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"Growing up, I would never dream that I would see a big fence". Extrait d'un récit de vie à la frontière États-Unis / Mexique

Cléa Fortuné

- 1 Entretien réalisé par Cléa Fortuné le 18 novembre 2018 à Douglas, avec Adrián, la trentaine. Il est né et a grandi à Agua Prieta, et vient quotidiennement à Douglas, de l'autre côté de la frontière. Il est directeur du service clientèle de Café Justo, une coopérative qui travaille avec les producteurs de café du Chiapas et dont les bénéfices des ventes de café leur sont totalement reversés afin qu'ils puissent subvenir aux besoins de leur famille sans avoir besoin de migrer aux États-Unis. Café Justo est né d'une initiative lancée par Mark Adams, qui fait partie de l'organisation humanitaire et presbytérienne Frontera de Cristo, basée à la fois à Douglas et Agua Prieta. Celle-ci a pour but de construire des ponts entre les frontières plutôt que des murs, de comprendre les causes et trouver des solutions aux migrations, et d'éduquer les citoyens états-uniens aux problématiques de la frontière États-Unis/Mexique.
- 2 Dans cet extrait d'entretien, Adrián aborde différents thèmes, tels que la vie à la frontière, ce qu'elle est devenue avec les changements qui ont découlé du renforcement des mesures sécuritaires, du problème de l'obtention des visas ou encore des organisations criminelles transnationales.

CLÉA FORTUNÉ: Could you tell me where you were born, how it was to grow up where you were born, and your experience with the border?

Adrián: So I was born and raised in Agua Prieta (AP), which is across Douglas, Arizona, and my parents are both migrants. My mom is from the state of Nayarit. And my father is from Jalisco. But they met here in AP working in a local maquiladora. And I was born and raised here a few years ago (laughs) and growing up... it was ... we didn't have a border. I don't remember growing up with a fence. I remember that because I attended elementary school that was just two blocks from the actual line

but there was no fence at all. There were some parts in this ... along the border where you found ... how do you call it? Wired fence, the ones they use for cattle. So I do remember the summers, when we went out of school, every day we would walk across the border to go to the local swimming pool which is right here in Douglas. We didn't go and cross the border. We would just walk and sometimes the Border Patrol would see us and do nothing. Sometimes they would hum, if you were walking by, you know, the Border Patrol approaches and says "hey where are you guys coming from?" and we said AP. And they go "do you have a visa?" and we said "no, not really" and they were like "well OK, let me just give you a ride back". So sometimes we were actually hoping for the Border Patrol to find us and give us a lift back to the border. So I didn't keep that in my mind, having the fence. Or feeling the community divided. To me going to Douglas is like going to the next block. I didn't have the sense of division between us, that we shouldn't cross over there because we were not welcomed. Many of my friends were living here on this side [in Douglas]. Sometimes after the swimming pool I would go visit them and you know get back [to Agua Prieta]. So this was my experience growing up. And then we started seeing this fence growing and growing and being built. And yet it didn't really stop people from crossing. I would see a lot of people just jump over the border wall, go to wherever they want to go.

C.F.: Because it wasn't that high?

A.: No, it wasn't that high. This fence was built back in 2014 I think or 2011; and then they were building the fence like all the way to the city. And that was it. You go over 30 miles there, there was no fence again. So you would just go around it. You could just walk. Because back then I think the Border Patrol was more focused on people smuggling stuff, drugs. But they were really not worried about people crossing undocumented. Talking with my mum and my grand mum they told me they didn't actually have a visa for many years. And they still would come and buy groceries here. We used to have a Safeway they would go to, not through the fence, they actually would go to the Port of Entry and say to the border agent "we're just going to Safeway to get some groceries and then come back" and the border agent would say "yeah ok". It was that easy because again they were not targeting people but drugs.

C.F.: You're talking about 20 years ago?

A.: No, I would say maybe 25-30 years ago. And for my grand mum maybe 40 or 45 years ago. So the border has changed a lot, like you start seeing this wall being built. It's like you have a neighbor and your neighbor and you walk freely to his front yard and will say nothing to you and welcome you. And then you start seeing this neighbor building a bigger, bigger and bigger fence, then you get the message that you're not wanted or welcomed anymore. It's the same feeling here now. So that was my experience growing up. I have seen many changes in this community. It is not as friendly, welcoming as it used to be. I had a visa back then. I always had a visa. Since I was born here at the border, I never had a problem, my parents never had a problem getting a visa for me or for them. And I have never had the need to cross undocumented, which is a huge blessing. Because a lot of people are dying because of that. So that's pretty much my experience. Now, it's so militarized. I mean, I would never dream growing up that I would see a big fence with all the cameras, sensors in the ground for people walking and crossing undocumented, I would never even believe it if someone had told me that.

C.F. : Does it have an impact on your life or you're just aware of it because you're involved in migration issues and you know what happens at the border?

A.: Maybe when I was 17, when I was about to graduate from high school, I started to see all these people coming from different parts of Mexico. I mean lots of people just passing through because this was again pretty easy to cross for people who were undocumented. So we started seeing all these people wearing their backpacks, walking. So we thought maybe there are many jobs over there and people are just going. When I talk to my father I ask him "I wonder why you never went to the US to get a job" and he said "there are good jobs here that provide us with money so there was no need for me to go".

C.F.: He worked in maquiladoras?

A.: Yes, he worked in maquiladoras for many years, maybe 30-35. Then he started his own business. He said growing up and living here, he never got the desire or the need to go to the U.S. Even though there were many of his friends who invited him to come over and work with them, because it was just that easy to find a job.

C.F.: Like where?

A.: Construction. I mean, landscaping, gardening, whatever. And that's why people are migrating. So that has changed. And then I became part of the Presbyterian church. And the Presbyterian church and the binational ministry of Frontera de Cristo, they really focus on migration. And then everything starts making sense to you and you start to be more aware of what's really happening, why it's happening, so you want to get involved and do something. You want to help people. That's why I became part of Café Justo. [...] I saw that Café Justo to me is one of the greatest responses to migration. At the end, people are migrating because there are no sufficient jobs or fair wages to provide for a decent living for their families, and they hear from a neighbor/friend/family that there are job opportunities here, so that's why they're migrating. Café Justo tries to address that. Because people are migrating for economic reasons. If they have a decent living in Mexico they will stay with their families. Otherwise, they're gonna be broke. I see Café Justo not really as a job but as a calling and also a way that I can do something [...] So we're trying to do what we can to help others. That's why, when I talk about my job, I don't feel like I'm working because it's something I love so much. And I don't need to migrate because I have a great job that fulfills me economically, spiritually and gives me a sense of service to others. What else can I wish for? [...]

C.F.: And do you think you got involved in migration because your parents migrated?

A.: No, not really. I got interested in the job because... OK, so when I finished school I had some uncles working in Phoenix in a golf course. Mowing the grass. And so they invited me. And I said well I can make some money. So I went and spent two years working in Phoenix. I was about 19 or so. And I was working over there and making good money. I mean enough to send back to my parents. And by this time I wanted to save. And so my father, his factory moved to Indonesia because of lower salaries compared to Mexico. So suddenly my father didn't have a job but he had enough money to start a business. So he called me and said "I need you, come home and help me start the business". I said yes of course. So I quit my job over there and moved back to AP. And my father started his business, which is a printing shop, you know for T-shirts, for marks, for everything, sport uniforms. So I worked with him for almost two years and his business was doing pretty good so I said "you know what? I

need to ... my uncles are again inviting to go to Phoenix where I make good money" and I wanted to save to buy a house or whatever. So I was about to leave when I heard in the church that there was an opening for this position. And I got really interested in what they were planning to do. So I said well "maybe I have the capacity" and what they're planning to do sounds like fun. It sounded appealing to me and just cool. I got the job so I didn't have to go back to Phoenix, which my mother was really happy about. Even if Phoenix is only four hours from here. And again I had been very blessed of not having to walk through the desert for three or four or five days. I had a visa so I was able to cross legally and come back to visit them. But still, you miss your family. That's another plus of this job. I'm next to my family. [...]

C.F.: When you cross to Douglas, how do you cross?

A.: I have a tourist visa that allows me to cross and visit. I'm not allowed to work here [...]. When I cross – and I cross pretty much every day – I have never ever been stopped and asked "hey why are you crossing every day?", "what's your deal here?". Never.¹ I would say stuff like I'm going to [...] to the church, to Walmart. [...] I mean once in a while [the Customs and Border Protection agents] would send me to secondary inspection, but that hardly ever happens to me. And I know most of them, they would say hi to me. They will not be very strict when they see me. "Hey how are you, where are you going today?". Especially the old ones. They will be more friendly than the new ones. The new ones are more like "by the book". And the old timers are more like "hey how are you doing? Where are you going over here?" more like they want to be polite. They don't really want to know what I'm doing.

C.F.: Is it easy for you to get a visa?

A.: Yes, because I was born and raised in AP, and I have a job which I've been doing for 14 years now. It's a struggle for people who don't come from AP, but from southern states of Mexico like Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz. Then they need to be here, stay at a job, have a property that they own for at least 2 or 3 years before being able to apply and get successful. Something that sucks in that process is that you can meet all the requirements but when you go to the interview and the agent is not in a good mood, he's gonna reject you. It's based on their own criteria. They ask you a lot of questions or they don't ask you anything. That's what really is frustrating for people. If the agent is not in a good mood but you have all the papers, and he says no... you're done. You can't apply until the year after and you lose all the money you've invested. [...]

C.F.: You need it to cross the checkpoint as well when you go to Tucson and Phoenix?

A.: When I go further than Tucson, I need to get a special permit, which is different from the visa. And there is another mini-interview that you do at the customs, and they ask you like proof you have a stable job, the checks, and maybe a bill, the direction of the place you're staying at when you travel. And then they take your picture, fingerprints, and then you get it for six months, it expires, you have to renew. The good thing is that you only get charged \$6 for it. And it's quick, you just show up, bring your papers and that's it. As soon as you cross the Port of Entry, the office next to it.

C.F.: How was it to live in Agua Prieta as a kid?

A.: Growing up, when I was in high school, I knew a couple of friends who would be enticed to drop people to cross stuff over here. Like "hey, if you cross this, I will give

you enough money to buy you a nice pair of shoes". And they would do it. I never did this. I was afraid of those... Maybe I was a coward. Growing up thanks to God and my father I never felt that I was lacking something. I never had to do those things because my father was not providing me with clothes, shoes, etc. He was always fulfilling so... But other friends maybe not. And that's what they did. And again, growing up they were not targeting young kids, they were targeting people more suspicious or another kind of profile. And then when the smuggling people business began, some friends would do that too, cross people through the desert, leave them in some point, then go walk and collect some money and they would be really excited about making this money in just three or four days. They could be in a really bad shape when they came back, burnt by the sun, dehydrated. But it never happened to me. [...] I was approached many times... Well not many times because they kind of knew that I wouldn't do it.

C.F.: How did they know that you wouldn't do it?

A.: Because, I mean, they know who would be in need. And they will approach them, have them to do stuff. It's like someone offers you drugs to try, if you say no the first time, it's likely they won't insist. But if you say yes the first time, then you're hooked. [...] Because the first time is free, the next time is not and you're gonna be hooked. Some friends of mine in high school, they were doing drugs. [...] It never really appealed to me. Maybe because I had so many people around me that were hooked on drugs. They were not fun. Why would you do it if then you're begging for money in the street and not in really good shape? [...]

NOTES

1. Note de Cléa Fortuné : ce commentaire ne semble toutefois pas partagé par une majorité de Mexicains ou Mexicains-Américains

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