

## Pro-migrant metaphors and persuasion in journalistic discourses about transit migration through Mexico

*Metáforas pro-migrantes y persuasión en discursos periodísticos sobre la trans migración por México*

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The objective of this paper is to analyze metaphors and their persuasive function in journalistic discourses in favor of migrants in irregular transit through Mexico. To do this, conceptual metaphors used in texts on Central American transit migration in the Mexican national press of 2014 will be analyzed. Likewise, the metaphor is discussed as a mechanism of persuasion through the appeal to emotions.

**KEY WORDS:** International migration, metaphors, persuasion, emotions, and Central Americans migrants.

*El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar las metáforas y su función persuasiva en los discursos periodísticos a favor de los migrantes en tránsito irregular por México. Para su logro se analizan las metáforas conceptuales empleadas en textos sobre la trans migración centroamericana en prensa nacional mexicana del 2014. Asimismo, se discute la metáfora como mecanismo de persuasión mediante la apelación a emociones.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Migración internacional, metáforas, persuasión, emociones, migrantes centroamericanos.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, migrants in irregular transit through Mexico have faced a toughening of immigration control policy as well as a rise in abuses and aggressions against them. Academics and civil society organizations have provided evidence about this situation and consider the actions taken by the government to be inadequate (see, for example, CNDH, 2009; WOLA, 2014; Casillas, 2016; Yee Quintero & Torre Cantalapiedra, 2016).

Given the state of vulnerability experienced by transit migrants in Mexico, most of whom are from Central America, the Mexican press have published discourses favorable to migrants in their publications. On the one hand, they have granted media access to the voices of migrant defenders,<sup>2</sup> whose discourses: i) denounce the bad treatment that migrants experience in transit through Mexico, making the phenomenon visible and sensitizing public opinion; ii) demand measures and actions by the State in order to reverse the situation; in particular, they promote policies in favor of respecting the rights of migrants who transit through the country and guaranteeing their personal safety. On the other hand, several Mexican newspapers have employed discourses in favor of the interests of migrants in their opinion texts –editorial and opinion articles– and have produced reports and news about the dramatic situation of migrants in transit through Mexican territory.

Despite the well-established importance of discourse in the configuration of knowledge that people have on migration issues (Retis, 2004; Casero Ripollés, 2007), these discourses favorable to migrants in the Mexican press have not yet been analyzed, nor has there been an exploration of the key aspects in understanding the role of favorable discourse in the social construction of the media's approach to migration, such as their use of metaphors. Within Mexico –a country of emigration, transit migration, immigration, and return migration–

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<sup>2</sup> In a previous work based on copies of *El Universal* between 2012-2017, it was found that approximately a quarter of the informative texts regarding Central American migration in transit through Mexico have accommodated the voices of migrant defenders (Torre Cantalapiedra, 2018).

research about journalistic discourses regarding migration is incipient (see, for example, Henneby *et al.*, 2017; Torre Cantalapiedra, 2018).

On the contrary, in the countries receiving large numbers of migrants –the so-called “First World” countries– there is a vast literature on journalistic discourses regarding migration. According to several investigations done in the context of rich countries, the tendency of the media has been to generate discourses unfavorable to immigration and immigrants –particularly by referring to migrants as “undocumented” or “illegal”. Frequently journalistic texts privilege the voices of state actors who tend to consider immigration as a problem, negatively qualifying the phenomenon to justify their exclusionary and persecutory immigration policies (Martín Rojo & van Dijk, 1997; Casero Ripollés, 2007).

It is not surprising that most of the research on metaphors in journalistic discourses on migration has focused on texts that represent migration in a negative way (see, for example, Santa Anna, 1999, 2007; O’Brien, 2003; Cisneros, 2008), whereas a smaller number of works have analyzed the metaphors in journalistic discourses that represent migration in a positive way (see, for example, Piñero Piñero & Moore, 2014; Piñero Piñero *et al.* 2014).

Metaphors are relevant in discourses because they fulfill several functions that go beyond maintaining a certain literary style or achieving aesthetic beauty. In this sense, it is worth mentioning the usefulness of metaphors in supporting arguments (González García, 1998; Lakoff, 1999; Santibáñez, 2009; Piñero Piñero *et al.* 2014) and appealing to emotions via discourse (Mio, 1997; O’Brien, 2003; Charteris-Black, 2006); metaphors contribute to the persuasive effect of such discourses –making readers both believe and act in accordance with the discursive tones they are presented with–.

The objective of this paper is to analyze metaphors in journalistic discourses that are favorable to migrants in irregular transit through Mexico, as well as their persuasive function. In this way we seek to explore several novel aspects in the literature on metaphors and migration: first, by dealing with the discourses regarding transit migrants in the national press of the country through which they travel (most of the them did not consider the option to settle in Mexico); second,

by addressing the discourses regarding migrants in irregular transit proceeding mainly from Central America countries with which Mexico has a special historical and cultural linkage –particularly Guatemala (Torre Cantalapedra y Schiavon, 2016)–, in other words, migrants who do not consider themselves as belonging to a distant form of otherness, as Muslims in Europe, or the Latino population in the United States.

For the achievement of the proposed objective, this paper is divided into four sections: first, the metaphor is analyzed as a persuasive mechanism. For this, the proposals of two authors who studied the relationship between metaphor and persuasion in political discourses are highlighted (Mio, 1997; Charteris-Black, 2006) –we emphasize the role of emotions– and the findings are discussed with respect to emotions in discourses surrounding migration. Secondly, we present the theoretical perspective adopted in this work, the conceptual metaphor proposed by Lakoff & Johnson (2001) and examine some of the works that have followed this line of analysis in order to explore the metaphors on migration in the US press. Thirdly, a brief description is offered, regarding the corpus of opinion and news texts selected from *El Universal* and *Reforma* from the year 2014. Fourth, based on the selected texts, we include a qualitative analysis of the conceptual metaphors used in discourses in favor of Central American migrants in irregular transit through Mexican territory, giving an account of the emotions to which their appeal is made.

#### METAPHORS AND PERSUASION: EMOTIONS IN MIGRATION DISCOURSES

The discourses on Central American migration in irregular transit through Mexico, as in other countries, can be organized around the dichotomy: proposals in favor of and proposals against migration and/or migrants. The social actors that are positioned in each of these extremes seek the adhesion of readers to their respective points of view. In this sense, metaphors function as a privileged mechanism in achieving this purpose.

Mio (1997) classifies the findings of the literature on metaphor as a persuasive device in the field of politics in three major categories: 1)

metaphors can simplify and make political events more comprehensible; 2) Metaphors can resonate with the underlying symbolic representations of their receptors; 3) Metaphors can promote emotions or bridge the gap between logical and emotional persuasion.

Regarding this last aspect, Mio (1997) points out that: i) metaphors in politics are designed to promote emotions, to appeal to latent cognitive structures, and are not meant to be analytical or logical; ii) Stone (1988) maintains that since metaphors involve solutions to problems they also imply an advocacy for certain positions. “If you refer to governmental regulation as a *consumer protection*, you are advocating a continuance of these regulations” (Mio, 1997, p.123); iii) Political metaphors allow combining the rational with the irrational, the logical with the emotional.

In a work on political discourses regarding migration, Charteris-Black (2006) recovers analytical elements of a previous work of his authorship in which he links the cognitive and emotional rhetorical potential of the metaphor with the classical concepts of logos (reasoned argument), pathos (appealing to emotions) and ethos (establishing the ethical credentials of the speaker); he argues that all are related to the primary rhetorical purpose of achieving legitimacy and identifies the following roles for the metaphor: communicating political arguments, communicating ideology through the political myth, increasing emotional impact and establishing the ethical integrity of the speaker. According to the author, these roles overlap and perform simultaneously so that metaphors are very attractive to politicians.

The proposals of both authors have several features in common: i) metaphors fulfill several functions in political discourses; ii) they separate the rational plane from the plane of emotions; and iii) they emphasize the appeal to emotions as an essential component in their respective frameworks. In this paper we focus on the ability of metaphors to promote emotions, realizing that they can be used in both pro-migrant and anti-immigrant discourses.

Research on journalistic discourses regarding migration has analyzed the appeal to emotions that is made in journalistic texts, when they are favorable and unfavorable to migrants. According to Rizo

(2001),<sup>3</sup> cited in Retis (2004), the media represent migration in two ways: on the one hand, fear is induced, showing migrants as a threat, on the other, it tends towards showing the more dramatic aspects, which induces a reaction of compassion and mercy in the receptor. Following Rizo (2001), Retis (2004) considers that discourses on Latin American migrants in the Spanish press promote fear of the Colombian population and compassion for the Ecuadorian population.<sup>4</sup>

Migration research focused on metaphors and on political and journalistic discourses has also revealed the capacity they have to generate emotions for or against migrants. Given that anti-immigrant discourses were the most frequent and used many disqualifying metaphors of migration, they have been analyzed abundantly. Charteris-Black (2006) points out that there is a rhetorical link in the discourse of the British right between the concepts of disaster and container – as metaphors for immigration and Great Britain, respectively– and the emotional domain, and, therefore, they have an influence on the generation of powerful emotions such as fear and the desire for protection. O’Brien (2003) finds that the metaphors used to denigrate migrants in the migration debates of the early twentieth century –by dehumanizing or portraying them as a threat– reinforce the conscious and unconscious fears of citizens.

On the contrary, Piñero Piñero and Moore (2014) analyze the metaphors used in the discourses of migrant activists who, in their discourses of solidarity with immigrants, appeal to emotions in favor of migrants and conceptualize the immigrant through the use of metaphors that portray them as people who are in a situation of helplessness and that require support and understanding.

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<sup>3</sup> Rizo, M. (2001). Miedo y compasión: dos estrategias de movilización afectiva en el discurso informativo sobre el inmigrante. *Revista Comunicar*, (2).

<sup>4</sup> Retis (2004) points out that the thematic arguments that associated Colombian migrants with crime and the negative image of Colombia imply a media image that provokes fear and rejection of migrants of Colombian origin; while the representation of the Ecuadorian migrants that generates compassion would be constructed through the reflection of tragic events that they experience in their daily life in Spain, presented in a melodramatic way.

## MIGRANTS AND CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS

Researchers have extensively analyzed journalistic discourses regarding migration and migrants through the perspective of the conceptual metaphor (Santa Ana, 1999, 2007; Piñero Piñero & Moore, 2014; Piñero Piñero *et al.* 2014). The theory of conceptual metaphor (proposed in the seminal work Lakoff & Johnson, 2001, and developed in several subsequent works, for example, Kövecses, 2010) defines the (conceptual) metaphor as the understanding of a conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain, called target domain and source domain, respectively. The conceptual metaphor highlights the existence of a correspondence between conceptual elements constitutive of the domain of origin and destination.

An example of a present conceptual metaphor in migration discourses is IMMIGRATION IS A NATURAL DISASTER.<sup>5</sup> It is noted that a conceptual metaphor, as in the example, does not appear in language as such, but conceptually underlies all metaphorical linguistic expressions<sup>6</sup> used to talk about the destination domain. For example, “We were surprised by the migratory *tsunami*”<sup>7</sup> or “Faced with this migratory *avalanche*, Germany feels besieged.”

Given the abundant literature on conceptual metaphors in the field of migration, collecting and analyzing all of them would exceed the limited space of this article. For the purposes of this work, it will suffice to recover just some of the metaphors proposed and analyzed in the works focused on the contemporary press of the United States, so that they serve as a reference for our analysis.

Santa Ana (2007) analyzes metaphors about IMMIGRATION and IMMIGRANTS in Los Angeles press around the time of the anti-immigrant Proposition 187<sup>8</sup> in California. In his analysis, he finds that the source

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<sup>5</sup> Small caps are used to account for domains and conceptual metaphors.

<sup>6</sup> They are words or other linguistic expressions that come from the language or terminology of the domain of origin.

<sup>7</sup> Bold is used to highlight metaphorical linguistic expressions.

<sup>8</sup> Approved by California voters, it sought to exclude migrants from certain public services such as medical care and public education.

domain that prevails for immigration is: DANGEROUS WATERS, and for the Immigrant: ANIMAL. As the author points out, these metaphors dehumanize the migrant, hiding his condition as a human being and reducing him to the category of animal, respectively.

Piñero Piñero and Moore (2014), among others, give an account of the conceptual metaphors regarding the EXISTENCE OF THE IRREGULAR IMMIGRANT and the HOST COUNTRY. Regarding the EXISTENCE OF IRREGULAR IMMIGRANT, source domains are recalled: NIGHTMARE, RISKY ACTIVITY and CHESSBOARD, which according to the authors, stress the anguish, the suffering, the danger and the difficulty that characterize the lives of immigrants in the United States and promote solidarity with them. As for the HOST COUNTRY, migrant activists will recall various source domains with which the United States is usually characterized, but this time with the intention of denying them: SOLUTION, HOST and DREAM. The authors point out conceptual metaphors that not only seek to export realities of the domain of origin, but also, attitudes, beliefs and emotions with respect to those same realities. Piñero Piñero and Moore (2014) highlight the fact that the metaphors of those who defend and support immigrants in the United States constitute a discourse of resistance, which questions the dominant discourse of the detractors of immigrants.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE CORPUS OF JOURNALISTIC TEXTS

The corpus of journalistic texts used in this work was made up of opinion texts, informative texts and informative texts with interpretation, in the newspapers with the highest national circulation: *El Universal* and *Reforma*. The year 2014 was chosen to carry out the research of both newspapers because in that year the rise in the migration of children and adolescents led to a considerable increase in the number of news pieces referring to Central American migration in clandestine transit compared to previous years (Torre Cantalapiedra, 2018).

For the selection of the opinion texts, all pages of both newspapers dedicated to opinion were reviewed in all copies published in 2014, a total of 63 texts (47 from *El Universal* and 16 from *Reforma*). The selection of informative texts –news, testimonies, interviews and

reportage– and informative with interpretation –chronicles and reports with interpretation–was done in the same way, with all pages of the Nation and States sections, totaling 281 texts (124 from *El Universal* and 157 from *Reforma*).<sup>9</sup>

Metaphors abound in the opinion texts, which seek readers' adherence to certain proposals; metaphors are at the service of the authors of these texts to help in this task of persuasion. In this sense, the election of 2014 allowed for a greater abundance of opinion articles and editorials, especially during the months of June and July.

In informative texts and in informative texts with interpretation, due to the question of objectivity –“information in the strict sense does not include the journalist's personal opinions, let alone value judgments” (Grijelmo, 2014, p.29, own translation)– and the need for a clear, concise and direct style of journalistic texts in the daily press, few novel metaphors are used. They mainly appear when the speech of others is specifically mentioned in the reports. On the contrary, some *dead* metaphors, those that have been lexicalized and their use is widespread, are used repeatedly. This is the case of the expressions “wave” and “American dream” in the analyzed texts.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE PRO-MIGRANT METAPHORS IN DISCOURSES IN FAVOR OF CENTRAL AMERICAN MIGRANTS IN TRANSIT

From the *American dream* to the *Central American nightmare*: explaining the migration of Central Americans through metaphors about the country of origin

The constructed representation of different migrant groups has a lot to do with the images generated about their countries of origin (Retis, 2004). The texts favorable to Central American migrants emphasize the factors that cause emigration in the countries of Central America:

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<sup>9</sup> In the case of *Reforma*, it must be considered that the States section is presented as a subsection of the Nation. Likewise, although both newspapers do not necessarily follow the same rules for classifying the news within these two sections, the content in both publications is similar.

poverty and violence; appealing to the compassion and solidarity of the readers, to promote social and political action in favor of migrants. Thus, the favorable discourses to migrants take up new domains such as NIGHTMARE, WAR and HELL, which allow us to understand and highlight the terrible situation that Central Americans experience daily in their countries of origin, and that propels them to emigrate.

The nightmare is the “dream in which horrible things happen, or where someone experiences distressing or terrible situations” (DEM COLMEX, 2018), therefore, resorting to this source domain justifies that migrants, in the absence of another type of solution, escape from that recurrent and frightening dream that envelops their lives in the countries where they were born:

*Los estudios demuestran que esa migración masiva de la infancia provocada por el miedo a perder la vida en manos de los cárteles, de pandillas, por violencia intrafamiliar y violencia institucional. No van atrás de un sueño, solo huyen de la pesadilla* (Cacho, 2014, June 30).

[Studies show that the massive migration of children is caused by the fear of losing their lives in the hands of the cartels, gangs, intrafamily violence and institutional violence. They do not go back from a dream, they just flee from the *nightmare*] (Cacho, 2014, June 30).

The most terrible aspect of the domain of dreams, the NIGHTMARES, is confronted with the idea of the *American dream*. Given that we want to emphasize that the reasons for mobility are the circumstances that Central Americans live in the countries of origin, some authors consider demystifying the *American dream* in the first place, an expression that epitomizes the seductive power of the US territory for migrants, but that is currently being questioned:

*Escuché a expertos en el tema afirmar que esta crisis [de los menores migrantes] ya no se explica más por la atracción del sueño americano, sino por la expulsión desde el colapso de los países de origen* (López Portillo, 2014, July 8).

[I heard experts say that this crisis [of migrant children] is no longer explained by the attraction of the *American dream*, but by expulsion, following the collapse of the countries of origin] (López Portillo, 2014, July 8).

The *American dream* is the promise of a better life for migrants and their children. This expression has become commonplace in the news, so it appears constantly in the texts analyzed as motivation for the migration of Central Americans and citizens of other countries into US territory.

*Por insólito que parezca, el INM ha detectado a infantes que vienen de España y China, con la esperanza de alcanzar el sueño americano a través de un insólito y peligroso viaje* (Editorial, 2014, July 6).

[As unusual as it may seem, the INM has detected infants coming from Spain and China, hoping to reach the *American dream* through an unusual and dangerous journey] (Editorial, 2014, July 6).

We recall the conceptual domain of DREAM to build a stylized image of what it means to live in the United States, a better life for everyone, or even, “the place where dreams come true” –the advertising slogan of the Disney World Campaign for its amusement parks– conceived, therefore, as a country with an irresistible force of attraction for migrants.

In contrast, the *Central American nightmare* would reflect the promise of a dreadful life for many Central Americans and their descendants if they stay in their countries of origin: the absence of a future.

*Para muchos de esos jovencísimos migrantes, la vida era imposible en sus países de origen. Muchos viajan tras haber sido amenazados, en términos aterradoramente concretos, por la violencia. No se van porque aspiren al sueño norteamericano, se van porque tienen que huir de la pesadilla centroamericana* (Krauze, 2014, June 30).

[For many of these very young migrants, life was impossible in their countries of origin. Many of them travel after having been threatened, in fright-

eningly concrete terms, by violence. They do not leave because they aspire to the *American dream*, they leave because they must flee from the *Central American nightmare*] (Krauze, 2014, June 30).

The conceptual domain of WAR is used to understand that violence is suffered by Central Americans and can be better understood if we consider that “es Centroamérica *zona de guerra*” (Garduño & Corona, 2014, July 15). Central America is a *war zone*, therefore, migrants are fleeing from the *war*:

*“La gente está viviendo en una zona de guerra y está desesperada por sacar a sus hijos de la zona de guerra”, aseguró Jeffrey Sachs, director del Instituto de la Tierra de la Universidad de Columbia* (Garduño & Corona, 2014, July 15).

[“People are living in a *war zone* and are desperate to get their children out of the *war zone*”, said Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University].

In this context of widespread violence that puts people’s lives at risk, the war euphemism par excellence, “collateral damage”, acquires a metaphorical significance that refers to migrant children who are the most affected by this situation and who are forced to migrate because of the *war* in Central America.

*Convirtieron a los niños migrantes en los primeros “daños colaterales” de la descomposición de Centroamérica* (Camil, 2014, July 18).

[They turned migrant children into the first “*collateral damages*” of the decomposition of Central America].

The use of the source domain of WAR is not trivial, since it is linked to and facilitates the consideration of those move as refugees. It is not surprising that Sachs retrieves elements of this source domain in his interview, to point out that:

*Uno de los criterios para hacer frente a las situaciones de emergencia que generan migración en los países de Centroamérica y en otros, tendría que ser la ampliación del concepto de refugio e incluso pensar en la figura de refugio temporal* (Garduño & Corona, 2014, July 15).

[One of the criteria for dealing with emergency situations that generate migration in Central American countries and others, should be the expansion of the concept of refuge and even to think of the figure of temporary refuge].

As can be seen, the metaphor of war is very interesting when discussing the concept of refugee, a term that is closely linked to considerations of violence in the country of origin. In any case, the conceptual metaphor of WAR serves the purpose of accounting for the harsh situation faced by Central Americans in their countries of origin and thereby appealing to the compassion and empathy of readers. This same effect is also achieved by recalling the source domain of HELL.

Of the three domains analyzed in this section, this is the one that can be considered to have a higher degree of lexicalization –in this case, the incorporation of meanings of metaphorical origin into the general lexicon. According to the Mexican Spanish dictionary of El Colegio de México, “infierno” (hell) has the following two meanings: “situation in which very intense sadnesses [“penas”] are suffered or that someone lives experience set of painful circumstances” (DEM COLMEX, 2018, own translation) and as the “situation or place where there is a lot of agitation, violent disagreements and constant aggressions” (DEM COLMEX, 2018, own translation). The second meaning is emphasized in the analyzed texts, understanding Central America as a type of hell from which thousands of Central Americans want to escape.

*No hay poder humano que convenza a nadie de quedarse en el infierno si hay alguna mínima posibilidad de escapar, aunque sea peligrosa, casi suicida. Mientras que las organizaciones criminales sigan hundiendo a Centroamérica en la anarquía, los centroamericanos van a buscar la manera de sobrevivir* (Krauze, 2014, July 14).

[There is no human power to convince anyone to *stay in hell* if there is any chance of escape, even if it is dangerous, almost suicidal. While criminal organizations continue to plunge Central America into anarchy, Central Americans will look ways to survive].

## DENOUNCING ABUSES AND AGGRESSIONS AGAINST TRANSIT MIGRANTS IN MEXICO

Texts that are favorable to migrants denounce the abuses and aggressions against migrants, resorting to the source domain of HELL and that of TREATMENT OF ANIMALS. In this case, the aim is to make readers feel compassion, disgust and shame about the treatment of Central American migrants who transit through Mexican territory.

The domain of HELL is also used to understand Mexico as a transit country, for Central American migrants, in which they suffer frequent aggressions and abuses by immigration authorities and organized crime.

*Podemos aspirar y debemos exigir que México conceda un trato digno a los viajeros; es una vergüenza nacional el infierno que pasan cruzando nuestro territorio* (Aguayo, 2014, June 25).

[We can aspire and we must demand that Mexico grant a decent treatment to travelers; *the hell* they experience when passing through our territory is a national shame].

Another paragraph refers to Mexico as “corazón de las tinieblas”, which brings us to the translation into Spanish of Joseph Conrad’s work, *Heart of Darkness*. In this novel the journey of Charlie Marlow in search of Kurtz –a leader of the exploitation of ivory– is narrated, a journey that for its protagonist constitutes a true *descent into hell*. Mexico, as the heart of darkness, can be understood as the setting for the most terrible and inhumane actions against migrants.

*Acompañado por su amigo-novio Juan, y seguido de cerca por el indígena maya Chauk, Sara se adentra en ese corazón de las tinieblas en que se ha convertido México para los centroamericanos [...] (Volpi, 2014, June 15).*

[Accompanied by her friend-boyfriend Juan, and closely followed by Chauk, an indigenous Mayan, Sara enters into that *heart of darkness* that Mexico has become for Central Americans [...].

Texts in favor of migrants recover the conceptual domain of TREATMENT OF ANIMALS in speeches that denounce the inappropriate, abusive and violent manner in which Central American migrants in transit are treated by immigration authorities and other state agents, organized crime organizations, *coyotes* and other non-state agents. Resorting to the TREATMENT OF ANIMALS appeals to certain feelings in readers such as disgust, outrage and shame. Migrants are *prey* to the *hunts* of authorities and criminal groups:

*Las autoridades mexicanas dedicadas a la cacería de niñas, niños y adolescentes que quieren cruzar la frontera, les entregan a albergues y asociaciones con acuerdos con el DIF* (Cacho, 2014, June 30).

[The Mexican authorities dedicated to the *hunting* of children and adolescents who want to cross the border, give them to hostels and associations with agreements with the DIF].

*‘Cazan’ a migrantes en empalme de tren* (Jiménez, 2014, June 12). [‘*Hunt*’ migrants in train junction].

*Muchos de los menores provenientes de Centroamérica que intentan llegar solos a Estados Unidos son “presa” de mafias y son hostigados por autoridades* (Chacón, 2014, June 30).

[Many of the children from Central America who try to reach the United States alone are “prey” to mafias and are harassed by authorities].

The criminal organizations and the *coyotes* treat the migrants as if they were a *cattle* business.:

... siempre seguidos por las “estafetas del crimen” que a lo largo de toda la ruta “ordeñan” los ingresos de los migrantes (Aleman, 2014, July 2).

[... always followed by the “couriers of crime” that along the route “milk” the income of migrants].

*La mañana del miércoles pasado en Houston, Texas, fueron encontradas 115 personas indocumentadas en condiciones de ganado: hacinadas, despojadas de sus ropas, sin agua ni comida* (Editorial, 2014, March 21).

[Last Wednesday morning in Houston, Texas, 115 undocumented people were found in cattle-like conditions: overcrowded, stripped of their clothes, without water or food].

When they are arrested, the migrant children are *caged* as if they were birds or wild beasts.

*Encerrados en jaulas, hacinados sin acceso a baños, sin comida y apenas un poco de agua, niños, niñas, y adolescentes de Honduras, Guatemala y El Salvador miran a las cámaras con el cansancio de quien ha recorrido miles de kilómetros entre hambre, sueño, miedo y agresiones* (Cacho, June 23).

[*Locked in cages*, cramped without access to toilets, food and just a little water, children, and adolescents from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador look at the cameras with the fatigue of those who have traveled thousands of miles, experiencing hunger, sleep, fear and aggressions].

*En la frontera, los niños migrantes son tratados como criminales sólo porque quieren reunirse con sus padres, porque aspiran a una vida mejor, y se les interna en jaulas, auténticas jaulas en improvisados galerones ...* (Volpi, 2014, July, own translation).

[On the border, migrant children are treated as criminals only because they want to reunite with their parents, because they aspire to a better life, and are placed in *cages*, *real cages* in improvised galleys ...].

In the journalistic texts we analyzed, both migrants themselves and members of civil society give an account of situations in which migrants in transit through Mexico are not treated with the dignity that should be given to any human being.

*Franklin, otro muchacho salvadoreño, de ceja tupida y vestimenta formal tipo oficinista, aguarda también la salida del tren. Ante la cámara se muestra huraño y le cuesta trabajo asumirse como usuario de La Bestia. Al opinar sobre la nueva prohibición gubernamental de abordar el ferrocarril, se expresa en tercera persona: “No pueden prohibirlo”, dice. “No son animales para que me los tiren de arriba a la fuerza, no pueden” (Castellanos, 2014, July 31).*

[Franklin, another Salvadoran boy, with bushy eyebrows and formal attire like a clerk, also waits for the train to leave. In front of the camera, he is sullen and finds it difficult to assume that he is a rider of The Beast. When commenting on the new government prohibition to deal with the railway, it is expressed in the third person: “They cannot prohibit it,” he says. “They are not animals to be pulled up by force, they cannot”].

*[Sergio] Tamai [director y fundador del Hotel Migrante] fue denunciado por el INM, debido a que el año pasado bloqueó el paso de un camión que pretendía deportar a 27 migrantes centroamericanos. Los delitos que se le imputan son obstrucción de las vías de comunicación y sabotaje, entre otros. “Sí, lo hice, y si me quieren meter a la cárcel que lo hagan. Porque transportan a los centroamericanos peor que a los animalitos”, reta Tamai a las autoridades (Sánchez, 2014, August 3).*

[Sergio] Tamai [director and founder of the Hotel Migrante] was denounced by the INM, because last year he blocked the passage of a truck that wanted to deport 27 Central American migrants. The crimes that are imputed are obstruction of communication channels and sabotage, among others. “Yes, I did, and if they want to put me in jail, they can do it. Because they transport the Central Americans worse than the animals”, Tamai challenges the authorities].

The metaphor THE TREATMENT THAT IS GIVEN TO MIGRANTS IN TRANSIT IS THE TREATMENT OF ANIMALS, can be considered as the antithesis of the conceptual metaphor IMMIGRANTS AS ANIMALS. While the latter dehumanizes migrants by lowering them to the category of animals, the former shows the inadequate treatment given to transit

migrants by not treating them as human beings. The discourses that resort to the metaphors of the TREATMENT TO THE ANIMALS, are discourses of denunciation of the terrible situations that the migrants suffer, of the violations of their human rights are reported and / or where a human treatment for the migrants is demanded, literally.

#### WHAT HAPPENS WITH METAPHORS ABOUT TRANSIT MIGRATION?

Texts of migration activists refer mostly to Central American transit migrants –people– and not so much to Central American transit migration –the migratory *flow* in the abstract. In this sense, being in favor of the rights of migrants in transit and guaranteeing their personal safety does not necessarily mean being in favor of not restricting migration in transit.

Water metaphors are those that predominate in the journalistic texts analyzed to refer to migration in transit. The word “wave” is used metaphorically to refer to the crisis of migrant children; while other, more devastating movements of water appear on rare occasions, see, for example, avalanche, flood, tide or *tsunami*.

*“No es un oleaje natural; es un tsunami que nos ha sorprendido. No estábamos preparados ni México, ni Guatemala ni Estados Unidos. Es horrible. Nos tiene saturados”, admite [José Mariano] Castillo [Embajador de Honduras en México] (Garduño, 2014, July 4).*

[It is not a *natural swell*; It is a *tsunami* that has surprised us. We were not prepared neither Mexico, nor Guatemala nor the United States. It is awful. It has us saturated”, admits [José Mariano] Castillo [Ambassador of Honduras in Mexico].

The use of these terms referring to *dangerous waters* in the analyzed texts, in principle, was not so much a way to understand this crisis of migrant minors in terms of catastrophe or threat to States –in contrast to discourses in the past and recent US press–, but a way of subtracting responsibility from the authorities justifying the impossibility of preventing the phenomenon or achieving its control.

One of the most prominent discourses in the Mexican press considers that the necessary conditions of development in the countries of origin should be achieved so that emigration is not the “only way out” for a large part of its citizens. The following sentence synthesizes the content of these discourses:

*“la clave para solucionar esta y todas las crisis migratorias no está en hacer la vida difícil en el país de destino sino en hacer la vida posible en el país de origen, mucho más tratándose de niños”* (Krauze, 2014, July 14)

[“the key to solving this and all migratory crises is not to make life difficult in the destination country but to make life possible in the country of origin, much more in the case of children”].

A similar position was presented from the academic sphere by the philosopher Thomas W. Pogge (2010) who argues that political efforts should focus on eradicating poverty in developing countries rather than increasing the number of poor and oppressed people admitted in rich societies.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

In the framework of the so-called crisis of the migrant minors of 2014, the analyzed opinion texts and information texts from the newspapers *El Universal* and *Reforma* have provided significant coverage of the discourses regarding the denunciation of the aggressions and abuses that are committed against the migrants in transit through Mexico, as well as discourses in favor of unconditional respect for the rights of migrants. In these discourses, especially in opinion texts, metaphors have been used to achieve the adherence of the reader to certain positions.

The pro-migrant metaphors in the analyzed texts seek, as one of their primary functions, to increase the appeal to emotions –such as compassion, disgust and shame– in discourses in favor of migrants; and in so doing they resort to source domains such as NIGHTMARES, WAR, HELL and TREATMENT TO ANIMALS.

Metaphors in favor of migrants support discourses that combat dehumanizing anti-immigrant representations produced, to a large extent, by metaphors against migrants. In this way, the metaphors of the conceptual domain of the treatment of animals face metaphors that consider migrants as animals.

When anti-immigrant metaphors appear in texts favorable to migrants, it is usually because they are going to be scrutinized in a critical or ironic way. For example, in the following case, irony is utilized when referencing two of the most classic metaphors present in the journalistic discourses of the American press, especially the one most opposed to immigrants, IMMIGRANTS AS ANIMALS and IMMIGRATION AS AN INVASION:

“... *familias enteras en Texas se han manifestado para que esa plaga no se aproxime a ellos, y el gobernador Perry incluso ha llamado a la Guardia Nacional, el Ejército del país más poderoso del mundo, a luchar contra esta amenaza, esta legión de niños indeseables, niños silenciados, niños invisibles*” (Volpi, 2014, July 27).

[“... entire families in Texas have protested so that this *plague* does not get near them, and Governor Perry has even called the National Guard, the Army of the most powerful country in the world, to fight against this threat, this *legion* of undesirable children, silenced children, invisible children].

In this work metaphors have been explored from the point of view of their emission; future research should address how they are effective to persuade readers through the appeal to emotions.

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