

# Security and Activism: Using participatory photography to elicit perceptions of Information and Authority among Hispanic migrants in the U.S.

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## Abstract

This paper presents results of a participatory photography research where we explore Information, culture and identity in the lives of disenfranchised groups such as undocumented migrants in the U.S.. Information behaviors of undocumented migrants are difficult to uncover, given their legal status. Migrants experience complex relations with authority, security and social activism, and their Information behaviors are mediated by the transience of their life experiences while at the border, the constant fear of detention and deportation in their daily lives, and their growing involvement with protests and activism for their rights as they become more established in their host country. We compare migrants' experiences at the U.S.-Mexico border with experiences in Seattle, Washington, and we uncover four migrants' information behavior types, corresponding to different stages of transience in their lives, while reflecting on participatory photography as a methodological framework suitable to a social group at the fringes of mainstream society.

**Keywords:** immigration; Latino studies; migration studies; photo-elicitation; visual methods

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## 1 Introduction

The U.S. is a country of migrants. "A lot of folks forget that most of *us* used to be *them*," and, unless you are Native American, "you came from someplace else," said President Obama in 2013 to foster support of immigration reform (Obama, 2013). That year saw highest number of deportations in the history of the United States (Department of Homeland Security, 2013). In the context of massive deportations, the daily life experiences of the estimated 11 million undocumented migrants in the US are fraught with uncertainty and fear, exacerbating their sense of impermanence, vulnerability and marginalization. While mainstream narratives about migration in the US are dominated by discourses about migrants' legal status, birthright citizenship, deportation, building a (longer) barrier along the Mexican border, and their contribution vs burden for the society (Kehaulani Goo, 2015), the experiences of migrants themselves are seldom taken into account. The discourse about migrants is de-humanized and mostly reduced to a cost-benefit calculation, where migrants themselves, their experiences, fears and contributions, have very little voice.

In this study, we seek to understand the experience of migration through the eyes and stories of migrants, eliciting and revaluating their perspectives. In particular, we seek to understand migrants' complex *relations with security forces and authority institutions*, which shape their information behaviors in unique ways. We define *information behavior* as "The study of how people need, seek, give, and use Information in different contexts, including the workplace and everyday living." (Pettigrew, Fidel & Bruce, 2001, p. 44). The same way, we focus on the *sense of transience* migrants experience while living (temporarily) at the U.S.-Mexico border, where they are particularly vulnerable due to multiple threats they confront.

At the border (in Nogales, Mexico), migrants are at the pivoting point between "here" and "there." The border is the place where they enter the US or where they are deported back, the place that represent and define their existence as "outsiders", "deviant" from the mainstream society, according to Becker's (1963) definition of deviance as an outcome of social constraints, rules, and power relations. The border is where migrants' information behaviors are shaped by the transience and impermanence of their experience.

This sense of transience is gradually reduced, but never gone, once migrants are more established in their new host country (in our study, in Seattle, WA). Their legal status is still uncertain, and threat of deportation omnipresent. However, as they build and live more permanent lives, migrants start to actively advocate for their rights, exercising a sense of equity and justice for themselves and for others [see Rawls' definition of justice (1971), implying equal rights and opportunities for everyone].

We use *participatory photography* and semi-structured interviews, a method we have called “Fotohistorias,” to explore a core aspect of migrants’ experience of migration that shapes their information behaviors: their relationship with law enforcement (police, border patrol, detention centers), as well as with organizations that help them (shelters, nonprofit organizations, etc.) or threaten them (drug cartels, criminal gangs, etc.). In particular, this study seeks to answer the following three research questions:

- 1) How do undocumented Hispanic migrants experience authority, security and activism in the US?
- 2) How are these experiences different at the transition point of border crossing, and in an established community in the US?
- 3) How do these experiences translate into different information behaviors?

Emerging in our study are perceptions and experiences that occur both at the border as well as in the new hometown, but also some unique experiences that are salient either at the transitional place of the border, or at the new home in the U.S. This research contributes important insights to studies in the field of information about immigration, and to broader research on understanding the knowledge society from the perspective of other local and indigenous cultures. Besides, this paper extends preliminary work exploring the Fotohistorias methodology (Yefimova, Neils, Newell, & Gomez, 2015) and reflects on a methodological framework suitable to uncover information about marginalized social groups at the fringes of mainstream society.

## 2 Research Context: The vulnerable lives of undocumented migrants and their information behaviors

Migration in the United States is a vast and complex socio-political phenomenon. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2013 about 17% of the population in the U.S. was of Hispanic or Latino origin, constituting the nation’s largest ethnic minority. Though difficult to count, the number of undocumented migrants in the U.S. is currently established to be around 11.2 million by most estimates (U.S. Census Bureau News, 2014). The border between Mexico and the U.S. is the busiest land border in the world, and the most heavily patrolled. At the peak of the flow, between October 2013 and February 2014, there were over 21,000 migrants attempting to cross according to Pew (Gonzalez-Barrera & Krogstad, 2014); in 2013, a record of 438,421 unauthorized migrants were deported from the U.S. (ibid.). The Tucson Sector, which includes Nogales AZ, and Nogales, Mexico, the site for the border part of this research, has the highest number of apprehensions of undocumented migrants from 1998 until 2013. About 706 migrants are estimated to have died in the sector alone from 2010 to 2013 (Newell & Gomez, 2014).

Migrants across the US-Mexico border face a treacherous journey, subject to the dangers of violence, theft, bribery, unsafe transportation, death at the hands of gangs, drug and human traffickers, and state authorities. Once on the other side, migrants have to deal not only with border enforcement and predatory traffickers, but also with the harsh conditions of the desert: heat in the day, cold at night, wild animals, lack of food and water. The ones who make it through the journey will often have to face social, economic and political marginalization, uncertain and dangerous work, low pays, and abuse by employers who take advantage of their vulnerable status. However, they (re-)establish themselves to live, work, and become part of a community. For undocumented migrants, living and working conditions are frequently precarious, though many raise families, some own houses, businesses, and most send money to their families back home (remittances). The majority live with constant uncertainty and fear of deportation, which can be triggered as a result of even minor traffic violations or other unrelated encounters with law enforcement (a raid on a workplace or apartment building, not necessarily immigration related). Once deported, the cycle is likely to start all over again; most will attempt to cross again, largely driven by the growing poverty, unstable political systems and the recent year’s violence that affects Mexico and many Central American countries some will make it, and some will not. Migrants’ information-access behavior reflects their vulnerable status: word of mouth and trusted personal networks are favorites over technologies, as even something as innocuous as a phone call is perceived as an action that could place them at risk of extortion (Newell & Gomez, 2014).

Once in the US, the great majority of undocumented migrants live productive lives, raise families, work and pay taxes, yet live with uncertainty and fear of deportation. Even if they still carry precarious and uncertain lives, migrants strive to contribute to the society where they live, with very little recognition. In Washington State, undocumented immigrants in 2010 comprised roughly 3.4% of the state’s population, and 5.1% of the state’s workforce (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Their work contributes largely to the state’s economic activity, quantified as \$6.4 billion in gross state product, 71,197 jobs (Perryman Group, 2008), \$292.1 million in state and local taxes (ITEP, 2013). Their uncertainty is, again, reflected in their information

behavior. Their comparatively lower rates of ICTs ownership, which favors mobile devices over computers and oral, non-English production of content (Fairlie, 2007), tells much about a quick, pragmatic consumption of information, and about the efforts to deal with both very practical (understanding the language, finding their way through the city, finding a job) and socio-emotional (keeping in contact with family, creating a new social network) problems they face in their new lives (Baron, Neils, & Gomez, 2014). Very little they communicate to the larger society about their experiences, which remain mostly unheard outside their own communities.

However, the mainstream discourse about migration and security takes an internal, state-centric point of view, focusing on the opposition between the threat of the migrant (as external, undocumented, untraceable, undesirable, uncontrollable forces) and the security of the state (internal). In this dimension, states seem to have arbitrary powers, having the rights to determine people's lives to apply discretionary procedures to citizen and non-citizen (Honohan, 2014). Even if no empirical evidence suggests that undocumented migrants are more likely to engage in violent or criminal activities, and some even suggest the contrary, that migrant communities are in fact less violent despite the stereotype, states' discourses argue that "the difficulty of tracing such migrants increases their potential threat" (Collyer, 2006, p. 257). Some scholars have identified this leap in the argumentation made in official policies about migration, and advocate instead for considering the concept of "human security," as opposed to national internal security (Lee, 2003). According to this concept, states and the international community should protect people's free satisfaction of their basic needs (*ibid.*). In this study we want to contribute to the body of literature that advocates for a more human-centered focus on migration. We address migrants' perceptions on security and authority and identify overlaps and additional insights connected to the topic, to bring the migrants' own voices to the dominant culture's migration discourse.

### 3 Research Methods: Participatory Photography

We used Fotohistorias (Yefimova et al., 2015) as a method to capture and understand a migrants' life experiences at their most vulnerable times: while receiving services such as food and supplies at a migrant shelter just minutes from the border in Nogales, Mexico, and while looking for work at a day labor dispatch center in Seattle, WA. In both places we worked in partnership with local organizations (El Comedor and Casa Latina respectively) to gain entry, recruit participants, and conduct the research on site.

Fotohistorias is based on providing participants with a digital camera and inviting them to take pictures of their daily life for a period of time (from a few hours to a week, depending on context). When participants bring their photos, they are transferred to a laptop computer, and a researcher conducts a semi-structured interview about the pictures taken. The Fotohistorias method has contributed to empowerment and positive experiences for participants, and has also opened the doors to unique insights from participants (Yefimova et al., 2015). This study offers additional perspectives this contribution as a research method in Information Science.

Visual methods in general, and participatory photography in particular, have been extensively used in studies with marginalized populations and immigrant communities. One of the milestones for visual methods studies is Collier's work with preliterate indigenous populations in North, Central, and South America (Collier, 1967). Collier had already identified many of the benefits of employing a visual methods in research with communities: photos allow the researcher to have a deeper understanding on a topic that he has not direct experience with, to gather more and different data compared to methods that rely only on observation and oral communication, and to empower interviewees, who, by taking photos, relate to the research process in a more aware and informed way. Through photography the role of the "informant" can be the one of "the expert guide, leading the fieldworker through the content of the pictures" (Collier, 1967, p. 13). Several scholars have investigated communities of migrants through participatory photography. Frohmann explored the meaning of violence in the lives of Mexican and South Asian immigrant women in the US (Frohmann, 2005). Kwok and Ku documented the realities of Chinese women immigrants in Hong Kong (Kwok & Ku, 2008). Sutherland and Cheng aimed to empower women immigrants in small Canadian cities (Sutherland & Cheng, 2009). Rhodes et al. assessed sexual and alcohol risk behaviors among immigrant Hispanic men in the U.S. (Rhodes et al., 2009). Holgate et al. worked with Kurdish workers in London who struggle to articulate their identities (Holgate, Keles, & Kumarappan, 2012). In each case, the photographs were found to facilitate researchers' exploration of the values, beliefs and feelings of the communities at stake, serving as a medium to elicit rich and detailed firsthand information from participants. The varied language used to describe the method and disciplines where it was employed suggest its adaptability to different types of marginalized communities (Vannini, Rega, Sala, & Cantoni, 2015; Yefimova et al., 2015).

We conducted seven Fotohistorias interviews with migrants at a nonprofit shelter in Nogales, Mexico (El Comedor, run by the binational NGO Kino Border Initiative, at the U.S.-Mexico border with Nogales, Arizona, kinoborderinitiative.org), and fifteen Fotohistorias interviews with migrants at a nonprofit job dispatch center in Seattle (Casa Latina, a nonprofit organization that serves the needs of immigrant day laborers and domestic workers, casa-latina.org). Participants were recruited on a convenience sample: in both locations, migrants were invited to participate in the research activities. All the ones who volunteered were interviewed by the research team.

Site	Men	Women	Total interviews
Nogales	5	2	7
Seattle	11	4	15
<i>Total</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>21</i>

Table 1: Distribution of Fotohistorias Interviews

While the same Fotohistorias method was used in both sites, there were small variations in duration, compensation and choice of technology. *Duration*: most participants in Nogales kept the cameras only overnight, given the very transient nature of their stay in that location; in Seattle participants kept the cameras for a week, sometimes two weeks. *Compensation*: by recommendation of the local nonprofit partner, participants in Nogales did not receive cash but a care package consisting of a backpack with a soda, two pairs of socks, a toothbrush, and chewing gum. Participants in Seattle, on the other hand, received \$20 in cash for their participation, which is reasonable and customary for other research conducted at that site. *Technology*: all participants in Nogales provided basic digital cameras, but some participants in Seattle chose to use their own cell phone as camera; a few even chose to share some of their pictures from Facebook.

All interviews were conducted on site by Spanish-speaking members of the research team during the summer 2014 (Nogales) and winter 2015 (Seattle). Interviews were translated, transcribed, and coded using qualitative software Dedoose. Results include a selection of both images and testimonials about the different themes that emerged in the interviews, which are translated and edited for clarity and brevity. Names were changed to protect the identity of the participants.

## 4 Outcomes: Migrants' experiences of authority and security

This section presents some of the most salient findings about migrants' experiences and perceptions related to authority and security, both at the border and in their host community<sup>1</sup>. We group the findings on authority and security under three headings: 1) Detention and deportation; 2) Legality and (un)documented life in the US; and 3) Marches and activism. These groupings emerge from participants' stories and experiences in both locations, though their expressions are different in each site.

### 4.1 On detention and Deportation

Fear of detention and deportation are a constant in the lives of migrants in our study. The theme was mentioned especially at the border, where participants had just reached the wall or had recently experienced deportation. Pictures stimulated the participants to share not only their stories, but also values and feelings associated to them.

Catracho (names changed) had traveled a long, strenuous and dangerous journey to get to Nogales from Honduras. He is now at the border, so close he can touch the wall. He talks about his frustration for being so close to the wall he can touch it, but still so far away from his goal. He talks about his frustration for knowing that all his efforts to have come so far could be vain if he is detained.

*Being here on the border, waiting to cross feels like you are in limbo waiting. It is frustrating to be feeling that maybe they will catch you again. If they catch me they'll keep me for 30 days and I'll keep on trying. (Catracho, Nogales)*

Lupe was recently detained and deported. She lived several years in the U.S., and her children are American by birth. Having migrated to the U.S. illegally, she was finally detained and deported. Being separated from her family in the U.S. was the most painful experience for her. Deportation engenders a sense of bereavement in her. Having lived many years in the North, having her family there, she does not

<sup>1</sup> Other themes are being analyzed elsewhere, in progress.

have anything to go back to in the South anymore. In her situation, migrants often wonder what to do next, and what are the choices they have to be confronted with.

*If I stay here, well, that would be better, but it would be turning my back on my kids. And I cannot do that, because they're my life. But if I try to go back and they catch me, they'll keep me in detention for a year, and I won't be able to be with my kids either. So I don't know what I'm going to do. (Lupe, Nogales)*

This uncertainty and anguish is expressed in one of the pictures Lupe brought for us of a superhero drawn on the side of a moving bus. Lupe feels powerless. She would like to have superpowers to be able to go back to her children:

*This bus has a superhero drawn on it. When I saw it, I thought of my son. When you are a kid, you really want to believe in superheroes and everything they do, and that's what I was remembering, that we have to be strong, because superheroes don't exist. They don't exist. We are on our own. We have to have our own goals. My own goal is to be with my kids. If I were a superhero, I would go flying all the way to my kids, but I cannot do that. (Lupe, Nogales; Figure 1)*

Lupe's experience is different from that of Macarena and Alejandro. The couple arrived in Nogales after being deported, and decided to stay here and work at the shelter *El Comedor*, instead of going back where there was no back anymore, or trying to cross again. They work at the shelter, serving food and offering accommodation to all migrants who, like them before, fear being detention, deportation and the perils of the journey. They portray scenes of their everyday life of care and service to the others. Others that were themselves before. Others with whom they empathize.

*My routine here is [that] every morning I make breakfast from 7 to 8:30. And I do it with my full heart, because I remember when I first came to this Comedor when we were deported, and we were hungry, desperate we had nothing in our stomachs. So I do this with lots of love because everybody who comes here they remind me of when I got here, just deported. I was one of them. I was, and I still am, a migrant here in Nogales. (Macarena, Nogales).*

Fear of deportation is something that will always be present in the life of an undocumented migrant. Benjamin took a picture of two trucks from Homeland Security ("*la migra*" is slang) in Seattle. He is afraid of them, and does not hide it. At the same time, he is the one with the camera, and he can take the picture. There is an interesting feeling of empowerment and fear in his words while describing the picture he has taken:

*I took that picture because sometimes with just seeing them you're afraid. So that's why I took that picture. Just [because of] the fear I have of seeing them. Because they're looking and I don't know if they want to ask you some questions. I'm fearful. You just have to behave yourself and work honestly so that you don't get into trouble. I was happy to be able to take the picture. I would not want to be inside one of those at this time. (Benjamin, Seattle, Figure 1)*

Also in Seattle, Vicente remembers of his experience being deported. He took a picture of a police car on the street at night, which prompted him to vividly recall the time he was caught by Homeland Security. He was traveling outside of a train transporting goods. After a long journey, jumping on the train and hiding from snow between each car, Vicente fell asleep, exhausted. He was awoken by policemen tapping him. Deported several times, Vicente keeps crossing again: life in his own country is much worse than a life living in fear of deportation. His picture are easy points of access to evoke his stories.

*When I finally woke up, I opened my eyes well, and I realized it was immigration. These big old guys with big round hats, started talking to me in English, told me to get up. They handcuffed me, and put me in the back of the patrol car, the green truck they have, they put me there in that cage. There were many there. The cages are full of criminals, bad people that kill other people, that is what prisons are filled with. They put me there, was there like 15 days, then they transferred me to a cell, and then another cell, then another, and finally the last one was in the big house in Chicali [Mexicali]. That was the last cell they put me in. Then sent me back to my country. All the way over there (Guatemala), so I came back again. Yes well, I could not stay over there because it's even harder over there... (Vicente, Seattle)<sup>2</sup>*

#### 4.2 On legality and being undocumented in the U.S.

The theme of legality is stronger among daily workers in Seattle, who, besides fearing of deportation experience the frustration of being undocumented and prey of someone else's decision. Crossing clandestinely means being vulnerable and exposed to many horrors: migrants are easy prey for mafia and drug dealers that charge them enormous sums or force them to carry drugs to help cross them on the U.S.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpts have been translated into English and copy edited for clarity.

In some cases, however, being victim of such crime means having a chance to legalize your position in the U.S. Julián was kidnapped by the drug cartel, beaten, and forced to carry drugs across the border. This scary and shocking experience has been haunting him since. Yet, this experience is giving him the possibility to apply for a visa and legalize his situation.

*I did not qualify for political asylum because you can do it only within a year of coming in. But the T-Visa I am after it's on account of the kidnapping that I had been kidnapped and forced to carry drugs. (Julián, Seattle)*

Usually, being undocumented in the U.S. engenders frustrations. Bureaucracy, a sense of domination, a feeling of powerlessness are among the most expressed emotions. Gloria entered the country with a tourist visa, then obtained a work permit and started the process to get permanent residency. Her lawyer, however, took advantage of her situation and committed fraud against her. Her residency process was, therefore, blocked. As she tells it in her own words:

*There was somebody helping me, but it turned out to be a fraud, so I'm starting again. And so, so this is a picture of a picture because I feel that this service of the immigration and citizenship it is a very unjust service. It's a service that plays with life, with the feelings of human beings. Immigration is not people, it's just politics, playing with the feelings of human beings, hurting you as if you were an enemy. (Gloria, Seattle).*

Because of this, now Gloria cannot leave the US and visit her home country, Guatemala, until her residency permit is cleared. Because of this abuse of power, she cannot visit her family. Else, she would not be able to come back to the US.

*I cannot leave the country because I would lose my work permit. There's not a single day that goes by that I don't think about getting my permanent residency. (Gloria, Seattle)*

Not everyone has a chance to legalize their position. For the undocumented, the fear of being separated from their families is constant even when they have been living in the U.S. for many years and their children are American citizens. Lupe insist on this point again:

*I don't ask to stay and live there, it is not my country. But I want my kids, they were born there and they want to stay there, and I want to be with them. (Lupe, Nogales).*

At the border, the experience of being undocumented is also connected to the dangers of the journey. Lupe also points out how being undocumented expose migrants to many dangers and tragic events. Many lives could be spared were migrants be allowed legally to work in the US. Lupe advocates for an amnesty, engaging for the first time in a political discourse about change.

*It's too many people dying, women being raped, both by the coyotes and by the mafia, by the drug people. What I want is just to go work. I never had a record, I always tried to be within the law. So what I think is needed is an amnesty, or at the very least a work permit. What I want is to be able to come and work for some time, even if it's six months, and go back. But to be able to do it legally. (Lupe, Nogales).*

When their life becomes less transient, migrants start to express their opinion about the public discourse. Josué has been living half of his life in the US. His frustration is connected to the way politics deal with immigration issues, supporting some just to leave others out. Josué does not have a family. For this, he will not benefit from the new proposed reforms:

*I'm glad that the law will keep families together, but those of us who have no family and have been here a long time, we don't qualify for that law. We're still left outside. The law is the law, and I think what they've done is good, to keep the families united is good. But they did not think of the people who have been here a long time and are alone. (Josué, Seattle).*

Rafael, 73 years old, has been living in the U.S. for 15 years. He feels migrants are used by the political discourse when it is convenient to politicians to do so, just to be discarded a moment later when the argument about them is not useful anymore, as cards in a "card game".

*[Migration] is a theme that they bring and they make it like a card game. They're always looking for the best cards, to win over the other party. But that is politics. We are what they take and use when they find it convenient, and when it's not convenient to kick us out. We are toys in the hands of politicians. The republicans are like the wind, they move when it's convenient for them, it goes back and forth. Same thing with the democrats. I don't understand much of that. I would like to understand it better. But I think if I understood it, I would want to be part of a party to try and help from within that party. (Rafael, Seattle).*

In parallel to critical views on the political discourse on migration, however, migrants in Seattle start seeing more and more another side of authorities, where rule enforcement is not necessarily against them, and

where rules are clear and applied the same way to everybody, no matter what their needs are. This is mentioned as a learning experience by Josué:

*Here in the United States I learned that there's laws. They're more clearly delineated. You have to follow the rules. I realize that the law is the law. If you break the law, then you have to pay. This sign means that if they catch you on the light rail without having paid, you get a ticket of \$125. And you cannot talk your way out of it. So my point is, this country has laws. And the law is cold. Even if I have a need, they won't change the laws because of my need. There's no exceptions. (Josué, Seattle).*

Because laws are the same for everybody, authorities apply them the same way to everybody. This is not necessarily scary anymore for migrants. They start understanding that the law can, in certain cases, even defend them. Benjamin tells a very important episode for the community at Casa Latina: a migrant member of the organization was killed to steal him a little money. The case came as a big shock for the migrants' community in Seattle. The suspect, however, was brought to trial and found guilty. The photo that Benjamin brings to us is a powerful testimony, which shows his presence at the trial, his ability to be there, even if undocumented.

*We went to his trial. I wanted to go to his trial to see his sentencing. And they sentenced him for ten and a half years and for me that's too little, they should have given him 20 or 25 years. But then eventually they get apprehended. Even if they catch you in Mexico and they look you up on the computer, they have information about criminals, either from here or from there, they receive all the information so when they catch you they can send you back. So that's why I took this picture, I was very glad that they're taking him tied up. (Benjamín, Seattle, Figure 1).*

The fear of authorities becomes less powerful as long as migrants feel more established and part of the system. This permits them to start exposing their faces, feeling entitled to begin a dialogue with them and, ultimately, start contributing to the society where they live.



Figure 1. Lupe, Nogales, would like to be a superhero and fly to her kids; Benjamín, Seattle, was happy to take a picture of Homeland Security Police; Benjamín, Seattle, was present at the trial for the murder of a migrant.

#### 4.3 On marches and activism

The third theme that emerges as part of experiences of security and authority is related to protests and civic activism. It is particularly strong among the Casa Latina workers in Seattle, while in Nogales it is almost not discussed at all. Only Lupe, who has lived in the U.S. for twelve years before being deported, briefly mentions it when talking about work:

*I think what is needed is an amnesty, or at the very least a work permit. Yeah, I think the best thing would be a visa. A work permit. (Lupe, Nogales)*

Being able to work legally is also the main reason why migrants protest in Seattle. For example Benjamín took pictures at the Martin Luther King Day March. When explaining the reasons of the protest and what they wanted to achieve, he explains that:

*It is important that the government listen to us and that what we want is to go to work honestly to 'bring bread' home for our family, be it here or to send some money to Mexico or wherever they are. We're all thinking about the same thing, we're all thinking about work. (Benjamín, Seattle)*

Simón adds that migrants in the US want not only to be able to work: They also want to contribute to the society, and to feel part of the place where they are established:

*Workers get together every day with the purpose of getting a job, but also to contribute, to have the voices of each one of us heard. People think that we're here to take other people's jobs. No. We want jobs and we want*



*to contribute something. And we want to see other proposals that are being put forward by the community. For me, this means, that the work that I am doing is to contribute to other people's lives. (Simón, Seattle)*

Gloria, who is part of the staff of Casa Latina, also stresses how her work contributes to the society where she lives now. A migrant herself, she works for the rights of others. She does not have the same rights as a U.S. citizen, but, with her life, she wants to contribute to the country:

*What I do in my job is to advocate. In my work, I advocate for the rights of the immigrant in this country. I travel around the country, we do demonstrations and marches, and I carry the voices of the women that I work with, but I am also part of it. [What I ask is] to work here with dignity, being a good citizen, even if I am not a citizen, but I am a good person that contributes to this country. (Gloria, Seattle)*

In their protests, Hispanic migrants join with other minorities, not necessarily migrants, in pursuit for a more equitable and just society for all. In the following excerpt, Benjamín explain how Casa Latina workers joined a march to support “the black people”, recent victims of police brutality. Benjamín focuses on how the march was for “everybody”, on common problems different minorities’ experience, and on how all should contribute to civic society because everybody is part of the same community:

*This was on the Monday on the day of Martin Luther King. We went on a march for everybody. Black people have been very much attacked recently by the police, they've been killed in other states. So we went to that march to keep them company, we're part of them too, in solidarity with them, because immigrants are also beaten up, and we went to that march because they are part of the community. So that we can all move forward and we can all help each other. And maybe one day, when it's the workers day, they will also come and be with us, so we all support each other in the community. It's for everybody. We're all human. (Benjamín, Seattle, Figure 2)*



Figure 2 – Benjamín, Seattle, thinks that the march is to the benefit of all minorities and discriminated people.

Migrants in Seattle also seem willing to engage in civic participation with a long-term perspective. They know that the changes they want can take time before they can actually be implemented. Nevertheless, they are willing to struggle for what they believe in, for the future generation to come:

*I participated in the protest in 2006, and also last year when I was detained in the immigration detention center in Tacoma. I participated in the hunger strike there and I share what some of the leaders here at Casa Latina say, they say: we have to be part of the battle, we have to be part of the struggle for the rights of Hispanics. Maybe I won't get individually what I want. It's not just about me. I have to participate in the march even if I don't get a direct benefit. But maybe in 20 years or 30 years, other Hispanics will benefit from these changes. It's not just about me. It's for others. (Julián, Seattle)*

Photos, here, play the role of testifying what is happening, and that they are not alone. Moreover, they give migrants the chance to express their proud to be able to be there and engage within the civil society.

## 5 Discussion and Conclusions

In this study we seek to understand how undocumented Hispanic migrants in the US experience authority and security, how their experiences are different at the transition point of border crossing and in an established community in the US, and how this reflects on their information behaviors. By using participatory photography and interviews in a method called “Fotohistorias,” we identified three different perceptions related to authority and security, connected to their legal status, to their fear of deportation, and to activism and contribution to the society. These themes are felt more strongly in one or the other location, and inform



on different phases of transience (a *transience continuum*) of migrants' lives in each moment (see: Figure 3). In Beckers' (1963) terms, these constitute different "sequential" phases of migrants' self- and societal recognition as "outsiders", reflecting a different development of their experience as migrant.

The border is the place of *complete transience*. It is a temporary and precarious place for whom arrives from the South to try and cross, or from the North as recently deported. The ephemerality and the uncertainty of migrants' situations cause frustration, bereavement, confusion. Here, migrants are the most vulnerable. Thus, their information behavior will mirror this status of confusion and ephemerality and distrust. In this precarious place, where what's at stake is migrants' lives and the ones of their families, not much room is left for activism and political participation. Migrants will need more basic information, and they will seek, give and use it very carefully, via trusted sources, so to protect their identities, positions and intentions from both organized crime and public authorities (Newell & Gomez, 2014).

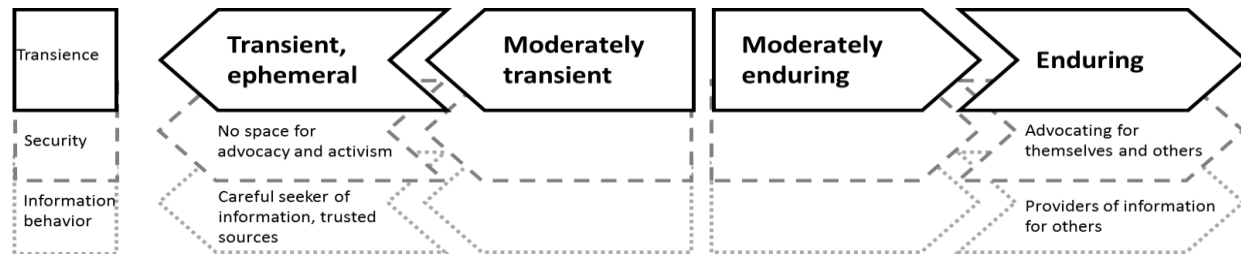


Figure 3 – The *transience continuum* connected to perceptions of security and activism, and informing the information behaviors of migrants in the U.S.

Once on the other side of the wall, migrants do not feel settled and safe at once. They gradually pass from a status of *partial, moderate transience*, where they have a place to eat and sleep (even if a shelter), to get work (even if day labor), and a way to connect to their families, to a status of *moderate endurance*, where they have a secure place to live, can communicate in English and have enough skills to get work. Initially still vulnerable to abuses and at risk of deportation, will pass from careful seeking and giving information, to consuming more differentiated information, being open to learning new skills and helping others do so in this new context. Advocacy starts appearing as a reference to immigrants work reforms and comments on how they feel used by the political game.

A more *enduring* position is reached when migrants obtain documents, allowing them to go out of the country to visit their families. In this phase, they have a place to live, a consistent flow of work, and they often actively help others, becoming providers of information. In this phase, they want to feel part and contribute to their new society, and they strongly advocate for the rights of both migrants and other minorities, aligning to Rawls' idea of justice as equal rights and opportunities for every person in the society, not just for themselves (Rawls, 1971). A trajectory leading from a smaller degree of civic engagement to a larger one is also traced along their transient continuum. An emerging insight that warrants further exploration is that more established migrants, such as those in Seattle, appear to be more engaged in political activism especially if they are affiliated with a service organization such as Casa Latina.

Fotohistorias confirmed to offer a suitable participatory framework to shed light on a social group at the fringe of the society. Its advantages included: being a tool to *access to information on participants' perspective*, one that is often ignored or concealed by the mainstream society, and *to listen to very profound narrations and feelings* on participants' experiences in a way that is unlikely to happen in a short time through interviews alone; enabling participants to reflect about their experiences and to speak out, thus *feeling empowered and valued*; allowing participants to *decide what to bring into the conversation*, without being subjected to researchers' mind-sets; being an *inclusive tool* for participants of different ages and abilities. Hence, we reckon Fotohistorias to be a powerful methodology to elicit information and gain deep insights into human experiences, which can be suitable and adapted to other dimensions beyond migrants to the U.S., and particularly to all those marginalized communities that are normally not encouraged to share, or are even silenced, their perspectives.

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