

Testimonies and Migrant Struggles: (In) Mobility in the Americas and COVID-19

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Cross-border migration and mobility policies as dynamics of exclusion

International, “irregular” and cross-border mobilities from the south and towards the global north are one of the features of the dynamics of exclusion related to neoliberal globalization (Brettell and Hollifield; 2015), and they occur in many countries and various regions of the world (CONAPO, 2020 & 2019). Migrations, although they have been linked to various processes of development and spatial and temporal growth of capitalism and European colonialism in previous historical stages, have increased in a sustained and generalized way in recent times, and are the product of different neoliberal structural transformations and of regional economic integration, within the framework of international free market trends (Castles, 2008).

In this vein, neoliberal globalization, and its constitutive dynamics (increased impoverishment, increased inequality, growth and concentration of wealth, productive decline in southern countries, capital accumulation, economic crisis, and contraction of the labor market and of the offer of labor options, among others), have configured and defined the production dynamics of various scenarios / places of expulsion of migrant groups in different parts of the world (Castillo Ramírez, 2018). Contexts of expulsion (in the global south) that, for decades and annually, have expelled thousands of migrants outside their localities and national states of origin, and force them to migrate to countries (generally in the global north), with the objective of increasing and their existence situations (Castillo Ramírez & Galindo, 2018).

An alternate perspective: migrants and border production

In this complex scenario, efforts are necessary to think about migration, not only from its structural causes and the dynamics of expansion of contemporary capitalism, but also from the perspectives and visions of migrants themselves. In this vein, the (In) Mobility in the Americas and COVID-19 project has a continental character and brings together researchers from more than twenty countries from various regions (South America, Central America and North America). The purpose of this project is to address the (im) mobilities, the experiences (struggles of) migrants and the production of borders in the context of the pandemic.

This project is located and positioned from a different perspective in relation to mobility and migrants. This perspective is distinguished by the relevance of the various scales (of national, regional and continental types) in which international and irregular migrations develop and unfold, but it is also framed within the explicitly political reading of cross-border mobility and the centrality of migrants, within the framework of the institutions, subjects and conditions that constitute and produce these migrations.

In this line of ideas, the analytical reflections of this project have focused on understanding what happened from the logics and dynamics of: (a) migrants (their strategies, practices, actions and discourses, etc.); (b) the countries / nation-states (and their different policies on migration, from control

and containment, to criminalization and irregularization, among others); (c) organizations, groups and social collectives linked to migration and migrants; (d) and, last but not least, the reciprocal constitutional dynamics between migrants, migration policies (of national states) and pro-migrant social organizations / collectives.

As a result of this, and identifying the cross-border mobilities and the policies that try to “control” the migrants (which unfold in different scalar frameworks of national and regional type), one of the contributions of this project has been the recognition of a group of dynamics that are similar to a large part of the countries of the Americas, and that allude to the role of national states and the way in which they “manage” / “control” cross-border migration in the context of the pandemic (in 2020) . As part of these dynamics are the securitization (closing) of borders (between countries and regionals), hypervigilance and control of populations in mobility, processes of irregularization and dispossession of rights (towards migrants), the impasse of the asylum procedures, the construction of confinement and waiting territories, among several others.

But perhaps it is more important to emphasize that one of the most relevant bets of the (In) mobilities project is the effort, from the different countries / nodes that participate in the project, to build an epistemological and political scaffolding whose axis is the subjects in movement. It is about producing the protagonist of the movements / struggles of migrants (their adversities, experiences, strategies, and struggles) within the exclusive, complex, and adverse cross-border migratory processes that occur in different contextual frameworks of policies of the (in) mobility, in the scenario of the Covid 19 health emergency, and its repercussions (national, regional, continental and global).

In this sense, the design, implementation, and operation of the polyphonic mapping of this project is a deliberate exercise to make visible the socio-political subjects in geographic mobility (in their transit, displacement, and immobility in and during different borders and countries). Thus, what is intended is to reflect, from below (the local) and explicitly, the dynamics of migration through the migrants’ own perspectives and voices. With this, and in an exercise of reciprocal collaboration based on solidarity and mutual respect, it is a matter of recovering and disseminating the experiences, mobilities and different struggles of migrants as socio-political subjects.

In memory of Guido Münch Galindo, who, with a deep anthropological sensitivity, made ethnography a way of life and a meeting place with indigenous peoples.

References

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