



Sergio Mendoza

Justice for Migrant Workers organized a Pilgrimage to Freedom campaign throughout the province of Ontario in 2010; this was one of our stops in downtown Toronto. Evelyn starting the rally and welcoming migrant workers who joined from far distances to make themselves visible to the rest of Canada and elected officials.

Evelyn Encalada Grez*
and Aaraón Díaz Mendiburo**

The Transnational Field Of Possibilities: Reweaving Community Across Time and Borders

Recognizing the significance of anniversaries in the history of humanity, we are very pleased to write and share this article—since it has given us the opportunity to contemplate our journeys navigating rural Canada and Mexico. In these 23 years we have trained as transnational researchers—in Mexico and Canada profundo—and developed as people who seek, through our individual and collective struggles, a better continent. In other words, we are looking for a better space where human mobilities are not used as a pretext to exploit nor

violate anyone. Instead, we seek to value and understand ourselves in a diverse world that enriches us with every encounter. We have followed and accompanied migrant farmworkers and their families back and forth between their lives in the provincias in Mexico and rural landscapes in Canada for over 20 years.

In our comings and goings, we have witnessed diverse Mexicos and Canadas, which are embodied in men and women who at times come together until the borders are diluted. However, the separation is often so great that the magic of what could represent a meeting between brothers and sisters becomes pulverized. We have seen how the clashes and dilution of borders between Canada and Mexico profundo open up transnational spaces of possibilities to assert belonging and dignity for migrant workers and

* Evelyn is an Assistant Professor at Simon Fraser University; you can contact her at eenalad@sfu.ca.

** Aaraón is a researcher at CISAN, UNAM; you can contact him at faraondiaz@yahoo.com.mx.

their families. We have accompanied migrant workers and their families to co-construct and dream of a world where human rights are truly inalienable, at a historical juncture where the current economic system has muted them for neoliberal interests.

Intentionally, through activism we have co-created spaces of possibilities that have served as schools for constant training and transformation. The creation of these new spaces was instigated precisely by the Mexican migrant community, who in 2001 woke us up by organizing one of the most important labor stoppages in the history of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP). This took place in Leamington, Ontario, which is known as the tomato capital of Canada. As a result, around 20 Mexican workers who were a part of the stoppage were deported or, as they say in the veil of politeness in Canada, “repatriated,” as a form of punishment for their defiant actions by the orders of the Mexican consulate and their Canadian employer. From here a migrant farmworker movement sprung up, along with the grassroots group Justice for Migrant Workers (J4MW) that Evelyn co-founded.

I (Evelyn) and other colleagues traveled four hours from Toronto to Leamington on an investigative mission to document all the happenings of the labor stoppage. At that time as activists, we were concerned about the world beyond Canada and seduced by revolutions that were not allowed to happen in the hemisphere. The further we drove from Toronto, the more the landscapes changed; and as a group of non-white activists, it was clear that we were bodies out of place in white rural colonized landscapes. The main purpose of our drive to Leamington was to meet with the Mexican migrant farmworker community that we had never had contact with in the multicultural metropolises in order to investigate the happenings of the disciplining repatriations that early spring of 2001. Since all the involved workers had been repatriated, we were met instead with story after story of abuse of the migrant workers who were still there toiling away—invisible to Canadian society.

I served as the interpreter during that unforgettable weekend, and in the crowds of men sharing their stories of mistreatment at work—in the local community and in their employer-provided housing—I clearly saw the faces of my own family. They could have been my uncle, my brother, or my cousin subjected to isolation and mistreatment in rural townships. However, not all the immigrant

We have called out the injustice of a situation where migrants’ work and presence in Canada continues to be tied to the dictates of employers who have the right to dispose of them at whim.

stories were the same. In sharp contrast to the experiences of my immigrant family from South America and many migrant workers, the issue here was access to permanent residency and Canadian citizenship rights. Once presented with this situation, I had to return to the farms and to Leamington—and I continue to visit to this day. After that weekend, a powerful movement exploded not because of us, Toronto based activists, but because of the courage of Mexican migrant workers who were united with a single voice of resistance. We simply responded, witnessed, and documented their conditions of life and work in Canada and took their stories to Toronto. We merged the gulf between the city and the countryside, along with the silence and erasure that migrant workers have been subjected to for decades. Also notable is Min Sook Lee’s film, *El Contrato*, which was produced in response to the organizing in Leamington. I was honored to assist with the production both behind and in front of the cameras.

Since 2001, we have organized through our collective, Justice for Migrant Workers (J4MW), and have undertaken a multipronged strategy to effect structural change for migrant workers and their families. Our actions include taking cases of abuse and racial discrimination through the court system, engaging in transnational advocacy efforts throughout the United States and Mexico, raising public awareness, providing gender specific healthcare directly to workers, frontline crisis support, and so much more. Our praxis is led by workers’ voices, and since the start of our organizing we have demanded the right to permanent residency for migrant workers. We have called out the injustice of a situation where migrants’ work and presence in Canada continues to be tied to the dictates of employers who have the right to dispose of them at whim.

Mexican migrant workers have been my primary teachers as a community organizer, researcher, and human being facing the challenges of life in a complicated world. In moments of personal difficulty, their powerful *dichos*



One of the many visits and experiences with migrants and family members in San Felipe Teotlalcingo, Puebla.

immediately come to mind, and I am able to lift my spirits through the example of their own ancestral perseverance and drive for a better life. They have also imparted the centrality of trust and commitment to organizing as invaluable immaterial resources that give prominence to the sustainability of community organizing. As a researcher, they have given me the language to explicate the research methodology that organically surged in my connections with the migrant community. Instead of utilizing the commonly used term participant observation, many Mexican workers gifted me the insight and possibility of *convivir*; this term emphasizes the living with and walking alongside the community. In this way, I was able to unsettle the hierarchies between the researcher and the researched. Through the practice of *convivir*, I learned that there was more to their stories of living and working conditions in Canada. Visiting the farms, enjoying a homemade Mexican meal, casually strolling through local towns on a Sunday, they taught me about the invisible labor they perform; the emotional work they have to undertake to be parents from afar and manage their households while managing their own emotions.

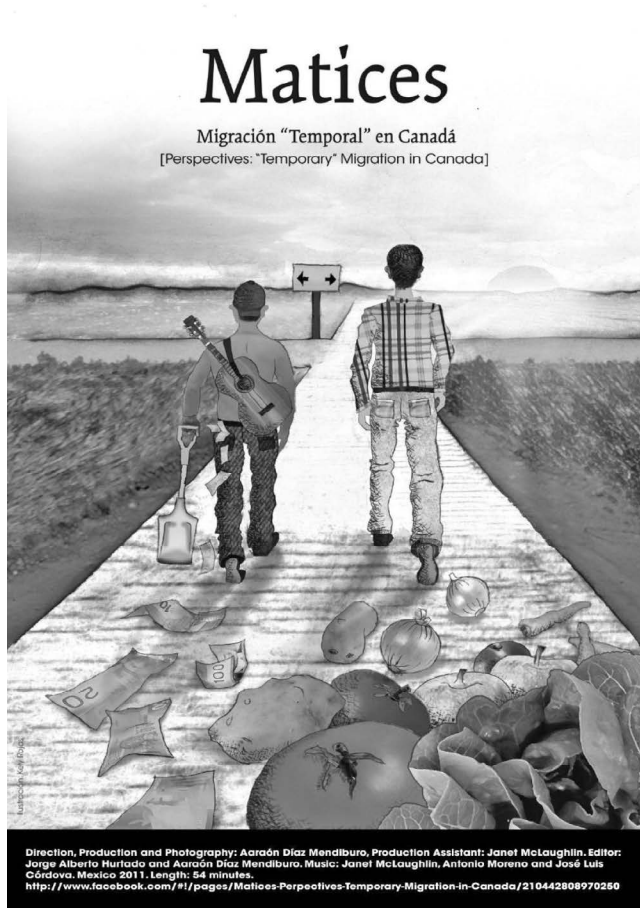
The goal is not just to give migrants
a voice, but to make them visible, since
the hegemonic structures of government
institutions and other bodies have
historically oppressed
dissident voices and bodies.

Among the many gifts was also being a part of a community etched between borders. Being with Mexican migrant workers on the farms transports me to the liveliness and warmth of Latin America. It grounds me in a profound sense of belonging as an immigrant myself; the feeling of never having a place—neither where I was born nor where I currently live. I have followed workers back to Mexico season after season, and have seen their children grow into adulthood. I have always been met with warmth and *cariño* from their immediate and extended families

who are the principal driving force behind their hard work and migration to Canadian farms.

It is during one of these comings and goings as a transnational organizer and researcher that I had the pleasure of meeting Aaraón. Together, we have been able to expand our reach and support to migrant workers and their families by creating bridges among us to access more of Canada and Mexico profundo. We have endless stories about driving out to farms and visiting workers in their villages. A quite notable one is regarding a woman in a village in the State of Mexico whose husband died due to pesticide poisoning in a greenhouse in Ontario. She was left widowed and alone to raise her child. As a single parent, she was conflicted about leaving her son to take her husband's place in the SAWP to be able to make ends meet. With Justicia and Aaraón, we came up with the idea to sell canvas bags with the Justicia logo and have all the proceeds go directly to her to support the startup of a small business. This way she was able to stay in her community with her son.

Being connected to various communities across borders creates networks of possibilities, particularly when states fail and continue to abandon people. Another concrete example is providing support to widows from the SAWP in Mexico to obtain the Canadian pensions that their husbands have paid into their entire work lives. Currently there is no governmental support in either direction for families to access social provision programs paid into by migrant workers. The paperwork and application process is prohibitive; only accessible in technical English and



Poster for the documentary Matices "Temporary" Migration in Canada (2011), designed by Kely Rojas.

French and has to be done through the mail. Evelyn and I use our privileged mobility to move within and across borders to follow up with the same families and workers and this way reinforce community, support, and belonging in all directions.

In our transnational collaboration, we have also witnessed and documented a myriad of situations among workers and their families. However, it is not all grim and melancholic. In the field, at farms out in the community, we have lived moments of immense joy and connection. We have enjoyed music, and laughter, taking in an abundance of love transmitted through the food prepared by migrant workers and their families. As borders and states continue to dictate who can move and under what conditions, migrant farmworkers have taught us that they never cease to assert their own agency and hope for a better life and a right to claim their own joy beyond their commodification as workers.

As a result of the characteristics of these transnational lives, I (Aaraón) realized that I had to join the activism already started from an interdisciplinary perspective; that is, use the resources learned at my alma mater, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, in the disciplines of communication, social work and then anthropology, to create films under the vision of transformative art through documentaries. The goal is not just to give migrants a voice, but to make them visible, since the hegemonic structures of government institutions and other bodies have historically oppressed dissident voices and bodies. The documentaries we have created: *Migrants, Those Who Come From Within* (2007), *Matices "Temporary" Migration in Canada* (2011) and the most recent, *Migrant Mother* (2022) have sought precisely to recover the counter-narratives of different actors to show that the sawr is abysmally far from being the exemplary program promoted by the government institutions of both countries. This task has involved a prolonged plunge —over 20 years— into the rural areas of Mexico and Canada, where without the support of families we would not have been able to investigate so many aspects of migration.

The documentaries have been presented in different spaces with equally diverse audiences, both in Canada and Mexico, such as in universities, in civil society organizations, in the homes where migrants reside, in their places of origin and in spaces where migrants are usually supported. These presentations accompanied by dialogues at the end of the screenings have contributed to the understanding of the living conditions and needs of those who cultivate the land for the benefit, in this case, of the Canadians themselves. They also serve to strengthen scientific and emotional ties among researchers who work on these issues, as well as being a reflection of the workers themselves and their families regarding the issues around mobility from academic and artistic perspectives, among other contributions.

We recognize that the path we face as transnational researchers has not been easy, and at times we have been tempted to throw in the towel. But those feelings fade as soon as we reflect on the numerous sinuous situations that migrants face with integrity, developing strength in themselves, and teaching us to find power within ourselves as well. We will never see the dilution of borders; however, nor will we cease to live the dream of dignity for all no matter where they find themselves in the world. **MM**



NORTEAMÉRICA

REVISTA ACADÉMICA DEL CISAN-UNAM

An open forum to debate and exchange, from a multidisciplinary perspective, theoretical, methodological and current studies related to North America and its links to the world.

Año 19, número 1, enero-junio de 2024 / Year 19, Issue 1, January-June 2024

ENSAYOS / ESSAYS

Make Trade Policy Great Again: el T-MEC entre el populismo y Trump

Make Trade Policy Great Again: USMCA between Populism and Trump

Mariana Aparicio Ramírez

Ivan López Martínez

Enrique Méndez Miguel

Rezago y asimetrías de las políticas nacional e internacional de ciberseguridad de México frente a Estados Unidos y Canadá: retos de cooperación para Norteamérica

Disparities and Backlogs in Mexico's National and International

Cybersecurity Policies vis-à-vis the United States and Canada:

Challenges of Cooperation for North America

Juan Manuel Aguilar Antonio

Framing Targeted Killings in Newspapers:

The Cases of Osama bin Laden and Qassem Soleimani

Enmarcando los asesinatos selectivos en los periódicos: los casos

de Osama bin Laden y Qassem Soleimani

Marcos Aurélio Guedes de Oliveira

Vinicius Cezar Santos da Cruz

Documented and Undocumented Skilled Mexican Immigrants and the Global Recession in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Region

Inmigrantes mexicanos calificados documentados e indocumentados

y la recesión global en la región metropolitana de Los Ángeles

Fabiola Galicia Bretón Mora

Rafael Alarcón Acosta

ANÁLISIS DE ACTUALIDAD / CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

Prácticas de diálogo social en Estados Unidos: casos de estudio

Social Dialogue Practices in the United States: Case Studies

Fernando Montoya Vargas

Desempleo durante la pandemia en Estados Unidos.

Un análisis interseccional

Unemployment During the Covid-19 Pandemic in the United States.

An Intersectional Analysis

Maritza Caicedo

Migración ecuatoriana a Estados Unidos: un análisis desde los riesgos en el contexto de tránsito (1999-2023)

Ecuadorian Migration to the United States: An Analysis of the

Risks in a Transit Context (1999-2023)

Luis Enrique Calva Sánchez

Zaira Novoa Rodríguez

Alex Valle Franco

DOSSIER

Introducción. Trumpismo y relaciones México-Estados Unidos

Introduction. Trumpism and Mexico-United States Relations

Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera

The Foreign Policy Foundations of Trumpism

Las bases de la política exterior del trumpismo

Joseph M. Humire

The World Adrift between Orders: The History of the American Far Right and its Impact on U.S.–Mexico Relations. Past and Present

A la deriva entre órdenes mundiales: la historia de la extrema derecha en Estados Unidos y su impacto en las relaciones Estados Unidos-México.

Pasado y presente

Marcel Sebastián Anduiza Pimentel

Migration Policy in the Era of Trumpism and Media Spectacle:

What a 2024 Trump [or Other] Presidency Could Mean for Mexico–U.S. Relations

Política migratoria en la era del trumpismo y del espectáculo mediático:

el significado de una presidencia de Trump u otro candidato en 2024

para las relaciones México-Estados Unidos

Terence Garrett

The Impact of Former President Trump's

Presidential Agenda on the U.S.–Mexican Border

El impacto de la agenda presidencial del expresidente Trump e

n la frontera Estados Unidos-México

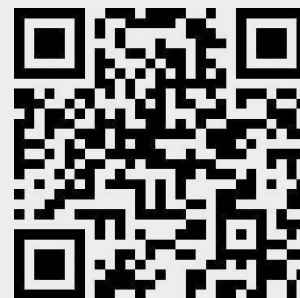
Kimberly Collins

Paradojas del trumpismo, la crisis del fentanilo y la guerra contra los cárteles

Paradoxes of Trumpism, the Fentanyl Crisis

and the War against Drug Cartels

Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera



CISAN Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte (Center for Research on North America)
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

Av. Universidad 3000, Torre II de Humanidades, piso 9 Ciudad Universitaria, Coyoacán, 04510, México, D. F.
Información general: namerica@unam.mx / www.cisan.unam.mx/Norteamerica