



Migration and Well-being: Visualizing Migrants' Health Processes and Psycho-sociocultural Coping Mechanisms

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ASA 2021 Virtual Annual Meeting

*Section Sociological Practice And Public Sociology - Panel On Sharing And
Visualizing Sociological Results*

Abstract

In our activist research project on the impact of migrations on health and well-being for both migrants and the relatives who stayed in their places of origin, focused on Latin American migrations to the Global North and back, we resorted to the employment of visual materials to ensure wide accessibility and enhance comprehension beyond language, nationality and degree of education. Together with a visual artist (who was also a migrant involved in the project), illustrations of the conceptualizations resulting from the research were created based on migrants' input, and a bilingual website was developed to include these drawings with clear and concise explanations and significant quotes from migrants in written and audio formats. The open, free of cost, and widespread circulation of the knowledge collectively created through this activist study was one of our original main goals, and in order to achieve it, the creation and publication of visual, graphic, multilingual and auditive sources were fundamental. The presentation of these materials in community workshops has been not only well received and valued as a key to disclose critically important knowledge about migration and health widely but also proven to be vital in our efforts to bridge academia and community and do public sociology.

About the project

- ▶ How Ecuadorean migrations to United States, Spain and back affected the physical and mental health of migrants and relatives who stayed behind contextualized with experiences of similar Latin American migrations to the Global North?
- ▶ Transnational, sociological, intersectional (feminist and critical race and migration studies), Latin American critical epidemiology, critical medical anthropology, Latinx sociology

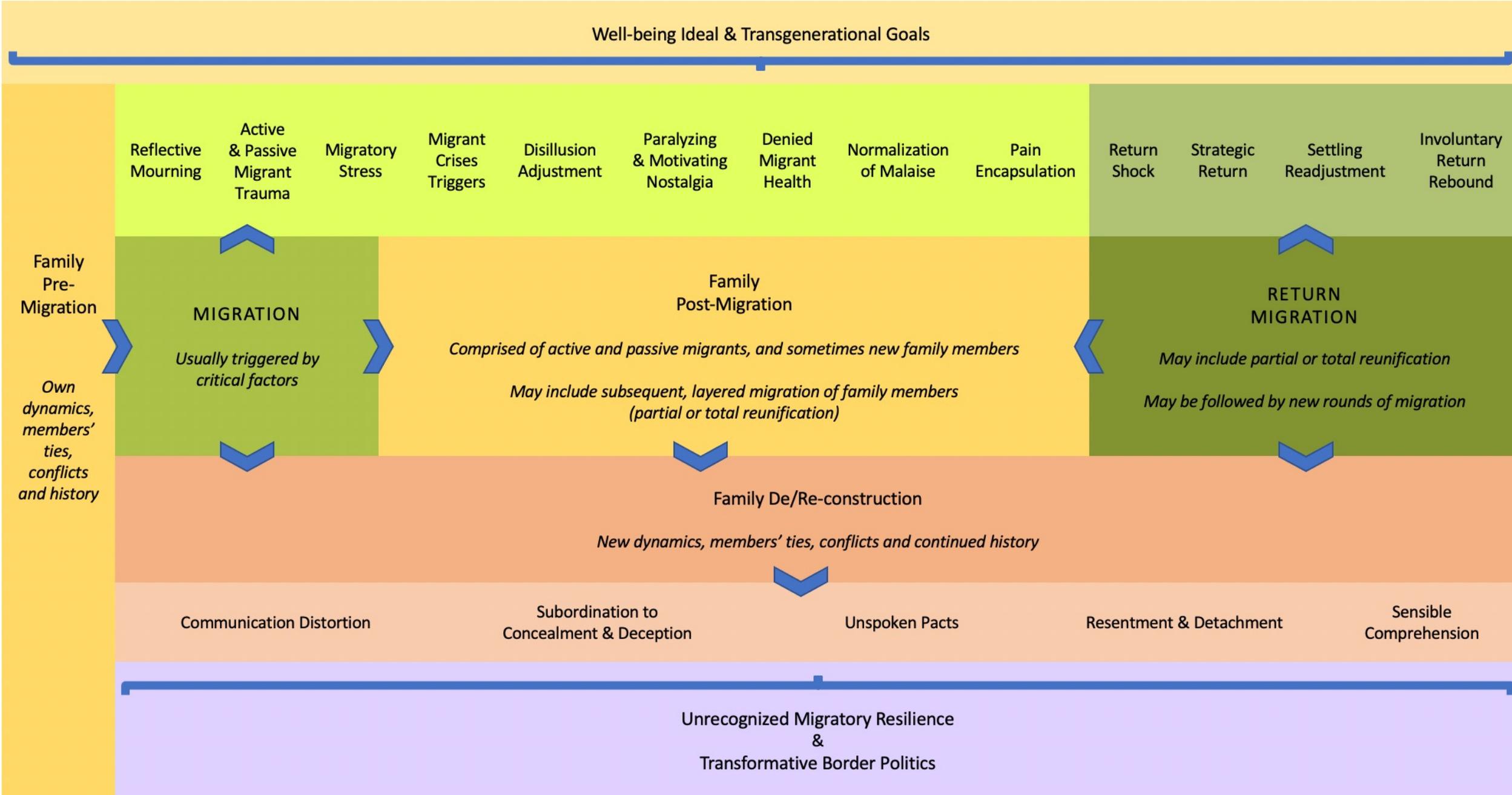
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- ▶ Antiracist & decolonial: *Migrants as protagonists*
 - ▶ Activist scholarship → research with/for migrants & advocates to advance migrants' well-being
 - ▶ Contribution to grassroots organizing and social movements for migrants' rights/health rights

What we learned

Activist, mixed-methods multi-sited field research (2015-2019) led to the conceptualization of a series of migration-related health processes and psycho-sociocultural coping mechanisms

- ▶ Provided a textured take on active and passive migrants, respecting their complexity as human beings, acknowledging their intelligence and emotions, and highlighting their agency, stressing the “protagonism implied in the decision to migrate” (Agustín 2006, 73).

Chart 1: Global Concept Map



Health Processes

Reflective Mourning

Active Migrant Trauma

Passive Migrant Trauma

Migratory Stress

Migrant Crises Triggers

Return Shock

Unrecognized Migratory Resilience

Processing the Effects of Migration

Paralyzing Nostalgia

Motivating Nostalgia

Denied Migrant Health

Normalization of Malaise

Pain Encapsulation

Well-being Ideal

Transgenerational Goals

Disillusion Adjustment

**Psycho-
sociocultural
coping
mechanisms
(1)**

Active/Passive Migrant Relationships

Family De/Re-construction

Communication Distortion

Subordination to Concealment and Deception

Unspoken Pacts

Resentment and Detachment

Sensible comprehension

**Psycho-
sociocultural
coping
mechanisms
(2)**

Return Migration

Strategic Return

Settling Readjustment

Involuntary Return Rebound

Psycho-
sociocultural
coping
mechanisms
(3)



The open, free of cost, and widespread circulation of the knowledge collectively created was one of our original main goals:

- ❖ design of visual, graphic, multilingual and audio sources
 - ❖ *collaboration with migrant artist*
- ❖ presentation of these materials in community workshops and trainings
- ❖ website (*still in development*)



“

When I was first exposed to this research, I saw my story reflected and it helped me personally mostly because I realized that what had happened to me was not a rarity. Then, as an artist I wanted to collaborate in disseminating how our relatives' and our health is affected by migration so we can be better prepared to deal with all the challenges that come up, understand what might have happened to us, and heal. The drawings are a means to connect us with our inner difficulties about which we are not always able to talk about. They are an expression of our frustrations or vicissitudes as migrants. Also, the illustrations help in portraying migrants' voices; voices that are usually silenced or hidden. They can work as mirrors where we may be able to see ourselves reflected, and then, they can help us engage in a healing process (Abraham Salazar, Personal Interview, New York, 2017).

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SALUD & MIGRACION

La migración afecta la salud física y mental tanto de los migrantes como de los parientes que permanecen en su lugar de origen. Este sitio está dedicado a explicar cómo sucede y que se puede hacer para prevenir y tratar los problemas de salud derivados de la migración.

¿Por qué?

Aprenda por qué nuestra salud se ve afectada por los procesos migratorios



¿Cómo?

Descubra los múltiples procesos de salud y mecanismos derivados de las migraciones



Experiencias

Comparta confidencialmente su propia experiencia como migrante o familiar de migrante



El Proyecto

Lea acerca del estudio realizado sobre este tema y quienes lo desarrollaron



Recursos

Acceda a materiales educativos sobre salud y migración
Agende una charla o taller



Contacto

Comuníquese y comparta preguntas, sugerencias e ideas sin compromiso ni riesgo



PORTAL | [¿Por qué?](#) | [¿Cómo?](#) | [Experiencias](#) | [Proyecto](#) | [Recursos](#) | [Contacto](#)

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MIGRANTES ACTIVOS Y PASIVOS

Usualmente cuando pensamos en la migración y los migrantes, nos referimos a las personas que se han ido a vivir a otro lugar, olvidando que es lo que le sucede a los miembros de la familia que se han quedado en el lugar de origen.

Sin embargo, ellos también sufren los efectos de la partida de su familiar.

Por lo tanto, al observar los efectos de la migración en la salud física y mental, tenemos en cuenta tanto a los migrantes activos (los que se marcharon) como a los migrantes pasivos (los que se quedaron).

MIGRAR

Desde los inicios de la historia de la humanidad hemos migrado. Sin embargo, la decisión de partir a tierras desconocidas no es fácil ni arbitraria. En general, migramos para encontrar mejores condiciones de vida para nuestra familia y nosotros mismos. Al migrar, los que se quedan absorben pasivamente las dificultades de la partida de su familiar, mientras que el familiar que se fue atraviesa activamente los desafíos de la misma. Si bien hoy en día los avances tecnológicos facilitan la movilidad y comunicación a distancia, el costo material y emocional de la migración continúa siendo alto.

[ATRÁS](#)



SALUD & MIGRACION

— ● Procesos en la Salud

¿Cómo se modifica
nuestra salud con
la migración?





Reflective Mourning

A process that active and passive migrants go through after departing that includes grieving what was lost or left behind in the country of origin and the hardships that may have arisen during transit and upon arrival, as well as reevaluating the reasons that led to migration and the opportunities that a new phase in their lives may bring



“ At the beginning, one goes through a mourning process. Loneliness is felt strongly. It is a personal process of grief because of what was left behind. If one goes far away from where one has always lived, is like something dies inside. Something new is born too (Pedro, Personal interview, New York, 2017). ”



Migrant Crises Triggers

Life events that generate a crisis in active and/or passive migrants that put into question their migratory condition

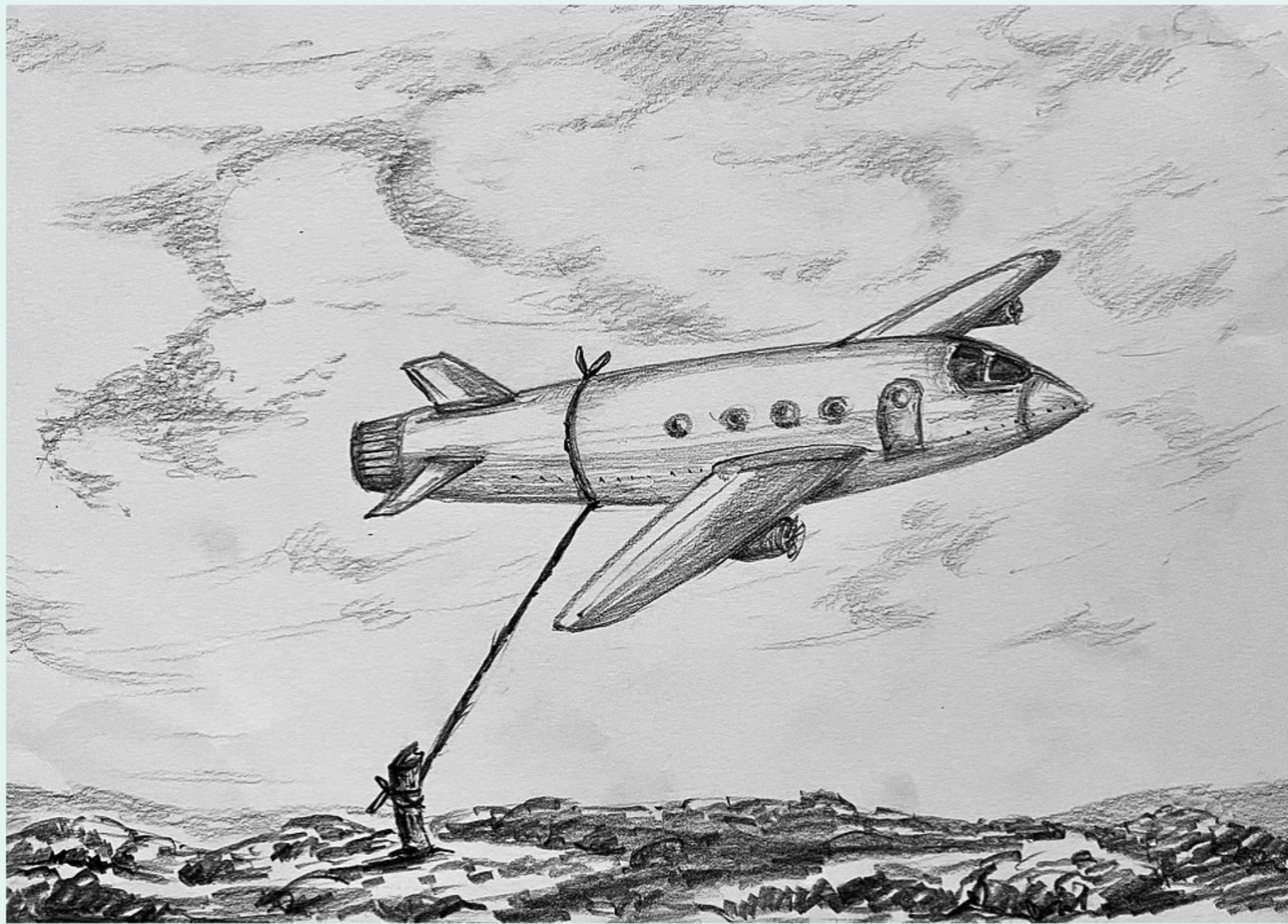


““ My life didn't make any more sense. My daughter graduated from college, got married and was going to give birth to her first child, my only grandson. And me? Away? Missing out. I was depressed. And anxious. I was separated and my best friends were either ill or had passed away. I had to rethink it all. I decided to retire and migrate to be with my daughter and grandson (Nuria, Personal Interview, New York, 2016).

””

— • Desafíos Migratorios

¿Cómo lidiamos con los desafíos que nos presenta la migración?





Disillusion Adjustment

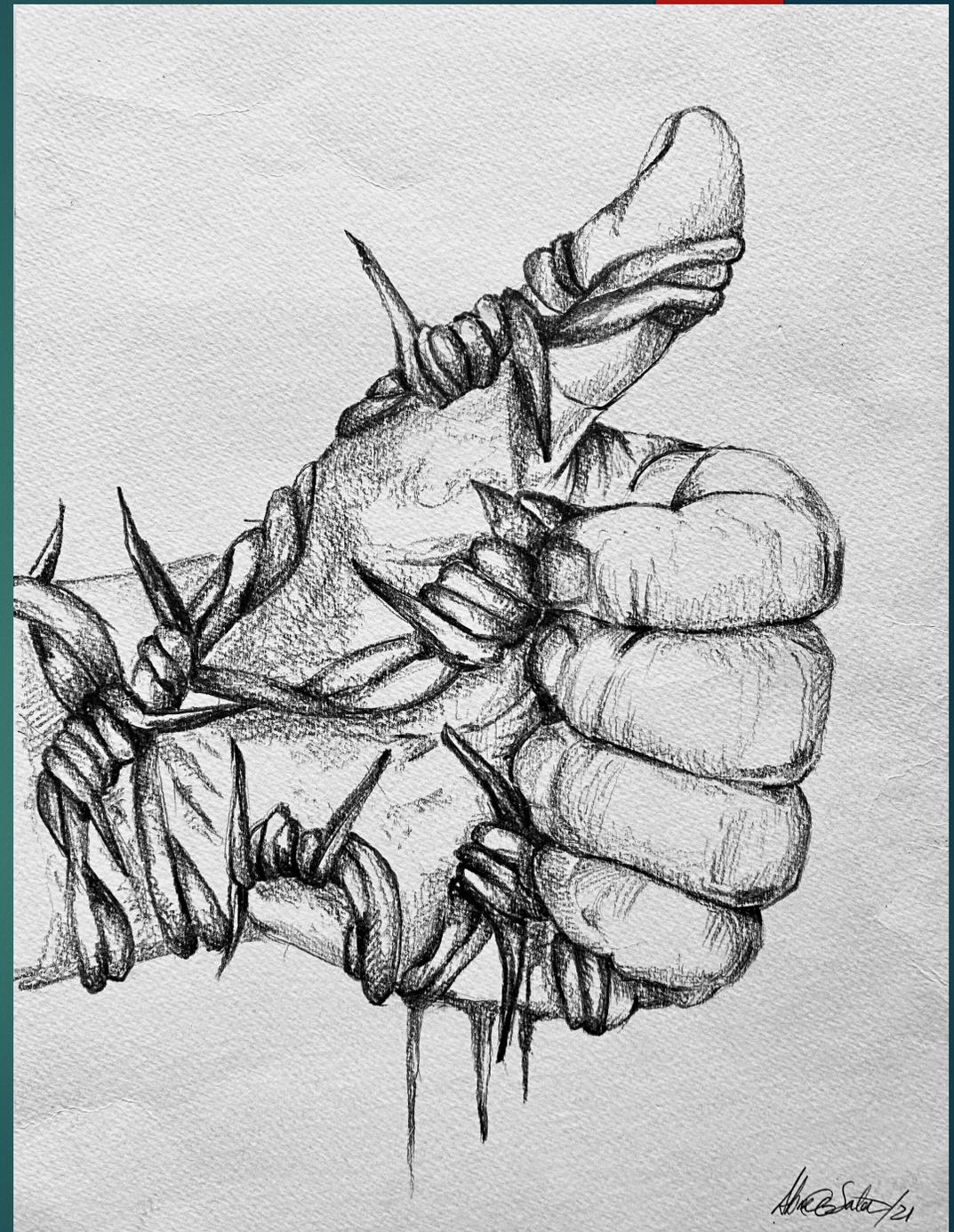
Process of adaptation to the reality of living as an active migrant, which frequently does not match pre-departure expectations and projections.



““ We were illusioned with going to the US because there were better economic opportunities, and we were economically broken after the crisis in Ecuador. And yes, like his relatives told him, as soon as he arrived, he started to work. But it was hard, very hard, because he had to work long, many long, hours. But he had to adapt to the crude reality of being a migrant worker away from home and the family (Ethel and Clara, Personal Interview, Loja, 2016).””

Normalization of Malaise

Active and passive migrants' understanding of health problems as intrinsic to the migratory condition resulting in their minimization and thus, mistreatment.

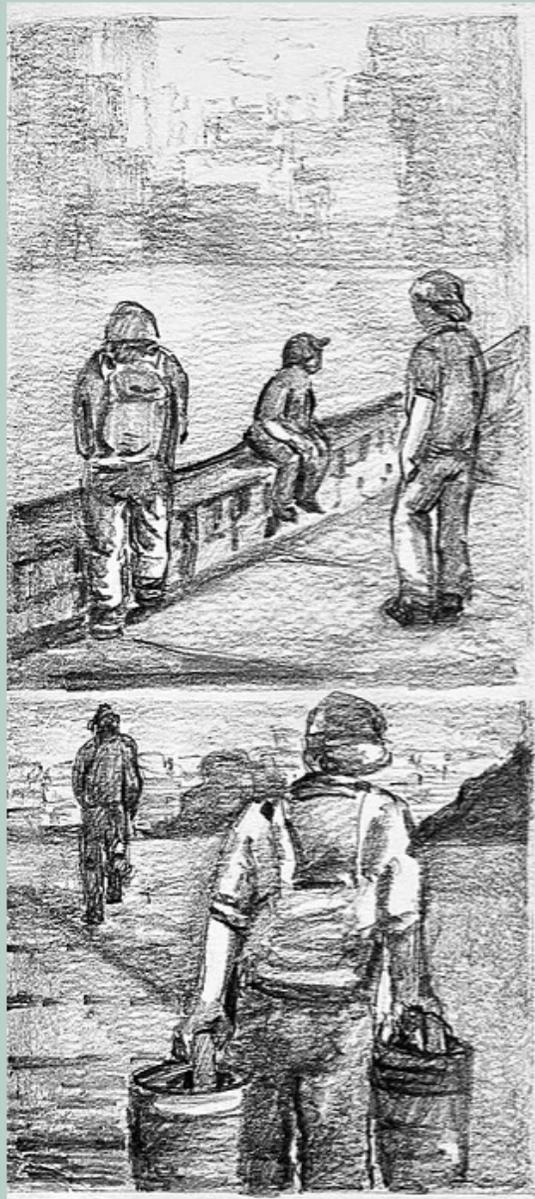




“ What happened to us what because we felt the absence of our parents while they were abroad. But we knew why they had sacrificed, and we did not want to create another worry for them. We adapted to the idea that anything that happened was normal, that these were all normal processes that we had to overcome to move forward. (Lara, Group Interview # 4, Loja, 2017). ”

• Relaciones y vínculos

¿Cómo se modifican las relaciones entre migrantes activos y pasivos?



David G. 21



Family De/Re- construction

Migrants' family units are untangled and refashioned with the departure and/or return of its members based on the new dynamics generated by the migratory process.



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It took me about twenty years to overcome the trauma of my father's departure from Ecuador and the process of getting used to living in the US away from my mother, sister, niece and grandmother, with our father's rejection and mistreatment and our older brother's limited time to care for us while he worked non-stop to make ends meet for all of us here and there...All my intimate relationships, my first boyfriend and later on, the man who I married and then divorced, were signaled from my feelings of abandonment and desperate emotional need, emotional dependency. It has been due to doing therapy that I've realized of this and began a process to be at peace with who I am and where I am (Lesly, Personal Interview, New York, 2019).

”

Subordination to Concealment and Deception

Active and passive migrants' systematic acceptance of partial and hidden information, and deception as an unavoidable aspect of living as a migrant family.





It was very sad to be an emigrant....Sometimes I would cry and think about returning to Ecuador. But

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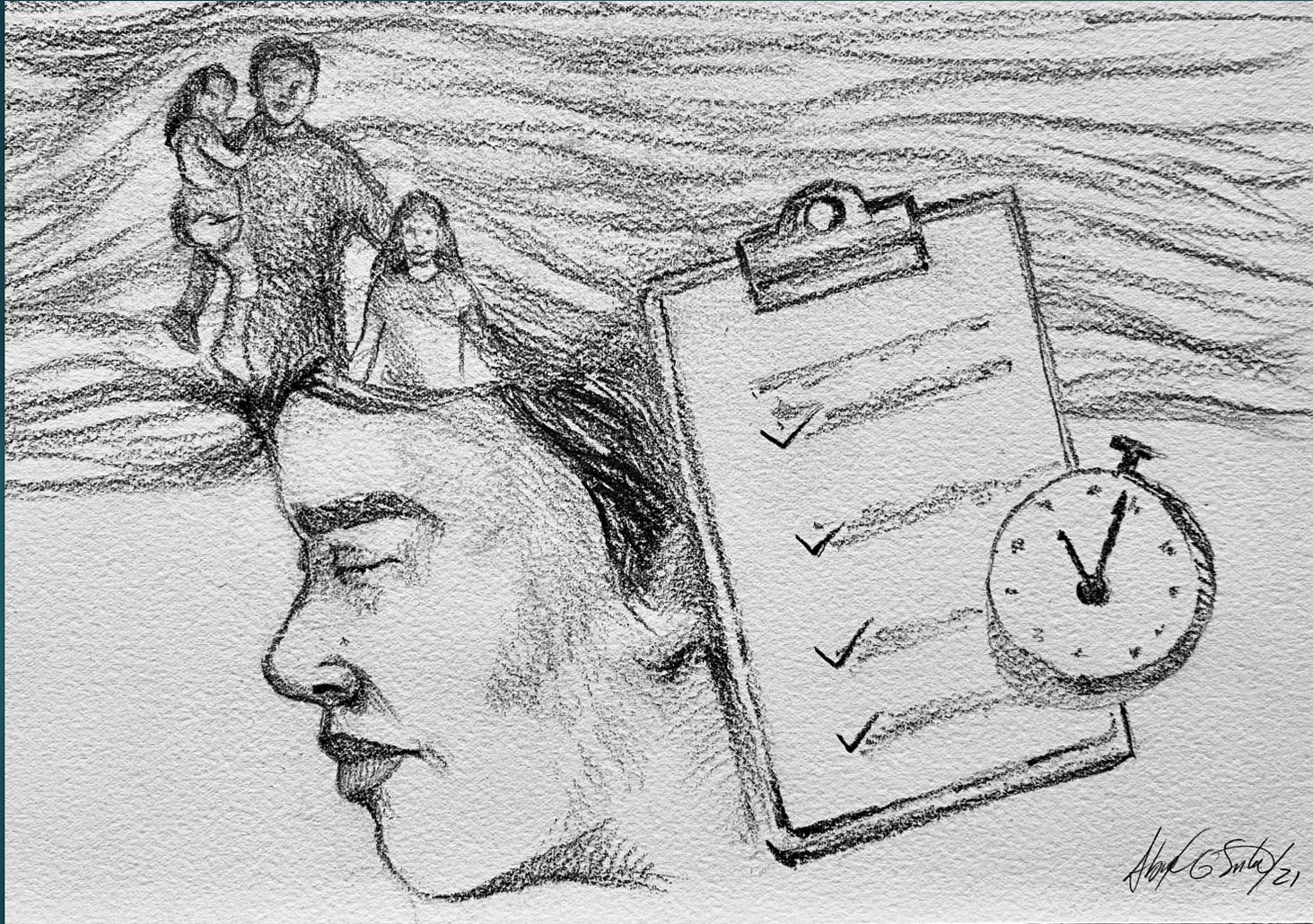
I learned how to be a migrant worker, I stayed and worked very, very much to achieve my goal to save money to build a house for my daughters...I liked to play volleyball a lot, so I used to play in cement courts in Madrid. One time, I broke my leg. I never told my family. They always asked me if I was doing all right, and I would always tell them that I was fine. My daughters would ask me when I was going to come back home, crying, and I would tell them that I was coming back soon...But I return when they had grown up, seven years later (Fernando, Group Interview # 3, Loja, 2017).

”

• Retorno

¿Cómo nos afecta la migración de retorno y posible reunificación familiar?





Strategic Return

Return migration resulting from a reflective and instrumental decision-making process based on transgenerational goals, well-being ideal, and current circumstances in destination and place of origin.



I made the right decision. My children needed me with them. Even if economically, we had difficult times after my return, emotionally and psychologically, it was the best I could have done. You cannot compare passing through economic hardships to missing out being with your children as they grow up. Even if my children were little, they felt my absence very much. When I arrived, they saw me as a stranger...so it was like starting from scratch, to earn their love and affection, it was very hard...But I don't regret returning because I was able to be with them again and see them grow up (Gisella, Group Interview # 3, Loja, 2017).



Settling Readjustment

Overcoming the impact that return migration caused in active and passive migrants by being at peace with the efforts and consequences of the migratory process, including its effects on the family, and the current reality of their homeland.





“ We were used to living in a house full of women, and now, it all changed completely with my father here...But now, three years have passed since his return and we all feel more adapted. We even miss him even if he's out of the house for a while...And, all of us, my dad, mom, grandma, sister and I, are feeling better; we are healthier and in better spirits (Luis and Camila, Personal Interview, Loja, 2016). ”

Conclusion

- ▶ The degree of comprehension achieved through this project can only attain a valuable meaning if it is translated into the promotion of collective health and the betterment of migrant communities
- ▶ Sharing the knowledge co-produced widely and accessibly is fundamental
 - ▶ Direct action (workshops, trainings, TV, radio, social media, website) and publications
- ▶ Limitations (reach, policy, budget, politics)

Thank you!

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