the possibilities for activism and social change that follow" (Whitlock, 2015, 10). Indeed, Postcolonialism revises the canon that assumes that life narratives produced by migrants are of lesser value. Postcolonialism critically examines the impacts of colonialism on societies that have shaped migration patterns and policies. Many migration flows stem from colonial histories to their former colonial powers. This theoretical framework highlights how neocolonial systems benefit the Global North. Therefore, migrants fill low-wage precarious positions (domestic workers, farm workers), reflecting racialized historical labor hierarchies that reinforce the "Other" as a dangerous burden. This perspective challenges the dominant narrative by uncovering the colonial roots of migrations, challenging racialized power dynamics, and offering migrant agency to combat historical inequalities and struggles for justice.

In her postcolonial reading of digital discourse Roopika Risam has pointed out disparities of representation in her book: *New Digital Worlds: Postcolonial Digital Humanities in Theory, Praxis and Pedagogy* where she describes how communities of color receive less representation. She has challenged myths of democratized knowledge and the role of English as the primary language of these projects. Risam mentions, for example, the grassroots digitization project of *Chicana por mi Raza* to collect Mexican American activism in the 60s and 90s and writes:

The lack of a centralized archive poses a barrier to making these materials and the history of Chicanx activism legible for both historians and the public. Thus, the project engages in a politics of representation that challenges the colonial dimensions of the Mexico-United States border as it preserves and disseminates these untold stories of Chicanx communities in the digital cultural record (…) race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, and other axes of identity and oppression are unexplored, unspoken, and undertheorized in the digital cultural record (Risam, 2018, 24).

Indeed, the digital record for marginalized communities is scarce, as is the case with the life narratives of migrants who lack a central and visible archive. Roopika Risam has theorized the disparity in digital projects and contributed to conceptualizing the *Torn Apart / Separados* project mentioned earlier.

Another life narrative that exemplifies the nuances and complexities of migration in *Humanizing Deportation* is when it involves child migrants brought to the United States. The narrative "Made a Criminal in America" (Jorge, Mercado & Irwin, 2017), relates the story of Jorge, who was brought to the United States when he was eight months old and later did not realize that he did not have documents. He was deported and found himself in Mexico without understanding the culture or the language; he only spoke slang words that he learned in California. Jorge reentered the country, was pulled over by the police in Alabama, and was charged with "illegal reentry," which banned him from the only country he had known and prevented him from seeing his two daughters. He must stay in Mexico for a decade until he can apply for a waiver. "I am not from the US, but Mexico doesn't consider me part of Mexico either. I had no country. Nobody wanted me. I did not understand the culture, and I didn't have any relatives. I wanted to be home. I wanted to be in the US" (Jorge, Mercado & Irwin, 2017). In the "Migrant Narrative" summary from the UC Davis Global Migration Center dedicated to Jorge's case, they provide the context of criminalization of childhood arrivals and the cases of migrants beyond DACA. They conclude that his case: "draws attention to the damage done by racial profiling and processes of neglect that lead to the criminalization to many youths of color" (De la Cruz & Irwin).

An additional testimonial that describes the dislocation of childhood arrivals is titled "Take Advantage of the Opportunity" (López & Irwin, 2017). The speaker narrates that he came as a teenager and was deported after working for 30 years. He learned in the detention centers that he did not have rights as a Mexican; there was no one to ask for help or complain about bad treatment. He signed a document to leave a detention center, stating that he would waive his right to become a legal resident. He was told that if he returned to the country, he would be sent to jail, so he stayed in Tijuana. He says that in Mexico, there is a lack of programs to help deported people; he was an older man who had spent his life working in the US. He says that he is making the video as a warning to other migrants who are working in the US to take advantage of their opportunity because they may lose everything, even their family. He wants to emphasize that the people who depict them as criminals are not speaking the truth; they have worked hard, and their only wrongdoing is their lack of papers to work.

As Martha Caminero-Santangelo states, "Indeed, it is arguable that there is no population more silenced in the face of debates that most directly affect them than the undocumented" (Caminero-Santangelo, 2012, 449). She argues that "Yet, personal stories —oral history, life writing, 'witness' testimony - play an important, perhaps even a vital role in advocacy and human rights struggles, as a body of scholarship of the last

decade suggests" (Caminero-Santangelo, 2012, 449). The life narratives in *Humanizing Deportation* help us to understand the plight of migrants and their life stories, which could be the life story of any displaced human through history, displaced after a natural disaster, war, or famine. The life stories depicted on this site are individual human dramas that can be stereotypically mentioned in the media or fictionalized in novels. Still, we lack their voice telling their side of the story. One of the striking factors of these narratives is that many deportees make the videos as warnings to help others like them understand the dangers and consequences of migration. Moreover, their narratives seem to help them process and verbalize the trauma of expulsion and separation from a country that represented their world and provided their sustenance.

Humanizing Deportation enables the collection and dissemination of stories, experiences, and perspectives that might otherwise go unnoticed. It empowers these communities to share their narratives on their terms, thus challenging stereotypes of migrants and misconceptions. The approach to digital platforms from a postcolonial perspective helps close the gap in inequities in digital knowledge production. These digital testimonies offer ways to address these dilemmas by presenting themselves as channels, allowing the subaltern to tell their story without filters and become the owner and producer of their own life story. These life narratives demonstrate alternative approaches and the potential of digital media to empower the Global South, detaching from neocolonial data analysis practices and offering fundamental methods that prevent the dehumanization of subjects. As Risam has asserted: "Access to digital media, which is essential to how knowledge is produced in the twenty-first century, is itself a matter of inequality." She highlights the importance of ensuring that otherwise unheard "voices become part of the digital cultural record" (Risam, 2018, 29).

The project *Humanizing Deportation* highlights the role of grassroots communities in creating new ways of digital production and paving the way for more digital projects that document the migrant experience. Most migrants now travel with a phone, a key technology for communicating with the loved ones they left, and a compass to find resources in an adverse journey where they may tragically lose their lives.

Conclusion: Is the Digital Being Humanized?

In every US election cycle, the border becomes a platform for political gain that exploits a humanitarian emergency of people in conditions of mobility that evidence global disparities and economic and political unrest in Latin America. In the spring of 2024 a scheme on the Texas border decided to install a floating wall with concertina wire (Office of the Governor of Texas, 2024). that has ensnared migrants - who have endured

the hardships of crossing the Darién Gap (the only section not developed of the Pan American Highway), drug cartel violence and kidnappings, and several country borders - to be greeted with a saw-like barbed metal in the floating devices. The sharp rhetoric of xenophobia materializes in the sharp barbed wire, ready to injure migrant bodies to deter human mobility with border barriers. The "contact zone" becomes an abrasive zone of injury of brown bodies, a place of an ongoing opening of wounds that expands the limit of "Nepantla" to the digital cloud, where the silenced voices of the migrants become accessible to anyone and their conditions of mobility connect with other borders, for example, Europe, and Africa. As Theo Deutinger has written (with border mapping and fence diagrams) in his *Handbook of Tyranny*, "Yet even Israeli experts, the world's leading wall-construction specialists, admit that physical barriers are most effective as symbols" (Deutinger, 2023, 37). Indeed, the border symbolizes global disparity when engaging in biopower rationality.

The narratives that highlight this disparity, presented in *Humanizing Deportation*, are told in simple language and are robust and engaging testimonies of real-life stories where Global South bodies become, for some, evidence of otherness and examples of biopolitics. The theory of the migrant body examines how migration affects the body shaped by displacement, labor, violence, and cultural adaptation. The State often regulates the migrant body through biometric surveillance and detention centers. As with the example of the barbed wire, many migrants bear the marks of their injuries, physical labor under exploitative conditions. Migrants also deal with physical and psychological violence from crossing the border to prejudiced attacks.

Furthermore, their bodies are transformed by new diets, climates, and cultural practices, which alter their identity into a binational being. As Caminero-Santangelo puts it: "Their bodies are racialized, and race is read as precisely the "sign" of their unbelonging" (Caminero-Santangelo, 2012, 463). The site we have studied provides a close-up of the migration/deportation debacle. It gives agency to the storytellers and documents their ordeals, as the migrant body is not just a passive recipient of commiseration or pity from the Global North. Still, it resists through movement, protest, and cultural expression. Indeed, as Caminero-Santangelo argues, these narratives can be situated in the Latin American category of "testimonio." She writes: "As with other instances of testimonio, trauma is described in terms of psychological effects that are marked *on the body*- that becomes, that is, embodied. Fear is a 'scarring,' a 'poison' that 'invades' the brain. The body testifies materially to the trauma of an underground, undocumented existence; it counteracts that trauma by insistently reminding readers of a fundamental, shared, *physical* humanity" (Caminero-Santangelo, 2012, 463). Testimonio is a genre developed in response to social injustices

and colonial legacies. It is a first-person account of a collective struggle that bridges oral traditions and written culture. Two important examples of these personal stories denouncing indigenous and political oppression are Rigoberta Menchu's *I Rigoberta Menchú* (1983) (Menchú & Burgos-Debray, 1984) and *Massacre In Mexico* (1975) by Elena Poniatowska (1992).

The digital initiatives described here provide migrants with easy access to technology, enabling them to tell their own stories. They provide anonymity, which is essential because of their legal status. They deliver agency by allowing the narrators to be proprietors of their stories and life experiences, including those shaped by deportation. Some of the examples provided serve as advice for other migrants, preparing them for the possibilities of disillusionment and loss of everything they have worked for throughout their journey. Life narratives encompass the events, experiences, relationships, and choices that shape a person's identity and can take various forms, such as autobiographies, memoirs, oral accounts, and short videos. The life narratives of migrants in *Humanizing Deportation/ Humanizando la deportación* are relevant to fields such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology, as they help researchers and individuals understand how migrants perceive, interpret, reflect on, and make meaning of their own lives. The stories gathered in *Humanizing Deportation* contribute to level the playing field by providing valuable insights into human development, identity formation, cultural beliefs, and how individuals cope with the challenges and trauma of migration. They can also be powerful tools for individuals to reflect on their past, understand their present, and envision their future.

The digital medium offers several affordances that make it well-suited for migrant narratives and testimonies. Its multimodal nature supports text, images, video, and audio, allowing migrants to share their experiences in rich and expressive ways that humanize the migrant condition. Smartphones, for example, provide easy access to documenting their migrant experience by recording their journey and geolocating centers for migrants, as well as connecting them to their families in their home countries. Digital platforms also enable interactivity, fostering engagement through comments, annotations, and dialogue. Moreover, digital storytelling transcends geographical boundaries, enabling migrant voices to connect worldwide and situate their stories within the broader context of other migrant stories, such as migration from Morocco to Spain. These platforms also provide crucial anonymity and safety, allowing migrants to share their testimonies while protecting their identities—an essential safeguard against risks such as deportation.

Additionally, digital media facilitate the long-term archiving and flexible retrieval of migrant histories, ensuring these narratives are preserved for future generations if they are maintained on the current servers at their host universities with proper funding. The online platforms discussed in this article also serve as spaces for community building, where migrants can share their experiences and offer mutual support. Ultimately, these technologies contribute to a growing digital archive of migrant journeys, fostering empathy and awareness. This is particularly significant in the United States, a nation historically shaped by migration, where such narratives play a critical role in influencing public understanding and policy discourse.

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