

# From migrancy to “migrancia”: phenomenological approaches to the social process of the migration experience of the United States-Mexico migration camp

## *De “migrancy” a migrancia: aproximaciones fenomenológicas al proceso social de la experiencia de la migración del campo migratorio México-Estados Unidos*

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### **Abstract**

*This article discusses the experience of migration through the concept of “migrancia”, thus making it possible to articulate the complex and diffuse category of “experience” in migration analysis. Without a viable concept in Spanish to explicitly reference the experiential repertoire of migration, I propose a new interpretation of the English concept of “migrancy”, through a reflexive conceptual deconstruction, revisited as “migrancia”. To arrive at this, I discuss major phenomenological arguments and the implications of thinking and working from “experience” in migratory contexts in order to highlight the formative role of experiences in migratory processes. In this, I highlight the importance of “de-migrantizing” migration analysis and its importance of articulating experience from a “third way”, i.e., hetero-phenomenologically. Next, I address the importance of “thinking through the body”, from feminist epistemic and methodological points of view, in order to corporealize the migratory analysis and thus revisit the concrete of “migrancy” and then introduce “migrancia” as a concept that encompasses the phenomenology, embodied, of migratory experiences. Taking the field of Mexico-US migration as a reference, I frame “migrancia” from a feminist phenomenological perspective that allows not only to return agency to migrant bodies, but to bring phenomenology to migration analysis. Finally, I argue that working with “migrancia” is fundamental to understanding migratory phenomena and promises to make a valuable contribution to the analysis and ways of describing and narrating migratory processes.*

### **Keywords**

*De-migrantization, embodiment, experience, Mexico-United States, migrancia, migrancy, migratory analysis, phenomenology.*

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## Resumen

Este artículo trabaja la experiencia de la migración bajo el concepto de migrancia, posibilitando así articular la compleja y difusa categoría de “la experiencia” en los análisis migratorios. Sin un concepto viable en español para referenciar explícitamente el repertorio experiencial de la migración, propongo una nueva interpretación del concepto inglés de “migrancy”, a través de una deconstrucción reflexiva conceptual, revisitada como “migrancia”. Para llegar a esto, discuto grandes argumentos fenomenológicos y las implicaciones de pensar y trabajar desde “la experiencia” en contextos migratorios para así resaltar el papel formativo que tiene las experiencias en los procesos migratorios. Para esto, resalto la importancia de “desmigrantizar” el análisis migratorio y su importancia de articular la experiencia desde una “tercera vía”, es decir, heterofenomenológicamente. A continuación, abordo la importancia de “pensar a través del cuerpo”, desde apuntes epistémicos y metodológicos feministas, para corporeizar el análisis migratorio y así visitar el concreto de “migrancy” para entonces introducir “migrancia”, como un concepto que abarca la fenomenología, corporeizada, de las experiencias migratorias. Tomando como referencia el campo de la migración México-Estados Unidos, enmarco “migrancia” desde una perspectiva fenomenológica feminista que permite no solamente devolver la agencia a los cuerpos migrantes, sino llevar la fenomenología al análisis migratorio. Por último, argumento que trabajar “migrancia” es fundamental para entender fenómenos migratorios y promete hacer una valiosa contribución al análisis y formas de describir y narrar los procesos migratorios.

## Palabras clave

Análisis migratorio, corporeización, desmigrantización, experiencia, fenomenología, México-Estados Unidos, migrancia, *migrancy*.

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## Introduction

The experiences of the migration of (and from) Mexican migrants, are structuring and (re)structuring their notions of identity, by the “decisive” impact of the experiences themselves—the trauma, the “difficult”, the “emotional”—that involves the translocation between spaces dominated by ideologies and political positions.<sup>1</sup> They are experiences that become “chapters” of the narratives of life, of one’s biography; they are (part of) “life stories” that structure and enable (re)ontological configurations and ideologies (Bakhtin, 2000). There is “a lived distance [that] links me to the things that count and exist for me and links them to each other” as stated by Merleau-Ponty (1997),

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1 See Gómez (2018).

“the physical or geometric distance that exists between me and all things,”  
As Sara Ahmed (2000) recalls:

The experiences of migration—of not being in a place that one lived as one’s home—are felt on the level of incarnation, the lived experience of inhabiting a particular space, a space that is neither inside nor outside of bodily space. (p. 92; my translation)

The interaction with the ways of being in the world generates values that structure the forms of interaction in and with the world, configuring ontologies, identities and ways of being (Bakhtin, 2000). As Handlin (1973) emphasized, “immigration altered America. But it also altered immigrants” (p. 4; my translation).

The lived experience of migration is a structuring experience (ontologically speaking). So how can we incorporate the experiential repertoire of experience into migration analysis? One way to do this is to bring, into Spanish, a reconstruction of the old English concept “migrancy”. I call this “migrancia”.

In order for us to reach this, I make a specific review of the literature that covers the migratory experience, intertwined with studies that employ and use “migrancy”, in order to reveal its meaning, and recover its essence put in a term that does not yet exist in Spanish, which I propose as “migrancia”. I start by raising the principles of phenomenology, to give some answers to the question of how does experience operate in migration analysis? Moreover, what does a migration phenomenology mean? Here I lean on the discussions that begin with the philosophical discussions of Martin Heidegger to demonstrate the social construction of reality. From this point on, I articulate the need to resort to other ways of thinking about migration analysis, an idea that finds encouragement with Janine Dahinden and her call to “demigrantize” migration analysis. Next, I address the ways of seeing what we see, from the ideas of the philosopher Daniel Dennett, who highlights that the interpretation of perception - as the basis of the work of scientific analysis and proper of migration studies, is given through a perception of perceived, i.e., from a “third way”, to what he calls heterophenomenology. Then I bring these discussions to the body, as the enclosure from which emanates perception, sensations, and constructions of experiences. I argue that embodying the phenomenology of migration allows not only to recover the agency of the migrant and highlight his/her body, but also to identify that the experience is part of biographical narratives built through situated bodies, stories, remem-

bered and perceived. Subsequently, I locate this discussion from the situated territory - history, recovering Jacques Derrida's concept of ontopology. On these discussions, I build a conceptual unit that seeks to recover and refer to the phenomenology of the migratory experience. I call this, and define it, as *migrancia*. Finally, I conclude with some reflections on the ways of thinking about migration analysis, and the importance of articulating the experiences in migration analysis, specifically, the importance of working with *migrancia* in migration analyzes.

## **The phenomenology of migration experience**

Experience, Heidegger says (1927/1997) is “being-in-the-world”. *To be-in-the-world* is to be *between spaces*—a space *between* another space—in which experience is mediated by the subjectivity of the body—corporeality—and perspective—particularity. The experience, in this sense, is framed by the dialectic of otherness, relational and situated within an unfinished process of constant construction. The experience of *being-in-the-world* is mediated in relation to the other—the “non-I.” The “lived experience” is the product of the dialectic between “experience” (*Erfahrung*) and “experience” (*Erlebnis*). Thus, the hermeneutic ascriptions to experience are found within historically forged and contextualized narratives and, of course, subjectivated (Føllesdal, 1991). The experience of migration is an experience lived, deposited and traversed in and by the body—symbolic, ontological, social—of the migrant. The experience of a lived experience is activated by the process of memory and its remembrance. Abril Trigo (2012) reiterates that the construction of memory, as an ontological positioning of the ways of being in the (biographical) temporalities from the present (the here-now), is what allows “the encounter of the present of the now [Jetztzeit] with the past of the *accumulated* experience [*Erfahrung*] where the lived experience [Erlebnis] occurs as duration” (pp. 26-27; original italics). In the words of Merleau-Ponty (1997), “for us to perceive things, we must live them” (p. 339).

The experience of the experience arises from the relationship with the duration “of the cultural-performative memory”, i.e., the memory produced and product of the confluence with the horizons of social action (Trigo, 2012). It is from a dialectical relationship between the individual (as the first point of oscillation of the subjectivity) and the sensitive horizons of the territories—

both physical and symbolic (the other points of oscillation of the subjectivity)—that enables the production, circulation and the “memory” of memory (Jelin, 2012). In other words, the sources of memory, as well as the sources of lived experiences, are and emanate from the social (Trigo, 2012). Thus, the expression “make memory” makes sense, because memory does not exist on its own, but memory “is made”. Memory is a product and a social process.

Concomitantly, lived experience is shaped by the relationship between space (as territory) and time (as history) that, consequently, shapes experience as a historical process attributed to the territorialization of space as “inhabited” and political space (Harvey, 2000). This semiotic and cybernetic contour, between the individual and his/her interactions, are constitutive in framing the conceptualizations of the connotations and meanings of the spacetimes that this occupies, transits and uses. The occupied and inhabited space is, therefore, the ‘primary source’ of the memory and builds the properties that nourish the narratives of experience, as properties of the “biographical space” (Arfuch, 2007).

Leonor Arfuch (2007) argues that the biographical space encompasses “the narration of stories and experiences, the capture of experiences and memories” (p. 84), therefore, the biographical space are the narratives that denote a sense to the individual that, in turn, structures agency, *expectations, ideations and, consequently, memory and remembrance*. Considering the Mexican deportee in a border area like Tijuana, the biographical space is in constant negotiation with the biopolitics of the border, and is part of the ‘biopolitical metaphor’. The migrant, like every individual, is situated through his history, his biography and his “world” (Schutz, 1982).

Considering all the above, one way to carry out the methodological operationalization of the phenomenology of experience lies in rescuing “dominated” concepts and carrying out a work of demigrantizing the analysis of migration. One of these concepts is the English concept of “migrancy,” which is mistakenly equated as “migration” in Spanish, but its denotation extended far beyond simply referring to something as obfuscating as “migration.” At first glance, its contemporary use seems to indicate that “migrancy” is related to mobility in the migratory process, but this is an effect of having been irreflexively dragged through history (Smith, 2004). It is necessary, as Janine Dahinden (2016) argues, to demigrantize migration analysis. One of the questions, still unresolved, that runs through this whole discussion is how can we instrumentalize, analytically, the phenomenologically expres-

sed experience of migration? One way out of this methodological epistemic alley is to approach this question from the “third way” and think about it heterophenomenologically.

### **“Seeing” the migratory experience: heterophenomenology and the “third way”**

Recognizing that communication is interpreted, doubly, as part of a “hermeneutic circle” where an evaluation of an observation on what is observed is made, it is useful to consider Daniel Dennett’s heterophenomenological approach. Recalling discussions of feminist phenomenology, Dennet (1991) identifies that an observation of an observation requires taking a reflexive position echoing the feminist epistemological discussions of Donna Haraway (1988) on “situated knowledge”.

In this regard, Daniel Dennett (1991, 2003; 2007) argues that the ways in which human beings construct narratives about who they are—biographical narratives that nurture and structure their *I*—are given through self-referenced discourses in relation to the “non-I,” i.e., with everything external to the individual communally identifying as part of the “otherness.” Every individual, therefore, develops dialectically positioned narratives with the experience of otherness, which encourages narrative properties that build the “body” of identity, the biographical territory of the individual; the biographical space. This narrative body-as-territory is part of what Leonor Arfuch has called the biographical space, which nurtures an identity cartography that guides, sustains, validates and gives meaning to human actions. Therefore, phenomenology is part of this biographical space, of this identity narrative and of this body cartography that defines the type and way of experiencing social reality. The phenomenology of experience, therefore, is not only a subjective expression and property, but is a social product and process. From these arguments, Daniel Dennett (2003) proposes to articulate a “heterophenomenological method”, to recognize the plurality of experience and allow addressing subjectivities as situated “truths” that, in turn, allows them to be treated analytically as valid sources. In this sense, biographical narratives must be approached as situated knowledge, from an explanation of the observer’s positionality on what is observed and consider what is said as a social fact (Atkinson, 1997).

Working a heterophenomenological method involves adopting an intentional, situated and reflective posture in which an epistemic subject is observed, with situated knowledge, invested with agency, beliefs and rationality, and his actions and narratives that he recalls about his experiences as part of a body-as-territory of his biographical space are interpreted as social facts. As Abril Trigo (2012) reminds us, “a proper negotiation and reconversion of subjectivity necessarily involves processing memories as instances imbricated dialectically to the present in duration, as lived experiences in practice” (p. 28).<sup>2</sup>

Phenomenology, like that which deals with the “phenomena” of reality, nourishes the essence of the identities that every individual assumes. In this sense, the ‘I’, argues Dennet, is the result of various narratives that are inscribed on the body and structure the way the body is positioned and placed in a social order (McCarthy, 2007). The incorporation of biographical narratives that are part of an identity unit, self-referenced, and from which one interprets, perceives and interacts with the world —the “I”— passes, Dennet (2003) tells us, through four articulations that are interposed in the binomial of the “I-not-I”:

- self-conscious experiences;
- beliefs about these experiences;
- the “verbal judgments” that express those beliefs; and
- expressions of one kind or another. (Dennet, 2003, p. 21; my translation).

The heterophenomenological stance fully holds that reality is a social construct.<sup>3</sup> As Thompson (2000) says, “the heterophenomenological world is, after all, the world in which we live” (p. 214; my translation).

The heterophenomenologically expressed act of “being in the world” (Vattimo, 1987) is presented in the narratives that describe, express, feel and occupy the spaces of the social construction of reality (Thompson, 2000). The elements highlighted in the narratives demonstrate a prioritization of those that stand out most in their incidence in the biographical space: they are narrative stories that participate and are presented in the “life story” that

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2 Own translation.

3 See “Dennett and Constitution” in Thompson, 2007 (pp. 214–217).

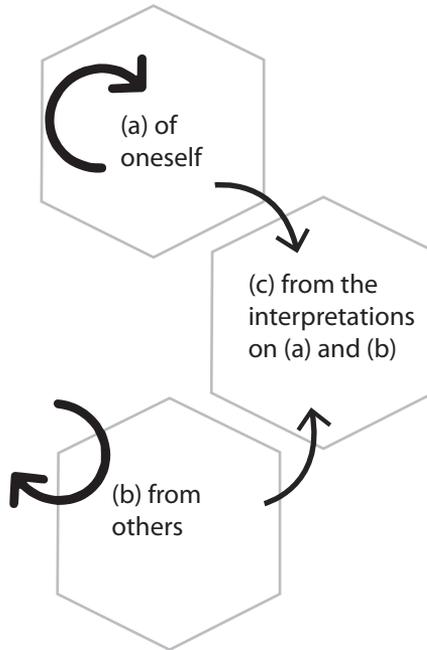
we tell about ourselves, and “the world” (Sanford, 2006). These perceived elements constitute an identity notion that conditions the ways of experiencing the world—as performances and perceptions of and in what Berger and Luckmann (2001) have described as “symbolic universes” defined as those “bodies of theoretical tradition that integrate zones of different meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality” (p. 124). Briefly, we can understand symbolic universes as the socially mediated and historically produced referential field that is part of what Dennet describes as “narrative centers of gravity.” For example, Avtar Brah (2005) recalls that both identity and lived experience is the product of the hermeneutic and phenomenological dialectic between the individual and the social, between the private and the public, between and from the narratives that stand on the social mesh of experience (p. 172).

Narrative centers of gravity are those facts and stories that find affinity with the individual biographical space; they are stories, events, experiences and ideas that “gravitate” towards the idea of the identity of every individual, being attracted by its essence in expressing relevant components to the “history of the individual”. In other words, narrative centers of gravity are those elements of social reality that take on importance in making sense of the history of who we are. Thus, the centers of gravity become sources for our Self, expressed in discourses and narratives that seek to explain our ways of being and being in the world. The centers of gravity are expressions of a “reflection” of a position assumed in the world, the result of a situated discursive internalization that allows us to access “models” of action, interaction and ways of being, and forms of the Self (Dennet, 1991). These are the speeches that “define” us; it is an expression of *habitus*, Bourdieu would say.

Likewise, every individual is a narrative composition. The biographical space, therefore, is established from the stories that are made: (a) of oneself, (b) from others; and (c) from the interpretations on (a) and (b) (see Figure 1). These narrative centers of gravity are configured in the double hermeneutics of the dialogic and dynamic relationship between the individual and “the world”. It is the gaze, from and towards the individual, charged with values, senses, intentions and “history” that influences the composition of the “life story”—which is spun from and through the individual—of its “being”. The look as sustenance and substrate of the biographical narrative is a political “space”. As Le Breton (2006) recalls, “the gaze that is placed on the other is never indifferent” (p. 60).

**Figure 1**

*The three main narrative centers of gravity of the Self, according to Daniel Dennet*



*Note.* Own elaboration based on McCarthy (2007).

Meaning, therefore, attributed to a lived experience is a corporeal thing, because it crosses the body and is “part” of the body (Ahmed, 2015). The body, thus, is the mapping of the reasons for the semiotic composition of lived experience (Ahmed, 2015) and becomes “a place” of memory (Nora, 2008). In his masterpiece on culture, Le Breton (2006) argues that the human being experiences the world “traversed and permanently changed by it” (p. 11), so the body becomes an extension of the “world”—becoming a *body-world*—where the body feels and experiences the “world.” Le Breton (2006) emphasizes that what conditions the way the world feels is not the body, biologically constituted, but the body as culturally nuanced: the body as social, as society.

## **“Corporezing” the migratory experience: from *migrancy* to *migrancia***

Since its introduction in the early 1960s, the term *migrancy*—without conceptual equivalent in Spanish—has been used to describe something related to the migration process, being a rather murky concept due to its absence of conceptual specification. What, really, does “migrancy” mean?

“Migrancy” is a term that differs from “migration” even though its Spanish translation usually equates both terms as synonyms. A critical review of its uses shows that “migrancy” is not just a mimetic variation to allude to “migration” but something else.

One of the earliest uses of the term ‘migrancy’ appeared in the publication of the results of Philip Mayer’s 1962 research, which presented results of his research into the migration of Xhosa tribesmen from the South African city of East London during the first half of the 20th century. The Xhosa are a tribe with a migratory tradition located mainly in the Eastern Cape of the southeastern region of the African continent. Throughout the 20th century, Xhosa were progressively incorporated into increasingly urban environments, entering new contexts and lifestyles. In search of understanding what happens when the Xhosa arrive in a city, with a time-spatial, cultural, political, economic and socially differentiated logic, Philip Mayer begins to describe the differences starting by identifying the existence of a double displacement in this movement: (i) one referring to the physically and geographically constituted space, and (ii) referring to the semiotic references that give meaning to the world.

In order to excel in the logic of a city, Mayer (1962) observes that Xhosas developed various strategies to give “meaning” to how, where and in what form they occupy the spaces of the city. The Xhosas in East London go through a reterritorialization of their identities—a reterritorialization of their biographical spaces—that seeks to move in an urban architecture and social organization that insists on positioning a “local” logic—urban, capitalist and “modern”—on the foreign—the strange, the otherness, the rural, the “traditional”. In the words of Stephen Cairns (2003), “the figure of the “migrant” (...) undergoes a “reterritorialization” after a periodic deterritorialization” (p. 1; my translation).

It is from these mechanisms and expressions of spatio-temporal narratives of the social membership of migrants—located in and between the locality of origin and the locality of destination—that the term “migrancy” emerge. Mayer (1962) is clear in framing “migrancy” as referring to the subjective

particularities of facing interaction in plurilocality, taken as heterophenomenological, i.e., as a “stable and intersubjectively reliable theoretical position” (Dennet, 1991; p. 81; my translation). Migrancy, then, represents the process of re- and de-territorialization of positionality and reflexivity attributed to “place creation events” (Jacobs, 2002). Entering distinct semiotic fields, the Xhosas experience a form of “clash of cultures” what Philip Mayer (1962) refers to as a “migrancy field”. Migrancy, in the context of the Xhosa, refers to the “extra-urban” relationships and ties that migrants who are now in urban environments maintain and persecute.

Re-focusing the concept of “migrancy” within the phenomenology approach of the migration experience is important because it recovers, conceptually, the phenomenological forms of the migration experience. Without a clear and definite equivalent in Spanish, I propose to use the term “migrancia” as its equivalent.

Migrancia concentrates the semantic value of the properties of the social process of migration and the expressions that emanate from and among migrants from the experience of migration. Philip Mayer’s analysis suggests that migration is an indivisible aspect and property of the process and experience of migration. Since Mayer’s studies in the early 1960s, migration studies have intermittently used the term “migrancy”—especially in research on African migration—but usually in a non-reflexive and loosely defined way, appearing to be just a creative equivalence to refer to migration. It would be within the framework of the “turn of mobility” (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013), almost three decades later, that a renewed interest arises in considering, seriously, the implications, meanings and properties of migration, highlighting the work of Iain Chambers (1994).

In his discussion of the implication and meaning of the concept of “migrancy” published in the early 1990s, Iain Chambers traverses the concept of *migrancia* by the reflexive canon of feminist, postmodern, and postcolonial and deconstructionist theories in considering migration as an ontological displacement of one who “is perpetually obliged to settle into an endless discussion between a scattered historical heritage and a heterogeneous present” (p. 6; my translation). With *migrancia*, the biopolitical structure of power relations becomes visible at the individual level (ethnic belonging, cultural values, gender practices, etc.), at the meso level (institutions) and at the macro level (the State and other supranational actors), making explicit the entangled relationship that affects and builds the migratory experience (Harney and Baldassar, 2007).

Migrancia, therefore, seeks to recover the migrant subject from the macroanalytic and structural enclosure, emphasizing the hermeneutics of subjective migratory phenomenology by addressing the “necessary complexity” of a lived experience crossed by a socially defined body (Carter, 1992). Andrew Smith (2004) argues that, currently, ‘migration’ appears as a *sui generis* concept to describe the condition of the contemporary human being, since “everyone seems to be a migrant in a certain sense” (p. 257; my translation). Migrancia becomes an omnipresent aspect of contemporary social reality, referring “not to fact, but to the condition of human life” (Smith, 2004, p. 257).

To speak of migrancia is to speak of a traveling process that reformulates the senses of subjective concepts such as “home” and structures the ways of perceiving and imagining the world, in structuring “landscapes” that configure the social perspective on itself and the “world”. The critical and reflective stance on migrancia highlights and reveals the significance of the role of migration phenomenology in the structures of agency, reference and ontological positioning frameworks. Migrancia, therefore, seems to be as important as other structuring factors of social reality such as gender, ethnicity, and social class. Finnish sociologist Lena Näre (2013) argues this by saying that:

Although the boundaries of migrancy are fluid and contingent, as a social category it has very real effects on people’s lives. In fact, it can be argued that migrancy has become as important a social category as those classics of the modern era: gender, social class, ‘race’ and nationality. (p. 605)

Migrancia is part of a heterophenomenological view of migration, as it is the incorporation of “what that subject believes to be true about his own conscious experiences and the world as experienced by that subject—the heterophenomenological or subjective world, i.e., not the real world” (Drummond, 2006, p. 57; my translation). So how is migrancia defined? To define it, it is still necessary to discuss an additional aspect: its ontopological constitution.

### **“Placing” the Migration Experience: The Ontology of Migrancia**

Resuming the feminist concern to refocus the body as an epistemic source, as a territory, as a policy, technology, protest and discourse, Donna Haraway raises a discussion about the body as an embodied body through the

metaphor of the prosthesis, as a process that intervenes the body, making the body, therefore, cloaks itself with new meanings and allows to get out of the semiotic cage that has dominated the body throughout a history of the masculinized, heteronormative and imperialist social sciences (Mignolo, 2010; 2015).

By seeking a political and epistemological positioning of the body as “always a complex, contradictory, structured and structuring body” as opposed to “the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity”, Haraway advocates the necessary consideration of the subject’s complexity—of his body—as of his gender attributes. It advocates a consideration of the *ontological* property of migration.

An “ontology”, writes Derrida (1998), is “an axiomatic that inextricably links the ontological value of the present-being (*on*) to its *situation*, to the stable and presentable determination of a locality (the *topos* of the territory, of the ground, of the city, of the body in general)” (p. 96; italics of the original text.). Therefore, lived experience is a situated experience that acquires the ontological character. We can think that the biographical space of migration is one mediated by an ontological field.

Taking into account the epistemic and methodological premises presented here, and seeking to instrumentalize the concept of migrancia, I propose to define it as: *the social product (unfinished) of the social process of the experience of migration, heterophenomenologically expressed and ontologically located.*

Thus, migrancia seeks to recover the migrant subject from the confinement of macro-analytical and structural analysis, emphasizing the hermeneutics of subjective and relational migratory phenomenology. Migrancia is one of the most outstanding heterophenomenological aspects of the social process of migration, enabling the recognition of the migrant agency, making visible its strategies, negotiations, ideations and interpretations that frame migratory contexts. Adding a migrancia approach to the analysis of migration phenomena helps to break the gap between the different scalar levels of analysis and adds a necessary dimension to the understanding of migration. Consequently, migrancia is a good concept to rescue and refer to the intersectional factors that, as a whole, are part of the essence of the migratory experience and “go” with the migrant. It is a concept, reminiscent of Gilles Deleuze (1995), essentially mobile.<sup>4</sup>

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4 In his own words, Gilles Deleuze argues that “it’s not enough to say concepts possess movement; you also have to construct intellectually mobile concepts” (p. 122).

## Looking for migrancia: between the ontological and heterophenomenological

Memory is a socially ontologically situated and essentially heterophenomenological process. Therefore, memories are multiple and plural—they are essentially heterophenomenological expressions—because narratives about experiences are fostered in the disjunction of perception, socially composed and ordered, which are based on the situated gaze. The experience is invested with multiple memories that compete for the dominant narrative, traversed by the plurality of the story, feeding the biographical space and moving through narrative centers of gravity.

Memories foster degrees of perceptions—such as tones and accents placed on remembered narratives—that feed perceptions of self in front of self and self in front of otherness. The memory of the experiences of migration is, therefore, always memories that find their expressions in social relations and interactions—in the “world”<sup>5</sup>—and, therefore, are structured as *social facts*. Experience nourishes and is nourished by the ontological aspect—i.e., a situated *topos*<sup>6</sup>—of memory, in a hermeneutic dialogical expression, which lays, fundamentally, in the phenomenology of lived experience (of “being-in-the-world”). Memory, then, is a constitutive and intrinsically social element, but memory also resides in an individual, therefore memory is also individual.

The French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1925/2004) argues that it is the social frameworks that engender the links that make memory architecture possible, as a mnemonic social architecture. Memory, like migration, is a social product made social.<sup>7</sup> To support these claims, Halbwachs demonstrates how the social framework engenders the formation of memory, presenting the context as a semiotic environment that defines experience and ways of remembering. Thus, individual memory is composed (and consequently) limited by the experiences (and scope) of the individual, as part of the extensions of the spaces (and times) that the individual occupies

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5 Understanding the “world” in phenomenological terms. Heidegger (1925/1997) argues that: to describe phenomenologically the “world” will mean: to show and fix in categorical concepts the *den* being between that is-there within the world. The entities within the world are things, natural things, and things “endowed with value.” [...] The character of being of natural things, of substances, which creates everything else, is the substance. Chapter Three, 63 (p. 91).

6 For a brief tour on the constitution of the concept “topos”, I recommend Portillo Fernández, J. (2016). Topoi and mental spaces. *Digital tones*, 32(0).

7 See Durkheim (1997, pp. 51-52).

in time and space. On the other hand, collective memory is limited by the set of references remembered from the points of interaction and is articulated by the ways of social interactions that are deposited in an object of greater communality (outside the individual) and part of the narrative references of the identity of the social group (Traverso, 2011). Collective memories are created as a process of unifying “stories” about lived experiences based on an “idea” of what happened that is spun into a “unified fabric”. Jelin (2012) emphasizes this aspect by writing that:

Memories are subjective and intersubjective processes, anchored in experiences, in material and symbolic “marks” and in institutional frameworks. This necessarily implies entering into the analysis of the dialectic between individual/subjectivity and society/belonging to cultural and institutional collectives. (p. 25)

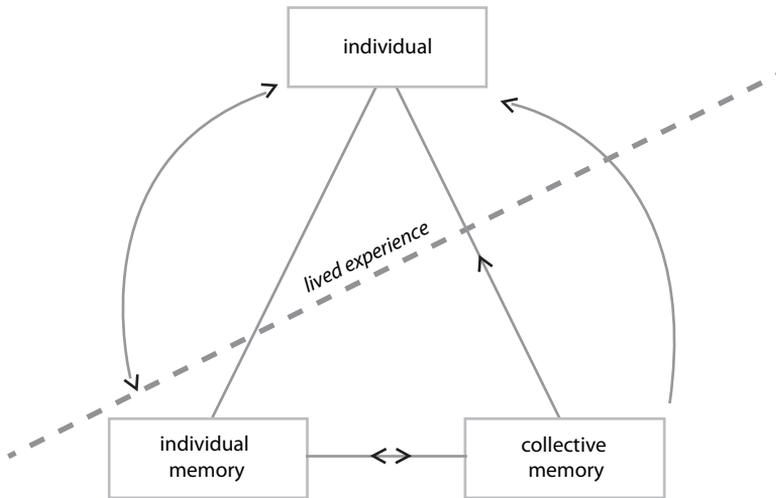
Collective memory thus represents a generalized, devised and politicized image of “history” (Halbwachs, 1925/2004, pp. 54-55). To speak of memory, then, is always to speak of memories—both individual and collective—all in coexistence on time-spatial planes of differentiated reference and social relationship. Illustration 2 recovers the process of the social construction of memory, promoting individual memories that are structured in relation to three referents: (i) the collective, (ii) from the collective and (iii) with the collective.

The social process of memory necessarily recovers the emotional degree that accentuates memory. The emotions that go through and are part of the experiences lived regulate the presence and penetration of memories. The more emotional, the more inflated the event becomes, enlarged by its emotional character. These are the memoirs, usually associated with structuring events in the narrative biography of individuals—they are the “chapters” of life, as are often the events of loss, trauma, great joy, or relief (Halbwachs, 1925/2004). These structuring events in the remembered biography of every individual move into narratives loaded with feelings. They are emotional narratives. Memory, therefore, is *attached* to the emotional (Ahmed, 2015). Memory, like all experience and its experience and perception of it, is situated in a time-space. It is on this premise that Jean Duvignaud (2004) argues that the analysis of memory is, at its heart, an analysis of time—of a way of structuring and articulating time (Halbwachs, 1925/2004, p. 11). Time enables experience and frames the experience in a context, in a relationship with a social history. They are the social frameworks that enable the discursive ar-

ticulation of a social history, ontologically located. The social frameworks, therefore, allow the expression of the memory —situated, affective, historical and biographical— as a symbolic enclosure of the social and symbolic interaction experienced and internalized.

### Illustration 2

*The construction of situated memory - individual memory and collective memory*



Note. Halbwachs adaptation (1925/2004).

Seeking to reflect on the “places” of memory, Pierre Nora (2008) conceives memory as the “life embodied” in social bodies that wander between memory and amnesia. Memory is, in the language of Maurice Halbwachs, expressions from social frameworks. Articulated on the premise of the “acceleration of history”, Pierre Nora argues that the plural composition of memory (multisituated, emotional and reflective) builds a need (from the State or ‘History’) to position memory ontologically, in social spaces that enable its continuity (as a memory).

Memory, as a social product of social frameworks, is part of the material social structure attached to the architecture of social organization. The

most iconic and recognizable “places of memory” are monuments, statues and other objects that seek, through their presence, not only to bring the past into the present, but to maintain a perspective of the past into the present. Thus, Nora argues that memories “have roots”—they are part of a territory (space-time)—and, consequently, memories inhabit a space (Nora, 2008).

The long-standing migration relationship between Mexico and the United States has built a supranational historical migration camp, forming a number of “places of memory.” An undocumented migrant in the United States is constantly navigating places of memory, as part of the semiotic social topography of identity. Its condition of undocumentation makes it coexist under certain limitations that, in turn, amplifies the reflexivity of the membership deposited in practices of remembering that constitutes forms of making community.

These factors build experiences that find roots in the spaces of their remembrance, as heterophenomenological expression, being one of its most emblematic expressions the presence, image and perception of “La Frontera”. The “traumatic” experiences of migrating, in an unauthorized way to the United States, cross the binational migration field as a social fact that has the effect, among others, of “tinting” memory by building a social “place” of memories. Migration, therefore, is an ontological expression.

The spaces and places of the memory of undocumented Mexican migration are found in the extensions of the contact points of the social biographies of migrants who “escape history” (Nora, 2008, pp. 38-39). They are the Chicano murals of San Diego, the graffiti of Los Angeles, the Migrant Houses in Tijuana, the neighborhoods of New York, among many other “buildings” of memory as extensions of the historical memory of being and remembering. These expressions are ontological representations of migrancia and the memory experience of “being” a type of migrant. The places of memory not only reside in the spaces of the dialectic of the subjective and objective, but also find encouragement in and between the topographical expressions “simple and ambiguous”, as in their “natural and artificial” joints.

For example, Leo Chavez (1992) is clear in demonstrating how undocumented migrants working in the agricultural sector of Southern California find themselves in a “space” of significance for inhabiting two mutually exclusive spaces: (i) one relative to the sphere of the labor field and another (ii) relative to the non-labor social field. Thus, Leo Chavez observes how, on the one hand, when these undocumented Mexican migrant workers are in the labor camp, they are usually treated with appreciation. However, when they are dislocated to the

non-labor social field, experiences are more diverse and dispersed and they are often the subject of negative evaluations. The American anthropologist emphasizes that, in the non-labor social field, perceptions that they are “feared, even despised” and, in certain areas, seen as “dirty, plagued by diseases, amoral and capable of any desperate or disgusting act” (Chavez, 1992, p. viii; my translation) usually appear. The separation of these “spaces” by a symbolic border of the craft, separates emotions and perceptions from social fields. Spaces become *significant* (Halbwachs, 1925/2004) and *places of memory* (Nora, 2008).

## Final considerations

Theorizing the epistemology and methodology of migration analysis is not just a capricious matter, but it is essential to maintain epistemic surveillance and to question reality from our various positions. The concepts, such as the concept of “migrancia” that I propose here, seek to recognize the experiential stories of experiencing migration. It seeks to show the ways of feeling migration, moving away from nuances that describe the migrant as a product of circumstances, barely reacting to its structure, without body, name, desires, or dreams. Considering Janine Dahinden’s call to “demigrantize” migration analysis, it becomes important, as I have sought to demonstrate here, to recover voices from other disciplines, which allow us to “see” it in other ways. This work is, at the same time, a product of incorporating an ontological sensitivity, as well as a heterophenomenological reflexivity.

The conditions derived from the confluences of factors such as: (a) being a migrant, (b) undocumented, (c) Mexican, (d) male and (e) adult—prevalent characteristics of the Chávez study group (1992)—are positioned as the valences of being and belonging to the social field configuring the essence of the *migrancia* of these migrants. “Their goals”—of these undocumented migrants in the United States— as Chavez describes, “is to survive, not to become rich or happy” (Chavez, 1992, p. ix). Memory that resides in the body builds identity in the same way that identity makes up memory.

The experiences — *lived*— of migration are deposited in a memorial architecture that feeds the biographical, cultural, political and social narratives of the subject and structures the ways of being in the world: *being in the world is remembering in the world*. The lived experience is part of the performativity of interaction and part of “being in the world” and incorporated

as the indivisible property of any individual. In a way, *we are by our experiences*. Therefore, lived experience cannot be analyzed as an isolated part, but is part of an interrelated configuration of a whole. It is only by the whole that the “impact” of the lived experience can be discovered. The meaning attributed to a lived experience is something bodily; that goes through the body, and is “part” of the body. As an ontological expression, *migrancia*—as an experience of migration—is located “with roots” in the space of the body; in its expression of “body-world”.

The body, therefore, is part of the cartography of the expressions that structure and guide the lived experience. As a substantive point, Russell Ferguson (1990) asserted, more than three decades ago, that “whiteness, masculinity, or heterosexuality can no longer be taken as the omnipresent paradigm, simultaneously center and limit” (p. 10; my translation) in the social sciences and this applies to the studies of migration. It must be remembered, reflexively, critically and analytically, that narratives are not absent from values; all narratives are political (from Fina, 2017). Consequently, the body is also political, therefore, what we say matters and, as we say it, perhaps even more so.

Therefore, the analysis of migration becomes feasible and viable provided that an intersectional perspective is adopted from feminist phenomenology, which makes it possible to articulate the experience of migration through at least three major social dimensions: ethnicity, class and gender, all structuring components of the ways of experiencing reality and consequently, incisive in investigating the ways in which migrants live the experience of migration. *Migrancia*, understood as “the social product (unfinished) of the social process of the migratory experience, heterophenomenologically expressed and ontologically located” recovers the subject, makes the body visible and returns meaning to the migrant. Their experiences matter; how we tell these experiences matter. *Migrancia* matters.

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