

A Historical Perspective on migrations in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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Abstract. This article aims to offer a brief analysis of the historical events surrounding the migratory process in Latin America and the Caribbean, from the arrival of Europeans in the 15th century to today's scenery, highlighting the problem of selectivity regarding the profile of the desirable and the undesirable immigrant. It is argued that there is a continuity of coloniality as a framework for differentiating immigrants based on race and for establishing anti-migratory policies to this day.

Keywords. Migrations. Latin America. Caribbean.

1. Introduction

Migration is an intrinsic part of the history of humanity, and the construction of societies is, from the very beginning, due to in and out migratory movements from one continent to another by land and sea. In Latin America, in particular, migration constituted and still constitutes one of the biggest milestones of the socio-political and economic changes in the region. Since the arrival of Europeans in the territory in the 15th century, until the implementation of the colonial system, leading to the independence processes of the early 19th century, and finally the emergence of globalization and neoliberalism - between the late 19th and 20th centuries -, migrants played a central role in Latin American social dynamics, becoming essential in the development of economies and markets. In all cases, environmental, economic and political factors proved to be decisive in understanding the departure and arrival of these populations.

Despite being organic, migration is still seen today as a problem to be overcome by major economies and world powers. Either by creating or implementing laws to control entry and stay in countries, or by seeking to overcome the possible causes of emigration - such as hunger, poverty, and war. It appears, then, that "really, as Bauman claimed, the right to mobility is today more elective and dependent on social class than before. National border controls and international cooperation in migration management have become highly restrictive" [1]. In other words, it appears that there is selectivity regarding the profile of desirable and encouraged migrants, with a view to feeding global

production chains, in contrast to the undesirable profile.

This elucidates another face of this problem, that concerns the imagery behind the migrant and the construction of anti-migratory narratives, which are used as tools to discourage the migratory phenomenon. Indeed, the trajectories, profiles and stories of these migrants end up being made invisible. And, contrary to what is defended and sustained by these views, it is projected that "development will not reduce migration. If there were less inequality (and therefore less poverty and human insecurity) there would not be less migration, but it would occur in very different circumstances" [2].

2. Historical migration flows in the region

In order to explain the causes that stimulate the emigration of certain populations from their countries and territories of origin, and that influenced the choice of their receiving societies, the migratory phenomenon in Latin America must be fundamentally analyzed through two analytical lenses: the global social-historical and the specifics experienced in the region. In this sense, international migration occurs due to different variables, such as environmental disasters, wars, violence, or economics [3].

One of the specificities of the migratory system in the region is its peripheral and dependent character,

which started with its asymmetric insertion in the world system after the implementation of the colonial system.

The first migration flow, which began with the arrival of Europeans on the American continent during the 15th and 16th centuries and with the conquest of America, also brought the adoption of extractivism and specialization in the production of raw materials for the economic system of the colonies. At this time, the mass migration of African and Asian populations was promoted with the aim of providing labor – in conditions of slavery or semi-slavery – for the European occupation and administration of the Latin American, Antillean and Caribbean colonies. It is estimated that in the period from 1501 to 1866 approximately 10 million captives landed in Latin America in the French, Portuguese, and Spanish colonies, among others from different regions [4].

The second flow started at the end of the 19th century and intensified until reaching its peak in the beginning of the 20th century (1890-1930). It is pointed out that “between 1881 and 1915, about 31 million immigrants arrived in the Americas, 4.2 million to Argentina and 2.9 million to Brazil” [5]. In the global context, the first phases of the expansion of capitalism – promoted by the industrial, agricultural, and demographic revolutions – were being experienced at this time, resulting in a greater demand for labor to meet the demands of the new economies on the rise in Latin America.

In the global context, the first phases of expansion of capitalism – promoted by the industrial, agricultural and demographic revolutions – were currently being experienced, causing a greater demand for labor to meet the demands of the new economies on the rise in Latin America. Another influencing factor is the emergence of nation-states and the construction of narratives and images to promote national sovereignty.

Turning to the regional scope, there was a search for the “whitening” of the population that was rescued by a civilizing project of national “progress”, and which was based on the conception that the immigration of a certain white European social stratum and “superior” that would help advance modernization. Thus, European immigration was the flagship of the incentive programs and laws created by Latin American countries at the time; as in the Brazilian case, where it was considered an instrument for racial regeneration and civilization, in addition to serving as a key piece in the maintenance of the country's agrarian-exporting economic system. Therefore, migratory flows from countries such as Spain, Portugal, England and Ireland have become essential in the national development of the new Latin American economies on the rise.

In a third moment, which takes place from the second half of the 20th century (1930-1960), international migration loses strength, opening space for a more regional and border migration associated with regional migration. Inserted in a scenario of

economic crisis and liberalism, as well as post-war, a tendency of migratory restriction and an even more intense filtering of the “ideal” profile of the desired migrant was observed on the continent, with marks of xenophobia and racism [6]. In Latin American countries, there was, on the other hand, the consolidation of the primary export model in the economy and the adoption of the industrialization model by import substitution, which had the effect of demographic and economic growth, as well as generating a trend towards modernizing the urban centers. Such changes in the local socioeconomic situation were also observed in the increase in rural exodus to cities, as well as intraregional migrations [7].

Finally, the fourth migratory phase takes place at the end of the 20th century, starting in the 1970s, until the beginning of the 21st century, being initially marked by the neoliberal crisis, followed by the commodity boom and the growth of social indicators, and later by the crisis. In 2008, Latin America experienced an inversion in its migratory flows, in which its populations migrated to European countries, such as Portugal, Spain and Italy, and to other economic powers such as the United States and Japan. On the other hand, South-South and intra-regional migrations (from Africa and Asia) continue to grow.

During this period, migration incentives were curbed in certain countries in the region, such as Argentina and Brazil, through the creation of anti-migratory laws, such as the Law on Undesirables, which was created in 1907, but only enters into force when from 1920. This law highlighted the xenophobic image of foreigners as a “scapegoat” for the social problems that emerged in Brazilian metropolises. In Argentina, the Residency Law, created in 1902, provided that any foreigner considered dangerous was eligible for expulsion and entry prohibited without the need for a court order [8].

Later, in the 1930s, in Brazil, the “2/3 Law” was implemented, which aimed to value the Brazilian worker against the migrant, since the legislation stipulated that in establishments with three or more employees, a proportion of 2 should be maintained. /3 of Brazilian workers to 1/3 of foreigners.

Some causes that can be pointed out are of a structural nature, such as the deepening of economic inequality caused by the implementation of neoliberal policies in the region between the 1970s and 1980s (known as the “lost decade”), as well as dependence on countries of the global North. At the same time, it is clear that other demographic, social and economic factors ended up creating a dependence on foreign workers and migrants on the part of developed central economies, which became evident with the economic crisis of 2008. In other words, countries like the United States, that already had an importance within the migratory networks in the American continent, became at the same time attractive for migrants and dependent on the

importation of foreign labor. However, while the flow of skilled workers is encouraged through professional mobility programs, the flow of unskilled workers is condemned, taxing it as unwanted migration.

From another perspective, at this stage, the adoption of socio-economic policies that opposed the neoliberal policies implemented previously in Latin American countries was highlighted, aiming at a return to state leadership and the implementation of social agendas. In addition, there was the emergence of a new geopolitical agenda that prioritized regional articulations, starting with the creation of regional organizations and institutions, such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). As a result, “if in 1970 intraregional migration represented 24% of the total, in 2010 it was equivalent to 63%. The increase in intraregional migration was especially evident in South America, where more than 70% of migrants originate from the region” [9].

3. Current prospects

The acceleration of the globalization in the last three decades, has also been intensified migration flows across the globe. According to the world migration report produced in 2020 by the UN Migration (IOM), the number of international migrants around the world in 2019 was around 272 million (3.5% of the world population), while the number of people displaced due to violence and conflict reached 41.3 million, demonstrating the highest level since 1998 [10].

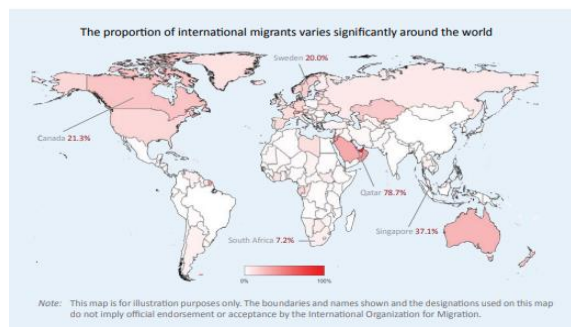


Fig. 1 - International migrants: numbers and trends.

Migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, in particular, are identified as the majority in residence outside their region of origin, as highlighted by the Venezuelan case in which approximately 4 million citizens left the country in mid-2019, and more than 340,000 sought refuge in 2018. Therefore, although Argentina and Venezuela have been the historic destinations of migration flows in South America, Venezuela, due to the political, economic and social crises it has been facing, has become the country with

the highest rate of population outflow. Receiving societies are also concentrated in the region in countries such as Colombia and Ecuador, as well as Chile, Peru and Brazil.

In this scenario, the importance of migratory networks and the particular incentive and reception policies in Latin America that led to an increase in intraregional migrations are highlighted. In this case, historical colonial relations are pointed out as facilitating factors, as well as the implementation of policies to encourage migration, such as the signing of bilateral agreements between countries that share common ethnicities and languages.

In terms of international migration, North America, especially the United States, remains the main destination for Latin Americans. As pointed out by the UN Migration (IOM), the Latin American and Caribbean population residing in North American territory has increased exponentially over the last few decades. In 1990 it was estimated that 10 million migrants from the region resided in the North. In 2015, this measure rose to 25.5 million, reaching 26.6 million in 2019. At the same time, the number of Latin American migrants who immigrated to the European continent more than quadrupled in this period, reaching 5 million in 2019. On the other hand, the total number of international migrants who moved to Latin America and the Caribbean remained stable over these 30 years, with an average of 3 million.

Thus, it is understood that the migratory system is inserted in a broader context that must be considered, as it implies a series of structural determinants for the conformation of capacities, institutions and ideas, with an impact on the political, economic and social spheres. This does not exclude the importance of migrant agency insofar as structures can condition, but not determine, action, which may or may not occur, depending on other criteria challenging even this structure. In order to understand some of the essential characteristics of the Latin American migratory system, it is necessary to mobilize theoretical perspectives that focus on the specificities of Latin America and the Caribbean regions.

Migration marks the Rendez-Vous of cultural diversity. The immigrant comes to aggregate and to offer a different perspective, but also to contribute to local economies when they are inserted in the labor market. In fact, many countries would not survive without remittances from immigrants, as is the case with Mexicans, Venezuelans, Cubans, and Central American immigrants.

On the other hand, it is possible to perceive a continuity concerning the migratory selection together with colonialist structural elements which subjugate, exclude, and discriminate against non-European immigrants. This comes through not only in migration policies, but also in the discourse against immigrants that reveals a clear colonialist vision that concerns how we perceive ourselves and

how the other represents us, this other who is black, indigenous, and who today comes knocking on our door, like Africans, Haitians, Venezuelans, Bolivians.

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