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The *Humanizando la deportación* digital archive: participatory storytelling as a technopolitical space

El archivo digital de Humanizando la deportación*: narrativas participativas como espacio tecnopolítico*

O arquivo digital Humanizando la deportación*: narrativas participativas como espaço tecnopolítico*

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This article analyzes the case of the digital archive of *Humanizando la deportación* as a technopolitical space based on the production of participatory documentaries. We explore how the experiences of deported people expose the cruelty of structural and institutional violence on migration and generate situated knowledge for a qualitative understanding of this matter. We discuss how participatory documentary actively produces agency of subaltern voices. We conclude that this platform is constituted as a technopolitical space against the grain of the official discourse on migration.
Keywords: Participatory documentary, technopolitics, migration, agency, storytelling.

Este artículo analiza el caso del archivo digital de Humanizando la deportación *como espacio tecnopolítico a partir de la producción de documentales participativos. Analizamos la manera en que las experiencias de personas deportadas exponen la crueldad de violencias estructurales e institucionales sobre la migración y genera conocimiento situado para una comprensión cualitativa del tema. Discutimos cómo el documental participativo potencia la agencia de voces subalternas. Concluimos que esta plataforma se constituye como un espacio tecnopolítico a contrapelo del discurso oficial sobre la migración.*
Palabras clave: Documental participativo, tecnopolítica, migración, agencia, narrativas.

Este artigo analisa o caso do arquivo digital Humanizando la deportación *como um espaço tecnopolítico por meio da produção de documentários participativos. Analisamos a maneira pela qual as experiências das pessoas deportadas expõem a crueldade da violência estrutural e institucional na migração e geram conhecimento situado para uma compreensão qualitativa do assunto. Discutimos como o documentário participativo fortalece a agência das vozes subalternas. Concluímos que essa plataforma é constituída como um espaço tecnopolítico contra o discurso oficial sobre migração.*
Palavras-chave: Documentário participativo, tecnopolítica, migração, agência, narrativas.

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Introduction

Although the "zero tolerance" immigration policy was implemented in 2018, the legal restrictions on undocumented entry date back at least three decades. Before the 1980s, the relationship between Mexico and the United States was almost symbiotic, resulting in high porosity on their shared borders. The demand for affordable and accessible labor in the U.S. market, coupled with the search for employment and better living conditions for the Mexican population, had resulted in the possibility of individuals being deported multiple times with minimal penalties. During the 1990s, there was a shift in this trend, and the 2001 terrorist attacks further intensified the security measures at U.S. borders, resulting in stricter screening procedures for legal entry into the country (Hiemstra, 2019).

According to figures provided by the Department of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), approximately 383 000 people were deported each year during Barack Obama's last term, which was a record high. This number was higher than the number of deportations during his predecessor, George W. Bush's term (251 000), and his successor, Donald Trump's (275 000). These figures demonstrate the upward deportation trend over the last 20 years (Nowrasteh, 2019). In 2016, Mexicans were the most expelled nationality, accounting for just under 50% of the total, with nearly 150 000 individuals (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2019). During the first year of Donald Trump's presidency, this number decreased, possibly due to the threats made by a policy that promised to prosecute anyone who crossed the border without authorization, whether for the first time or multiple attempts. By 2018, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, reported that the number of people apprehended and returned to their home country had nearly matched the numbers during Obama's administration, with 337 287 individuals, including 126 410 Mexicans. From 2022 onwards, Mexico continued to have the highest number of undocumented entries and deported citizens.

The strictness of U.S. entry policies has resulted in changes to circular migration, leading to more extended stays and modifications in family reunification patterns (Basu et al., 2022). Although the emotional

impact of this hardening on the migrant population is challenging to measure, there is evidence of its repercussions, including a daily life marked by fear for those who have migrated. Detentions based on race and social class create fear among communities, as loved ones could be taken away at any time (Golash-Boza, 2019, p. 18).

Morris and Palazuelos (2015) argue that deportation has wide-ranging effects beyond the personal and familial spheres, which can negatively impact the mental health of individuals stigmatized as criminals due to their lack of legal residency documents. These effects can lead to high levels of stress and anxiety when individuals are expelled to unfamiliar places, mainly if they flee those places due to violence or precarious living conditions. The authors note that deportation can destabilize communities where expelled individuals are relocated. Trauma resulting from deportation can hinder integration into the labor force and civic life and may lead to involvement with criminal groups or addiction.

Family separation can further exacerbate these issues, breaking the social fabric of communities on both sides of the border. Therefore, the numerical data alone cannot fully capture the impact of deportations or the emotional toll it takes on individuals. For instance, the constant fear of being separated from their parents due to their undocumented status violates children's right to a secure environment. The legal framework on migration in the United States and Mexico has ignored the severe humanitarian crisis created by these circumstances (Allen et al., 2013; Boehm, 2017; Dreby, 2012).

This article focuses on studying the experiences of deported individuals, an aspect often overlooked by governmental and institutional reports and market-driven approaches. These voices are frequently considered residual but provide crucial insight into the problem. The following is an analysis of the digital archive of *Humanizando la deportación*. This digital archive serves as a technopolitical space for creating agency through the audiovisual production of participatory narratives. It contains testimonies about the reasons, circumstances, and effects of deportation on the lives of its storytellers. The production of these short documentaries follows a participatory format, where deportees contribute their experiences and preferred way of storytelling.

The academics and students collaborating on this project assist in digitally producing and publishing the short films on the project's website. The process is conducted through dialogue, typically over several meetings, to ensure that the deported individual is the primary creator of the content, with the assistance of project facilitators.

The text highlights the significance of participatory documentary practices in empowering deportees by giving them a platform to share their voices and experiences. By prioritizing the perspectives and circumstances of deportees, these practices aim to amplify their agency and shed light on the harsh realities they face. Furthermore, the text explores how the firsthand experiences of deported individuals expose the systemic and institutional violence inherent in the migration issue. Through their testimonies, a deeper understanding of the cruelty and injustices migrants face becomes possible, contributing to a more comprehensive and qualitative comprehension of this complex phenomenon. Ultimately, the text concludes by emphasizing the role of digital platforms in creating a technopolitical space for subaltern subjects. By challenging the dominant and official discourse on migration, these platforms allow marginalized individuals to voice their perspectives and contest the prevailing narratives.

The digital archive of *Humanizando la deportación* currently contains more than four hundred stories, making it the largest repository in the world for individuals who have been deported or may face deportation due to their immigration status. The archive is organized chronologically based on co-created stories. It is possible to access these narratives through keywords that provide a multidimensional perspective and facilitate an understanding of the complexities that arise from desires for free human flow and transit. The team of mediators also presents additional information in various forums and publications. The initiative originated at the University of California, Davis. The development of this project involved collaboration with academic centers in Mexico, including *El Colegio de la Frontera*, the *Tecnológico de Monterrey*, and the *Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua*, among other higher education institutions, as well as with various civil organizations and groups that support migrants and deportees (Irwin, 2022).

Methodologically, we selected five stories from the archive to analyze common conditions of cruelty experienced by deportees. Our focus is on the suffering caused by family separation, taking into account gender, the conditions of arrival and expulsion from the United States, as well as the emotional ties that were interrupted or broken as a result of deportation. These stories depict individuals who experience the breakdown of family ties and undergo expulsion processes that fail to consider the social impact on both sides of the border, affecting thousands of people who, like them, experience anxiety, sadness, and unease. However, they also demonstrate hope, solidarity, and resilience.

Participatory documentary as a technopolitical strategy

In 2018, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California in San Diego ordered the Trump administration to provide a list of the number and identification of families separated by his government. In just eighteen months (since January 2017), there were an estimated 2 654 children separated from their families. In 2022, more than 1 500 minors were still "lost in a limbo that, according to experts, it is not known how it will be repaired" (Cancino, 2022). The media extensively circulated images as a counterweight to the growing and globalized anti-immigrant discourse due to the cruelty of measures promoted during Donald Trump's presidency (Viola & Musolff, 2019).

While the media's role in promoting actions that induce social change has been extensively studied (Alia, 2004), there is also enough evidence that negative coverage can influence audiences' attitudes toward specific problems and social segments. According to Happer and Phillo (2013, p. 321), the media can significantly restrict the information available to audiences regarding social issues, excluding potential alternative solutions from public debate. It is evident in the coverage of Latin American migration to the United States, where the press presents the issue as a problem for all citizens without providing any nuances or clarifications. According to Dunaway et al. (2010), the issue transformed regional concerns into national ones, generating negative attitudes and emotions among its audiences. Recent analyses of the media and the entry of the undocumented population of Mexicans

and Latin Americans in general to the United States, have identified the tendency to stereotype and racialize the Latin American population that arrives in that country. Thus, the Trump campaign discourse derived from, was an effect of, in reality, representations circulating for more than a decade in mainstream media. The Latino immigrant population is associated, in most conservative media, with the idea of being an "ethnic threat" that benefits (unfairly) from public policies. So, Latinos are overrepresented and negatively characterized above other ethnic groups (Mohamed & Farris, 2020). However, this type of bias is also present in the Mexican press, which favors a dichotomous approach with a negative tendency both toward people who move from Central America to the United States and toward Mexicans who are repatriated and remain in border towns (Ramos Rojas & Arreola González, 2022).

When analyzing media coverage of the issue, Tiscareño-García emphasizes that it is uncommon to hear the voices of migrants. When heard, their voices often express poverty and marginalization, and they are often objectified. Tiscareño-García also notes the need to study further migrant women and their representation in the press (2021, pp. 290-291). Ramos Rojas and Arreola González (2022, pp. 219-220) concur that the absence of migrant voices is a critical issue. There is no sufficient context and information about their motivations for moving outside of their homeland and the presence of migrant women as a significant social group is made invisible. The creation and dissemination of digital narratives by migrant individuals serve as an alternative discourse on these issues. Although it is inconclusive that they counterbalance current representations, their integration into the media and educational ecosystems provides alternative perspectives by revealing new angles and complexities of the migratory phenomenon. Most importantly, they promote the possibility of different paths of technopolitical action.

By prioritizing the situated knowledge of its protagonists, participatory digital storytelling can be understood and studied as technopolitical spaces that democratize public opinion. As Kellner (2001) notes, oppositional politics find in communication technologies the means to channel acts of resistance against various forms of domination. In this regard, Leetoy et al. (2021) argue that technopolitics includes

the connection of collective action where *avant-garde* transgressive identities converge and develop forms of innovation in public policy design from participatory audiences in digital environments. This extends to other arenas of social intervention, including glocal coordination for the preservation and defense of commons and public spaces, the demands for transparency and accountability, and the organization of demonstrations and alternative forums, among many other possibilities (pp. 2-3). One of these possibilities is the creation of participatory, networked spaces that dialogically explore complex social problems that require more sophisticated and in-depth critical approaches, such as deportation and migration.

In this sense, the construction of firsthand stories leads their protagonists to see themselves as citizens with a voice and valuable information for many others in the same situation. Through these short audiovisual productions, they realize that they can summon other audiences and thus generate images that are different from those that are usually circulated everywhere; they produce new forms of power and agency by appropriating their narrative on their terms and based on their experiences (Edwards & Hecht, 2010). It is based on the construction of stories through the subjectivity, everyday life, and memory of those involved, as the filmmaker José Balado proposed: subjectivity through the recognition and exposure of cultural and social identities that define the subjects. Everyday life is the ordinary that has dramatic possibilities of being documented, and memory, or rather memories, because it proposes an alternative scenario to dominant discourses on the perception of the past, offering a subaltern gaze that arises from interpretations rooted in the previous two elements (Leetoy & Zavala-Scherer, 2019).

These participatory digital narratives function as distributive practices that emerge from below, implying collaboration and demonstrating other ways of doing politics. They emerge as technological tools that identify the rise of alternative political subjects and, at the same time, foreground practices that arise from their daily and local actions and ensure the right to self-representation. This generates forms of agency by questioning dominant ideologies, depriving them of their monopoly on constructing truths and exposing the inconsistencies of a discourse shaped by privilege.

It is under this premise of oppositional politics that we consider this kind of participatory storytelling and, by extension, the Digital Archive of *Humanizando la deportación*, as a technopolitical practice to stimulate the generation of diverse and plural public spheres, or, following Dahlgren (2006), to contribute to the creation of civic agency through the inclusion of people's everyday experiences in the deliberate use of communication tools.

This technopolitical practice interests us because we believe it stimulates the formation of subaltern counterpublics, those parallel discursive spaces explored by Fraser (1992) in which members of subordinate social groups construct and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs. These alternative public spheres give rise to innovative areas of dissent not contemplated by liberal public spheres (in the form of the oppositional politics mentioned above): they function as catalysts of agency that challenge dominant and public discourses. It develops a series of previously absent or dismissed alternative spaces and an expansion of resistance strategies. Therefore, participatory digital narratives can not only generate oppositional politics but can also be used as communication strategies for subaltern counterpublics to challenge injustices, seek recognition of their identities, and imagine an anti-hegemonic social contract (Leetoy, 2011).

Participatory digital storytelling is an audiovisual production technique that, as a methodology, grew out of the idea of people creatively telling their stories without technology being a barrier (Barber, 2016). Burgess (2006) was an early observer of the democratic potential of what he called "vernacular creativity" (pp. 5-6). He used this term to emphasize the nature of this audiovisual genre by detaching it from institutionalized forms of communication and instead bringing it closer to everyday modes of expression. As a vehicle for amplifying subaltern voices, digital narratives contribute to their legitimization and incorporation into public culture. Other forms of knowledge are produced through interaction, deliberation, and active listening to testimonies and subaltern experiences that broaden the understanding of the social world. Linked to the use of communication technologies and the way these narratives are produced, we can imagine

scenarios that, as Mihailidis (2018) comments, rethink digital literacy as a way to promote participatory citizenship based on the common good relevant to the empowerment of people's capacities.

The Center for Digital Storytelling promoted this documentary production methodology. Lambert (2013), one of its founders, pointed out that its original purpose was to support communities and individuals to "express themselves" (p. 4) using digital tools. Although this practice had been encouraged by social networks and their use, it was now a matter of putting it at the service of community concerns in different contexts and adapting it to the needs of each situation. The narratives of *Humanizando la deportación* do not emerge from collective workshops where migrants manipulate technological devices to generate their stories. Multiple precariousness characterizes the particular conditions of migrants: they are in transit, perhaps in shelters or detention centers. They are under tremendous stress due to the uncertainty of their status in a country that is not theirs or in an unfamiliar environment. Their economic, work, family, community, and emotional circumstances require the assistance of others who support the creation of the digital story.

The stories in *Humanizando la deportación* are short videos, between three and six minutes long, in first person, recounting firsthand experiences. The narrators decide whether to reveal their identity, whether to show their faces, and whether or not to address specific topics. They control the type of personal images displayed, request the accompanying musical backgrounds, and create the titles of their stories. Those who collaborate in this process help with the digital production and its dissemination through its inclusion in the digital archive, which is public and open. The project protocol stipulates that the narrators' vision determines the course of their story (Irwin et al., 2022).

This digital archive began in late 2017 and continues to grow, with several hundred stories. In the first months, its main narrators were Mexicans deported from the United States. However, with the great mobilizations of 2018, through caravans of migrants arriving at the border from different parts of Central America, the focus of the archive has expanded: now it can be found testimonies of people from almost all of Latin America and the Caribbean, with a variety of migratory situations.

In the digital narratives in this archive, emotions manifest themselves in constant and contrasting ways: for example, they oscillate between hope and despair, nostalgia and expectation, joy and fear. As Boccagni and Baldassar (2015) observe, emotions emerge in migrants' testimonies. However, their analysis has been largely neglected, overshadowed by the attention paid to economic and political aspects of human mobility. Hand in hand with technology, deportees speak publicly into a microphone for the first time to tell their stories and connect with a broader audience. Freely accessible and distributed, these audiovisual short films aim to build dialogical bridges. For this reason, the dual nature of the story, informative and passionate, generally contributes to diversifying representations of the subjects of migration, weakening negative preconceptions about them, and laying the groundwork for informed empathy among audiences.

Cruel Deportations: Testimonies and Situated Knowledge of Deportation

As mentioned at the beginning of this text, *Humanizando la deportación* is the largest participatory digital narrative archive in the world on deportation and migration between the United States and Mexico. The organization of the testimonies on the platform allows for keyword searches that focus on specific issues besides those generated by deportation per se. In other words, the qualitative richness of the archive does not represent a collection of stories without order. It can be explored from social or cultural contexts that complexify different dimensions of prejudice and vulnerability suffered by people expelled or in transit: LGBTQ+ community, women and mothers separated from their children, people fleeing poverty and criminal violence, war veterans, DREAMers and people who arrived in the U.S. as children, etc. Thus, it is a meeting point that proposes a multidimensional approach to human migratory flows, touching on geopolitical and environmental circumstances, gender violence, racism, international criminality, and cartel operations, public policy and human rights, and colonial imaginaries, among many others that can be derived from the stories published there.

Methodologically, the qualitative approach allows for an in-depth examination of the institutional discourses that touch people's daily lives and the effects they have on them. The state and the market are exposed as macro-narrative constructs of power, violently embodied in people's bodies and circumstances, which graphically show the impact of migration policies and capitalist logics. The testimonies and dramas shared by the creators of these narratives are juxtaposed with quantitative indicators that depersonalize their experiences, sufferings, and desires, so it is essential to address them through a sociology of absences that seem to remain invisible to the hegemonic reality of the world, a phenomenon not taken into account as a priority due to monopolizing practices in the production of knowledge of a positivist nature (Santos, 2006). Therefore, following Boaventura de Sousa Santos, an insurgent sociology that problematizes the absence of dominant rationalities is needed, mainly instrumental and Eurocentric, to give way to an insurgent sociology that considers a diverse ecology of knowledge that proposes multiple ways of approaching and solving a social problem.

This marks the critical strategy we present here through participatory narratives: horizontal productions that challenge simplistic and unsophisticated approaches to deportation as something suffered by those who transgress migration policies without considering a comprehensive and in-depth look at the conditions under which they occur and produce humanitarian crises. Below are a few narratives we selected from the archive that illustrate some of the recurring and common themes in the stories of *Humanizando la deportación*: violence in detention centers, family separation, and discriminatory treatment. We chose these stories as examples of practices of cruelty that are ignored and absent from official statistics and reports on the subject.

In May 2017, the first participatory documentary of the *Humanizando la deportación* project was produced. In this story, Gerardo Sanchez (2017), a person deported in Tijuana, recounts how he was separated from his family for drunk driving. What would have resulted in detention and subsequent fines for anyone with legal residency or citizenship, meant deportation and leaving his wife and daughters (legal residents) in the United States. This narrative, titled

"Cruel Deportations," recounts how Sanchez was sent to a migrant detention center and the indignities that people who end up in these places are subjected to. The narrator comments that the people who are taken to these centers are locked in rooms called "tanks," cages in which 30 to 40 people are crammed together, handcuffed at all times, in unsanitary conditions, and subjected to violence by immigration agents.

Those detained in these centers, the narrator says, are isolated without access to lawyers or visits from their families. He recalls, for example, the discriminatory comment the agents made to him when they arrested him: "Now they will eat nopales and beans in their beloved Mexico". After being deported to Tijuana, Sanchez lived on the streets with no place to sleep and no one to support him. He tried to cross again several times to reunite with his family but was detained and deported back to Mexico.

In another of the narratives, Emma Sánchez de Paulsen (2017) states that she received a ten-year sentence when she attempted to re-enter the United States; she had traveled to Mexico to fix her immigration status. Married to an American war veteran and mother of three American children, she experienced separation from her family when Michael Alexander, Ryan, and Brannon were four, three years, and two months old, respectively. Sanchez de Paulsen begins his narrative with a few questions that set the thematic tone for his story and emotionally engage his audience: "How is it possible that they believe that laws that separate a mother from her little children, from her babies, are right? How is it possible that they believe it is right to leave small children, teenagers, without their mother?" Both Sánchez de Paulsen, as a deportee separated from her nuclear family and living in a place she did not consider home, and her three children suffered the consequences of what she considers "very insensitive laws". After twelve years, the family was reunited in 2018, as detailed in a second digital narrative in the *Humanizando la deportación* archive.

If emotions are a construct that expresses an understanding or perception of a situation related to the subject's concerns (Plantinga, 2022), Sánchez de Paulsen's questions highlight what is for her, the most relevant aspect as a result of being removed from the country where she had organized her life: the meaning of motherhood for both

the woman and her offspring. Her words reveal a traditional approach to the relationship between mothers and children, such as maintaining a physically close emotional bond between them. However, this same conviction leads her to question the laws in the United States. This aspect distances her from the place traditionally assigned to women: the intimate space. The formulation of her questions implies doubt about the morality of these laws through a double repetition ("How is it possible that they believe (...)?"). In this way, she emphasizes that these dispositions are based on beliefs and can be transformed and changed.

In another of the archive's narratives, Gustavo Suárez (2019) tells a similar story to the one of Gerardo Sánchez. After being arrested for drunk driving, he is sent to prison and then deported. Suárez has lived in the United States for most of his life, having arrived as a very young child, but he has never been able to solve his immigration situation. It was cruel and painful for him to be separated from his family, as his three children, Nathalia, Anthony, and Gustavo, remained there, and it was not possible to reunite with them. For Suárez, as for many of the other narrators in this digital archive, Mexico is a strange place he has never been to and knows only through his parents' memories. He also notes that he has been discriminated against not only in the United States because of his immigration status but also in Mexico because he is not a native Spanish speaker, which has led him to seek work in call centers where he anonymously answers inquiries in English. The conditions of his deportation were just as bad, as he was transferred over several weeks to different prisons in Wisconsin, Chicago, and Louisiana, where he was treated like a criminal. He was even denied medical care when he needed it for a severe dental problem. After his deportation, he arrived in Guadalajara, where some relatives of his parents, whom he did not know, lived and helped him to settle down.

These stories from the archive unfold places that become commonplace, as they are repeated in countless stories in *Humanizando la deportación*: stories of desolation, anxiety, sadness, pain, and above all, cruelty. In doing so, they amplify the voices of those who experience deportation and the lack of support, solidarity, and empathy in the processes of both deportation and reception of people in the

United States and Mexico. Nevertheless, they also reveal stories of resilience, courage, and hope, which we explore below.

These digital narratives show why the philosopher Shklar (1984) put cruelty first as the worst of all vices. For the author, no vice, hypocrisy, betrayal, arrogance, or misanthropy is above the capacity for cruelty, which destroys any notion of freedom. Drawing on the thought of Michel de Montaigne, Shklar condemns all acts of cruelty that transcend religious or political conventions: these are acts of pure evil that disfigure the human character and defy any attempt at rationalization or justification. The author did not doubt that any form of cruelty, the deliberate infliction of physical pain on a weaker being to cause it distress and fear, should be pointed out as the supreme evil, to be judged as such, and not because it implies a denial of God or any other higher standard. Therefore, no legal framework, religious premise, or social order can legitimize an act of cruelty since it is an act of power that cannot be dignified under any circumstances and that must be exposed without condescension (Shklar, 1984).

Shklar's thesis is fully understood through the narrative of Velasco (2019), a Vietnam War veteran with the rank of sergeant in the U.S. Army. Velasco, who has lived in the United States for most of his 74 years, was deported after being a witness to a street shooting. When he was brought in to testify, California police authorities realized that he was a legal resident but not a citizen, so they proceeded to deport him because he had never completed that bureaucratic process, even though he had served his country. Velasco does not blame anyone in particular, but he does blame an unjust Manichean legal system based on draconian laws. Velasco, who left his entire family in California, including his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, and who had a spotless police record, recounts how he was treated as a criminal and deported to Tijuana, in a country he considered foreign, where he fell into a terrible depression. Velasco comments: "Do you know how many soldiers are on duty with legal residency who do not know their rights? Thousands!" Stripped of his veteran's benefits and social security and struggling with health problems from diabetes, Velasco is still trying to return to what he considers his country despite his expulsion.

In another testimony, Karla Estrada (2019) gives the audience another complex look at deportation. This is the case of her brother, a deported minor, and her parents' decision to move to Mexico to be with him in the face of the vulnerability in which he found himself, which represented the separation of the family. Faced with the existence of laws and regulations, Estrada's story shows the consequences of their relentless application, as in the case of those who arrived in the United States as children. It also shows how emotions, even when they come from a firmly rooted construct such as family, move them into an unexpected social sphere due to their political overtones and the activism of the narrator herself, who regrets not being able to help her brother despite her commitment to the fight for immigrant rights. Faced with the weight of the law, which places deportees under the stigma of criminality and minimizes control over transcendent aspects of their own lives, this narrator overcomes the power that both countries have exercised over her family by being able to articulate her own story, a pattern similar to almost all narratives of family separation. Perhaps this gesture and her words are an action with reduced effects. However, they can be read as a desire to rebel against what has been imposed on them from where they are and with the tools they have at their disposal. As Castro Ricalde (2023, p. 176) states, the greater the power asymmetry, the more symbolic the reactions to it become.

Each narrative in the archive is a testament to the deportees' unique perspective, which emerges from situated knowledge. Haraway (1988) identifies them as emerging from alternative perspectives of non-privileged subjects and presenting elements ignored by dominant discourses that alienate identities and segregate other ways of understanding and constructing the world. In the words of Haraway (1988), situated knowledge requires that the object of knowledge be represented as an actor and agent, not as a resource, nor as a slave to the master who closes the dialectic in the totalitarian authorship of supposed objectivity. The deportees' experiences and understanding of their circumstances make them the main interlocutors of their reality. This reverses the privileged voice of the authorities, who make public policies on the matter from technical grounds, far from the consequences on the lives of those affected by such policies. This generates divisive

practices whose rationality objectifies subjects based on binary oppositions that forge hierarchies derived from power imbalances (Foucault, 2003). In this case, for example, in the categories of deportee and citizen, illegal and legal, undocumented and documented, criminal and model subject, migrant and tourist, and worker and investor.

The stories in the archive reveal a constant struggle for access to a better life against all odds. They are not passive subjects at the mercy of their misfortunes but always keep hope as the guiding axis of their lives and, most of the time, act to maintain it. Despite their vulnerability, these stories invite us to appreciate the courage of the victims of a social and political system that excludes them and which they nevertheless confront. Shklar (1984) says courage should be valued because it prevents us from being cruel. The courage of the victims empowers them and leads them to overcome their fear of physical and moral threats.

For Shklar, cruelty defies such complete rationalization that only stories can grasp its meaning (1984). This idea is echoed by Rorty (1989), for whom novels, poems, films, or any other form of narrative become the main vehicle of moral change and progress because they operate within the contingency of language without claiming to create unique visions or vocabularies for understanding the complexities of social reality. In this way, the incommensurability of cruelty can be questioned and confronted through narratives that, like those in the *Humanizando la deportación* archive, show not only the tragedy of deportation but also ways of resisting and rebelling against such a calamity. Victims regain their voices and appropriate their history on their terms to confront the power relations resulting from the ideological state apparatuses.

Situated knowledge, through the voice and interpretation of the subaltern, strips away absolutist visions of a social reality made up of instrumental ideologies that subjugate the victims of institutionalized migration policies. In this sense, digital narratives are instruments for the resignification of human stories that reveal the cruelty of one-dimensional understandings of migration. One-dimensional thinking is systematically promoted by policymakers and their purveyors of mass information, whose discourses become hypnotic definitions

or dictates because they are repeated incessantly and monopolistic (Marcuse, 2002). We believe this one-dimensionality is challenged and destabilized by the digital archive of *Humanizando la deportación*.

Conclusions

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed (2015) explains that one motivation for writing this work was to stimulate agreement on the requirements necessary to "participate in national culture through feelings of well-being" (p. 314). The deportees' stories exemplify how citizenship is not enough to generate institutional agreements based on empathy. Their stories bring them into the debate about the effects of immigration laws and how they participate precisely through the opposite emotions: those of nonconformity and discomfort.

Thus, through their titles, audiences' first contact with participatory digital narratives endorses the value of emotions in societies where their expression indicates weakness and fragility. Considered as signs of invalidation or subordination (Pribram & Harding, 2002), in these testimonies, their narrators transform feelings and affections into powerful tools that position them as suffering subjects deserving of attention. In doing so, they demonstrate how emotions produce culture rather than simply being echoes of other social formations or power relations (Pribram & Harding, 2002, p. 416). The decision to recount their experiences by appealing to a wide range of emotions challenges the notion of whether or not it is appropriate to talk about effects in the context of a public space. In doing so, they weaken the separation between private and public matters. In this way, they invite a broader audience to empathize with their situation since their precariousness and vulnerability are not unrelated to the general problems of the audience. Thus, through testimonies in which facts and informational aspects are intertwined with emotionally charged expressions, deportees promote their stories as personal experiences and testimonies of collective interest and broad social reach.

Therefore, this article focuses on exploring the testimonies of those who experience the problematic situation of being deported. This aspect is rarely explored from a qualitative perspective by the pragmatic

statistics of government agencies and the market. These voices are absent in the reports and diagnoses of these organizations. Nevertheless, they are essential for a direct understanding of the impact of economic laws and logic on people's lives. In this context, we examine the Digital Archive of *Humanizando la deportación* case, which we conceive as a technopolitical space that promotes action through the creation of participatory digital narratives produced horizontally according to how those involved refer to their situation. This archive presents accounts of the reasons, circumstances, and consequences of deportation in the lives of its narrators. In the form of short documentary films, these productions are made in collaboration with the archive team and coordinated by academics from universities in the United States and Mexico.

We conclude that this digital platform is configured as a technopolitical space for subaltern subjects in opposition to the dominant and official discourse on deportation and migration in general. We show this by discussing participatory practice as a horizontal exercise in communication, where the narrators tell their story on their terms, using their experience as a common thread that intertwines with the common themes of other deportees. Accordingly, a collective canvas of cross-cutting circumstances people suffer in this situation emerges, offering a deeper and more nuanced look at the implications of these human flows.

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