

Between mobility as a political strategy and the production of closed borders

# **Migrants in regional and global contexts of criminalization**

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## **The production of forced cross-border and irregular mobility**

Neoliberal globalization, with its characteristic reforms towards the free market and economic deregulation in different regions of the world, has fostered processes of capital accumulation and concentration of wealth, with their respective consequences in the disproportionate increase in inequality and the increase of poverty, with a special presence in the countries of the global south (Robinson and Santos, 2014). These complex processes of deterioration of the material conditions of life / existence produced diverse and very frequent contexts of expulsion of hundreds of thousands of people, who, faced with very adverse economic and political situations (lack of employment, insufficient wages, poverty, violence and insecurity, environmental impacts), decided to leave their homes (Brettell and Hollifield, 2015; UNHCR, 2016; Castillo Ramírez, 2018). This happened at the center of a paradox. While neoliberal national states and global companies, on the one hand, promoted intense and generalized flows of goods and capital throughout the world (Delgado et al., 2009), on the other hand, they multiplied borders and strictly restricted the cross-border spatial mobilities of impoverished human groups deprived of their livelihoods and subsistence (Mezzadra, 2012; De Genova et al., 2020), and this because of the structural reforms of said economic model / system.

These complex processes between contexts of expulsion (with structural causes), forced migrations and policies to control and contain cross-border mobility, are especially present, in addition to Africa and Europe, in the regions of Central and North America, with massive migrations from the Northern Triangle of Central America and towards the United States (EU) (Castillo Ramírez, 2019). However, US geopolitical pressure is an important element in understanding the relationship between migrations from the Northern Triangle of Central America and recent border and migration policies in Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala.

Particularly during the Trump administration there were three very clear processes in these countries:

- (1) The multiplication of walls and closed and militarized borders, produced as material and political devices to stop and dismantle migrant populations and groups bound for the United States.
- (2) Contexts of criminalization of foreigners on the move and without immigration documents, and within local, national, and regional dynamics of irregularization.
- (3) And, finally, this had and has effects on processes of violence, precariousness, and exclusion on migrants on their routes and transits through the different countries (of origin, transit, and destination).

These three processes previously described, and even despite the decrease in cross-border migrations during 2020, were accentuated in the context of the covid pandemic<sup>19</sup>.

## **Mobility as a strategy and political action**

Although migration occurs in frames of exclusion and constant violence (because it is produced by structural causes), also, and from the perspective of individuals in cross-border mobility, migrations can be seen as recurring strategies / actions to overcome very difficult situations. difficult. In particular,

facing contexts of expulsion that they did not produce, but that they do suffer. The fact that migrants, through their spatial mobility across various borders, show a certain political capacity for action and intervention (of a non-institutional and non-governmental nature) to try to change / improve their lives, and this within very precarious and adverse material orders of existence.

In this sense, migration is a way of addressing different institutions and situations, and in different scalar orders (local, national, and regional).

- 1) This interpellation in the country of origin resides in the affirmation of the migrants for not accepting the “I do not guarantee anything” from the governments of their national States of origin. Remember that these are life contexts characterized by precariousness and exclusion (of basic social rights: work, decent wages, basic socio-material development), and an open and generalized insecurity and violence. And, in these scenarios, migrants, de facto, position themselves as subjects who, despite various obstacles, seek to transform and improve their living conditions.

- 2) Regarding the interpellation with the countries of transit and destination, in the face of the exercises of irregularization and criminalization on the part of the national States through which they cross and to which they arrive (to seek employment options), migrants assume as subjects with diverse rights and a legitimate and unquestionable desire for a dignified life, through their willingness to work and contribute socially to the places of destination.

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