

No Son Libres Allí/ They Are Not Free There

Proposed for Part 2 of the “Language and Migration: Experience and Memory” Symposium

Abstract

In the context of multi-generational mobility and migration, this proposed paper analyzes how young people talk about the ability to *ser libre/be free* when considering their migratory options. The data is drawn from 10 months of ethnographic field work in Guatemala with indigenous youth from areas where an estimated 40-60% of community members are living abroad or have lived abroad at some point. In this context, migration is often seen as the logical next step for young people. Despite broader social pressures to do otherwise, the youth I worked with want to stay in their home communities. Informed by conversations with their loved ones abroad, the stories of people who have returned home, and the tangible impact migration has had on their communities, these youth redefine what it means to *be free* in order to justify non-migratory aspirations and question dominant economic and social logics of migration. I argue that while “cultures of migration” are often assumed to encourage migratory aspirations, they can also produce an urgent will to stay, and young people’s discourse around migration becomes a critical locus for understanding these processes.

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