

¿Los Foráneos? Relatos de Población Receptora de Migrantes en una Ciudad Fronteriza

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Abstract

This research article shows a broad analysis of the situation of migrants in the city of Cúcuta - Norte de Santander (Colombia) and the representations that the receiving citizens have in this border context. The methodological approach of this study was framed from the qualitative-hermeneutic paradigm where the life story was used as a basis for collecting information. The results of the research show that the discourses of the subjects under study legitimise violent actions towards the Venezuelan migrant population. Furthermore, it shows that in the border municipalities, residents naturalise the current situation, to the extent that it seems that the events that occur in this border context are isolated from the reality of those who do not migrate, describing them as "something normal".

Keywords: migration; border contexts, recipients, xenophobia.

Introduction

Interpreting the stories of Venezuelan migrants creates a special space for reflection on this complex and alarming phenomenon, which in a certain sense can generate feelings of rejection and hatred towards the migrant; But at the same time, it can establish feelings of resentment, resentment and anger on the part of Venezuelans, with future consequences in a context where the dynamics are diverse and changing, making reference to the fact that in the past Venezuela was the refuge of thousands of Venezuelans who fled the war and the crisis in our country, and now they are the ones who ask for the support of the Colombian people.

However, this situation can change at any time, and these actions of discrimination and rejection are detrimental to the relations that need to be assertive between Colombians and Venezuelans, as well as being fundamental elements in our role as trainers of professionals in disciplines such as Social Communication and Social Work, allowing the analysis of the context and in favour of building true territories of peace and bi-national cooperation in the border area from the educational campus.

Consequently, we pose the following questions: what are the evaluations or perceptions that the citizens of La Parada have of Venezuelan migrants; what are the imaginaries that legitimise the violent culture in the border context of La Parada; what are the sources or foundations of power that make the inhabitants of La Parada

construct or deconstruct the violent culture towards Venezuelan migrants; and what are the sources or foundations of power that make the inhabitants of La Parada construct or deconstruct the violent culture towards Venezuelan migrants?

This is fundamental, since the information is obtained from the voice of the direct actors and not from secondary sources such as the daily news published by the national media, which can distort the information and the reality of the border areas, given the political and economic interests that they hold.

Being the corregimiento of La Parada the place where the links between the two nations are most evident due to its border with the municipality of San Antonio del Táchira, as well as being the epicentre of attention or assistance by all the institutions and entities towards the Venezuelan migrant population, we took as a representative sample five residents in the commercial area of the corregimiento, chosen intentionally according to the specificities of the border context and which have been detailed throughout this study, We took as a representative sample five residents in the commercial area of the township, chosen intentionally according to the specificities that mark the border context and that have been detailed throughout this narrative, because they show different perspectives of the situation and provide sufficient elements to account for the purposes of this narrative.

It is worth noting that the corregimiento of La Parada belongs to socio-economic strata 1 and 2, and its commerce is mainly centred on the main avenue that leads to the municipality of San Antonio del Táchira. In relation to the number of inhabitants of the district, it should be noted that at present there is no specific data on the population from DANE; however, the Metropolitan Police of Cúcuta in alliance with the Mayor's Office of Villa del Rosario, carried out an approximate population study in order to establish the feasibility of the construction of District Three, which will be located in the district of La Parada. The study established an approximate population of 2,450 inhabitants, of which 16% belong to the floating population.

For this purpose, two formal traders were selected, owners of businesses dedicated to the wholesale and retail trade of basic foodstuffs, as this sector is the one most affected by the border crisis. We also interviewed a male and female informal vendor who sell various products brought from Venezuela on the main avenue of this district. It is worth noting that these four traders live on the outskirts of La Parada.

We also managed to obtain the account of an inhabitant who has her housing unit in the central area of the village and who has lived in the sector for more than 20 years. These people were approached through a formal trader who facilitated their location and was very useful in breaking the ice and avoiding obstacles to the collection of information.

With the information collected, we intend to answer the questions posed for this narrative, which generally seeks to understand the dynamics that make the inhabitants of the village of La Parada construct or deconstruct the violent culture towards Venezuelan migrants. The above, through three specific objectives: to identify the assessments or perceptions that the citizens of La Parada have of Venezuelan migrants, but also to know the imaginaries that legitimize these practices in the border context of La Parada, and finally to investigate the forms or foundations of power that make the inhabitants of La Parada construct or deconstruct these imaginaries that sustain the violent culture towards the Venezuelan migrant.

The results of this research exercise are of primary importance for the inhabitants of the village of La Parada, as this is where binational relations have historically been most evident. Moreover, it is currently the sector where a large number of migratory movements are evident and where attention is focused on migrants from Venezuela. However, with the results we want to extend this study to all governmental and non-governmental entities that have an impact on the attention to the Venezuelan migrant population.

In addition to this, it serves the university educational community in which we work as teachers, to establish pedagogical strategies of peace building and nonviolence from the Social and Human Sciences inside the classroom, where we have noticed attitudes of discrimination and rejection towards the migrant population of Venezuela, facilitating the correlation with subjects that allow through the pedagogical practices that are carried out in and with communities to promote social integration and rebuild the social fabric in the Colombian-Venezuelan border.

Methodology

This research focuses on the interpretative paradigm, under Blumer's perspective in Symbolic Interactionism, as it allows us to understand the dynamics through which the inhabitants of La Parada have directed their behaviours according to the meanings established about the Venezuelan migrant population. It is worth noting, as Blumer (1969) refers, that these meanings that emerged in the midst of social interactions "depend on and are modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he or she encounters" (Cisneros, 1999, p. 116).

In other words, they do not occur genetically, and this approach is precisely the central axis of the object of our narrative. Likewise, the importance of this paradigm is highlighted, taking into account that as researchers, we must look at reality from the eyes of the direct actors and not from our perspective, taking as Blumer (1966) mentions, "the role of the actor and see the world from his situation" (Carabaña& Lamo, 1978, p. 172).

In turn, from this perspective, we seek to interpret the phenomenon from the meanings given by the subjects who experience it, that is, to identify the routine and daily practices of the inhabitants of La Parada that give rise to violent actions towards the migrant population from Venezuela, but at the same time to know the atavistic imaginaries that legitimise the violent culture in the border context, ending with investigating the forms or foundations of power that make the inhabitants of the Corregimiento de La Parada construct or deconstruct the violent culture towards Venezuelan migrants.

Data collection techniques

For this purpose, we used simple narrative as a literary genre and narrative analysis as a methodological strategy, allowing us to point out the events occurring in the border context as a result of the economic and social crisis unleashed since the reopening of the pedestrian crossing of the Simón Bolívar International Bridge on 17 July 2016. As data collection techniques, we used semi-structured interviews and participant observation as a cross-cutting element in the research process, thus facilitating the identification of expressions and emotions expressed by the interviewees during the course of the fieldwork.

The interview was conducted with five inhabitants of the village of La Parada with specific characteristics, which are detailed in the description of key informants (see Annex 1), taking into account that this is the sector where the greatest relations between Colombians and Venezuelans take place. It is worth noting that people with these specific characteristics were chosen because, when analysing the historical context, it is the commercial context in which relations between the residents of the two countries have been woven.

With these interviews we intend to tell from the direct actors their experiences, highlighting the values or attitudes they have towards migrants, the ways in which they address them or how they treat them, that is, the practices or actions, atavistic imaginaries that determine these evaluations, and the sources of power from which they construct or deconstruct the imaginary of the Venezuelan migrant.

Results and discussion

A deeper analysis of the atavistic imaginaries with which the residents of La Parada legitimise violent actions towards the Venezuelan migrant population reveals that these were established from the sources or domains of power held by the social institutions that govern the border area and that seek at all times "the obedience of the citizens to it" (López, 2012, p. 37).

In view of the above, the residents of La Parada have constructed their imaginaries in the midst of logics that underpin their actions derived from sources of power such as religion, which has educated us in a culture that conditions the way we differentiate between good and bad, based on a discourse based on the commandments of God's law, in which rules are established that we are obliged to comply with, because, otherwise, we will be subjected to "eternal punishment for those who ignore the limits imposed by its truths" (Martínez, 2015, p. 20).

Therefore, not following the divine commandments is a reason for punishment and, therefore, violent actions are legitimised under the shield of God's law, as one of the traders states in his narrative, "every time they catch someone stealing or who killed a person, at once people say they are Venezuelan and woe betide them, because they give them the "paloterapia" and not even the police can take them away" (Pedro, 2018).

In addition to religion's source or domain of power, there is another source that is of vital importance in the interpretation of atavistic imaginaries: ideology. This is established by the state, which came to replace God as the supreme being, demanding compliance with norms and rules under its authority, where its mandates account for the power exercised over the people, because "who can better define the laws or provisions of God than those who represent him?" (Martínez, 2015, p. 44), as Galtung (2016) ratifies: "religion and God may be dead, but not the nodal ideas that made them possible, based on the great and profound dichotomies" (p.160). And although this figure has been absent from the border for years, the state has taken advantage of the breaking point in border dynamics to show itself as the supreme owner of what happens in the northern border municipalities of Cúcuta and Villa del Rosario.

In order to sustain this power and be recognised by the people, drastic measures had to be taken from the central level, such as the rupture of relations between the two nations, ignoring the fact that this would damage the links that had been woven for decades between the populations of Norte de Santander and the State of Táchira.

Thus, in order to demonstrate its divine power, the State has constructed atavistic imaginaries that have triggered violent actions against Venezuelan migrants, "it's that, as the Mayor said, you can't give them so much help because that's why we are the way we are, with this insecurity" (Luisa, 2018); "Recently, for example, the Commander of the Cúcuta Police said in the news that they should not rent houses to Venezuelans, because they were killing the owners to avoid paying the rent, so it scares you, because if the commander says it, it's because it's true" (Pedro, 2018).

However, in the areas closest to the border, the power of the state is blurred. In La Parada, we witnessed that the ideology is imparted by outlawed groups that wield their power through fear and anxiety towards the inhabitants, who obey for fear of harm, not only to themselves but also to their families. The authorities, although they are present, seem to turn a blind eye to the risks suffered by the community, because in La Parada, it is not the delegates of the state who are obeyed, but those groups that have come to establish the war for territory, which moves between smuggling and illegality.

We cannot ignore the fact that in the middle of the fieldwork, two male subjects approached us and asked us if we were new because they had not seen us; we told them that we were doing University work and when we asked for identification we told them that we did not understand why they were doing this if they were not authorities; one of them looked at us and laughed and said "there is another authority here" (PO).

This ratifies that they obey the one who holds a divine figure, the one who imposes rules under the pretext of establishing social control and who is openly acknowledged by the residents of La Parada when they mention that, "those who came to ask them are the authority here and it is better that they look for a person who lives here and guides them because this is very dangerous" (PO). The above statement coincides with what is expressed by (Martínez, 2015).

It is from this image of controlling, omniscient and omnipresent power that the various subjects of power that have succeeded the divine image have been configured, either by attributing to it its characteristics or by relying on it to manipulate natural fears, anxieties and anxieties in order to gain social control" (p. 93).

But undoubtedly, the domain that forms the cross-cutting axis of relations between the two nations is the economic one. Professor María Clara Robayo states that "(...) the economy of the border areas depended on the Venezuelan economy. With the Venezuelan situation, Cúcuta was left in a high degree of vulnerability that was exacerbated by the massive arrival of migrants".

En este sentido, la economía facilitó la construcción de imaginarios atávicos que marcaron dualismos como amigo/enemigo, bueno/malo, "ellos venían a comprar aquí, por eso la economía era muy rentable" (Pedro, 2018); "era completamente diferente, muy tranquilo y despejado, usted entiende a que me refiero, no había tanto vendedor ambulante, ni gente rara. El comercio era muy activo, los venezolanos venían mucho a comprar los productos aquí" (María, 2018).

However, after the border crisis, this perception changes, "we have been affected by the number of Venezuelans who have arrived and they all bring something to sell to subsist and...so many people, the city is starting to be harassed, as if it is not breathing, more for the affected merchants and also for the employees because the labour force is starting to decrease because the Venezuelan is offering it at half the price" (Pedro, 2018).

In addition to the above, the economy has rooted the atavistic imaginary of the construction of borders, going from a territory that we considered free transit, to a space with uniformed representatives of both states (Venezuelan and Colombian) that instil terror and despair, or worse, besieged by criminal groups that exercise power openly and without any kind of control in their fight for smuggling.

However, based on this dominance, the inhabitants of La Parada began to see migration as an opportunity where personal interests take precedence, as stated by an informal trader from La Parada, "it has been beneficial because we work in the grocery trade and they buy a lot here in La Parada" (E1).

The domains of power described above end up legitimising atavistic imaginaries, making it seem that it does not hurt to offend, to beat and even to kill, because they are doing what they call "justice", the right thing, the divine mandate, and this is justified in order to preserve the social order, ignoring that these practices only increase the walls that we have built and that make us look different every day, when in reality we are so equal that we even share the same space, the same air, the same culture and to be more realistic, even the same skin, because we are children of the same homeland, the Great Colombia built by Simón Bolívar and Francisco de Paula Santander, for which so many lives were sacrificed in order to preserve the unity of the peoples of the south, and which today we have only allowed the bonds of brotherhood to fracture so that we are no longer sister nations.

However, these domains are also the vanishing point of the hegemonic culture. The residents of La Parada reflect, for example, through religious learning on the opportunity to see the Venezuelan migrant as their neighbour, which is evident in the residents' expressions, "The Pope has always said that you have to help migrants and God says that you have to help the needy, so you take charge, you are doing a work of charity"

(Rosa, 2018). (Rosa, 2018) or as expressed by Franklin Díaz, when he invokes Christian teachings and states that "as a divine mandate we should all love and accept each other as brothers"; an idea shared by Priest David Cañas when he affirms "is that in the book of Job 42, God says to Job: "for interceding for a brother I bless you double", then we have to fill ourselves with hope in this situation...".

Thus, the image of the migrant resembles the sufferings of Jesus in his journey on earth, as stated by Priest Cañas, "we must not forget that the first migrant on earth was Jesus", thus facilitating the interpretation of Felipe Aliaga's statement that "migrations are constituted as human actions that can alter and construct social imaginaries in societies of origin, transit and destination, producing ruptures in the ways of understanding traditional social interactions".

From this perspective, the Catholic Church has initiated actions to delegitimise the violent behaviour suffered by Venezuelan migrants, as the priest Cañas points out, "the Venezuelan brother comes anguished, with rage...". Faced with this reality, the idea was born to create a space where the migrant feels sheltered, protected and helped. The Casa de la Divina Misericordia is today one of the first friendly hands that Venezuelans find when crossing the international bridge Simon Bolivar or the trails, because there they are not only offered a plate of food but spiritual help, as the parish priest Cañas ratifies, "we have spirituality days, we have moments of Eucharist; we are not only giving them bread, we are trying to accompany them".

Like the Diocese of Cúcuta, the Scalabrini Corporation has initiated processes that seek to stop seeing the migrant as the enemy or usurper, for which they have been working on various actions not only of a humanitarian nature, which have been a constant since the border crisis began, but also on community integration actions, which according to the project coordinator, teacher Franklin Díaz, are "workshops with Venezuelan migrant women and Colombian women, historically settled. In these workshops, they work together and develop a process of integration through weaving... they get to know each other, exchange their stories and ultimately realise that they are more similar, or have more similarities than they thought".

The above, affirms what Martinez (2015) states when he states that "society, guided by rationality, has believed not only that it can inhibit any possibility of change that falls outside its parameters, but also plan, decide, organise and define the possible changes" (p. 21), thus understanding that, although social institutions reproduce imaginaries that legitimise violent actions justified in disobedience to their codes, manuals or rules, the limits established within them facilitate the legitimisation of violent actions. 21), thus understanding that, although social institutions reproduce imaginaries that legitimise violent actions justified by disobedience to their codes, manuals or norms, the limits established within them facilitate the crises that arise from the points of escape and that make the dynamics change, favouring the construction of different worlds.

It is precisely the descriptions given, what should motivate us to seek to deconstruct the imaginaries that originate this violent culture woven in the midst of the loom of uncertainties, because we stop seeing ourselves as brothers, equals, and that by delving into the history of our territory we find, as Professor María Clara Robayo mentions, "what is being experienced today is a return of first, second and third generation Colombian-Venezuelan generations, and this has not been analyzed", a statement that coincides with that given by Doctor Felipe Aliaga, "we must remember when the Colombian also had to leave at the time", recognizing that the dynamic is changing and shaped by an economic system that life itself shows as a play, where the stage and the actors are the themselves, but the roles change. Therefore, it is not the Venezuelan who is rejected, but ours; children and grandchildren of Colombians who at the time had to migrate to save their lives and preserve that of their race.

Conclusions

The speeches present in this article allow us to reflect on how border residents legitimize violent actions towards the migrant population of Venezuela. In addition to this, we understood that in the border municipalities, residents naturalize the situation that currently exists, to the point that it seems that the events that occur in this border context were isolated from the reality of those of us who did not migrate, qualifying them as "something normal".

Likewise, the given narratives made us rethink ourselves as university teachers and even more so as professionals in the Social Sciences. In this regard, what was experienced during the course of this investigative exercise questioned us about the academic exercise that we carry out, making us look for strategies to implement in the chairs that we guide, in favor of facilitating the deconstruction of these atavistic imaginaries from the academy, which also our and our students have demonstrated within the classrooms.

We can achieve this through methodological strategies that delegitimize the use of violence, that is, with the implementation of the migratory chair in educational institutions of all academic levels (primary, secondary and university), in which the border history, the relationships that have taken place, emphasizing what is migration? And how has it happened in the border contexts of Colombia and Venezuela? Analyzing the causes that motivate citizens to leave their countries of origin, allowing a critical view to be established when analyzing the migration problem.

These proposals include the community contexts that we reach through our professional work, in which the construction of intercultural strengthening projects between the two nations is suggested, leading immersed workshops on alternative mechanisms for the transformation of conflicts and the exchange of cultural knowledge. Between the residents of the different neighborhoods, thus allowing us to contribute to the construction of true peace scenarios, from the reconstruction of the social fabric in a territory used for years to see us as brothers and not as enemies.

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