

MIGRATION TRENDS

Contributions from a
human rights perspective



Carmem Lussi
Editor

MIGRATION TRENDS

Contributions from a
human rights perspective



Brasilia
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PREFACE



The contemporary human mobility, in its different typologies, is a complex and dynamic phenomenon. Its study involves not only a multiplicity of disciplines, multi-scalar synchronic and diachronic approaches, heterogeneous subjects, diverse socio-cultural contexts and multi-causal phenomena, but also different epistemological perspectives, often conditioned by the interests involved.

Certainly, there is a hegemonic narrative about current human displacement that is deeply influenced by “state thinking” (Sayad, 1998), “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer, Glick Schiller, 2002) and even “colonial Eurocentrism”, which, through the imposition of analytical categories, tends to standardize the migrant population and naturalize their subordination in relation to the “autochthones”. This narrative is not neutral and influences not only migration policies, which are increasingly securitarian and restrictive, but also public opinion, promoting the growth of a xenophobic and racist *ethos*, with inevitable impacts on the population in mobility.

Furthermore, there is also the emergence of alternative or critical narratives, with epistemological perspectives “from below” (Basualdo, Domenech, Pérez, 2019), including migrant struggles (Varela, 2016), which aim to denaturalize hegemonic narratives, question the taxonomies used by “state thinking”, making transparent the dialectic between structures and the agency of people on the move (Mezzadra, 2015), as well as the different interests involved. In any case, there is a dispute between narratives that aims to influence the population’s imagination about human mobility.

As I write this introduction, this dispute has become even more heated following the election campaign and the inauguration of the new US government (as of January 20, 2025) and in the face of the heinous violence against the civilian population in Gaza. In both cases, the concealing of the historical roots of the phenomena, the imposition of analytical categories and the control (manipulation) of information strengthen the “demonization” of the other and the “invention” of enemies.

In the first case, immigrants were unscrupulously accused of eating cats and dogs, bringing “bad genes” to the US, being criminals and therefore an “enemy within”. The use of a 1798 law called the Alien Enemies Act to speed up deportations is the clearest proof of the transformation of immigrants into enemies. The violence of the narrative has also reached solidarity segments, such as sanctuary cities - and their “firewall” policies (Gonzalez Morales, 2024) - churches and organized civil society. The spectacularization of the deportation of migrants in chains (which is reminiscent of the slave trade) is a stark testament to the priorities of white supremacists in the US and their obsession with radicalizing the climate of deportability (De Genova, 2002), thus feeding the vulnerability of the migrant population, which is increasingly unable to claim the most fundamental human rights. Situations similar to those in the US can be found, perhaps in a more camouflaged form, in many other countries around the world.

Gaza’s situation is even more hideous. For decades, people have been treated as “foreigners” and “enemies” in their own land. The almost daily murder of children, civilians, members of non-governmental organizations, health workers and journalists attests to a total disregard for human rights. Above all, the murder of journalists is striking, demonstrating an explicit intention to hide the seriousness of what is happening. All this in the face of the indifference and, not infrequently, complicity of the international community, which is impassive even in the face of the positions of the International Criminal Court.

One might venture to say that we are facing a “rights-humanicide”, the complete dereliction of a system of human rights protection that emerged after the Second World War, a system that

had one assumption: “every human being is born free and equal in dignity and rights” (UDHR, Art. 1). Faced with the current situation, the first article of the UDHR appears to be a mere illusion. In fact, nowadays, birth only guarantees biological life, because what confers dignity and rights is only the document that one receives after birth. This document establishes a hierarchy between human beings, generating a modern caste system, a hideous stratification of the world’s population. In this way, some human beings are in fact considered more human than others and, as a result, human rights are applied selectively, losing their universality.

In this context, I believe it is worth remembering the prophetic stance of the leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis, who, as recently as 2013, on his apostolic trip to the Italian island of Lampedusa, denounced the “globalization of indifference” in the face of the deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea: “We have become accustomed to the suffering of others, it does not concern us, it does not interest us, it is not our responsibility!” (Francis, 2013). Indifference to the slaughter in the Mediterranean seems to have undermined the universality of human rights and paved the way for the criminalization of “less human” populations and even humanitarian aid and solidarity.

These brief observations attest to how the issue of international human mobility has become a field of dispute in which not only the dignity of an ever-increasing portion of the world’s population - a racialized and inferiorized portion - is at stake, but also the future of humanity on planet earth. It is in this sense that this book, organized by Carmem Lussi, from the Scalabrinian Centre for Migration Studies in Brasilia, is born as a “counter-narrative”, an analysis of the conjuncture and migratory trends that seeks to question and complexify those superficial and often manipulated approaches to this issue. We know that there are no neutral narratives: each point of view is always the view from a specific point. In the case of this book, the perspective has two priorities: academic rigor and the universality of human rights. Rigor and intellectual honesty go hand in hand with a commitment to the rights of peoples, individuals and even planet Earth, our common home. That’s why, in addition to five articles covering the various geographical areas of the planet,

we address some issues that we consider to be priorities, such as climate change, the feminization of migration and migrant struggles.

We wish you all a good reading.

Roberto Marinucci

Centro Scalabriniano de Estudos Migratórios – CSEM
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1



MIGRATION TRENDS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA Key Issues

Michael Mutava

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Introduction

Africa, often referred to as the cradle of humanity and the geographic origin of human migration across the globe within the last 100,000 years, is a continent of remarkable diversity and intricacy, encompassing 54 countries with unique histories, cultures, and languages (Campbell *et al.*, n.d.). Spanning over 30 million square kilometers, Africa is the second-largest and second-most populous continent, with a population of more than 1.4 billion people (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2023). Its diverse landscapes range from the expansive Sahara Desert to the dense rainforests of the Congo Basin, and from the arid plains of the Sahel to the fertile river valleys of the Nile. The historical significance of Africa is unmatched, as it is the birthplace of some of the world's earliest civilizations (Mokhtar, 1981). Africa's people have both shaped and been shaped by centuries of migration, trade and cultural exchange. Currently, the continent stands at a critical juncture, balancing its ancient traditions with the demands of modernity

while simultaneously grappling with challenges and opportunities that will define its future in the global arena.

The continent exhibits striking economic disparities, with the presence of copious amounts of natural resources coexisting alongside pervasive poverty, unemployment, and income inequality (African Development Bank, 2007). Many African countries heavily depend on agriculture and natural resource extraction, while others such as South Africa, Morocco, Tunisia and Morocco are becoming significant players in global markets by pursuing industrialization and technological advancements.

The educational landscape in Africa is diverse, with some regions making progress in enhancing access to basic and higher education, while others grapple with low literacy rates and insufficient educational infrastructure. According to Mendez and Evans, one in three children does not complete primary school (2021). These disparities are particularly pronounced between urban and rural areas and between genders. Demographically, Africa is characterized by a burgeoning and youthful populace, with a median age of 18.8 years in 2023, 12.2 years younger than Latin America and Caribbean which has the second lowest median age (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2023). This youthful demographic presents both opportunities for economic growth and challenges in providing adequate employment, healthcare, and education for the expanding population.

Migration has consistently been a fundamental element of Africa's social, economic, and political landscape. Given that Africa is the world's second-largest and second-most-populous continent, it is characterized by a diverse array of cultures, economies, and environments that have historically influenced the movement of its inhabitants. However, the patterns and causes of migration in the region have undergone significant transformations over time, reflecting the continent's evolving circumstances and challenges. Presently, migration within and from Africa is driven by a multifaceted interplay of factors that highlight the continent's struggles and opportunities in an increasingly globalized world. Nonetheless, African migration is often shrouded in stereotypes and half-truths that are not supported by empirical evidence

(Flahaux, De Haas, 2016). Misperceptions that it is a continent of mass exodus and violent conflicts continue to be propagated. Although this may hold true for certain parts, it is not applicable to the entire continent. This article aims to examine the recent trends and patterns of migration in Africa and dispel some of the misconceptions and myths surrounding.

1 Causes of migration in Africa

According to De Haas (2010) and Sara (2016), migration is not only a result but also a means to broader societal processes and outcomes, thus, it is the norm rather than the exception. It is crucial to understand the social context of migration and to consider the intrinsic motivations that drive the process. In Africa, it is influenced by a multifaceted interplay of factors, including economic, social, political, and environmental causes. Additionally, cultural and historical factors also play a significant role in driving African migration, as individuals seek to preserve their heritage and maintain cultural ties with their ancestral homelands.

Economic factors exert a considerable influence on the migratory patterns on the continent. In general, emigration tends to flow from less developed to more developed countries (Massey, 1988). Poverty, unemployment, and underemployment, which are prevalent in many African countries, often drive individuals to seek better opportunities in areas with stronger economies, where they can find employment, higher wages, and improved living conditions. The movement of individuals between African countries reflects this reality, with developed economies receiving more migrants than less developed ones (Mutava, 2023). For example relatively richer countries such as South Africa and Kenya are net receivers of migrants whereas Mozambique, a low income country has net emigrants. Moreover, people from rural areas frequently relocate to urban centers within their own countries or to neighbouring nations with more promising job markets.

While individuals typically move from underdeveloped to developed regions, it is necessary to take into account their “ability” to migrate. Notably, migration requires resources, and if economic conditions are too poor, the migration process becomes

untenable. In some parts of Africa, as the rate of economic development increases, there is a notable increase in emigration from the continent, in line with the 'migration hump' phenomenon, where higher per capita income is consistently associated with higher rates of emigration (Angenendt *et al.*, 2017). There is limited mobility in severely underdeveloped countries. When the level of development between two regions becomes equal, the rate of migration reaches an equilibrium and may even begin to decrease. As will be seen in subsequent sections, the direction of migration in Africa reflects its level of development.

Social factors, particularly education and health, play a significant role in driving migration within Africa. In many cases, migrants move in search of improved healthcare services due to inadequate medical infrastructure and resources in their home countries. Health crises, such as pandemics and chronic diseases, further contribute to migration as individuals seek treatment. Globally, education is often viewed as a great equalizer, sometimes compensating for a lack of resources (Uma A, 2018). Differential returns to skills in both the origin and destination countries are a primary driver of migration. The economic success of immigrants in the destination country is largely determined by their educational background, the transferability of their skills to the host country's labour market, and the extent to which they invest in further skill development after arrival (Dustmann, Glitz, 2011).

Educated migrants that find opportunities overseas, or those that migrate for education and continue to work abroad at the end of their program, lead to brain drain. Loss of talented and skilled individuals to the process of migration weakens the capacity of origin countries to innovate and develop. Brain drain is a bane to Africa's potential especially in critical sectors of the economy such as Science, technology, Engineering and Mathematics. It is estimated that one in ten doctors in the UK, comes from an African country, when African countries are suffering the consequences of an understaffed and ill-equipped healthcare system (Whitehouse, 2024). Additionally, the Africa Union reports that more than 70,000 skilled professionals emigrate from Africa every year (Kweitsu, 2018). Some experts argue that remittances sent by migrants to their countries of origin can mitigate the negative effects of brain drain.

Indeed, these inflows of money have a significant impact on the GDP of many African economies. However, investments, no matter how well-intentioned, are not effective without a corresponding pool of skilled human resources. Fortunately, many African migrants aspire to return home after retirement, bringing with them valuable experience and capital (Åkesson, Eriksson Baaz, 2015).

Political factors play a significant role in both compulsory and voluntary migration in Africa, impacting internal displacement and international migration. Various regions of the continent are plagued with the pervasive issue of armed conflict. For instance, in 2023, five of the world's eleven least-peaceful nations were situated in Africa, namely the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mali, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023). In some cases, these conflicts may extend beyond borders, such as terrorist insurgent attacks in Nigeria, parts of East Africa, and Central Africa. Kenya experienced a devastating terrorist attack conducted by Al-Shabaab in 2013, followed by another in 2015 where more than 147 university students were brutally murdered by the same terrorist organization (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The ongoing conflicts have severe consequences on the economies of these countries and the livelihoods of their inhabitants.

Beyond civil wars and armed conflicts, African countries experience fragile and unstable governments that contribute significantly to migration. For instance, since 2020, there have been a record 9 successful military coups on the continent, each with distinct causes and motivations (Vines, 2024). The primary causative factors include government failure to address security concerns, protect democracies, and, more recently, manage deteriorating economic conditions that have precipitated a wave of violent protests across the continent. Conversely, some governments maintain a facade of functioning liberal democracies while exercising authoritarian control. This dictatorial predisposition and the prevalence of coups have led to a general decline in the belief in democracy (Chlouba, 2024). Nevertheless, there remains cause for optimism, as exemplified by Mauritius, which was recognized as fully democratic in the sub-Saharan region in 2022 (Saifaddin).

Political instability in Africa can also be characterized by ethnic cleansing and systematic violence aimed at removing an ethnic group from a particular territory. The Nigeria-Biafra war was a devastating ethno-religious conflict that resulted in the deaths of three million people and the displacement of an equal number (Ibhawoh, 2020). Nigeria still experiences a systematic religious genocide, with Christians in the middle belt region being targeted by religious fundamentalists (Dembele, 2015). The Rwandan genocide of 1994 is perhaps the most notorious example of ethnic cleansing in recent history, resulting in the deaths of over 500,000 people and the displacement of more than 2.2 million both internally and internationally (Dominique *et al.*, 2001). In Ethiopia, there have been recent reports of ethnic cleansing, with the Ethiopian government accused of targeting the Tigray population (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Overall, African conflicts and violence have displaced over 40 million people, making it a significant cause of migration (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2023).

Environmental and cultural factors are at the core of migration in Africa. For the first time in 2022, climate-related disasters caused a similar number of internal displacements as conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa (International Rescue Committee, 2024). Drought and desertification are recurrent issues in many parts of the continent, particularly in the horn of Africa and Sahel regions. The Horn of Africa region experienced a serious drought in 2011, affecting an estimated 4.5 million people, primarily pastoralists, exacerbated by the lack of feed for their animals (International Organization for Migration, 2011). In 2023, the drought returned, resulting in comparable disastrous consequences. Unlike other factors, drought and desertification can impact multiple countries, necessitating migrants and refugee seekers to travel further for humanitarian aid. In the 11 months of drought in 2022, only 83,000 refugees sought assistance in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia (Kyilah, Aishwarya Rai, 2023). This low number highlights the hopelessness of seeking refuge in a country riddled with similar challenges as those from which they are fleeing from. Similar biting droughts have been reported in West, Central and Southern Africa (European Commission, 2024; World Food Programme, 2024). The Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (2024) predicts that by 2050,

climate change will account for up to 10% of all African cross-border migration.

Natural disasters are increasing in Africa. For example, countries like Mozambique and Madagascar, are prone to cyclones and storms that damage homes, infrastructure, and crops. In 2023, Tropical cyclone Freddy, made landing in Madagascar, Mozambique and Malawi, leaving behind a trail of destruction. Although less frequent, geological events such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions can also trigger migration. Mount Nyiragongo's eruption in the Democratic Republic of Congo forced more than 230,000 people to leave their homes and at least 31 dead (Nasa, 2021). It should be noted that natural disasters have a low potency to cause international migration, but cause a lot of discomfort through internal displacement.

The significance of cultural influences on migration is indisputable. Kinship bonds and familial responsibilities drive individuals to relocate in order to be with loved ones who have already settled in different regions or countries. This phenomenon also leads to the emergence of chain migration patterns, where the migration of one individual prompts subsequent movement within the same family or community. Moreover, factors such as shared ethnicity, religion, or language serve as guiding forces for migration in Africa.

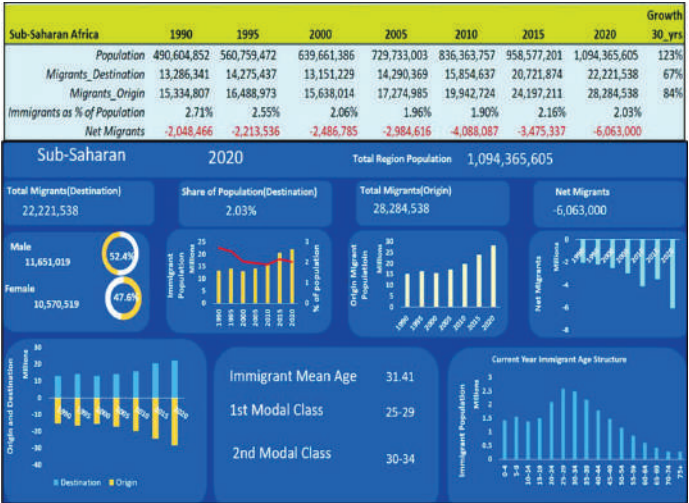
2 Trends and patterns of migration in Africa

This section looks at migration trends in sub-Saharan Africa, based on the latest statistics published by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Sub-Saharan countries include all countries in Africa, with the exception of Northern African states which are predominantly Arabic. The Northern African states include Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and the disputed territory of Western Sahara. These countries have distinct cultural, linguistic, and historical ties to the Middle East and the Mediterranean region, differentiating them from the Sub-Saharan countries to the south. From a migration perspective, the Northern Africa region is one of the wealthiest regions in Africa, as a result of close proximity to European markets and presence of

natural resources, hence migration tends to be between member states or outside the continent (*Exploring Africa*, n.d.). This is unsurprising, as it is expected that migratory movements move from less developed regions to more developed ones.

Figure 1 indicates that, in 2020, the percentage of migrants to population was 2.03%. Notably, sub-Saharan countries and Africa as a whole are not prominent migration hubs, which highlights the low level of economic development in the continent. This pattern is evident in most sub-Saharan countries, with only four countries, namely Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Seychelles, and Djibouti, having a migrant share above 10% (Mutava, 2023). Typically, regions with low economic potential experience higher emigration than immigration rates. Between 1990 and 2020, there was an 84% increase in emigration and a 67% increase in immigrants. Consequently, the net emigrants (the excess of emigrants over immigrants) stood at 6.06 million. As the technological revolution continues to advance, generating high-quality digital employment opportunities, it is anticipated that improving economic prospects will result in an increase of net emigrants.

Figure 1: Visualisation of Key Sub-Saharan Africa Trends and Statistics



Source: Author Aggregation from UNDESA data

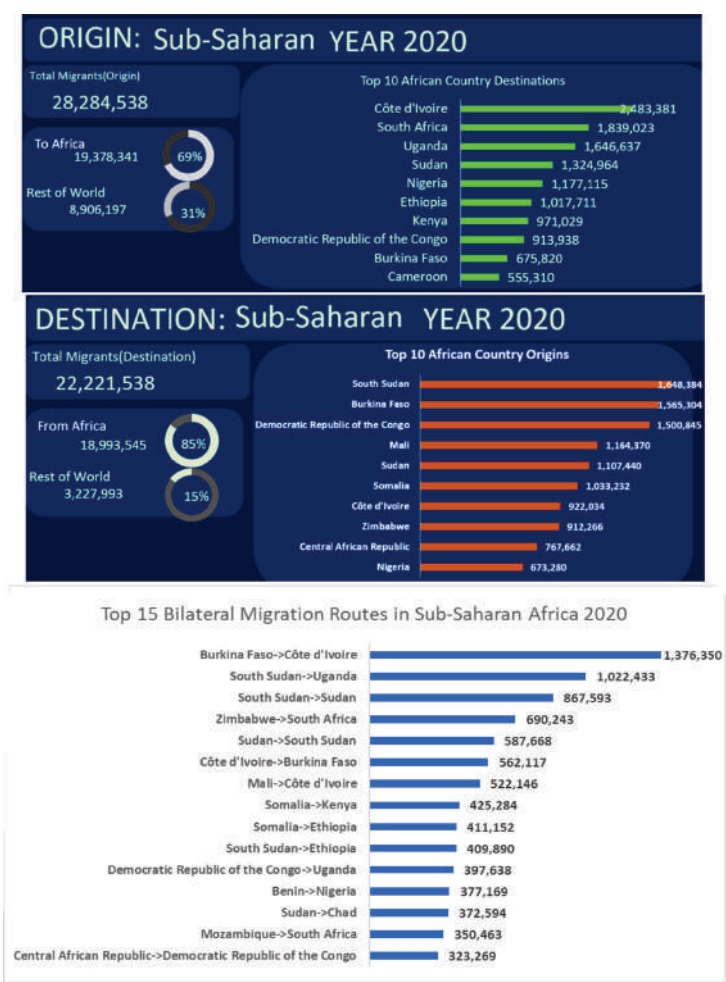
As of 2020, the ratio of males to females in migration flows was nearly equal, with 53% males and 47% females. The participation of women in migration is particularly noteworthy in the region. A variety of factors may contribute to this trend, such as the increasing demand for female labor in sectors like domestic work, healthcare, and informal trading. This can be attributed to both evolving social norms that accept women in the workforce and severe economic pressures that make it difficult for male income to sustain households.

The mean age of sub-Saharan immigrants was 31.41 years, and the modal age group was 25-29 years, indicating a preponderance of young people in the immigrant population. The youth, who often face limited economic opportunities, stagnant job markets, and a desire for better livelihoods, constitute the largest migrant group. Moreover, the youth are more likely to take risks and are less tolerant of subpar conditions, which drives them to seek migration as a solution to their issues. In 2024, violent youth-led protests occurred in Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria, raising concerns that more countries may experience similar unrest. The youth-dominated migration patterns reflect broader issues in the region, where there is a significant youth bulge that is not adequately addressed. By 2100, Africa's youth population is projected to comprise half of the world's youth (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2023). While migration presents opportunities for both women and young migrants, it also poses substantial risks, including exploitation, hazardous travel routes, and uncertain legal statuses in destination countries.

It is essential to examine the origins and destinations of both immigrants and emigrants in the region to comprehend their source and target locations. In 2020, an estimated 28.2 million emigrants from sub-Saharan Africa were noted, with approximately 69% of them being destined in other African countries. The main destination countries to the West and East are Cote d'Ivoire, and Uganda respectively. South Africa is the main destination country to the South while DRC is the hub in Central Africa. Interestingly, the region collectively received 22.2 million immigrants in 2020, with only 15% of them originating from outside the continent. Despite the global interconnectedness of the modern world, sub-Saharan Africa appears to be an isolated and insular region, with

minimal interaction with the rest of the world. However, this trend refutes the common stereotype that Africa is a continent of mass exodus. The main sending countries to the region are South Sudan to the East, Burkina Faso to the West, Zimbabwe to the South and DRC in central Africa.

Figure 2: Main Origin Countries, Destination Countries and Bilateral Country Routes:



Source: Author Compilation from UNDESA tables

Most migration occurs between neighboring countries, and the movement of people is often reciprocal. For instance, Burkina Faso to Cote d'Ivoire and then Cote d'Ivoire to Burkina Faso. Many sub-Saharan African countries are part of regional economic blocs that promote and encourage free movement of people. Examples include the East African Community, the Southern African Development Community, the Economic Community for West African States among others. The exchanges of migrants between neighboring countries, particularly those that belong to the same economic communities and with more progressive policies on movement, demonstrate that adopting liberal mobility policies does not result in a disproportionate burden on one side. As Massey (2012) notes in his description of the unintended consequences of the 1965 US immigration policy, which was hostile towards South American citizens, it inadvertently led to a surge in the number of undocumented migrants who did not have the option of moving back and forth as they pleased. It is noticeable that this back-and-forth movement is frequent between most African countries, forestalling the fear for a migrant accumulation in any one area or country.

The regionalization of sub-Saharan migration and the strong bilateral migrant routes seen demonstrate strong neighbourhood alliances. This phenomenon can be partially attributed to the state formation processes of these countries. African nations were established along the boundaries of former colonial administrative units, thereby depriving the state formation process of the opportunity to evolve and unify based on important factors. To a significant extent, borders were drawn arbitrarily during the Berlin Conference and other colonial negotiations, disregarding the intricate ethnic, cultural, and political landscapes of Africa. As a result, independent countries with artificial and poorly demarcated borders were created (Nkuendi, 2012). Furthermore, these states comprised diverse groups with little historical precedent for unity. In some instances, the boundaries divided communities and ethnic groups, disrupting continuous sects by imposing different national identities. The overlaps in ethnicities and cultures between countries have resulted in microcosms that blur the line between citizenship and nationalism (Manby, 2015).

There are various borderland ecosystems in Africa, including the Virunga, a territory on the edge of Uganda, DRC, and Rwanda, the tri-border Mandera triangle between Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia, and the Liptako-Gourma area at the intersection of Burkina-Faso, Mali, and Niger, among others. Most of these communities share the same economic activities. For example, the Somali communities in Kenya and Somalia are both pastoralists (UNDP, 2020). Despite the apparent tension between migration liberalism and the nation-state, these commonalities should serve as bridges rather than barriers and should be leveraged to promote migration in Africa.

Despite the overwhelming evidence for thriving ecosystems in sub-Saharan Africa's borderlands, there is a discernible trend toward increasingly isolationist border management policies across the continent. Some measures, such as increased border patrols and military presence to deter migration, are quite severe and have significant human rights implications. In extreme cases, some countries have even proposed constructing physical barriers like walls. South Africa passed a new border management law in 2020 to strengthen existing legislation due to concerns about porous borders, resulting in the establishment of a Border Management Authority (BMA) with armed border patrol guards possessing extensive powers (Moyo, 2020). However, the new law's objective appears to be more focused on restricting the movement of migrants and refugees rather than securing South Africa's borders. This approach resembles the European Union's border control methods between Morocco and Spain, which utilizes advanced technology to keep out migrants and refugees. Both systems share similarities with apartheid-era practices, restricting the right to mobility.

In 2015, following a devastating terrorist attack on innocent university students on the border town of Garissa, the government of Kenya took steps to create a physical wall spanning 700 kilometers between Somalia and Kenya. The wall, for which \$35 million was spent, was only completed for 10 kilometers by the end of 2019. This is a classic demonstration of corruption in migration management, but it also shows the slippery slope sub-Saharan countries are taking, in implementing regressive and repressive

border management techniques. The border between Rwanda and Uganda was shut in 2019 due to geopolitical tensions, and only reopened in 2022 much to the reprieve of border communities and migrants at large (Songa, 2022).

Unfettered access to country borders is without doubt perilous, but the harm caused in disenfranchising legitimate access is greater. Drawing inspiration from Europe, which boasts the most effective model for the free movement of people, sub-Saharan African nations can enhance their border security by fostering cooperation across borders instead of working in isolation. Collaborating on the sharing of information, technology, and joint efforts to tackle the challenges associated with migration is a more reliable approach to border management. Furthermore, in today's world, borders are increasingly difficult to define. They exist everywhere and nowhere. For instance, while land borders present certain barriers, airports have become the *de facto* 'borders' where they are more pervasive. In East Africa, cross-border cooperation has led to the establishment of single border posts, where neighboring countries share information to prevent smuggling, human trafficking, and the movement of undocumented migrants (Mendez-Parra, Calabrese, 2023). Similarly, migration cooperation between Kenya and South Africa has proven successful and has important lessons for the rest of the continent. Prior to 2020, South Africa was hesitant to grant Kenyans reciprocal visa-free travel due to concerns about an influx of undocumented migrants from Somalia and Ethiopia passing through Kenya. Ultimately, South Africa relented, subject to the condition that undocumented migrants could be repatriated back to Kenya, regardless of their nationality, at Kenya's expense. In essence, this arrangement shifts the burden of screening South African migrants to Kenya, effectively serving as a border control measure.

3 Refugee crisis

The refugee crisis in Africa represents one of the most pressing humanitarian issues in the contemporary global context. They face several challenges ranging from clean water accessibility, inadequate health services and poor education. The region hosts a

substantial refugee population, and recently, a pervasive anti-migrant sentiment in most parts of the developed world is exacerbating the situation. For the first time in 2021, all of the world's most neglected displacement crises were located in sub-Saharan Africa. These included DRC, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, South Sudan, Chad, Mali, Sudan, Nigeria, Burundi and Ethiopia (Wanless *et al.*, 2022). In 2024, the list of the most neglected countries comprises 9 sub-Saharan African countries, with Honduras being the sole country outside of Africa. Notably, all the African countries in the 2021 list also appear in the 2024 list with the exception of Nigeria, Burundi and Ethiopia (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2024).

The distribution of refugees on the continent is dynamic, and it is estimated that sub-Saharan Africa hosts more than 26% of the world's refugees (United Nations, n.d.). This figure is rapidly increasing as new areas of violence and conflict continue to emerge. The distribution is also disproportionate within the continent, with some regions bearing a greater burden of the crises. According to the UNHCR (2024b), the East, Horn and Great Lakes region accommodates 5.2 million refugees and asylum seekers, representing 14% of the world's total. The countries in this area include Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Somalia, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Kenya. Nations with the highest refugee populations include Ethiopia, Kenya, Chad, Uganda, and Cameroon, among others. Collectively, the region has an additional 16.7 million internally displaced persons, positioning it at the epicenter of the refugee challenge in Africa. It is evident that refugee crises in Africa constitute a protracted issue rather than a transient one and necessitates a novel, nuanced approach to find a long-term solution rather than a palliative measure.

Given the sensitive nature of border control in Africa, refugee management and governance are addressed with insufficient attention, and the implementation of reforms is notably inadequate. Typically, throughout the region, there are four levels of refugee management: international, regional, national, and institutional frameworks. Internationally, almost all sub-Saharan African countries have acceded to the 1951 refugee convention and its 1967 protocol, forming foundational legislation for addressing

refugee issues. The protocol defines who a refugee is and outlines the rights and obligations of host countries (UNHCR, 2011).

The regional frameworks are primarily initiated and led by the African Union, which is the preeminent political organization in Africa. In 1969, the OAU, which is currently the African Union, passed “The OAU Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa”. The OAU framework expanded the definition of a refugee, including people fleeing violence, foreign aggression, and any events that significantly disrupt public order, all of which were characteristic of Africa at the time. This expanded definition has found expression in national refugee laws of most African countries such as Ghana, Angola, Malawi, Senegal, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. The OAU was also instrumental in the 1981 adoption of “The African Charter on Human and People’s Rights,” which, though not directly focused on refugees, provided broader rights protection applicable to displaced people and refugees (OAU, 1981). Since its transformation from the OAU to AU in 2002, there has been one additional regional agreement, known as the Kampala convention of 2009, which ensures the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons in Africa.

Each country in the region has established its own policies and legislation that further complement the international and regional laws. These laws encompass matters such as asylum procedures, access to social services, and in some instances, the process of obtaining work permits. It is noteworthy that while some countries’ national laws enhance the international and regional governance frameworks, others impose significant restrictions. Several countries, including Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Uganda, are already implementing an open-door refugee policy (Oxfam International, 2023). This development is encouraging; however, the European Parliamentary Research Service highlights the mixed outcomes of more open borders in Africa coupled with limited inclusion and integration efforts (Zamfir, 2017). Refugee issues are protracted, have been compounding, and necessitate an ongoing rather than an intermittent treatment. Uganda’s Refugee Act of 2006 is frequently cited as a model for progressive national refugee laws, particularly because it not only welcomes refugees but also delineates pathways for their full integration and inclusion

in the community (*Uganda: The Refugee Act*, 2006). This can be contrasted with Kenya's Refugee Act of 2006, which effectively codified refugee encampment into law, jeopardizing the potential for refugees to be readily integrated into society. Notably, Kenya has enacted a new refugee act in 2021, which envisions broader rights for refugees beyond being hosted in encampments.

Institutional frameworks have been a crucial cornerstone of migrant and refugee reforms in Africa. These frameworks encompass a wide range of entities, including government-led institutions, private sector organizations, multilateral organizations, and civil society organizations. UNHCR and IOM have played instrumental roles in refugee matters. In Kenya, for instance, the government was responsible for refugees' management since independence; however, following the 1991 influx due to regional instability, it entrusted that role to UNHCR for active management (Mutava, 2024). UNHCR also provides operational support to numerous governments in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as emergency support in humanitarian crises to refugees and other migrants. Additionally, it is involved in the development of progressive legislation that addresses the most salient issues concerning refugee management and national interests, as evidenced in the formulation of the Uganda Refugee Act and Ethiopia's Refugee Proclamation (*Ethiopia Refugee Proclamation*, 2019).

IOM, similar to UNHCR, contributes to emergency response and humanitarian assistance in the region. Through a joint initiative between the EU and IOM, the latter has previously provided assistance to tens of thousands of migrants in West and Central Africa. They have also extended aid to several other migrants who were adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (IOM, 2020). IOM conducts critical search and rescue missions for migrants and refugees in perilous conditions, such as in desert environments or other equally challenging settings conducive to human trafficking and smuggling. In addition, it has been integral in capacity building and training of governments and other migration stakeholders on pertinent migration issues such as border control and inclusion.

The impact of the private sector in refugee management is most significant for inclusion and integration. Without impeaching their profit motive, private sector entities have developed strategies

to reduce refugees' dependence on aid. The International Financial Corporation (2019) identifies five pathways to scale private sector interventions beyond humanitarian assistance, i.e: sharing capabilities such as technology, extending services, enabling employment, integrating into value chains, and building businesses. In Ethiopia, Gebeya, a private company, introduced a digital product that facilitates refugees' self-marketing in the job market (UNHCR, 2024a). In Kenya, Safaricom, the largest telecommunications company, has launched a series of products aimed at enhancing the learning experience of refugee students through digital learning solutions and network coverage (Capital Business, 2019). In Angola, as early as 2006, micro-credit institutions were already extending credit facilities to migrants to promote self-reliance (Malungo Muana, 2006). Throughout Africa, the private sector has recognized that engaging with refugees extends beyond corporate social responsibility and represents a potential opportunity for exploitation. As services are integrated for this demographic, the profitability of the companies also increases.

Establishment of effective legislation is distinct from its judicious implementation. Notably, African nations have enacted a considerable number of migration laws, including regional and international regulations. Civil society organizations consistently monitor the governments to ensure that the laws are not merely symbolic but are substantively applied in the protection of refugee rights. These organizations have evolved from being solely critics of unfavorable government policies to occupying a significant role in shaping governmental policy through extensive lobbying and advocacy efforts. In 2022, the Socio-Economic Rights Group, a non-governmental organization in South Africa, led litigation resulting in a favorable outcome for informal traders who had been displaced from the inner-city precinct in a Johannesburg street (Vanyoro, 2024). The majority of these traders were refugees that had been unfairly targeted. Kenya in East Africa also experienced a water shed moment in 2016 when the government made a severe decision to close two refugee camps following a devastating terrorist attack. 'The legal centre', a Civil Society Organization (CSO), spearheaded litigation in court to nullify that decision, thereby safeguarding migrant rights. CSOs also fulfill other less prominent functions,

such as providing humanitarian assistance, facilitating community integration, and engaging in capacity building.

It is important to note that while CSOs' actions are present in nearly every country, the outcomes of their activism are largely contingent upon the maturity of individual countries' democratic systems. More specifically, these outcomes depend on the robustness and independence of the judiciary, as well as the adherence to the rule of law. A pertinent example is the 2023 enactment of a restrictive anti-homosexuality law in Uganda, which was implemented despite opposition from various groups. The law was subsequently challenged in court in 2024 but was upheld, much to the consternation of numerous human rights activists. Beyond affecting Ugandan citizens, this legislation poses a potential risk to refugees whose sexual orientation may be criminalized under the law. Generally, Africa exhibits weak institutional frameworks, and it is becoming evident that these structures must be strengthened to consolidate the progress made thus far in refugee governance.

4 Xenophobia in Africa

Among the emerging migration issues not only in Africa but globally is the concern for xenophobia, which is defined as the aversion, apprehension, or antagonism certain individuals harbor towards migrants. Migration plays a crucial role in introducing heterogeneity into an otherwise homogeneous society through multi-ethnic, cross-cultural, and religious interconnections. Paradoxically, these differences may also function as counteracting factors to the attainment of social cohesion through ethnocentric perspectives of interacting groups. In contemporary times, individuals frequently regard one another with suspicion based on racial and religious distinctions leading to discrimination and prejudice. Additionally, in many sub-Saharan countries, migrants are often seen as competitors for scarce jobs and resources. This competition can lead to resentment among local populations, who may perceive migrants as taking opportunities away from them.

South Africa has been characterized as a prominent example of xenophobia in Africa since its independence. In late 1994, armed youth groups in the vicinity of Johannesburg destroyed

property belonging to perceived undocumented migrants while demanding their forcible removal. Between 1994 and 1997, approximately 200,000 foreigners from neighbouring countries were deported, signaling to the continent that the country was not prepared to welcome migrants (Human Rights Watch, 1998). Since then, xenophobic attacks have become prevalent in the Republic of South Africa, just changing the forms. What has remained consistent, however, is the resultant destruction, either in the form of loss of lives, property, or both.

The hostility towards foreigners in South Africa often lacks objectivity. A survey by a human rights group indicates that suspected undocumented immigrants are arrested based on complexion, accent, “looking too black” or, more unusually, for “walking like a Mozambican” (Human Rights Watch, 1998). In numerous instances, these ad hoc and unstructured attacks also affect citizens or legal residents, subjecting them to extortion and bribery from authorities. Authorities handle them with excessive force and frequently detain them in substandard conditions awaiting deportation.

Unlike the early post-independence period in South Africa when attacks were sporadic, there has been an increase in systematic and coordinated hostilities led by the populace, particularly since 2015. In 2015, the Zulu king exacerbated the violence by asserting that foreigners should “go back to their country” (Ofeibe, 2015). This underscores the role of political manipulation and misinformation in the complexity of the xenophobic issue. Politicians, cognizant of the negativity that pervades public policy and popular discourse about migrants, attempt to capitalize on it for political expediency.

South Africa is arguably the most infamous sub-Saharan country for xenophobia but it is not the only one. According to Govender (2023), it turns out that there are several other countries in the region that have historically been discriminatory towards migrants. In 1969, Ghana introduced the Aliens Compliance Order, which led to deportation of large numbers of Nigerians. In 1972, Uganda expelled the Asian community and took over their businesses, some of whom were coming from her neighbouring countries such as Kenya. In 1983, as economic fortunes dwindled in Nigeria, they deported over 2 million migrants, and a further

wave followed in 1985. DRC deported 50,000 Angolans in a vengeful retaliatory purge against the Angolan regime in 2009. In 2013, Tanzania expelled 11000 undocumented migrants in the guise of fighting crime, majority of whom came from Rwanda. Most recently, there are pseudo-xenophobic tendencies, that are thinly veiled as security measures but at their core are aggressive to foreigners. Such techniques include tighter border control measures as discussed in earlier sections. More worrisome, the veneer of 'security measures' has also been adopted beyond the continent, giving rise to several anti-migrant legislations in other parts of the world such as the UK's illegal migration act that sought to repatriate undocumented migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to either their home countries or to Rwanda (Illegal Migration Act, 2023).

Sub-Saharan governments' response to xenophobia has predominantly been characterized by denialism and scapegoating (Crush, 2023). For instance, governments exhibit a greater tendency to attribute violent anti-migrant campaigns to criminal elements rather than acknowledging the intentional and systematic violence perpetrated against migrants by native populations. Denialism also manifests in the form of minimizing the consequences of such campaigns. Scapegoating represents an even more problematic reaction, as the government deflects blame onto the victims by implying their complicity in the issue. The fallacy in this reasoning lies in the fact that the proportion of migrants to the total population in the region is slightly over 2% and less than 10% even in the most hostile nations, rendering it implausible that such a small percentage could significantly impact the economy negatively. Moreover, the extent of global interconnectedness in contemporary times is so substantial that it precludes the possibility of avoiding retaliatory actions. In 2019, violent riots aimed at stores that were mainly owned by foreigners in South Africa were vandalized and looted in a deadly xenophobic expression. As the attacks were going on, Nigerians began reprisal attacks, targeting South African investments in Nigeria, especially supermarkets and Telcos (Patrick Egwu, 2019). The heightened conflict resulted in the temporary closure of the South African embassy in Nigeria.

The situation is not entirely negative, as some countries demonstrate a more favourable attitude towards migrants.

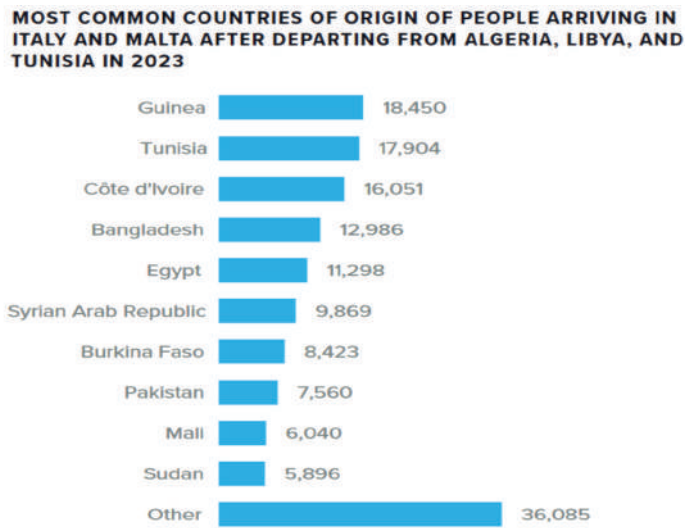
According to the Gallup Migrant Acceptance Index of 2020, which utilizes a scale from 0 to 9, Africa has four countries among the most accepting nations for migrants (Neli *et al.*, 2020). These include Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Rwanda, all of which exceed the 7.5 threshold, which is considered significantly high. For context, the global average was 5.2, and Canada, the highest-performing country, achieved a score of 8.46. Notably, no African country appeared on the list of least accepting countries, which is a positive indication. The xenophobic crisis, therefore, manifests in milder forms across most of the region and is only marginally uncontrolled in a few isolated countries.

It is evident that xenophobia is antithetical to the aspiration of a united Africa, as it engenders fear, suspicion, and unfounded stigma between individuals, impeding the realization of migration benefits. Migration has become a crucial factor in economic survival rather than a mere peripheral consideration. Emigrant Remittance flows to sub-Saharan Africa are increasing and constitute fundamental components upon which these economies depend. Given the high levels of poverty and unemployment across all sub-Saharan countries, it is incumbent upon all nations to conduct themselves as respectful guests in the countries they visit and to be hospitable hosts to the visitors they receive.

5 Mediterranean crossings

Mediterranean crossings have indeed become a significant and tragic aspect of African migration. This perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea represents one of the most hazardous routes for migrants and refugees attempting to reach Europe from Africa. The primary transit countries for sub-Saharan African countries are Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. There are predominantly three major routes utilized by undocumented migrants into southern Europe through the Mediterranean: Central, Western and Eastern routes. Sub-Saharan migrants mostly utilize the Central route. Guinea, Tunisia and Egypt are some of the main sending countries through this route, but migrants come from as deep as East Africa and the Horn of Africa. According to the IOM, there were 212,100 reported attempts through the central route in 2023, representing a 33% increase from 2022 (IOM, 2023).

Figure 3: Top Origin Countries Central Mediterranean Route



Source: UNHCR Global Trends Report 2023

Numerous migrants lose their lives during these treacherous sea journeys due to overcrowded and unsafe vessels, adverse weather conditions, and inadequate safety equipment. In 2023 alone, more than 3000 migrants lost their lives or were reported missing at sea across all three crossings (IOM, 2023). Such frequent and severe fatalities have led to the Mediterranean being referred to as a “graveyard” for migrants, with thousands of lives lost annually. Capsized boats, drownings, and exposure to extreme weather conditions contribute to the high mortality rate. Furthermore, vulnerable migrants often fall victim to criminal networks that exploit their precarious situation, charging exorbitant fees for dangerous passage. These traffickers frequently employ deception, coercion, and violence to exploit migrants, subjecting them to inhumane conditions during their journey. Many migrants are compelled into debt bondage or other forms of modern slavery to finance their passage. In recent years, the dangerous humanitarian crisis of the Mediterranean crossings has been expanded to include the land route all the way from East and Horn of Africa as well as West Africa, through the Sahara desert where children and women

are most at risk of sexual and human trafficking. Essentially, no one cares whether they live or die!

Mediterranean crossings are undeniably perilous; however, they have also been utilized to disseminate propaganda, misinformation, and partial truths regarding African migration, consequently eliciting inappropriate responses from concerned governments. Media representations of Africans scaling border walls, overcrowded fishing vessels, and other distressing depictions convey an alarmist message of desperation by seemingly overwhelming numbers of Africans fleeing wars, famine, and violence in their home countries. Such portrayals perpetuate the notion that migrants are responsible for the majority of problems in destination countries, fostering negative attitudes from host countries and their populations.

Initially, it is important to note that the number of Mediterranean crossings in comparison to other emigration from Africa is relatively small. In 2020, there were over 40 million African emigrants residing in countries other than their native countries, compared to the 212,100 Mediterranean crossing attempts in 2023 through the central route. Consequently, the majority of African migration to other countries occurs through legitimate channels. The specific case of Mediterranean migration should not be generalized as representative of African migration patterns. Nevertheless, while the actual number of such migrants may be comparatively low, their rights and lives are equally significant. The loss of a single life is unacceptable, and governments must implement interventions to prevent unnecessary loss of life and human rights violations.

European countries, particularly those on the Mediterranean coast such as Italy, Greece, and Spain, have intensified border security through enhanced patrols, anti-smuggling operations, and fortification of borders. The EU's European Border and Coast Guard Agency has played a crucial role in these efforts, but the measures have been criticized for pushing migrants to take more dangerous routes. Additionally, there have been efforts to cooperate with North African nations to intercept migrant boats before reaching Europe. This cooperation is largely a compulsion for the North African countries to restrict migration in exchange for certain benefits such as work permits, aid, and financial support, among others (De Haas, n.d.).

The response of European nations has majorly been to deter migration and externalize borders, providing financial incentives to other countries to manage migration on their behalf. These actions are undertaken with the presumption that development investments in these countries might reduce migratory incentives. Anderson (2016) posits that Europe's approach to migration bears similarities to the global war on drugs, wherein substantial financial and human resources have been expended with minimal efficacy. The intensification of deterrence measures correlates with increased incentives and innovative methods to perpetuate the migratory process. The obstruction of legal pathways to Europe has resulted in a proliferation of alternative legal and illegal sea and land border crossings, and notably impeded circular migration, wherein migrants engage in return trips to their countries of origin. Conversely, the augmentation of financial aid predicated on the assumption that improved economic prospects in origin countries will decrease migration is paradoxical, as migration tends to increase concomitantly with rising income levels. This perspective fails to acknowledge that migration is a deliberate decision made by individuals with agency. As European nations implement novel strategies to control Mediterranean crossings, the frequency of illegal crossings is likely to escalate, inevitably leading to an increase in fatalities and humanitarian crises across the Sahara Desert and Mediterranean Sea.

Conclusion and way forward

Africa is the second largest and second most populous continent, comprising 54 countries. It stands as a continent of stark contrasts and immense potential. Despite its vast natural resources and rich cultural heritage, the continent grapples with persistent challenges of poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment. There are also disparities in education, as one in three children does not complete primary education. Notwithstanding these issues, Africa is home to some of the world's earliest civilizations. Patterns of migration in Africa have undergone significant transformation over time, shaping the populace, cultures, and cosmopolitan identities of the continent.

There are numerous causes of migration in Africa; however, it is also noteworthy that migration possesses its own agency. It is a normal societal process of development undertaken willingly, consciously, and sometimes as a luxury by migrants. Migrants generally move from less developed areas to more developed areas, but the migrating individuals need to possess the ability to bring mobility into fruition. Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, which are comparatively wealthy countries in sub-Saharan Africa, tend to have higher emigration outside the continent, whereas a country such as Mozambique, with a lower development index, experiences mostly regional migration.

In 2020, there were 22.2 million immigrants into sub-Saharan Africa, 85% of which originated from other African countries. There were 28 million emigrants, with almost 70% destined for other African countries. This demonstrates that the region is relatively insular, with most migration occurring between African countries, particularly those in close proximity. This phenomenon is partly due to strong social and economic ties stemming from the artificial demarcation of African boundaries in the colonial period, leading to blurred lines between citizenship and nationalism. There exist cross-border communities and cross-border ecosystems that serve as facilitators of these interactions.

The list of least peaceful nations of the world includes several African countries, leading to an inevitable refugee crisis. The management of refugees, however, remains focused on the notion that it is a transient issue and needs to transition to a new paradigm of inclusion and integration. Anti-migrant sentiments and xenophobic attacks are increasing. Such attacks are unfounded and are often utilized for political expediency as scapegoats for issues confronting host nations. Africa's Mediterranean crossing challenges are likely to compound as Europe develops new methods of restricting legal pathways for migration. Militarization and externalization of borders will only incentivize the development of new strategies to circumvent these restrictions.

Migration exhibits a duality, in that it has some undesirable consequences such as pressure on amenities, security threats, and economic pressures, among others. However, it also has beneficial

aspects such as increased remittances, alleviation of unemployment, and improved education and health outcomes. From a global perspective, there is a clear imperative to embrace migration due to the level of interconnectedness between economies in different parts of the world. This imperative is more significant for developing countries that face numerous challenges and view migration not as a luxury but as a national strategy to address some of the issues affecting their nations.

Recognizing the critical importance of migration and acknowledging the predominant pattern of regionalism in sub-Saharan migration, governments in this region should endeavor to enhance cooperation in order to implement the African Union resolution for free movement of persons. The free movement of persons protocol was signed in 2018; however, progress towards its ratification and implementation has been notably slow due to hesitations in intergovernmental cooperation which would ensure a joint framework to address the contentious issues of migration, including border management, asylum rules, and refugee management (African Union, 2018).

In 2018, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) as well as the Global Compact for Refugees. These are non-binding frameworks that provide guidance on the sustainable management of migration and refugees in the context of contemporary circumstances. Key objectives of the GCM include managing migration in a safe and orderly manner that preserves human dignity, mitigating risks, and strengthening international cooperation, among others. Regarding refugees, there is an emphasis on their humanitarian treatment and long-term inclusion, as opposed to isolated encampment.

Twenty-three countries have volunteered to serve as champion countries for the GCM, signifying their commitment to act as proponents for the proposed comprehensive framework of the agreement. Among these, only nine are from Africa, namely Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, and Senegal (United Nations Network on Migration, n.d.). Kenya has taken further initiative by developing an implementation

framework for the GCM and has executed key measures towards its realization, including the establishment of a new refugees' act that aligns with the broader propositions of the Global Compact for Refugees. It is anticipated that if more countries adopt these frameworks and achieve a higher level of migration governance and cooperation, mobility would significantly increase in the region. While acknowledging the importance of intergovernmental cooperation in enhancing migration, it is imperative that non-state actors assume a more prominent role in this process. Churches, civil society organizations, private sector entities, and local governments possess a more nuanced understanding of local issues and are better positioned to devise interventions that further realize the aspirations of the GCM.

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2

MIGRATION TRENDS IN ASIA **Focusing on the Philippines, Indonesia,** **Vietnam, Taiwan, and India**

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Introduction

Migration has been a crucial part of human history, but today, it is more visible and influential than ever. It affects not just the people who move, but entire nations, economies, and global patterns. By understanding the trends and demographics of migration, we gain a clearer picture of how societies are evolving in response to larger social and economic changes. As of 2020, there were approximately 281 million international migrants worldwide, making up 3.6% of the global population. This figure represents a significant increase compared to past decades with the number of

international migrants increasing by 128 million since 1990 and more than tripling the number recorded in 1970 (World Migration Report, 2024).



Source: International Organization for Migration - UN Migration; World Migration Report, 2024.

Regionally, migration is unevenly distributed across the world. Europe and Asia together host 61% of the global migrant population, with Europe accommodating around 87 million and Asia 86 million. Asia, in particular, has witnessed significant growth in migration, increasing by 74% from 2000 to 2020 (World Migration Report, 2024). This migration has transformed the region, as millions of people seek better opportunities and are driven by economic factors, political instability, and environmental pressures.

The gender composition of migration has also undergone noticeable shifts. In 2000, men and women migrated in nearly equal proportions—men comprised 50.6% of all international migrants, while women made up 49.4%. However, by 2020, this balance had tilted, with men accounting for 51.9% and women 48.1% of all migrants. For instance, Gulf nations like the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have a significantly higher proportion of male immigrants. In contrast, some countries, like India, report slightly more female immigrants than males, reflecting more complex gendered migration patterns. Among the top 10 countries of origin in Asia, nearly all—except for China, the Philippines,

and Kazakhstan—have more male emigrants than females (World Migration Report, 2024).

Another key aspect of migration is remittances—money sent by migrants to their home countries. The importance of remittances has grown considerably in recent decades, helping to stabilize economies and support families. Global remittances have surged from \$128 billion in 2000 to \$831 billion in 2022. Countries like India, Mexico, China, the Philippines, and Egypt are among the top recipients, with India receiving a remarkable \$111 billion in 2022 (World Migration Report, 2024). These financial flows are essential lifelines for many developing countries as they offer economic stability and contribute to poverty alleviation.

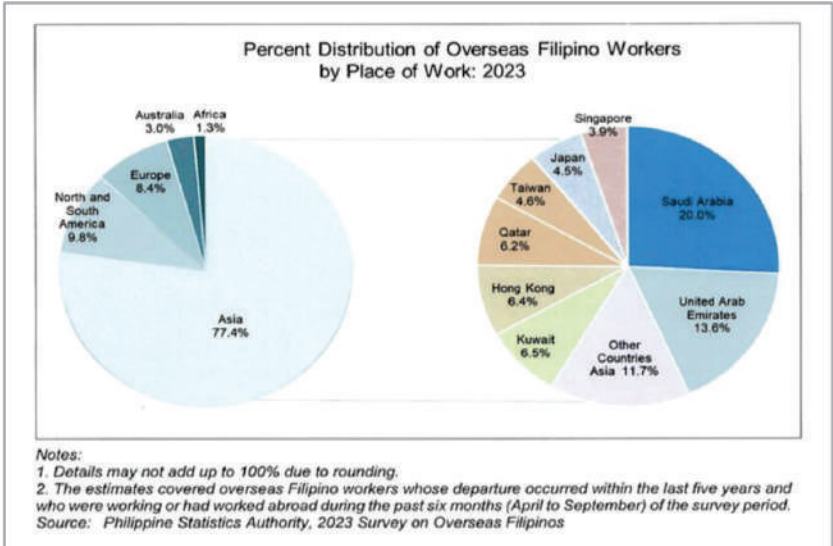
Migration's relationship with development is highlighted in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015. The 2030 Agenda comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at addressing poverty, inequality, and other global challenges. A key feature of the 2030 Agenda is its emphasis on universality and inclusiveness, ensuring that sustainable development is a shared global responsibility. Migration is explicitly recognized as a core element of development within the Agenda, especially under SDG 10.7, which calls for policies that facilitate safe, orderly, and responsible migration (International Organization for Migration, 2018). With more discussions and writings about gendered migration appearing, it also very much relates to SDG 5 (Gender Equality). By integrating migration into the broader development agenda, the SDGs aim to protect migrants' rights, enhance their contributions to development, and promote collaborative global migration governance.

This report explores the key migration trends in five Asian countries: the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Taiwan and India. Labor migration, gendered migration, international migration, and marriage migration serve as the core focus areas, with an emphasis on their social and economic impacts to their host communities and countries of origin.

1. Migration trends by country

1.1 The Philippines

Historically speaking, and in general the Southeast Asia (SEA) has been defined to have a large-scale population movement across the globe (Global Migration Data Portal, 2023). As such, numerous themes arose from Migration discussions across SEA and the Philippines which includes employment opportunities, financial security, internationalization and globalization, family safety and themes that center human capital, mobility and emigration, economics, social, and culturally ingrained aspects.



Source: Philippine Statistics Authority, 2024.

The Philippines is known for and leads South-eastern Asia for labour migration (Global Migration Data Portal, 2023). According to the Commission on Filipino Overseas’ data (2018), the Philippines possesses a long history of migration dating back since Hispanic ruling in the 14th century. Additionally, studies have shown and concretized that the first Filipino seafarers migrated to Guam, Mexico, and other nearby islands through the trading ships, and one of the examples is the Manila-Acapulco galleon trading (Ang and Tiongson, 2023; OECD/Scalabrini Migration Center, 2017;

Calzado, 2007). One of the many reasons why Filipinos migrated is to settle permanently abroad—the term it may use here is “emigration” (Commission on Filipino Overseas, 2018). A recent survey from Philippine Statistics Authority (2023).

One of the agencies tasked with protecting the rights and advocating for the welfare of OFWs is the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), which was created and constituted by Republic Act No. 11641, also known as the “Department of Migrant Workers Act,” which took effect on 3 February 2022, signed by former President Rodrigo Duterte.

The DMW is tasked with facilitating Filipino workers’ employment and reintegration abroad while taking the National Economic and Development Authority’s national development initiatives into account. Through ongoing education and training, it is also entrusted with advancing the protection and empowerment of OFWs (DMW, 2022).

Gaps, challenges and initiatives

Even though there was an “institutionalized system of migration” in the country as presented by the World Development Report (2023), still, there are ongoing gaps and challenges identified in the Philippine overseas employment program. These gaps and challenges are problems in the reintegration and sustainable dimensions of migration and development. In the forum led by Center for Migrant Advocacy (CMA) with the theme: Shaping Local Migration Governance towards the Empowerment of the Migrants and Families: Consultation on the Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals and its Nexus with Migration and Development held at the Hive Hotel, Convention Place, Quezon City. It is clearly discussed there that many OFWs were left with the option to remigrate or reintegrate despite of the efforts made by various migration governance actors in assisting returnees, remigration is the preferred option for those who have managed to find a way to leave, while others who continue to struggle and stay seem find it difficult to reintegrate economically and socially into their community of origin.

The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) undertakes steps and processes towards actions and realization on Sustainable Development Goal No. 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, wherein the agency tries to bridge the gap between those who are stuck and could not move forward by their own efforts. This effort as a partner in local migration governance and the full cooperation of help desks can go beyond volunteerism among migrant communities to yield sustainable reintegration initiatives that will soon contribute not only to the agency involved but also to the greater good of the community.

An example of executed plans and actions can be seen from the municipalities in the Philippines that led to forming and providing OWFs and their families Capability Building for OFW Family Circle (*Financial Literacy, Values Formation and Migration Realities*) conducted by the partnership of Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) and OWWA at the Regional Welfare Office-Caraga. Another cited example was from Overseas Workers Welfare Administration Regional Welfare Office VI (OWWA RWO6) in partnership with Miag-ao Public Employment Service Office (PESO) conducted *Financial Awareness Seminar and Small Business Management Training* for the members of Miag-ao OFW Family Circle. The activity was held in Justice Ramon Britanico Hall Miag-ao, Iloilo last July 25 2022.

In Metro Manila, one that is visible, operationalized, and functionalized local government unit is the *Quezon City Public Employment Service Office (QC PESO) Migrants Resource Center (MRC)* that offers services for OFWs and their families regarding reintegration processes, psychosocial counseling, *Balikbayan* portal, values formation, management seminar, pre-employment orientation seminar, assistance and training in DOLE registration, skills, financial literacy, seminars on Safe Regular Orderly Migration, anti-illegal recruitment and trafficking in person campaign and even Smart Child: E-Habilin, Kyusi OFW Online Kumustahan and Repatriation Assistance Program.

Another specific initiative in the Philippines, the OFW Family Circles (OFCs), provides essential support for Filipino migrant families. OFCs play a significant role in mitigating the

social challenges of migration, including family separation and the emotional impact on children. They serve as a model for community-based support, offering essential resources that help improve the socioeconomic stability of OFW families and maintain connections despite the geographical separation. This report suggests that similar initiatives could be adopted in other Asian countries to provide greater support for migrant families and address the broader challenges associated with migration in Asia.

On Filipina Migrants' Agency: their role and reasons for migration

Labor migration in the Philippines is often seen through the lens of economic necessity. However, Filipino labor migrants actively assert their agency by making deliberate decisions to leave their homes for various reasons that extend beyond survival. Gender dynamics also play a significant role in shaping these decisions. As Parreñas (2015) noted, women frequently migrate to challenge gender inequalities within their households. For some women, migration offers an escape from abusive relationships or the unequal division of labor at home, allowing them to navigate the constraints imposed by societal norms. However, even though female migrants may leave patriarchal structures behind in the Philippines, they often encounter new forms of inequality in their destination countries (Parreñas, 2015). Indeed, Migration can serve as a source of empowerment for women. It offers access to education and career opportunities, enabling women to earn higher incomes, gain more autonomy, and improve their social and economic status (O'Neil et al., 2016). However, this empowerment is not automatic—it requires protecting and promoting the rights of migrant women, including their labor rights, so that they can fully harness their potential as agents of development. Addressing gender-specific constraints is critical to ensuring that women can realize their productive potential. Promoting safe migration pathways, adopting a gender-responsive approach to SDG target 10.7, and advancing related targets on decent work and women's empowerment (International Organization for Migration, 2018).

1.2 Indonesia

Over the years, Indonesia has played a significant role in global migration, serving both as a source and destination of migrants (Ananta, Arifin, 2014). Indonesia is one of the largest labor-sending countries in Southeast Asia, second to the Philippines (ASEAN, 2024). It is ranked 8th in the top 10 of the total number of emigrants in Asia and ranked 14th in the top 20 of the total number of emigrants globally (McAuliffe, Oucho, 2024).

Migration in Indonesia is influenced by the demand for labor caused by the country's rapid economic development, as well as climate and environmental emergencies (IOM, 2023). Due to various socio-economic issues, i.e., unemployment, inequality, and poverty, Indonesian workers are driven to search for opportunities outside their region and borders. In light of the increasing significance of migration in Indonesia, this literature review explores its recent and future trends, with particular emphasis on labor migration and remittances, gendered migration, and the vulnerabilities and legal framework for Indonesian migrants.

Labor migration and remittances

The World Bank (2017) revealed that over 9 million or approximately 7% of the labor force in Indonesia are migrants working abroad. It was estimated that Indonesian migrant workers earn four to six times more during their stay abroad compared to their country, driving more Indonesian workers to search for opportunities overseas. The Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Board (BP2MI) revealed that irregular migration has been occurring as well, where a large number of Indonesian migrants remain undocumented by the Indonesian authorities (International Organization for Migration, 2010).

As shown in Table 1, the common destinations for Indonesian migrant workers are Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore. Moreover, the majority of the Indonesian workers abroad are revealed to take up “low-skilled” occupations, i.e., domestic workers, caregivers, operators, and general workers.

Table 1: Some Indicators of Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) Deployed to Work Abroad (2018 - 2021)

Indonesian Migrant Workers' Indicators	Year			
	2018	2019	2020	2021
3 main occupations (in order)	(1) Domestic Workers (2) Caregiver (3) Operator	(1) Domestic Workers (2) Caregiver (3) Operator	(1) Domestic Workers (2) Caregiver (3) General Worker	(1) Domestic Workers (2) Caregiver (3) General Worker
3 most important destination countries (in order)	(1) Malaysia (2) Saudi Arabia (3) Taiwan	(1) Malaysia (2) Taiwan (3) Hong Kong	(1) Hong Kong (2) Taiwan (3) Malaysia	(1) Hong Kong (2) Taiwan (3) Singapore

Source: Indonesian National Labour Placement and Protection Agency (BNP2TKI) (2021)

Indonesian labor migrants are the main contributor of remittances to Indonesia. Commonly, the flow of remittances significantly influences the country’s economic growth, resulting in an increase in the household contribution, allocation to investment, and even the income distribution (Meyer, Shera, 2017). However, contrary to this claim, the study of Ukhtiyani, Indartono (2020) revealed that remittances from 1998-2018 in Indonesia have made no significant contribution to its economic growth as the remittances were not used for investment but rather for food consumption and expenditure by households only. Likewise, according to Annisa, Jayadi (2024) (revealed that) remittances have no impact on Indonesia’s economic growth as they are still small and unable to sustain the economy and the exchange rate.

Indonesian women in migration and women agency

Traditional gender stereotypes have a significant impact on Indonesian migrant women. Men are commonly perceived to be the breadwinner, while women are for caregiving (McAuliffe, Oucho, 2024). Thus, women dominate the care and domestic workers as

these occupations are seen to be “feminine”. Compared to male migrant workers, Indonesian women are overrepresented in low-skilled occupations (OECD, 2022).

Female migrants in Indonesia are found to be vulnerable to human rights abuses, especially those employed in the care and domestic work sectors. This is further heightened due to the lack of labor protection policies (Faidah, 2024). As shown in Table 2, from 2018 to 2021, women consistently dominated the Indonesian nationals deployed abroad.

Table 2: Female Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) Deployed to Work Abroad (2018 - 2021)

Indonesian Migrant Workers' Indicators	Year			
	2018	2019	2020	2021
Percentage of Females	70%	69%	80%	90%

Source: Indonesian National Labour Placement and Protection Agency (BNP2TKI) (2018-2021)

The increasing number of Indonesian migrant women documented to have experienced abuses, exploitation, and violence caused the establishment of various agencies of women as a way to combat, help, and protect these workers. One of these is the Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia (KABAR BUMI), an organization that has been at the forefront of migrant women’s struggle in Indonesia. Kabar Bumi was established in May 2015, with founding members composed of migrant activists and organizers (APWLD, 2022). (In one of their studies, it was) A study by Kabar Bumi reveals (revealed) that women migrant workers from Indonesia were victimized by their employers and recruitment agencies by confiscating their personal documents, hindering them from applying for welfare and assistance programs of the government and forcing them to pay exorbitant recruitment agency fees (Umil, 2023).

Vulnerabilities and legal framework

Indonesian migrant workers are reported to be a vulnerable group. Kusuma (2023) pointed out that the significant gap found in the data between BP2MI and the World Bank signifies the high possibility of an illegal or non-procedural migration of Indonesian workers. Without proper procedure, the Indonesian government cannot protect their migrant workers.

From 2019 to 2021, a total of 544 Indonesian migrant workers experienced physical, psychological, and sexual abuse overseas, as revealed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (Pratama, Hincks, 2024). Hasbiyalloh *et al.* (2024) added that Indonesian labor migrants are forced to work in exploitative and poor conditions, reportedly with low pay and salary deductions, which often result in migrant workers taking high-interest loans.

National and international policies were adopted in order to protect the human rights of Indonesian migrant workers. The Indonesian government signed the 1990 UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families in 2012. They also enacted Law No. 18 of 2017 on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers, providing them end-to-end protection. Furthermore, Indonesia has been consistent in pursuing ratification to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers to enhance the protection to Indonesian migrant workers (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2020). However, while these laws and initiatives further amplified the protection for migrant Indonesian workers, they are still far from satisfactory due to lack of certain key provisions (Migrants Refugees, 2019).

Indonesian migration is mainly driven by the desire of Indonesian workers to gain bigger opportunities. Due to the country's worsening socio-economic condition, its workforce (is forced to) take risks just to be able to work abroad. This includes migrating illegally, which makes it hard for the Indonesian government to track, help, and protect the Indonesian migrants who work in low-skilled occupations, mainly care and domestic work. Workers in these sectors reportedly experience human rights abuses, including exploitation and violence. In order to protect them, national and

international policies were enacted. However, these laws show inadequacy and evidently require further intervention that aligns with resolving the challenges experienced by Indonesian migrants. Overall, the migration trends in Indonesia reveal the multifaceted nature of challenges and the growing significance of its migrant workers, both in the economy and policy development.

1.3 Vietnam

Vietnam is another prominent source country for labor migration, particularly in Southeast Asia. The Department of Overseas Labour in Vietnam reported that a record 160,000 Vietnamese workers went abroad in 2023, representing a 5% increase compared to 2019 (International Labour Organization, 2024). This figure also significantly exceeded the government's target, which had been set at 110,000 to 120,000 workers for the year.

Migration in Vietnam has evolved significantly over the past decades, driven by a combination of economic, environmental, and socio-cultural factors. Both rural-urban migration and transnational migration have had profound effects on Vietnamese society as it influences several aspects from household welfare to gender dynamics. This essay explores key migration trends in Vietnam to present a clear understanding of how migration has shaped the lives of Vietnamese people in various ways.

Rural-urban migration and household welfare

In recent decades, rural-urban migration in Vietnam has been driven by economic opportunities and poverty, with many people moving to cities in search of better livelihoods. This migration is often a household strategy, especially in disaster-prone areas like Dien Bien and Ha Tinh, to reduce economic risks linked to agriculture (Simelton *et al.*, 2021). Migrants typically send remittances to their families, which are used to improve living conditions, access healthcare, and invest in education. Migration, particularly during economic shocks such as job losses or crop failures, becomes a necessary decision for many households.

Rural-urban migrants, however, face significant challenges in cities. Many migrants, especially newcomers, struggle with insecure employment, as only about half have formal work contracts. This lack of contracts limits their access to social protections like healthcare and unemployment benefits. Migrants often endure low wages, poor working conditions, and vulnerability due to inadequate legal protections (Nguyen, Raabe,, Grote, 2013). These difficulties make the transition to city life particularly challenging for those lacking the skills and knowledge to navigate urban complexities.

Despite the hardships, rural-urban migration remains a crucial livelihood strategy for many Vietnamese households. Migrants help reduce their families' economic vulnerability by sending remittances, which improve household welfare in rural areas. While urban life poses difficulties, migration continues to be an important pathway for rural households facing poverty and economic uncertainty.

Marriage migration and gender dynamics

Marriage migration in Vietnam, particularly involving women marrying foreign spouses from Taiwan and South Korea, has significantly impacted families, gender roles, and communities since the mid-1990s. Women who migrate for marriage often send remittances back home, increasing their status and influence in household decision-making, especially regarding major economic transactions like purchasing land or building homes. This shift has challenged traditional gender roles, empowering women with both financial independence and greater social authority within their families (Bélanger, Linh, 2011).

The phenomenon of women playing active roles in international migration reflects the broader regional trend known as the "feminization of migration." Women, once seen as passive dependents, are now recognized as contributors to family welfare, gaining control over household finances. However, this empowerment is uneven. While some women gain autonomy, others remain under the control of male relatives who manage the remittances. Bélanger and Linh (2011) emphasized that marriage migration has disrupted traditional gender roles for men, who are

increasingly taking on responsibilities like childcare and household management, challenging established norms in rural communities.

Marriage migration has also transformed local marriage markets, particularly in rural areas where many women prefer to marry foreign men. This has led to a shortage of single women, giving them and their families more bargaining power in local marriage transactions. However, the rising bride prices and preference for foreign husbands have negatively affected young men from poorer backgrounds, who struggle to find wives and face social stigma. It is interesting to note that labor migration is viewed more positively by the Vietnamese state, as a development strategy, while marriage migration is often criticized, despite its crucial role in supporting families through remittances (Bélanger, Linh, 2011).

Debt and labor migration

Debt also plays a significant role in shaping migration trends in Vietnam, especially in transnational labor migration. Many Vietnamese workers take on large debts to cover recruitment fees, travel costs, and other expenses associated with migrating to work abroad. Both legal and illegal recruitment agencies often exploit these migrants, charging excessive fees that push them into debt bondage (Bélanger, Wang, 2013). This debt entraps migrants, limiting their freedom as they are forced to endure exploitative working conditions to repay what they owe in their host countries.

Hoang (2020) explores how debt undermines migrants' freedom, drawing on Amartya Sen's (1985) concept of freedom as the ability to pursue meaningful goals. Although migrants technically choose to work abroad, their decisions are heavily constrained by debt obligations and power dynamics within the labor migration industry. Migrants like Vinh, a domestic worker in Taiwan, experience severe restrictions on their mobility and personal freedoms, as they are often bound to specific contracts and employers (Hoang, 2020). This can lead to mistreatment or isolation, as returning home without clearing their debt could result in financial ruin.

Debt-financed migration also has emotional and social repercussions, causing family separation and strain, as children and

spouses struggle with the absence of the migrant worker. Hoang (2020) notes that female migrants, in particular, often have less agency in their migration journeys due to their pre-migration roles within the household economy and labor market. Many remain in abusive situations because of financial dependence on remittances, as leaving their jobs could result in even greater debt and insecurity for their families.

Migration trends in Vietnam are shaped by a range of factors, including economic opportunities, gender dynamics, and debt. Rural-urban migration offers a pathway out of poverty for many households, though it comes with its own set of challenges. While migration does not eliminate the vulnerability of rural households, it plays a role in lifting families out of poverty and improving the welfare of entire communities. Migration, especially marriage migration, has also reshaped gender relations, marriage markets, and social structures in Vietnam. As women marry foreign men and migrate abroad, they gain increased status and influence in their households through remittances. However, the benefits of migration are not equally shared, with young single men and women left behind often bearing the brunt of the increased labor and limited marriage opportunities. Finally, debt plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences of labor migrants, limiting their freedoms and making them vulnerable to exploitation. Hoang's (2020) research highlights the need for more equitable labor policies that protect the rights and freedoms of Vietnamese workers abroad. Together, these migration trends reflect the complexities of life as Vietnam continues to navigate the pressures of globalization.

1.4 Taiwan (Republic of China)

Globalization has been one of the main driving forces of human migration. In fact, Deng and Yulianto (2020) supported this argument, stating, "globalization has been featured for a long time as a driving force that allows the free movement of people." In addition, they also said that mobility with freedom was desired by many as their reason for searching for a much better life compared to their lives in their own country. As shown in the paper of Deng and Yulianto (2020), most human movements, specifically labor

migration, are concentrated on the western part of the globe leading to well-developed countries or first-world countries.

Despite the ongoing tension with the People's Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan is still one of the few countries in Asia that are migrant-receiving. Most of the migrants in Taiwan came from their neighboring Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, and the Philippines. According to data from the National Statistics Taiwan, there are a total of 887,969 migrants living in Taiwan, and almost 680,000 come from Southeast Asian countries. An infographic of One Forthly based on the data of the Ministry of Labor Statistics as of January 2018, states that there are 258,703 migrant workers from Indonesia, 208,476 from Vietnam, 149,433 from the Philippines, and 61,085 from Thailand. However, the most recent data from the National Statistics, shows that there are now 294,033 from Indonesia, 265,129 from Vietnam, 163,193 from the Philippines, and 81,614 from Thailand. The trend shows that even though the country has been subject to the influence of changing global circumstances and global tension, the number of migrants going to and working in Taiwan is still growing and increasing.

Taiwan as a labor migrant receiving country

Unlike other countries featured in this paper, Taiwan is characterized as a labor-receiving country. Between 1961 and 1973, rapid economic growth generated a trend of internal migration with the big development of high-tech industries such as Taiwan's Silicon Valley (Lin, 2012). The development of Taiwan's economy is summarized by Deng and Yulianto (2020) which provided that in the 1970s and 1980s, Taiwan like its neighboring countries in East Asia and Singapore underwent rapid economic growth and became one of the newly industrialized countries. With this and due to labor shortages, the government of Taiwan decided to open its doors to blue-collar and white-collar immigrant workers wherein they worked mainly under the social welfare and industrial industries.

The huge number of migrant workers in Taiwan is distributed among the major cities in Taiwan with Taoyuan having the most number of migrant workers, followed by Taichung, New

Taipei, Tainan, and Kaohsiung. As discussed earlier, most of the population of migrant workers in Taiwan are from the ASEAN countries especially Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia. The National Statistics of Taiwan says that with these numbers of migrant workers, you will see around one migrant in every 33 people in Taiwan.

Arranged marriage migration

Arranged marriages have become one of the easiest ways to enter and stay in a migrant-receiving country. An article by Melody Chia-Wen Lu discusses and problematizes the issue of commercially arranged marriages. She identifies that the main problem of commercially arranged marriages is that it is “commonly seen as a form of trafficking in women or mail-order brides (MOB), by focusing on a less discussed aspect of commercial marriage migration namely, the match-making and/or marriage brokerage operation,” (Lu, 2005).

The idea of Commercial Marriage Migration most commonly known as MOB or mail-order brides is one of the mechanisms being used in Taiwan to be able to work and stay there for long periods of time. This phenomenon was supported by the article of Chung, Kim, and Piper (2016), which states that the vast majority of marriage migrants are from Southeast Asia and most of them are women. These migrant women head to Taiwan primarily to marry a local. Based on the data provided by the Department of Household Registration Affairs, 15,940 Vietnamese women marry Taiwanese husbands, 2,381 Indonesians, and 1070 Filipinas also do the same. The trend of female migrant workers marrying a local is not just prominent in Taiwan but also in Japan and South Korea.

Women being centered around the issue of arranged marriage migration shows a crucial dilemma that women are still being subject to, with it even leading to women being traded as impersonal commodities. The lack of inclusive migration policies is leaving female migrant workers no choice but to marry just for them to be able to stay in the country they are working in for a much longer period of time. The issue of arranged marriage migration is a profound topic and the issue involving women is

also complex on its own, it is noteworthy that women engaging in arranged marriages are capable of choosing and making their own life choices.

Taiwan's migration pattern is distinct as it is a host to migrants, both labor and marriage, from other parts of Asia including the countries featured in this paper. Being an industrialized country and an aging society, it addresses the needs of labor and population growth respectively.

1.5 India

Recent academic research on Indian Migration cites the National Sample Survey (NSS) and National Census of 2001 as the main turning point in Migration Studies in the country (Deshingkar, Aktar, 2009; Mazumdar et al, 2013; and Kone et al, 2018). From the Census, the Indian Government defines migrants as individuals that have changed residence from their initial birthplace. Based on this definition, it was found that 30% of over one billion Indians were involved in migration of any form which equates to around 307 migrants (Deshingkar, Aktar, 2009). Also, the census included the main reason for migration among individuals but it does not consider migration flows which can provide the necessary context for migration patterns. The census also fails to capture illegal migrations, which includes informal/illegal labor migration, child labor migration, and trafficked labor migrants. As such, data provided by the government alone can not fully account for the total number, and significant features, of migration in India.

Labor migration

Migrant labor provides a considerable share of contribution to the Indian economy, but migrants are not afforded the same recognition and protection traditional non-migrant workers enjoy (Kabeer, 2005). Migrants have very few citizen rights, further exacerbated by political inefficiencies and xenophobia (Kone et al, 2018). The very few rights migrants are able to enjoy are oftentimes inadequate and poorly implemented. For example, the Public Distribution System, which supplies subsidized food and

water to over half of the Indian population is implemented through the use of 'ration cards' which are only eligible to be used in the administrative boundary of a citizen's home state. This is extremely problematic for cross-state labor migrants, as most of which are entirely dependent on the PDS. This 'ration card' also covers other basic needs and necessities like healthcare and education for the migrants' children.

Prospective migrants who have decided to migrate for employment reasons are easily enticed and recruited by contractors who tend to target poor migrants as they are more likely to work informally. The informal nature of the work would also increase the risk of these migrants to be exploited for their work and be paid very little and without job security. Injuries are also very common due to the harsh conditions but there is inadequate medical assistance or compensation extended by their employers. The daily nature of wage payment would also mean that workers do not get paid when having to take time off work due to injuries incurred while working (Mosse et al, 2002; Sarde, 2008). Despite the associated risks with informal work, migrants would still prefer to work on these jobs as it pays more than the traditional agricultural work they do at home.

Overseas skilled worker migration

Migration of skilled workers abroad is one unique trend in the country. Specifically, young professionals move to richer and more developed countries for better employment opportunities. This resulted in an increase in overseas remittances sent to the country. On average, remittances from Indian overseas workers have increased by about USD 2.9 Billion annually in the past three decades. In 2018, India recorded the highest level of overseas remittances totalling to USD 79 Billion, with China, Mexico, and the Philippines behind (World Bank, 2019). This highlights the importance of overseas skilled worker migration to the national economy.

Skilled Migrants also contribute to the development of India through what is called "Brain Gain" from returning migrants. This trend involves the repatriation and return of skilled professionals from the U.S, Europe, and Canada. These returnees bring back

with them the knowledge and skills obtained from working in “more developed countries” and actively try to incorporate and use these skills locally (Tejada et al, 2014). Yet, only a handful would come back permanently. As such, this incurs a “net loss” of skilled professionals, thereby “draining” the parent country of labour capital, a term referred to as ‘Brain Drain.’

Indian women migrants

Data on migrant women and children are hard to come by since Indian Migration tracking only uses male migration when analyzing labor migrations (Mazumdar et al, 2013). Independent researchers have found that while migrant workers are reported to be targets of harassment and exclusion, female migrant workers (and children migrants) were found to have been more susceptible to abuse not only in their workplaces, but also inside the household. According to a study conducted by the International Development Center (IRDC, 2013), women migrant workers are more vulnerable to violence and exploitation than their male and non-migrant counterparts. An example can be found in urban areas, where the gender inequalities and differences are further worsened by gender-neutral infrastructure and services. This highlights the gender insensitivity in urban planning and policies which in turn causes more problems and avenues for the abuse and harassment of female migrants (Khosla, 2009; Mahamkar and Gokhale, 2015).

While Indian migration patterns tend to focus more on labor migration, data from 2007-2008 seems to suggest that the increasing migration rates in India is actually caused by female marriage migrations as it was found that male migration rates were falling in the same time period (Mazumdar et al, 2013). Mazumdar et al (2013) also found that female marriage migrants are found to be increasing in rural destinations coinciding with the decline in rural female work participation rates. However, the decline has more to do with more urban women (usually belonging to higher castes) shifting from a domestic lifestyle into finding employment, than with rural women leaving their agricultural work. In fact, Bhagat (2017) states that women in rural settings are expected to do both domestic labor and work in the farms. This is especially more

common in households with a labor migrant father as women will then have to manage the household in the father's absence on top of the agricultural work.

The current situation of female labor migration in India is still subjected to problems associated with gender inequalities. Mazumdar et al (2013) even argues that rather than lessening these inequalities, the oppressive system is rather reconfigured to worsen the oppression and abuse women migrants endure. Poorer women are more likely subjected to a life of debt-based circulation due to the menial wages they earn and the degraded conditions on which they work which was found to be worse than what poor males are subjected to.

Effects of labour migration on children

Labor migration patterns heavily influence the problem of child labor practices in the country due to a myriad of factors. Examples of this influence are found in the children of migrant parents which falls into two categories; children that migrate alongside with their parents, or those that are left-behind by a parent migrant in their place of origin.

Summary

In a nutshell, the five countries featured in this paper display similar and unique characteristics in terms of migration. The three Southeast Asian nations display skilled, unskilled, and gendered migration. Moreover, of the three, the Philippines has an institutionalized system of migration through the creation of its Department of migrant Workers (DMW). In addition, India features an internal migration and skilled migration specifically in fields of information and computer technologies. Meanwhile, as the most advanced of them all, Taiwan hosts labor and marriage migration.

Country	Salient Features	Trends	Challenges
Philippines	Skilled and unskilled migration Gendered migration	Institutionalization of migration	-illegal recruitment, exploitative practices, abuses of brokers
India	Internal migration Skilled migration	Increase in skilled migration	Exploitative practices
Indonesia	Gendered migration	Increase in labor migration	Exploitative practices
Vietnam	Gendered Migration	Increase in marriage migrants	Exploitative practices
Taiwan	Receiving country	Hosts labor and marriage migrants	Arranged marriage (a form of human trafficking) Exploitation of women

Conclusion and recommendations

Studies on the five countries featured in this paper display something in common: migration is an inevitable course of action for the peoples of these countries. For the three Southeast Asian nations, outbound of skilled and oftentimes unskilled and gendered migration are a recurring feature. Uniquely, due to its long history of sending labor migrants abroad and their crucial role in the coffers of the local, regional, and national governments, the Philippines has institutionalized its system through the creation of its Department of migrant Workers (DMW). Interestingly, India witnesses an outflow of its skilled people abroad specifically in the fields of information and computer technologies. Meanwhile, Taiwan hosts labor and marriage migration to address its labor and population needs.

Migration of peoples to developed countries like Taiwan are without issues. Specifically for unskilled workers, illegal recruitment, exorbitant fees imposed by brokers, and exploitative practices by

employers are just a few of the problems they face. This is where the works of the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo (MSCS) played a crucial role in alleviating the sufferings of the migrants abroad.

The Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo (MSCS) is among the stakeholders of the Roman Catholic Church involved in migrant advocacy in general, and in migrant pastoral care in particular. Regardless of the work of the MSCS' provinces and delegations, the sisters can only help as much given their strengths and weaknesses as nuns and as a congregation. By conducting cost-effective migrant pastoral care approaches, the Scalabrinian Sisters can already contribute newer ways of migrant pastoral care work. The Sisters just have to choose carefully the (right) groups to work with, and to strategically employ the skills they are currently good at. The ripples of small deeds related to migrant pastoral care provide far-reaching implications that, in the individual Asian countries the delegation is in, can already jumpstart reform measures for improved well-being by migrants and refugees.

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3



TRENDS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF MIGRATION IN EUROPE

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For several centuries, until well into the 20th century, Europe was predominantly a land of origin for migratory flows to other continents. Following the economic development after the Second World War, it became as a whole primarily a region of destination for international migration, between European countries and from other continents. On the political level, after a relatively liberal phase, a process of closure began in the 1970s, worsened from 2001 onward, and has become even more accentuated in the last decade, with the so-called “refugee crisis”: in reality, better defined as a “refugee reception crisis” (Rea *et al.*, 2019).

In the EU, as of 1 January 2023, 27.3 million people (6.1% out of a population of 448.8 million residents) were citizens of third countries (Eurostat). 5.1 million people entered the EU in 2022, mainly due to the invasion of Ukraine. In addition, 1.5 million residents of an EU country moved to another EU country: a variable but significant share of immigration to the EU is made up of EU citizens.

However, talking about Europe is too general and risks generating confusion. Even limiting the discussion to the European Union (and including the United Kingdom), which is not equivalent to Europe as a whole, three regions must be distinguished. The first is North-Western Europe: the first to enter industrial development and to attract significant migratory flows, from former colonies and from the less developed areas of Europe itself; the second is South-Western Europe, which until the 1980s was mainly a region of emigration, due to a later development, and quickly transformed into a pole of attraction for international migration; finally, Central-Eastern Europe, where population movements were blocked until 1989 by the communist regimes, and which subsequently saw large flows of emigrants leave. The movements are now in the process of drying up, while incoming flows have begun, for work and now also for asylum, due to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

In the following discussion I will take this distinction into account where necessary, leaving aside the historical aspects and focusing attention on more recent phenomena.

1 The salient trends

De Haas, Castles and Miller (2020) have distinguished some general trends in international migration. I will resume here the most relevant ones with regard to the European Union, adding some aspects referable to migration policies in this region.

The first concerns the *differentiation of migration and immigrants*, in terms of desirability, acceptance and legal status. Economic, political and cultural factors are intertwined, producing a “civic stratification” of immigrants (Morris, 2002). The European Union first of all attributes rights of free movement, settlement, access to the labor market to citizens of other EU states: despite persistent regulatory and bureaucratic stickiness, citizens of other EU countries enjoy at least on paper the same rights as national citizens, with the sole exception of the right to vote in general elections. The EU has also introduced a special residence permit, the Blue Card, for highly qualified workers, and fast-track entry for some highly sought-after professional categories, such as doctors and nurses. Investors and wealthy people enjoy privileged treatment, being

able to access the so-called Golden Visa. In some countries, such as Cyprus and Malta, they can obtain citizenship without having to demonstrate prolonged residence and knowledge of the national language. The visa regime also facilitates entry, for tourism, study, seasonal work, for citizens of non-EU European countries and other countries considered friendly, while placing much greater obstacles for citizens of the South of the world. As a result, the possibility of moving across borders is now a transnational social issue of absolute importance (Faist, 2018), configuring “mobility regimes” that exacerbate inequalities on a global scale (Glick Schiller, Salazar, 2013).

The demographic evolution of immigrant populations is also part of differentiation: in several countries, especially in North-Western Europe, primary flows have slowed down, also due to restrictive policies, while second, third, fourth generations of citizens of immigrant or mixed origin have grown up in the territory, but they often continue to encounter problems of social acceptance and forms of discrimination. Therefore, in scientific discourse, there is a tendency to speak of populations of immigrant origin, or with a migratory background, rather than immigrants in the strict sense.

The cultural dimension can also be included in the concept of differentiation: immigrants in Europe now have very varied origins, and are bearers of a cultural and religious pluralism that is unprecedented in various respects. Vertovec (2022) coined the concept of “superdiversity” in this regard, meaning that Europeans today must deal with immigrant populations perceived as very different, in terms of origins, language, habits, family traditions, religious beliefs. The religious dimension is salient, with Islam in the foreground, especially because many European countries have been almost mono-religious for centuries, or composed of almost mono-religious regions, or have in any case historically incorporated into their norms a privileged relationship with a particular religious confession. Just think of the Concordats or the tradition of state churches. Perhaps the main cultural innovation induced by immigration in various European countries, especially in Southern Europe, is the introduction of a previously almost unknown religious pluralism (Ambrosini, Naso, Paravati, 2018; Ambrosini, Molli, Naso, 2022).

The second trend, far from new but which has re-emerged forcefully in recent decades, concerns the *feminization of migration*, which combines entries for family reunification, marriage and work. In Europe, despite prevailing representations, the majority of immigrants are women. The significant demand for domestic help and assistance by European families has attracted a considerable influx of immigrant women workers, especially from Central and Eastern Europe, both from EU member states (Poland, Romania, Bulgaria) and from outside (Ukraine, Moldova) (Vianello, 2009). Other workers employed in domestic services have been coming from Asia (Philippines) and Latin America for decades. Southern Europe in particular is involved in this phenomenon, due to a social structure in which households are still the main providers of care for people, especially the most fragile (elderly, children, sick...), combined with the lack of public services (Ambrosini, 2013).

The third trend, very marked in recent years, consists in the *politicization of migration* (Geddes, Hadj-Abdou, Brumat, 2020). From a low-profile issue on government agendas and party programs, international migration has risen to the rank of a high-priority issue, often highly influential on electoral outcomes. New political actors, definable as national-populists, openly hostile to immigrants, refugees, cultural and religious diversity, and especially to Islam, have played a key role in this pathological emphasis on the importance of migration: terms such as invasion, ethnic substitution, clash of civilizations have gained a large space in political discourse. Even mainstream political forces have been influenced by it, as shown by the new Pact on Immigration and Asylum approved by the Council and the European Parliament in 2024 (see below). Brexit was the most eloquent demonstration of the influence of xenophobic suggestions on voters' orientations. Other electoral outcomes in various countries, first and foremost in Italy, have confirmed that closure towards immigrants and refugees attracts significant shares of voters and can determine electoral outcomes. Politicization is particularly expressed in the securitization of migration policies (Faist, 2002): the immigration-security nexus has established itself as a regulatory principle of the phenomena of mobility across borders. The (declared) closure of borders has established itself as a widely shared orthodoxy

(Ambrosini, Campomori, 2024). The control of borders, the reaffirmation of national sovereignty in terms of control over those who enter and want to stay on the territory, the prevention of unwanted entries, have drawn strength from the link between the control of (poor) immigration and the protection of citizens' security.

In the most recent phase, two phenomena have intervened to complicate the architecture of migration policies: the new demand for labor, even not particularly qualified, that intra-European migrations no longer seem to satisfy, and the influx of refugees from Ukraine. Hostile campaigns have thus focused on refugees from the South of the world.

Confirming that more than an objective problem of intensity of arrivals and costs of reception, a cultural and political closure towards spontaneous entries from developing countries is at stake, the invasion of Ukraine and the arrival in the EU of a mass of over four million refugees in a few months have occurred: the implementation for the first time of the 2001 EU directive, which allowed free entry, movement, access to the labor market and social services, has corresponded to a mobilization of civil societies in multiple reception initiatives. Despite complications and bureaucratic obstacles, Ukrainian refugees (mainly women and minors, it should be noted) have found the doors open: indeed, the many citizens who have come forward to welcome refugees into their homes have often been disappointed by the complications and institutional stickiness that have prevented them from implementing their intentions (Bassoli, Campomori, 2024).

It can therefore be said that in Europe the idea of an invasion by an incalculable crowd of asylum seekers predominates, but the numbers tell another story. The war in Syria and Iraq has forced about five million refugees to flee across the border, with millions more within the two countries. The invasion of Ukraine has forced about eight million to flee, of which over four million in the EU, as already mentioned, although partly mobile and commuters. Apart from the latter, only a modest minority of people seeking asylum, according to UNHCR data (2024), on average the best equipped and selected, arrive in Europe, but this is enough to trigger fear and refusals. In reality, 75 per cent of people seeking asylum

(117.3 million in 2023) find shelter in intermediate or developing countries, about a third in the poorest countries overall. The majority are actually internally displaced persons (68.3 million), welcomed in other regions of the same country, those who cross a border in 70 per cent of cases stop in the neighboring country. In 2021, before the invasion of Ukraine, according to Eurostat data, the EU welcomed less than 10 per cent of the world's refugees, now it is perhaps around 20 per cent. The countries most involved in welcoming refugees in 2023 are instead in order: Iran (3.8 million, growing due to arrivals from neighboring Afghanistan), Turkey (3.3 million), Colombia (2.9 million, due to the arrival of refugees from Venezuela), Germany (2.6 million), Pakistan (2.0 million, also arriving from Afghanistan) (UNHCR 2024). Germany was the only EU country to figure among the top ten in the world in terms of number of refugees welcomed. In relation to the inhabitants, Lebanon welcomes one refugee in 6 inhabitants; Montenegro one in 9; Jordan one in 16. Within the EU, Sweden welcomes one in 40; Malta one in 56. Italy is below average, with one refugee for every 175 inhabitants (about 6, including Ukrainians - every 1,000 inhabitants).

Making use of their economic strength and political influence, European governments have hired the governments of the countries affected by the passage of migrants and asylum seekers as external border guards (Lavenex, 2006). In this sense, it can be said that the borders of the EU have been relocated in the South of Libya, in Niger, Turkey, Bosnia-Herzegovina; as those of the United States in the South of Mexico. At the same time, however, Western governments have placed themselves in a condition of dependence on external partners with questionable democratic standards: think of the power that Erdogan or the Moroccan or Tunisian governments hold today in dealing with European governments.

Border surveillance also combines new and old technologies. In airports and other entry points, increasingly sophisticated biometric systems have been introduced, from body scanners to the digitalization and storage of fingerprints (Dijstelbloem, Broeders, 2015). The role of the European agency Frontex has increasingly strengthened at land and sea borders, becoming in the space of a few years the most powerful EU agency, equipped with planes,

ships, drones, and night vision goggles. In this way, a powerful border control industry has been formed, an industry that feeds on its own failures: the more borders are violated, or rather, the more they are perceived as vulnerable, the more governments invest resources to control them (Andersson, 2016).

A fourth trend, linked to the politicization of migration but which should be considered separately, concerns the high priority given to the fight against irregular immigration, which also includes the entries from the sea of people seeking asylum: indeed, these have become the symbol of unauthorized and unwanted immigration. Irregular immigration and landings from the sea are overlapped and confused (Ambrosini, Hajer, 2023).

The connection with security, as well as the feared links with Islamist terrorist attacks, have highlighted its importance, especially after the attacks of September 2001. The ability to control immigration has become a test of the credibility of governments and their ability to guarantee public order and the protection of citizens. The distinction between regular and irregular immigration has been greatly dramatized, as has the exogenous nature of irregular immigration, conceived as an illegal crossing of borders. Terms such as “clandestine” translate the stigmatization by the receiving society and the sense of threat associated with the phenomenon.

European research on the topic has also tried in this case to deconstruct current representations, starting from the difficulty in defining exactly what irregular immigration is. Although the concept may appear immediately evident, a more in-depth examination reveals uncertainties and ambiguities (Spencer, Triandafyllidou, 2020). It has been noted that irregularity can refer to four different aspects: entry (whether the foreign citizen entered the country legally, for example with a tourist visa, or illegally, for example with forged documents); residence (whether they have a document authorizing them to reside in the country, or not); work authorization (whether the permit authorizes them to work or not); the nature of the occupation (whether it is formal and involves the payment of taxes and contributions, or falls within the underground economy). Another dimension, which intersects with the previous ones, concerns documentation (i.e. whether the authorities are aware of the presence of the foreign citizen on the

territory) (Baldwin-Edwards, Kraler, 2009). However, a potential complication arises. A foreign citizen may be in order for some profiles, but not for others. For example, they may have a permit as tourists, which authorizes them to stay for a certain period, but does not allow them to work officially. Or if they stay with a regular permit as students, they can work for a certain number of hours per week (usually twenty), but if they exceed (for example, by accumulating two part-time jobs) they commit an infringement of the rules. There are therefore numerous uncertain situations or situations of partial regularity, for which Ruhs and Anderson (2010) have coined the term semi-compliance. Let us think for example of an immigrant for whom an application for regularization has been submitted in one of the recurrent Italian amnesties, but who is waiting for a response; or of an asylum seeker whose application has been rejected at first instance, but has filed an appeal. Therefore, studies on the subject converge in stating that regularity/irregularity is not a clear-cut dichotomy, but rather a continuum, with various intermediate positions and nuances (Triandafyllidou, Bartolini, 2020, p. 13; Hellgren, 2012; Belloni, Pastore, Roman, 2023).

A final trend to be mentioned concerns policies towards immigrants once they have entered and settled in the EU: the rejection of multiculturalism and the return to a more assimilationist approach. In the last quarter of the last century, multiculturalism was, at least at a theoretical level, the most shared approach in the European debate on immigrant integration policies. Although the concept is subject to different interpretations and operational declinations, it can be agreed that some form of recognition and public support for the cultural identities of new arrivals was considered a fair and desirable option. Following the attacks of the early years of this century, several European political leaders have begun to accuse multiculturalism of being responsible for the separation of immigrants from the mainstream society, and even for their segregation. The very idea of preserving cultural identities has come under fire, seen as the basis for the institution and hardening of identity boundaries. Fear has taken over that, in order to protect and promote cultural diversity, maintaining a distance from the receiving society would be encouraged through multiculturalism, avoiding mixing.

Other voices have blamed immigrants' cultural and religious traditions for the discrimination and mistreatment of women and minors, an accusation taken up by a feminist scholar like Susan Moller Okin in a book with the emblematic title: *Is multiculturalism bad for women?* (1999). In fact, the defense of women's rights has become a widely used argument against immigrants by supporters of closing borders and stricter control of their behavior (Fassin, 2010).

There was thus a rapid convergence of national and European integration policies towards a re-edition of more assimilationist approaches: a shift from a vision of integration policies as a public offering of initiatives and resources for an easier integration of immigrants into the host society, to a vision in which policies affirm the duty of immigrants to loyally integrate into the host society, and to invest time and resources for this. The most typical example is the compulsory courses for learning the language, the law and the historical heritage of the host societies, with the related verification exams. In this sense, it can be said that we are witnessing the return, especially in Europe, of a more or less light neo-assimilationism, which translates into:

I) the introduction of a) linguistic requirements or the raising of the level of competence when the requirement was already foreseen in order to access various rights; b) tests of culture, knowledge of fundamental laws and detection of public values that must be shared; c) commitments or oaths to respect the fundamental values of the country of immigration. II) These barriers can be placed at various stages: the issuing, the renewal of the residence permit, the granting of the residence card, family reunification, the acquisition of citizenship and III) they can be accompanied by support courses organized in various ways: of different duration, optional or mandatory, paid, free, refundable (Zincone, 2007, p. 24).

After having outlined the general trends in the reception of immigration in the EU, I will move on to examine in the following pages the most debated issue of the last ten years: the reception of refugees from the South of the world.

2 The new EU pact on immigration and asylum

The difficulties of the EU in dealing with the reception of refugees and spontaneous arrivals are revealed by the difficult agreement reached in April 2024, after seven years of attempts and three years of negotiations under the leadership of Ursula von der Leyen¹. As various actors involved in the defense of human rights have pointed out, the agreement was found around a text that takes several steps backwards on the right to asylum and refugee protection. According to Amnesty International, “Migration and Asylum Pact reforms will put people at heightened risk of human rights violations”².

The main contents of the Pact in fact concern the restriction of access, of the possibility of obtaining asylum or in any case of remaining in the territory of the EU. As García Agustín and Jørgensen (2021, p. 858) note, “Despite the intentions, the Pact entails a continuity with the previous EU strategy by maintaining the focus on border externalization, detention and deportation”. First of all, the text provides for the unification of the procedures for the presentation and evaluation of asylum applications, in place of the national procedures in force until now. Refugees arriving in the EU will be held for seven days in special identification centers at the borders, in order to ascertain their identity and subject them to medical and security checks. An Italian association of pro-immigrant lawyers, ASGI (Associazione Studi Giuridici sull’Immigrazione), has stigmatized in this regard the fact of having introduced “the legal fiction of non-entry”, configuring the border areas as extra-territorial zones, establishing legally gray areas and risking excluding refugees from effective protection of their rights. Furthermore, forcibly holding refugees who have entered the territory spontaneously, by land or by sea, means needlessly depriving of freedom people who are often vulnerable and in need of protection³.

¹ Available at: <https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en>. For a broad discussion of the Pact in an international perspective, see Carrera, Geddes (2021).

² Available at: <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/04/eu-migration-asylum-pact-put-people-at-risk-human-rights-violations/>>, April 4, 2024.

³ Available at: <<https://www.asgi.it/asilo-e-protezione-internazionale/requiem-per-il-diritto-dasilo-in-europa-possiamo-ancora-evitarlo/>>, April 11, 2024.

Border detention is primarily aimed at implementing a more stringent screening of asylum applications and a faster repatriation of those who are rejected. At least that is what European and national officials hope. The repatriation of unwanted migrants is a real obsession of European institutions: in the September 2023 version, the term “return” and its derivatives were cited more than 90 times.

In detail, an accelerated procedure for examining applications will be introduced, based on a list of countries considered safe, because less than 20 percent of asylum applications from refugees from those countries have previously been accepted. Refugees originating from a country on the list will have their asylum application examined in a time frame reduced to 12 weeks, and may be detained in the meantime. It is evidently supposed that these are unfounded applications, destined for rejection, which should be followed (in theory) shortly by forced return to the country of origin. An additional three months of detention are planned for this purpose.

ASGI has also drawn attention to this provision, denouncing a system that is “not only repressive but also discriminatory on the basis of nationality”. Detention at the border for more than 12 weeks, awaiting repatriation, also means “relentlessly violating the right to personal freedom”, exposing migrants to the risk of refoulement, i.e. expulsion to countries where their safety and personal integrity would be at risk. It should be added that speeding up the assessment times for applications not only requires more flexible rules, but also adequate staffing, i.e. investment of resources by governments. Just as repatriations require agreements with the countries of origin, which must be defined, financed and made operational.

Even the partial overcoming of the Dublin Convention occurred in the name of a vision that considers refugees as a burden that no one would want to take on. A form of mandatory solidarity has thus been introduced, with the redistribution of refugees to other EU countries “in the event of a sudden increase in arrivals”: a clause that will certainly be discussed, and which risks calling into question the already modest progress made. The numbers are however low: the redistribution should start with 30,000 places per year, which would become 60,000 the following year, then 90,000,

up to 120,000 from the fourth year onwards. This is a very small share of the people who apply for asylum in the EU each year, over 1.1 million in 2023. Furthermore, governments that do not want to accept asylum seekers on their territory will have an alternative: to pay a sum of 20,000 euros for each person rejected. It seems like a rather mild compensation, but the Hungarian government (and previously also the Polish one) has firmly rejected this possibility. On the Italian side, Minister Piantedosi also stated that he does not want to accept financial contributions in exchange for welcoming refugees, and indeed explained that a large country like Italy does not need this compensation. In the name of national pride, he renounced the argument of the costs of welcoming as a reason for closing off refugees.

The agreement also meets the expectations of internal EU countries by extending the blocking of refugees in the countries of first arrival from 12 to 20 months, with the exception of people rescued at sea by NGO ships (for whom it remains at 12 months), and by introducing simplified procedures to send asylum seekers who cross the internal borders of the EU back to the country of first entry: Brussels intends to more effectively combat “second migrations” and increase the number of Dubliners, that is, refugees bounced back after trying to settle in another European country. Part of this plan is the collection of biometric data also on children, starting from the age of six, against the current 14: officially to protect them, but more likely to be able to send them back more easily to the country of first entry.

Beyond these provisions, the Pact insists on collaboration with the governments of the countries of origin and transit, that is, on the external dimension of migration policies already mentioned above. The declared objectives are five: supporting countries that host refugees and host communities; creating economic opportunities close to home, especially for young people; fighting against migrant trafficking; improving repatriation and readmission, intensifying voluntary repatriations and contributing to reintegration; developing regulated channels for legal migration.

The language is very careful, but the underlying political vision is clear: the EU intends to work to keep refugees in transit countries, financing their reception; better still, to exchange the

reduction of flows for the development of the countries of origin, ignoring the evidence on the links between the first phase of a development process and the increase in departures. It insists on repatriations, voluntary and forced, and on reintegration in the homeland. It relaunches the criminalization of transporters, grouped under the label of traffickers, hiding the fact that for those fleeing from developing countries there are no alternatives: the fight against traffickers is in reality a fight against refugees. In exchange, the European institutions and national governments offer a cautious opening to entries for work, but it is very doubtful that it could concern countries at war or suffocated by oppressive regimes and enemies of the West, such as Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan. The objective of greater effectiveness in the expulsion of unwelcome refugees is finally pursued through another provision: the possibility of expelling rejected asylum seekers not to their country of origin, but possibly also to a country with which they have “reasonable ties”, for example because they have transited there. This opens the way to rejections towards North African countries such as Libya and Tunisia, exposing the people involved to violence, harassment, violations of fundamental rights.

3 Migration policies as a battleground and humanitarian action

From the considerations made, a finding emerges: migration policies have today become a decisive battleground for the affirmation of the humanitarian values that lay at the foundation of the European Union. They are an arena in which public institutions and civil society confront each other, sometimes collaborating, other times coming into conflict: for or against the reception of immigrants and refugees. Everyone brings visions, values and interests that animate the debate, in explicit or implicit forms. Actors can therefore establish alliances or tacit agreements, form coalitions or emphasize disagreements. In democratic societies, cultural and communicative activities, aimed at attracting public consensus and influencing political decisions, take on particular importance (Ambrosini, 2021; Campomori, Ambrosini, 2020).

The concept of battleground can be applied at different levels. At international and national levels, it can refer to the tension between NGOs involved in sea rescues and policies aimed at re-establishing the inviolability of borders and state sovereignty; to transnational networks of solidarity cities; to the actions of activists who help asylum seekers cross land borders, evading border controls. At local levels, it applies to relationships between public authorities and solidarity actors, and especially in conflicts related to the reception of asylum seekers and assistance to migrants without legal authorization. The extreme case consists of measures against reception and the recurrent forms of criminalization of solidarity in various countries.

Another strand of literature focuses instead on the relationship between immigration, borders and humanitarian action. The debate has been greatly influenced by the positions of what is defined as critical anthropology and critical studies on the development policies of the South of the world. From this side come harsh accusations against what Fassin (2012) has defined as “humanitarian reason”, others even more generically as “humanitarianism”. NGOs are seen as accomplices of governments, pillars of the neo-liberal governance of humanitarian crises, guilty of silencing refugees and the persecuted, of making them victims without a voice and margins of freedom, of appealing to suffering instead of justice and human rights, of managing reception camps that imprison refugees and keep them away from the North of the world, or trap them on the margins of the receiving societies.

“Critical studies” of humanitarian action have subsequently involved solidarity mobilizations in favor of welcoming refugees on European soil in their criticisms. After an initial, more sympathetic phase, as it focused mainly on the no-borders movements and the counter-hegemonic meaning of their protests (Vandevoordt, Verschraegen, 2019), subsequent works have instead insistently stigmatized the lack or insufficiency of political commitment in denouncing and opposing closures and injustices towards asylum seekers (Kleres, 2017). The lack of political awareness would be combined with the reproduction of inequalities and social hierarchizations, between local actors with resources and skills and the new arrivals who find themselves dependent on their help

(Fleischmann, Steinhilper, 2017). Or even the exercise of a “mental maternalism” and attitudes of superiority towards the people welcomed, treated as weak subjects to be educated and emancipated (Braun, 2017). There is no lack of those who have observed, reconnecting to a not new current of criticism towards voluntary solidarity, the infiltration of particular and even selfish interests in the participants (Malkki, 2015), such as the search for gratitude (Moulin 2012), or personal gratification in the form of “narcissistic Samaritanism” (Kapoor 2005). Then there is the emphasis on the primacy of emotions as a driving force of mobilizations and the consequent victimization of refugees, seen as deserving of help because of their suffering (Karakayali, 2017). Even authors who have spoken of “subversive humanitarianism” (Vandevoordt, Verschraegen, 2019) have insisted on its “ambiguities”: “vertical relations”, that is, asymmetric and unbalanced, between aid providers and beneficiaries; introduction of forms of categorization of beneficiaries, based on vulnerability, legal status or deservingness; compensation by volunteers for deficient public policies, which are not questioned, or not enough. Ultimately, in many respects, pro-refugee grassroots mobilizations have been assimilated by this strand of literature with the depoliticized humanitarianism of large NGOs operating at an international level.

Studies on solidarity and reception by civil society actors have, however, also proposed more sympathetic visions towards grassroots mobilizations. Agustin and Jorgensen (2021) spoke of “civic solidarity”, promoted by various pro-migrant civil society actors, in parallel with “autonomous solidarity”, self-organized by migrants and asylum seekers, and with “institutional solidarity”, implemented by public actors, such as solidarity cities. Civic solidarity challenges the barriers between included and excluded, emphasizing the elements that unite people from different backgrounds. It fights to eliminate the vulnerability factors that prevent people from participating in society on an equal basis. It combines the expansion of rights with the construction of collaborative relationships between and within social groups (wenness).

Sandri (2018), with reference to the pro-migrant activities organized by various groups of volunteer-activists in the so-called “Calais jungle”, instead proposed the expression “voluntary humanitarianism”, seeing it as a form of “civil disobedience”, distinct from large NGOs, but also opposed to neo-liberal border governance, as it is aligned against governments and migration regimes.

Also for Schwiertz and Schwengen (2020), what defines the bottom-up initiatives to help asylum seekers and immigrants is the opposition to national borders and to the possession of citizenship as a political limit of solidarity: the reference here goes in particular to the large mobilizations that took place in Germany in 2015, on the occasion of the influx of about a million refugees, mainly Syrians. Schwiertz and Schwengen therefore discuss “inclusive solidarity”, through which civil society initiatives renegotiate social structures, in favor of people who move across borders.

Fleischmann (2020) also refers to the German context and the “spirit of summer 2015”. She illustrates its different manifestations, as well as the various interests at stake. Humanitarian volunteerism and political activism are in any case not easy to distinguish. Fleischmann also speaks of “solidarity”, albeit “contested”, and underlines its potential to challenge the demarcation between citizens and non-citizens. Solidarity therefore takes on the character of a transformative relationship between included and excluded, capable of establishing a community despite differences. However, her conclusions return to a contrast between forms of support for migrants that inspire political action and fuel egalitarian practices, and forms of support that inspire practices with anti-political meanings and effects, becoming complicit in government discrimination and the production of new forms of exclusion of migrants.

Other authors have insisted more strongly on the convergence between political activism and humanitarian action (Della Porta, 2020; Queirolo Palmas, Rahola 2020; Zamponi, 2017). Artero (2019, p. 158) has presented volunteering as a “micropolitical practice”, which has encouraged volunteers to be outraged by structural injustices, to sympathize with migrants and to engage in explicit forms of dissent. Giliberti and Potot (2021) have instead

analyzed the “solidarity practices” that develop around borders, which include material and moral aid to people stranded along migratory routes, help to cross borders, denunciations of violence by authorities and illegal pushback actions. This framework includes works that have denounced and analyzed the criminalization of solidarity towards asylum seekers and other unauthorized migrants or those with weak and controversial legal statuses: an exacerbation of the sacralization of borders and national sovereignty, which also affects those who provide non-profit assistance to people in transit.

The tension between humanitarian solidarity and political borders is a common thread that connects this array of contributions in various ways. In this regard, the concept of “de-bordering solidarity” (Ambrosini, 2023) can be proposed, in which some unifying characteristics can be identified: first of all, the protagonism of pro-migrant civil society actors, variously organized; secondly, the reference to universal human rights, with the consequent refusal to consider national belonging as a criterion for the recognition of rights and inclusion in solidarity relations; thirdly, the implicitly political meaning of aid towards immigrants and refugees, even when it is not openly professed (just think of Carola Rackete, an icon of sea rescue and for this reason arrested and tried); finally, the emphasis placed on concrete support towards people in conditions of fragility, regardless of their legal status.

Another strand of literature focuses instead on the agency of legally fragile immigrants, migrants in irregular conditions, asylum seekers, people on the move rejected at the borders. That is, the immigrants most affected by the tightening of border controls, with its consequences on the territory and in the various interactions with the receiving societies. Reacting not only to the criminalization, but also to the victimization of vulnerable migrants, studies of the last two decades have insisted on the margins of initiative and search for solutions of their situation enacted by this population (e.g. Ataç *et al.* 2015; Fontanari, 2019).

Without entering into a discussion on the concept of agency, for the case of migrants we can define it as the ability to shape one’s life, to exploit available opportunities or to open up new possibilities, for oneself or possibly for one’s families (Triandafyllidou, 2019).

Appropriately, Ruhs and Anderson (2010) spoke of a “spectrum of agency”, considering different individuals and groups in different times, spaces, circumstances. Agency therefore does not mean absolute freedom of choice, but a perspective to understand decisions, room for maneuver, opportunities, trajectories of migrants. Agency can therefore unfold in different forms and degrees, more or less high, dealing with structural, political and economic constraints.

Summarizing the main results of the available studies in a typology, we can distinguish three forms of agency. The first and most common can be defined as *adaptation*. It consists in the effort to respond to a problematic personal situation (in the case in question, the lack of legal status or its weakness) by finding private solutions at the micro-social level, without aspiring to change the overall context: for example, by finding informal work in the underground economy, obtaining help from family members and compatriots, relying on some solidarity institution of the host society.

The second form of agency can be defined as *reconfiguration*. It refers to the effort to reshape one’s personal condition, often in connection with other people who find themselves in the same situation, trying to change the image they have in the eyes of the majority population and to succeed in becoming more accepted, tolerated, and possibly regularized (Triandafyllidou, 2019). Here are the attempts to collect and accumulate demonstrations of good conduct and deservingness: by presenting themselves as diligent and impeccable workers, law-abiding subjects, caring and responsible parents, morally irreproachable people, alien to drunkenness, brawls, gambling, family disputes. For example, by attending a religious congregation, conforming to an aesthetic of sobriety and composure, pursuing a rigorous lifestyle, with the aim of being judged worthy of support, and possibly of access to a status of legal residents (Guzman Garcia, 2020).

The third form of agency, at the antipodes of the first, is characterized as *mobilization*. It includes the various manifestations of political activism and irruption into the public arena, with the aim of changing the legal framework or easing the application of the rules, thus acquiring spaces of recognition and legalization.

Demonstrations, marches, occupations of public spaces are its expression (Chimienti, Solomos, 2020). Here the contestation of borders and their consequences on people's lives becomes explicit.

This typology illuminates a paradox: the first two forms of agency, at the individual or of small group level, do not disturb the social order, do not question the normative framework of the receiving society, do not formulate requests for structural changes, but precisely for this reason they have a greater chance of success. The third, potentially more incisive, has attracted considerable attention and sympathetic glances among scholars, for its profile of subversion of the established order, of political rebellion or at least of claiming justice by the oppressed, but in fact it has achieved limited success, especially in recent years. The hardening of borders has also caused closure towards collective mobilizations of unauthorized migrants.

Conclusions. migration policies and European values

The debate on international migration in Europe in the last decade has given great importance to the arrival from the South of the world of people seeking asylum, as well as to the policies governing the phenomenon. It can be said that scientific research has followed the priorities of governments, the mass media and public opinion, placing the issue of welcoming refugees at the center of attention, but distancing itself from common sense and apocalyptic visions of the phenomenon. The view adopted in the social sciences has favored a largely critical and deconstructive approach: it has placed the defense of human rights at the center, claimed the duty to welcome, denounced the surveillance measures and closure of borders by EU governments.

Studies on borders and the unequal distribution of the right to mobility have produced a wide range of contributions, mostly critical of the visible reaffirmation of the power of national states to control access to the territory. The persistence of irregular immigration, despite efforts to eradicate it, has also been a subject of investigation, exploring the plurality of forces and interests that fuel

the phenomenon. Several works have then highlighted the capacity for initiative and the political protagonism of refugees and irregular immigrants, revealing decidedly sympathetic positions towards the subjectivity of the excluded, but with the risk of emphasizing actions that are rarely long-lasting and rewarded with success.

More controversial, however, is the judgment on the various declinations of humanitarian action promoted by different subjects of civil society, from large NGOs to spontaneous groups of citizens. The criminalization of solidarity, by governments, security apparatuses and judicial powers, has been denounced in many places, but the evaluations of the humanitarian initiatives of civil societies have differed.

A critical vision of the so-called humanitarianism has prevailed in the literature, as I have illustrated in the previous pages, which starts from the reservations on the action of NGOs in developing countries to be poured on humanitarian subjects in the host countries. Interesting works have however observed the convergence between political activism and reception practices, the breadth and meanings of pro-refugee mobilizations, the political values of humanitarian activities, in the name of solidarity against borders. Humanitarian corridors, in the Italian case and in other European countries, are an example of this (Ambrosini, Schnyder von Wartensee, 2022). In a polarized political and cultural context, the reception of refugees and unwanted immigrants is configured as a battleground in which the desire for closure is opposed by various supportive subjects of civil society. Perhaps starting from here it will be possible to reverse a trend that is currently generally unfavorable in Europe to the recognition of the right to asylum and humanitarian obligations.

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4

MIGRATION TRENDS IN THE AMERICAS AND PROSPECTS FOR THE NEXT DECADE

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The following piece presents a brief reflection on present migration trends in the Americas. The reflection looks at changes in the nature, volume, dynamics, and politics of migration and addresses some unintended consequences related to them. Building on the examination of present conditions, we elaborate on pressing challenges looming on the horizon, which we presume will shape the work of the Scalabrini Sisters' Order in the years to come.

1 The rise of population movement

Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced a very significant increase in the overall volume of migration in the last five years. This trend is part of a general uptick in the volume of people on the move. According to the International Organization

for Migration (IOM), the number of international migrants reached 281 million in 2020 (International Organization for Migration 2023, 23). Although this volume represents only 3.6% of the world's population, it reflects a sustained increase in migratory flows. Since 2010, the number of migrants has increased by 60 million people, with a higher percentage in certain regions such as Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Latin America (UNHCR, 2024). In the case of the Americas, the number of people who migrated doubled from 7 to 15 million between 2005 and 2020. This figure makes the region with the highest increase in migratory volume since the 2000s (International Organization for Migration, 2023, p. 23). After a marked drop due to the restrictions on movement imposed by States during the COVID-19 pandemic (Herrera, 2023), the number of people on the move rose steadily (International Organization for Migration 2024, chapter 9). This increase includes a growing number of forced migrants, including refugees, internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and stateless persons who had to abandon their places of residence because of violence, repression and war. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 122.6 million people were forcibly displaced by June 2024 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024).

Moreover, Latin America and the Caribbean are now home to a higher share of migrants than anywhere else in the world, with children making up an increasing share of the migrant population. Globally, approximately 13% of migrants are children; however, within Latin America and the Caribbean, they represent 25% of migrants. In 2022, approximately 250,000 migrants—including 40,000 children—travelled through the dangerous jungle of Darién. This trend intensified in the first half of 2023, with over 196,000 migrants, including more than 40,000 children, making the same perilous crossing (UNICEF, 2023).

2 Deteriorated living conditions across the region

Increasing volumes of migration in the Western Hemisphere are mostly the product of a worrying deterioration in living conditions across the region. Growth is fueled mostly by the

massive exodus of Venezuelans. According to statistics from the IOM and UNHCR, eight million Venezuelans -almost 30% of the population- have migrated since 2015 (Intraregional Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants of Venezuela, 2024). That puts Venezuela second place in the world in terms of displaced people behind Syria, a country that has suffered massive displacement because of its terrible civil war. Venezuelans are fleeing a toxic mixture including economic malaise, high crime rates, state repression, criminal violence and abysmal social services (Betts, 2019; Gandini, 2022). This is further compounded by economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. government, which directly impact the national economy and exacerbate its contraction (Weisbrot, Sachs, 2019).

Most Venezuelans have found refuge in South America, primarily in Colombia (~ 2' 860.000) (R4V, 2025). In general, at the beginning of the exodus, the countries in the region had open-door policies to receive Venezuelans and sought pragmatic solutions to regularize this population by granting visas, residence permits, both temporary and permanent, and various types of humanitarian protection. Over time, however, this disposition has changed towards harsher positions (Gandini, Seele, 2023). The weakening of the economies and a marked deterioration in security conditions, often simplistically attributed to this population, has been fueling a climate of particular hostility on the part of some sectors of the population, which has led several governments to begin to impose immigration restrictions on this population (Gandini, Seele, 2023; Freier, Doña-Reveco, 2022). In fact, since 2017, 21 out of the 33 countries comprising Latin America and the Caribbean region have revoked Venezuela's visa-free access. These nations include El Salvador, Panama, Honduras, Guatemala, St. Lucia, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Chile, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, St. Maarten, St. Eustatius, Saba, Mexico, Costa Rica, Belize, Nicaragua, and Suriname (Passport Index, 2025). This adverse context has confined Venezuelans to illegal border crossing via so-called *trochas* or to enter a hyper-precarious stage of transiting between one country and another in search of a decent and safe place to live. This is how many Venezuelans migrate to a third or fourth destination: those who had settled in Brazil, Chile,

Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, among other countries, resumed their journey, this time to the United States as their destination. Mexico's decision to impose visa requirements for Venezuelans in January 2022 significantly altered migration patterns across the continent (Gandini, 2024). Before this restriction, fewer than 3% of those crossing through the Darien Gap were Venezuelans. Since the visa policy was implemented, however, they now account for over 65% of crossings, leading to a considerable increase in the number of people using this migratory route (Feldmann, Sturino, 2024).

Other regional crises have also increased the number of migrants and refugees circulating through Central America. Cuba, for example, has seen an intense migratory increase in the last decade: in the last two years alone, 425 thousand Cubans migrated to the United States (US Customs and Border Protection, 2024) while others have gone to Brazil, Russia and Uruguay, among other destinations. The flows of Cubans leaving the country are the highest since the 1959 revolution and are due to the critical economic condition and the lack of freedoms in the country (Mariakarla, Bare, 2024)

Haiti, a country experiencing a particularly shocking security situation, represents another case fueling mass migration. Even for a country accustomed to an almost permanent state of disaster, existing conditions seem unprecedented. Following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse on July 7, 2021, the country was plunged into a major crisis prompted by the almost total breakdown of internal order. The collapse of authority derived from the power vacuum left by Moïse's slain fueled a spiral of violence that authorities have not been able to contain. Dozens of armed gangs have taken control of large areas of the country, including the capital, Port-au-Prince. Today, there is no safe place in the country's capital. Although the existence of groups outside the law capable of controlling marginal urban sectors, such as Cité Soleil, has been historic in Haiti (Kolbe et al., 2010; Feldmann, 2013), in the last two years, the power of these groups has increased dramatically.

Gangs disputing territory in bloody confrontations, often with heavy weapons, control 80% of the Haitian capital. According to Human Rights Watch, 10% of the population (1.1 million people)

live in territory controlled by gangs (Human Rights Watch, 2022). In the areas under their control, the gangs subject the population to a regime of terror characterized by selective assassinations, kidnappings and extortion (International Crisis Group 2023) (Da Rin, 2022). The serious problems facing Haiti have generated a substantial exodus. Although emigration has been a mechanism historically used by the Haitian population (Helton 2002), in the last 18 months, the number of Haitians who left the country has increased sharply and is estimated to be in the tens of thousands (Human Rights Watch 2022; International Organization for Migration, 2024a). Haitians have gone to the United States, its historical main destination, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic, among other destinations across the Americas.

Another very worrying situation concerns the dramatic impoverishment and security crisis facing Ecuador, which has caused a significant increase in the number of people leaving the country (Jokish, 2023). The homicide rate in Ecuador quintupled between 2019 and 2023, going from 6.8/100,000 inhabitants to 45/100,000 in 2023. This increase is the most pronounced in Latin America and has transformed the country into one of the most dangerous in the region (Mantilla, Rivera, 2024). The increase is primarily the result of Ecuador's transformation into a strategic hub for drug trafficking, which has generated an explosive and very complex dynamic. The new conditions have attracted transnational criminal gangs (Colombian and Mexican) that have landed in the country. Local groups (Los Choneros, Lobos, Lagartos, Tiguerones, Chone Killers and R7) have also become involved by forming alliances with foreign groups and disputing part of the business. The result has been a fragmentation of the criminal world that has fueled violent disputes. The security crisis coincides with a visible deterioration in the country's economic and social conditions. Structural problems in the national economy related to neoliberal policies that have eroded social protection systems and failed to promote wealth redistribution particularly during the second decade of the 21st century, low economic growth rates (2.7% in 2022), fiscal debt, low productivity and lack of investment, among others, especially since the end of the raw materials boom, have

had a very harmful to the social and economic conditions of the population (Insight Crime, 2023).

Because of this situation, Ecuador, a traditional country of origin, has seen a sharp rise in migration flows as people from all walks of life seek to escape (Álvarez Velasco and Jiménez Bayón 2023, Álvarez Velasco and Cielo 2023). About 8% of the Ecuadorian population, around 1.2 million people, live abroad: 450 thousand in the United States, 417 thousand in Spain, 83 thousand in Italy and 42 thousand in Chile (Jokish 2023a). There are no exact figures to quantify the exodus from the current economic and security crisis. However, some glimpses of its magnitude can be seen from information regarding irregularized border transits. The Government of Panama, for example, indicates that in 2023, 57 thousand Ecuadorians transited the country, the majority through the Darién Strait, with the intention of continuing their trip to the United States (Feldmann and Sturino 2024). The US authorities, for their part, report 24 thousand encounters with Ecuadorian nationals in 2021, 97 thousand in 2022 and 117 thousand in 2023 (US Customs and Border Protection, 2024).

In recent years, Latin America and the Caribbean faced a series of challenges in integrating these individuals, compounded by the effects of the pandemic. Many people who had previously migrated and experienced severe hardships chose to migrate again, even after achieving some form of regularization (Álvarez Velasco, Miranda, 2024). This led to repeated forced migration movements. The consequences of “imperfect integration” (Zapata *et al.*, 2023), along with limited social protection policies for migrants (Vera Espinoza *et al.*, 2021; Bojórquez-Chapela *et al.*, 2023), hindered efforts to mitigate the economic impacts of the pandemic on migrant and refugee populations. Although Latin American and Caribbean economies rebounded strongly at the end of 2021, the trend reversed in 2022 due to several factors, including the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its effects on commodity and energy prices (ECLAC, 2022).

Consequently, the cost of living rose, resulting in significant inflation across the region. This situation severely affected the ability of refugees and migrants to meet their basic needs,

disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable groups, such as women and Venezuelans in irregular situations. By the end of 2022, it was estimated that nearly three-quarters of displaced persons from Venezuela in the region struggled to access food, housing, and formal employment (R4V, 2022). Thus, the impacts of the (post)pandemic partly explain the increase in mobility within the Americas, alongside economic, political, and social factors that often have structural roots in the region. These include inequality in wealth distribution, rising poverty, job insecurity, unemployment, barriers to healthcare and education, limitations in social protection systems, institutional racism, repression, authoritarianism, and corruption (Vera Espinoza *et al.*, 2022; De Haas *et al.*, 2020).

3 Migratory transition and the emergence of new migratory corridors

As a result of this context, population movement today is characterized by the massive irregularized transit of people through migratory corridors across the region and, relatedly, by the subsequent constitution of important diasporas in various countries of both transit and destination. This incessant movement is characterized by mixed flows; that is, groups of people who leave their communities for various reasons (economic, environmental, violence, family reunification) who travel together along the same migratory routes and use the same means of transportation (see (UNHCR, 2024). Betts describes these flows as “survival migration”, which refers to a population that flees their habitual communities due to violations of their fundamental rights (civil, political, economic, social) to guarantee their survival (Betts, 2013).

As noted, although the dynamics of population movement in the region are long-standing (Massey, Durand, 2010; Feldmann *et al.*, 2022), they currently present novel features. In other words, as a phenomenon, migration in the hemisphere presents continuities but also interesting changes. As related, migratory movements in the region, as in the world, obey a constellation of factors, some of a structural and long-standing nature (economic, political, social) and others of a more contingent nature (sudden changes in migratory

policies, natural disasters and dynamics of the criminal world). Migratory movements are also facilitated by the development of new infrastructure for physical mobility and the technological and communications exchange derived from the globalization process. Greater access to digital information about migratory dynamics, in terms of dangers, routes, key actors, access, strategies, conditions in the destination country, etc., which are disseminated through new technologies such as the Internet and cell phones, have led to conditions that contribute to the movement of people (Durand, 2019; 2022). The flows are also largely mediated by a strong cultural attraction, the idea of the “American dream,” which motivates thousands of people to undertake the journey in search of a better life for themselves and their families (Velasco, Cielo, 2023).

The impossibility of securing a viable destination, compounded by the rapid deterioration of conditions in the primary countries of regional reception, forces migrants into relentless cycles of transit. They find themselves perpetually navigating between countries—temporarily settled yet always on the brink of resuming their journey.

This phenomenon is evident not only within Latin American borders but increasingly within the U. S. Our empirical findings and recent press reports (Camhaji, 2025) suggest, for instance, that there are cases of Venezuelan migrants who arrived in the past two years with usually one (or more) previous migratory experience in the region, often compounded by the arduous journey of traversing the hemisphere on foot. Unable to secure dignified employment or housing in their initial U.S. cities of reception, they frequently relocate internally, moving from New York City to Chicago or vice versa. When conditions fail to improve, many consider crossing north into Canada or returning to Venezuela. This perpetual transit exacerbates a range of rights-related challenges, extending beyond the right to legal status to include access to housing, healthcare, decent work, continuous education for migrant children, and more. This dynamic largely explains the dizzying increase in the volume of people leaving their countries and the connection between the three migratory systems of the hemisphere (South American, Central American and the Caribbean and North American) that

previously operated with certain degrees of autonomy. This has led to the emergence of new irregular migration routes, especially in Central America (Álvarez Velasco, Jiménez Bayón, 2023; Seele et al., 2023; Gandini, 2022; 2024). This, as will be seen, constitutes a fundamental change that has critically transformed the nature and volume of mobility in the hemisphere (Feldmann et al., 2022).

4 The blending of migratory systems in the hemisphere

A transcendental element to understand the current conditions regarding migration in the region refers to the fusion of the hemispheric migration systems (South American, Central American and Caribbean and North American) (Feldmann et al., 2022). Although, the communicating vessels between these systems have existed since precolonial times, intensified in the post-colonial period since at least the 1960s with the first regional and transcontinental migrant mobilities (Álvarez Velasco, 2020; Álvarez Velasco, Jiménez Bayón, 2023), they were not massive, and systems largely worked in a relatively independent fashion, especially the South American system (Durand, 2022; Prieto, Bengoechea, 2022; Duany, 2022; Massey, 2022). However, the emergence of simultaneous migration crises in South America (Venezuela, Ecuador), the reinforcement of border control measures in the U.S. and externalized beyond Mexico across the region (Alvarez Velasco, 2024; Gómez Johnson, González Gil, 2024, Liberona et al., 2024), and the worsening of expulsion factors in the Caribbean and Central America ended up connecting them.

Transcontinental transit is influenced by a mix of seemingly contradictory policies (Gandini, 2024). On one hand, there is an increasing emphasis on control, which stems from the externalization of governance flowing from north to south across the continent, as well as from the countries' own interests. On the other hand, there exists a current that facilitates transit. Some countries have enacted specific policies to manage this movement. For instance, Panama has initiated Operation Controlled Flow, and there is a "new mobility plan" aimed at expanding the "humanitarian corridor"

between Panama and Costa Rica. Additionally, governments in countries further north, such as Nicaragua and Honduras, charge safe-conduct or transit fees but still allow people to pass through. In Guatemala and Mexico, the fees are applied more arbitrarily, with various legitimate and illicit actors involved in collecting charges. Consequently, in all these countries—whether formally or informally, officially or unofficially, and through legal or illegal means—mobility is both encouraged and exploited.

The result of this context is the transformation of Central America into the great migratory connector of the hemisphere through which hundreds of thousands of people from the entire region circulate (Álvarez Velasco, Cielo, 2023). In addition, thousands of extracontinental migrants and refugee seekers also circulate through this territory, adding to this multitudinous population circulation (Campos-Delgado, 2021; Álvarez Velasco, Jiménez Bayón, 2023).

The creation of this corridor has been largely fueled by the perception -not based on factual information- that the conditions for entering the United States during the administration of Democratic President Joe Biden (2020-2024) eased (Feldmann and Sturino 2024). The ambivalence of President López Obrador's administration about the possibility that migrants *en route* to the United States can stay in Mexico has also created an incentive for people to try to migrate north. The combination of these factors explains the generation of an unprecedented flow through Central America that, concomitantly, has caused a humanitarian emergency in various transit and destination countries. The changes, however, are not merely reduced to the number of people who migrate. A striking element is the enormous diversity of the population in transit, not only in terms of the countries of origin, but also in terms of their demographic conditions (age, sex, socioeconomic status) (Feldmann, Sturino, 2024). Another novel dimension is the nature of the transit: unlike the past, it is not about people or small groups, but in many cases large groups (Gandini, Fernández de la Reguera, Narváez, 2020). In relation to the type of migratory movement, a growing complexity is also observed: many people are victims of repeated forced displacements, for example, the case of people

who migrated to a first destination but who, upon encountering very adverse conditions, decided to migrate again. The configuration of waiting and circulation nodes that have transformed local economies, especially border ones, is also observed, as well as the interweaving of irregularized transits with illicit industries such as drug and human trafficking (Álvarez Velasco, Gandini, Feldmann, 2024).

Such dynamics have prompted the acceleration of the migratory transition process throughout the region (Delgado Wise, Guarnizo, 2007). By migration transition, we refer to the transformation of the traditional role of countries in terms of their nature as places of origin, transit and destination of migrants and refugee seekers. In addition, some countries in the region have become destinations for deported migrants, primarily from the U.S. or Mexico. These migrants do not necessarily return to their homelands but instead resume their journey, an unintended consequence of deportation (Ambrosius, Velásquez, 2024). This role is likely to intensify as the new Trump administration begins its policies. A novel and important element is that several countries in the region, which for decades were net emitters of migrants, have become countries of transit and even destination, something that represents an alteration of their traditional role in the hemispheric migration system (Feldmann, Bada, Schutze, 2019). As explained, the transformation of some of these countries into migratory destinations occurs because thousands of people, upon failing or giving up in their attempt to reach the United States, choose to stay in them, even when it was not their first option (Feldmann, Bada, Durand, 2021).

The growing influx of South Americans, Caribbeans, Africans, and Asians – albeit in smaller numbers – has profoundly altered movement dynamics and catalyzed a migratory transition in numerous countries across Central America. A case in point is Panama. Since 2021, the country's traditional role as a receiving country has undergone a substantial change: migratory pressures in South America and the permeability of the border area with Colombia have created ideal conditions for the formation of a migratory corridor of people seeking to reach the United States (Álvarez Velasco, Gandini, Feldmann, 2024).

5 Climate migration

Another relevant transformation in migratory dynamics has to do with climate change. Migration due to climate change is the result of the exposure of vulnerable communities to several situations related to climate variability and the risk and vulnerability to disasters, including droughts, floods and landslides, hurricanes, fires, rising sea levels, and coastal erosion, among others, which make the permanence or viability of productive activities impossible in many communities (Kent, 1987).

Although there is still no complete clarity about how climate change impacts population movement, experts agree that its influence is significant, particularly in driving internal displacements (Riosmena, 2022). While this remains an area of research in its early stages, especially in relation to transnational mobility, there is growing concern that climate change will exponentially increase migratory flows in the coming decades, particularly in developing countries (Aleinikoff, 2019).

This problem impacts many regions in the Western Hemisphere. Central America is a region particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Some preliminary research estimates that the problem strongly impacts Central America and that the impact it causes will increase. The phenomenon, which began to be reported after the devastating Hurricane Mitch in 1998, has forced thousands of people to leave their communities of origin. For these people, migration represents an adaptation mechanism. This reflects the immense complexity of human mobility in the region since climate change is intertwined with other factors mentioned above, causing displacement (Bermeo 2021; Andreola Serraglio, Aleksandrova, Schraven, 2021).

6 Booming border Transit migration economies

As noted, the sharp increase of people on the move has expanded the number and extension of transit border zones. In these areas, migrants rest, connect with relatives, and try to collect funds to continue their journey. These zones emerge because of

diverse conditions: some are areas where people prepare their trips (Capurganá, Colombia), rest and recover after extenuating travel conditions (Metetí in Panama), others placed where people get stuck due to restrictions on movement imposed by different governments (e.g., northern Mexico) (Álvarez Velasco, Pedone, Miranda, 2021; Frank-Vitale, 2020).

The presence of large numbers of people who stay temporarily in these locations has fueled a border economy stemming from an array of economic activities that sustain migrants while they await to continue their journey. Areas in the migration route have seen the emergence of lucrative activities where there is a blending between formality and legality, and informality and illicit practices intertwine and feed on each other in complex ways. The arrival of migrants to certain areas in transit countries creates opportunities for communities. Like other actors, migration opens interesting business opportunities for these communities, often marginalized, with low income and little or no economic activity, usually located in border sectors. The massive arrival of people and their urgent need for services and products constitutes a welcomed injection of resources that generates sources of income and work. Many people, therefore, change their activity and dedicate themselves to selling goods and services to this floating population. Recent scholarship has investigated these zone's economic nature, which some authors have coined as the *political economy of transit*. By this, it means the diversity of economic practices and interwoven and contradictory political dynamics that are crucial for the functioning and reproduction of irregular migratory transit, implemented by a broad set of actors involved in the production, distribution, exchange, consumption of goods and services, as well as dispute and exercise of power (Gandini, Álvarez Velasco, Feldmann, 2024).

The Panamanian Darién neatly illustrates this dynamic. As indicated above, large numbers of people have been crossing the Darién Gap while trying to reach the United States in the last three years, transforming this area into one of the busiest parts of a long migration route in the Western Hemisphere. Several business opportunities arise around the difficult journey crossing the jungle

from Colombia to Panama. In Colombia, criminal organizations, most notably the Gulf Clan, offer packages to ferry people across the Urabá straight into Colombia (see next section). Once in Panama, people need help to cross the thick jungle. Representatives of indigenous tribes have thrown themselves into the business: many women sell food, offer specific products, provide accommodation, and many young people offer themselves as guides or carriers of cargo, services for which they charge money. Indigenous groups also transport migrants upstream from the jungle's edge to Metetí, Panama's most southern urban area, where migrants rest and recover from the exhausting and dangerous jungle crossing.

Once they reach Metetí, people coalesce around so called Temporal Migratory Reception Stations (Estaciones Temporales de Recepción Migratoria, ETRMs), where the Panamanian government, with the support of the United States, registers migrants and offers them humanitarian assistance (food, medicine, shelter). ETRMs also open relevant business opportunities and generate jobs for the surrounding community. Within and around the ETRMs, informal markets have emerged where people can buy food, clothing, accessories for their cell phones, medicines, among others, products. One of the most lucrative businesses is that of intermediaries located in the ETRM in improvised stands with Western Union canvases where they process the receipt of remittances for people to continue their journey. For this service, intermediaries charge between 15 and 20% of commission, a much higher rate than the commercial rate. People are also hired to help with the preparation of food that is served in ETRMs and may be hired as cleaners or other services required to run these centers (Gandini, Álvarez Velasco, Feldmann, 2024).

Another source of work for the community is related to the arrival of humanitarian personnel and international cooperation. Several humanitarian organizations have descended upon Metetí and offer assistance and protection to migrants, ranging from several United Nations Agencies (UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, WHO, WFP) to civil society entities with diverse mandates and specializations such as Doctors Without Borders, Hias, Word Vision and the Norwegian Council of Refugees, and the International Committee of the Red

Cross, among others. These organizations complement the work of the Panamanian government in matters such as health, food, care for girls and boys, psychosocial programs, legal protection, and support for the infrastructure of reception centers, among many others. The operation of these organizations opens diverse business opportunities related to services required to assist migrants and international and local personnel working for the local population (lodging, feeding, products, and services such as transport and security) (Feldmann, Sturino, 2024).

Governmental agencies, officials from various departments, and even politicians also participate in this lucrative business. This takes different forms and shapes. Some unscrupulous officials benefit personally from participating in corruption schemes demanding tolls or extorting migrants, frequently in cahoots with criminals in criminal governance arrangements. State agencies, for their part, have benefited from allocating important budget items, both from the central government and international cooperation, especially from the United States. Undoubtedly, one of the most beneficial aspects for state officials is linked to providing services to migrants. For example, given the high number of people who circulated through reception stations, the Panamanian government decided to put out to tender the food service to a local company, as well as the transportation service that takes migrants out, to prevent them from staying in the country. To this end, as already mentioned, it signed an agreement with Costa Rica in October 2023 to create a 'humanitarian corridor' that allows Panamanian buses to take people migrants directly to a Temporary Migrant Care Center located 17 kilometers inside Costa Rican territory. Transportation is done in private buses and costs 60 dollars per person (Deutsche Welle, 2024). To operationalize the plan and given the impossibility of bidding for the concession due to the sudden increase in flow, the Panamanian government granted service to a private company in the region. Various press reports assert that said company is linked to Darien politicians.

7 Criminal encroachment on migration

One of the most ominous recent trends concerns the growing involvement of criminal groups in migration in the Western hemisphere. Aware of the enormous sums of money this activity potentially offers, criminal groups have quickly embraced the opportunity opened by the sharp rise in migration. While criminal groups have historically been involved in different facets of this business, in particular human trafficking, the extent of their engagements seems unprecedented (Assman, Shuldiner, 2024). This follows a general pattern whereby criminal organizations expand their business portfolio (Bergman 2018). Such a situation is linked to a significant strengthening of organized crime across Latin America, explained in part by a severe weakening of state structures stemming from a toxic combination of economic malaise, institutional decay, and political disarray, particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic (Albarracín, Barnes, 2022; Feldmann, Luna, 2023; InSight Crime, 2024). The involvement of criminal entities significantly results from the rise of areas governed by criminal entities (see Uribe *et al.*, 2024), in which the state is either absent or complicit in criminalized structures and operations. Recent work conceptualizes such pattern as criminal governance understood as “the regulation of social order, including informal or illegal economies through the establishment of formal and informal institutions that replace, complement, or compete with the state and distribute public goods (social services, justice, and security” (Mantilla, Feldmann 2021, 2, see also Lessing, 2021). People on the move in the region have been increasingly exposed to these dynamics to the extent that they are forced to traverse areas characterized by criminal governance schemes during their long journeys. Cases in point include the Colombian Venezuelan border, the Gulf of Urabá, the Darién Gap, the border between Guatemala and Mexico, and various zones in Mexico, particularly northern states bordering the US.

Criminals exploit migration by engaging in diverse illicit activities. Organized crime has traditionally played a leading role in human trafficking (i.e., an unlawful act of coercing people to benefit from their work or service), a multimillion-dollar industry

(Weitzer, 2015).¹ A particularly disconcerting development concerns the meteoric ascendance of the *Tren de Aragua*. This Venezuelan criminal syndicate has profited from human trafficking activities related to the sizeable Venezuelan diaspora including prostitution, extortion, and forced labor (Insight Crime, 2024).

In addition to human trafficking, diverse organizations have tapped into the business by simply charging people for crossing territories they control. In Colombia, the National Liberation Army (ELN) has made a fortune due to its vast control of border areas between Colombia and Venezuela, charging people and goods crossing through so-called *trochas* illegal trails connecting the two countries. As indicated, the Gulf Clan carries out a complex operation to facilitate the transit of migrants who wish to reach Darién from Colombia. The organization offers maritime transportation (by boat) and ‘protection’ which, according to reports, between 100 and 125 dollars per person. According to testimonies in land, the organization also imposes a tax (called *gramaje*) on the community’s people that shelter, feed or guide migrants (France 24, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2024). In this way, profits made from border crossings multiply without much effort. The Ministry of Defense of Colombia, it is estimated that because of the operation, the Clan amassed close to 57 million dollars in 2023 alone (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Extortion represents another modality groups have engaged in. Members of organized crime regularly kidnap people in transit and then demand large sums of money from their relatives in their countries of origin, especially in the United States, to free them (Verduzco, Brewer, 2024). This practice has become widespread along the migratory route, especially in Guatemala and Mexico, but anecdotal evidence shows an extension to South America and

¹ The Palermo Protocol supplementing the UN Convention against organized crime defines trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs (United Nations, 2000).

the Caribbean. Stories abound of deaths of people who could not pay the ransom or how crime groups and organized forces force migrants who cannot pay a ransom to work for them as porters, mules, and domestic, agricultural, or sexual workers.

Finally, many criminals, usually groups with lower organizational levels, make money by robbing migrants *en route*. Numerous testimonies and Reports show a widespread pattern of assaults in the jungle in which criminal groups. They strip people of their scarce assets (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Migrants relate how they must pay for safe passage to various organized crime actors throughout their migratory journey and how those who fail to do so pay a dire price by being harmed or forcefully recruited and coerced to work for criminals in dangerous and abusive tasks.

8 Child migration across the Americas

Child migration is a longstanding social phenomenon throughout the Americas (Milanich *et al.*, 2020). However, since the turn of the new millennium, it has markedly increased in two principal regions of origin. On the one hand, Central America — particularly Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador—has emerged as a significant source of unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents fleeing conditions exacerbated by poverty and escalating criminal violence (Hernandez, 2020). On the other, in Andean nations such as Ecuador, migrant children have been transiting with coyotes under irregularized family reunification schemes to join their migrant parents in the U.S. This modality has been prevalent since at least the 1990s (Álvarez Velasco, 2021).

One of the most profound consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the surge in migrant families and, consequently, children on the move. The accelerated deterioration of living conditions and the intensification of violence in Latin American and Caribbean countries, as noted earlier, have compelled both nuclear and extended families to leave their countries of origin together. The prospect of securing a better future for their children within their home countries has diminished. Simultaneously, the tightening of regional border controls has prompted many families

to migrate collectively, choosing to endure the journey as a united front, determined to avoid separation or obstacles to reunification in the future. While some families depart directly from South American countries, others originate from elsewhere and depart from the first South American countries where they had initially sought refuge. This is particularly true for Haitian, Venezuelan or even Cuban families, many of whom have already undergone one or two previous migratory experiences. Additionally, some families end up crossing borders after having been displaced internally, a phenomenon now increasingly observed in Mexico, Colombia, and Ecuador. All these families share the same ultimate destination—the U.S.—which remains the primary refuge from poverty, state violence, and criminal persecution.

Migration data offer a glimpse into these intricate dynamics. The number of individuals encountered by the U.S. Border Patrol within a family unit increased from approximately 561,000 in 2022 to around 804,000 in 2024. At the same time, the number of unaccompanied minors saw a decline from roughly 152,000 to 109,998, though it remained above the 100,000 mark. Disaggregating by country of origin reveals that most of these minors are from Ecuador (1,030 in 2022 to 3,010 in 2024), Venezuela (1,139 in 2022 to 3,240 in 2024), Mexico (approximately 28,000 in 2022 to 33,000 in 2024), and Central America—particularly Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras (115,000 in 2022 to 57,000 in 2024) (US CBP, 2025).

Simultaneously, the number of children crossing the Darien Gap en route to the U.S. rose from approximately 33,500 in 2022 to over 40,000 in 2023 (UNICEF, 2023). These figures underscore the urgent need for countries of origin, transit, and destination throughout Latin America and the Caribbean to fortify child protection systems. This entails expanding access to gender- and age-responsive, rights-based services during the migration journey and within host communities.

9 The road ahead: final reflections

This essay offered a succinct reflection on recent migration trends in the Americas, examining the changing dynamics of migration, the increasing volume of movement, and the emerging political challenges. It discussed migration trends in the Americas, mainly focusing on the recent rise in migration from Latin America and the Caribbean. It underlined the significant increase in migrant flows, especially from Venezuela and the notable presence of migrant children and migrant families. It examined the push factors driving this migration—economic hardship, political repression, and violence—and the evolving political dynamics in receiving countries. We also discussed the emergence of transit zones along migrant routes, which developed in response to various factors like exhaustion, government restrictions, and logistical needs. In these zones, migrants rest, reconnect with family members, and gather funds and energy to continue their journey. Metetí in Panama and Capurganá in Colombia were examples of such zones. These areas have developed a border economy where local communities profited by providing goods and services to migrants, blending formal and informal economic activities, often involving illicit practices.

Our reflection also highlighted the growing involvement of criminal groups in migration across the Western Hemisphere, driven by the enormous financial opportunities that the movement of people presents. Criminal organizations, which have historically been involved in human trafficking, have expanded their operations, taking advantage of the weakening of state structures in Latin America, worsened by the economic and political turmoil following the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation has contributed to the rise of criminal governance, where criminal groups regulate social order and control territories, often replacing or complementing the state. In these areas, criminal syndicates exploit and abuse migrants through coercion, extortion, and forced recruitment and demand large sums of money to traverse zones under their control. The extent of this exploitation highlights the intersection of organized crime and migration, exposing migrants to severe risks during their journeys.

Another relevant issue the essay raises concerns the pressing problems posed by climate change and how they exacerbate migratory pressures, forcing people to leave their communities. This dynamic arises against the backdrop of rising restrictions and obstacles erected by states to deter the arrival of migrants and control existing flows.

This daunting context, marked by disconcerting levels of dehumanization stemming from governments' disregard for the dignity and basic rights of people on the move and the rise of protagonism of criminal entities that abuse and exploit migrants and refugees to profit from their desperation, emphasizes the pressing need for comprehensive policies and greater international cooperation to address the challenges faced by migrants. It anticipates that the Scalabrini Sisters will face growing challenges in the coming years as migration patterns evolve and the political landscape in receiving countries becomes more complex. It also underlines the need to address a shrinking humanitarian space, with governments reluctant to fulfil their obligations and criminal entities that lack incentives to engage in dialogues to provide minimal guarantees to people crossing their territories.

Given this challenging regional context, the priority must be to strengthen the State. It is necessary to address the alarming weakening of the State's capacity in almost all countries to provide public goods, starting with security but continuing with others no less significant, such as health, education, and housing. Without this, it is unreasonable to think that the conditions that lead people to leave their countries can be stopped, much less reversed, even if they do not want to, as is the case for most of those who migrate. The task is titanic because it is necessary to do it without falling into authoritarian temptations and with an alternative vision of economic development capable of providing minimum conditions of dignity to the entire population.

It is also critical to increase collaboration and dialogue between states, especially in areas with convergence. So far, most governments have adopted individualistic positions that maximize their interests by facilitating flows to neighboring countries or closing their borders so that people do not enter. These measures are taken

without considering the effects this has on the people affected or neighboring countries. Understanding that the magnitude of the problem requires a joint response and that countries working together have a greater chance of facing the challenge should be the first step towards a more fruitful dialogue (Merke, Stuenkel, Feldmann, 2021). For now, countries could discuss a plan to share responsibilities and burdens, with each offering a migration quota, as happened during the civil war crises of the 1980s in the region or as the countries of the European Union have just done in the face of the Ukrainian exodus. Unfortunately, this will have to be done in the absence of the United States, given the recalcitrant stance developed by the United States under the second Trump administration (2025-). Additionally, due to the measures that the USA has started to implement – such as mass deportations, the cancellation of CBP One, and the reinstatement of the *Quédate en México* Program – Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) states, particularly Mexico, are compelled to negotiate bilaterally with the USA. This situation hinders their ability to develop multilateral and regional positions and proposals. Cooperation is also essential to address transnational organized crime, which does not recognize borders or sovereignty. Greater exchange of information, especially in police intelligence, seems necessary in the current context.

In closing, we offer some ideas that Order might entertain while planning its future work in the Western Hemisphere. Given the situation we describe, it seems urgent to increase the levels of protection for people who migrate. Formally, this implies providing greater access to social services, especially work. Migration regularization processes are essential, but they represent only a first step. It is undeniable that states have minimal resources and enormous social debts with their population, and therefore, requiring them to allocate resources to foreigners who do not vote is politically unfeasible. However, in the current context, it is crucial to recognize that migratory flows will not decrease, and that people will probably not return to their countries in the short term, so it is critical to advance in constructing a transversal vision that addresses the challenge as a national project. This must be based on a constructive and creative proposal that takes advantage of the potential of the migrant population. In this sense, it seems essential

to speak to the population with the truth and recognize that the integration of foreigners entails sacrifices on the part of the host society but that, in the medium and especially in the long term, there will be benefits not only for migrants but for society. Migrants bring ideas, energy, and creativity and enrich the host country's culture. Although, unfortunately, not all of them contribute positively, most migrants do, contrary to the prevailing discourse in many societies. The Sisters' Order might think about developing in conjunction with other civil society organizations and business allies. The government's clever public campaigns underline that migrants are not a threat as often portrayed and, as importantly, that castigating migrants will not necessarily improve the standards of living of the local population, as populist politicians often claim.

Relatedly, one of the most complex aspects of the current situation is the lack of information regarding the dangers and conditions people will encounter once they reach their destination. The United States appears as a modern promised land in the collective imagination. The idealization of conditions in the United States, which attracts migrants, contrasts with the harsh reality they encounter: a difficult life with deprivation where they face incomprehension, loneliness, and a cultural and language gap that is very difficult to overcome (De Haas, Castles, Miller, 2020, p. 265-295). In this sense, it is necessary to develop balanced information campaigns that guide migrants about the dangers and challenges they will encounter, both on the way and at their destination. This should be done not to dissuade them from undertaking the journey but rather so that they have the necessary elements to make an informed decision. Countless testimonies from those who have traveled the route express that, had they known what they would experience, they would not have done it, much less exposed their families. It is also a priority to educate migrants about their rights and combat misinformation on social media, such as TikTok, where many organizations spread false information to attract people and thus profit from what has become a multi-million-dollar business.

Another pressing need related to the previous point is to strengthen the role of civil society in this discussion. As shown in the report, when taking measures to manage migration flows

pragmatically, many regional governments operate with secrecy and opacity, marginalizing civil society. This represents a missed opportunity: civil society should not be seen as a threat but as allies with much to contribute. The fact that civil society organizations criticize some government measures on migration does not make them enemies. Likewise, civil society organizations must be measured in their criticism and understanding of governments' limitations and constraints (political, economic, diplomatic). In other words, the problem is too urgent, and the challenges are so considerable that it is unreasonable to allow divisions and acrimony among the various relevant actors to weaken the response further. Dialogue and collaboration are essential. The order has historically played an important role in this regard and should envision doubling down on promoting a measured position based on its solid knowledge, first-hand experience with migrants, and collaborative spirit with every relevant actor.

The Sisters' Order, finally, could also use its expertise and degrees of legitimacy to enhance strategies to open humanitarian space to assist and protect migrants and refugees from criminal organizations (Feldmann 2024), giving special attention to children and adolescents. We know for a fact that many of the spaces through which they travel migrants are ruled by organized crime or, worse still, are governed in a kind of collusion between authorities and criminal groups. This means that any protection strategy must pass necessarily by an agreement, by dialogue, with these structures in the shadow that have a completely different set of incentives (Lessing 2021; Barnes 2025; Arias 2017; Feldmann, Luna, 2023) to the conventional ones that we use in the case of the States. In other words, we must be careful not to stigmatize these groups and establish a dialogue because this is the best way to protect people. The order could benefit from opening dialogue with humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, and other humanitarian entities exploring this thorny matter (Carpenter 2012; Lucchi, Schuberth, 2023).

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5

MIGRATION TRENDS IN BRAZIL **Human rights, securitization, and** **outstanding challenges**

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Introduction

In October 1988, a few years after the end of 20 years of civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985), a new Constitution symbolized Brazil's re-democratization. Based on fundamental rights, this so-called Citizen Constitution asserts that "everyone is equal before the law, without distinction of any kind, guaranteeing Brazilians and foreigners residing in the country the inviolability of the right to life, freedom, equality, security, and property" (Article 5. Brazilian 1988 Constitution). This emphasis on equal rights was indeed novel

in a country historically shaped by colonialism, grounded on the extraction of natural resources and raw materials, exploitation of enslaved African and Indigenous peoples, and cheap immigrant labor, which led to enduring social inequalities and structural racism. As historian Sergio Buarque de Holanda (1936, p. 119) has reminded us

Democracy in Brazil has always been a regrettable misunderstanding. A rural and semi-feudal aristocracy imported it and tried to accommodate it, wherever possible, to its rights and privileges, the same privileges that had been, in the Old World, the target of the bourgeoisie's struggle against the aristocrats.

From this point of view, considering Brazil's historical racialized social inequality, this essay examines whether and to what extent the 1988 Citizens' Constitution has influenced the construction of migration policies based on fundamental rights and the demands of social movements of migrants, refugees, and stateless people. The background to this question is, on the one hand, the process of re-democratization in Brazil after 20 years of civil-military dictatorship and, on the other hand, the emergence of a new regime of migration control in the European Community and the United States, which became global through the projects and activities of various international agencies, especially the International Organization for Migration (IOM). To this end, we map the challenges, achievements, and obstacles to formulating policies based on the notion of migrants as subjects of rights against current neoliberal capitalism's brutality, the broader Brazilian political context, and the construction of a new global migration control regime.

Neo-liberal capitalism and the dynamics of emigration and immigration in Brazil

The proclamation of the 1988 Constitution took place during the global crises of the 1980s and 1990s in a neoliberal conjuncture characterized by a new logic of expulsion (Sassen, 2014). This logic, based on the accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2005),

has reorganized the processes of capital accumulation, intensified the extractive use of resources and all kinds of displacements, widening social inequalities and creating larger contingents of the dispossessed.

Against this background, the 1980s and 1990s global crises affected Latin America, raising the number of people leaving their homelands to seek better opportunities elsewhere. In this scenario, Brazil - a country of immigrants - changed its positioning in the world political economy by further becoming a country of emigration. It continued, nevertheless, to attract international migrants, albeit on a smaller scale. Between the 1980s and 2000s, the largest contingents to arrive and settle in Brazil were from Bolivia, Colombia, Argentina, and Paraguay. In the case of Andean migration, there has been a process of feminization of migration.

Comparatively, the subsequent 2009-2010 crises hit EU countries and the United States especially hard. As a result, growing and diversified migration from the Global South has turned instead towards other Global South countries. Although immigrants to Brazil today represent less than 1% of the Brazilian population, one hundred and ninety-seven nationalities have arrived. Many used new land routes, mainly through the northern arc of the country; the new migration included significant contingents of Venezuelans, Haitians, and Cubans. Since then, Afghans, Nepalese, and Indians, among others, have also arrived by air and then used the region as a land transit route to cross the Darién jungle in Colombia to reach Central America and later the Mexican border with the United States, posing new challenges for the Brazilian migration authorities.

In line with the changing global political economy, scholars focused on the relationship between emigration and immigration (CNPd, 2001; Patarra, 1996; 2005). Initially, the Brazilians who began to leave the country for economic reasons in the 1980s and 1990s, and more intensively in the 2000s, attracted greater attention. These migratory movements made way to the formation of a Brazilian (primarily undocumented) 'diaspora' at a time of changing migration control regimes in post-Schengen communitarian Europe, as well as in the US since the mid-1990s

and increasingly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. While continuing to activate racial, gender, and class classifications enmeshed in structural and State violence, new policies provided the seeds for the construction by international organizations of a global migration control regime based on securitization, technocratic governance, and the criminalization of undocumented (so-called “illegal”) immigrants. Also, in the US, with the enactment of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 - also known as the “crime bill” - deportation included even green card holders who had committed minor crimes, thus expanding the numbers of detainees and deportees (Lind, 1996). In addition, the post-9/11 transfer of immigration control from the Department of Justice to the Department of Homeland Security, along with the increased funding for immigration enforcement, led to escalating national security control, long-term detention, and a “deportation machine” that made it even more difficult for unauthorized immigrants to regularize their status in the US. (Lind, 1996).

In comparison, Brazil still had the Foreigner’s Statute from the time of the civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985) in force. This anachronistic law bore a resemblance to the previous New State dictatorship (1937-1945), which categorized immigrants as ‘police cases’ and denied them the right to participate in political and trade union demonstrations. However, instead of drafting new legislation, the Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration (1995-2003) revamped in 1996 the existing National Immigration Council (CNIg). In all likelihood, this course of action attempted to avoid confrontation with the still powerful military, whose agents had gained immunity for the crimes of torture, abduction, forced disappearance, and murder committed against political dissidents under the sweeping 6.683/1979 Amnesty Law. Although initially created as part of the Foreigner’s Act, the revitalized CNIg became a collegiate body with a quadripartite composition - with representatives from various government departments, trade unions, commerce and industry, academia, and observers from civil society. Following the 1988 Constitution, this quadripartite Council has focused on immigrants as subjects of rights. From this perspective,

the design, coordination, and orientation of immigration policies demanded regulations based on specific decrees and resolutions. Thus, these decrees and resolutions have bypassed the obsolete Foreigners' Statute for most of its history (1980-2017) (Feldman-Bianco, 2018; Meunier, 2019).

In addition to the CNlg, in 1997, the FHC government created the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE), a collegiate body linked to the Ministry of Justice and Public Security responsible for deciding on applications for recognition of refugee status. Thus, the re-democratization of Brazil has essentially led to a policy of document regularization and labor protection through different types of visas for foreigners entering the country, be they immigrants, investors, students, temporary workers, or recognition of refugee status. In the case of the CNlg, the concern to regulate documentation further encompasses the decision-making processes regarding omitted cases or unique situations that, although not covered by the Council's resolutions, may be eligible for visas or stays in the country. (Feldman-Bianco 2018; Oliveira, 2020).

Although its mission focused on immigrants in Brazil, in the 2000s, the CNlg also became involved in protecting Brazilian migrants in the face of escalating securitization, especially in the US and EU. Also, against the backdrop of their struggles and activism in their countries of settlement, Brazilian migrants began to mobilize for their citizenship rights in Brazil in the FHC era. Their struggles and activism revitalized and broadened immigrants' mobilizations in Brazil, including the demand to replace the Foreigner Act with new legislation based on human rights. Thus, the CNlg, in the face of economic recession, restrictive policies, and border closures in the Global North formulated its various actions in dialogue with proposals from the Brazilians Abroad social mobilizations. In this regard, the centrality to migrant labor issues, in addition to discussions about transforming this body into a National Migration Council, a recommendation made in 2007, reflects the inseparability of immigration and emigration, defended by activists and academics and especially by sectors of the Catholic Church, based on its practice with both populations. (Feldman-Bianco, 2011).

For almost two decades, the recurrent pressures on the Brazilian State by migrant leaders, religious organizations (especially those linked to the Catholic Church), migration scholars, and other activists regarding the nationality and citizenship rights of Brazilians living abroad have often resulted in occasional victories. However, taken as a whole, these various mobilizations, dramatized by the increasing deportations, detentions, deaths, and even murders of undocumented Brazilians in Europe and the United States, as well as border conflicts in South America, have undoubtedly contributed to placing international migration at the center of Brazil's intergovernmental agenda. It led to the founding of the General Secretariat for Brazilian Emigrants in 2007 to expand consular services and establish bilateral agreements on behalf of Brazilians abroad. Holding the First Meeting of Brazilians in the World in 2008 led to the institutionalization of dialogues between the Brazilian State and its diaspora and thus to an official commitment by Lula's government (2002-2010) to take action to uphold their citizenship rights in Brazil. Therefore, on the threshold of his mandate, in December 2010, President Lula created the Council of Representatives of Brazilians Abroad (CRBA) within the Decree 7.214/2010 framework, establishing principles and guidelines for Brazilian communities abroad and institutionalizing the "Brazilians in the World" Conferences. While the Brazilian government had the responsibility for defending and promoting the rights of its "diaspora" at the national and international levels, the members of this (unpaid) elected council's role was to advise the Ministry of Foreign Relations on matters of interest to the Brazilian community abroad and for organizing the conferences. The aim was to ensure the continuity dialogues and policies for the Brazilian deterritorialized population. (Feldman-Bianco, 2011; Reis, 2011). Subsequently, the Rousseff administration (2011-2016) turned attention to the new contingents of migrants that started arriving in Brazil in the context of the 2008/2009 global crisis and to the increasing mobilization for a new migration law, which had long been also a demand of the Brazilians Abroad movement, whose rights as citizens finally received recognition in the 2017 migratory legislation.

A review of the existing literature points to the centrality of work in the migration process, further bringing to the fore the relationship between work and illegality, social discrimination, and the reconfiguration of gender relations. (Machado, 2015) By considering issues of illegality, citizenship, work, and identity as axes of analysis and paying attention to the contextual dynamics of social interaction, some of the ethnographies conducted with Brazilian women and men, especially in the United States and Portugal, revealed the work strategies and conflicts experienced by migrants whose lives intersect with structural inequalities and hegemonic national imaginaries. They described processes of racialization, exoticization, or “active subordination” (Machado, 2009) in which migrants situationally mobilized identities and stereotypes of Brazilianess (Beserra, 2005, 2007, 2011; Frigerio, 2002), forming circuits and networks of kinship, friendship, aid, and work to circumvent the situation of undocumented status and increasingly restrictive migration policies in North American and European contexts. They have also explored the constitution of segmented labor markets and niches differentiated by race, gender, class, age, ethnicity, and nationality (Beserra, 2003, 2005, 2011; Ribeiro, 1998, 1999). Moreover, in the context of the convergence between the fields of migration, gender, and criminal justice - significantly since the adoption of the United Nations Palermo Convention in 2000, which put the issue of “migrant smuggling” and “human trafficking” on the international political agenda - both Sprandel’s (2005) and Piscitelli’s (2010, 2011, 2012) contributed to the development of critical analyses of the link between “sex tourism”, “human trafficking” and the displacement of Brazilian women and transvestites (and those from other countries of the Global South) to Europe. (Feldman-Bianco, 2001; Feldman-Bianco, B. Sanjurjo, Mansur da Silva, 2020).

Contradictions arose as Lula implemented human rights policies for Brazilian migrants abroad and immigrants in Brazil while initiating, at the same time, significant investments to transform the country into a prominent global actor, which meant aligning with global security policies restricting migration and the rights to movement and refuge. Beyond serving as the coordinator of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti from 2004 to 2017,

the country assumed a leadership role in South America, not merely within the framework of the MERCOSUR, but also by establishing the UNASUR (Union of South American Nations) in 2008. Brazil also ratified the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (Decree No. 5,640 of 2005) and the Palermo Protocol (Decree No. 5,017 of 2004). These ratifications resulted in the subsequent approval of a National Policy to Combat Trafficking in Persons and two National Plans. These alliances have favored the endorsement of the international agenda of combating drug trafficking, human trafficking, and smuggling (Dias, 2014; Dias, Sprandel, 2011; Dias, Sprandel, 2012; Lowenkron, 2015; Lowenkron, Piscitelli, 2015; Piscitelli, Lowenkron, 2015; Sprandel, 2011; Sprandel, Dias, 2010).

Similar contradictions characterized President Rousseff's government. On the one hand, while a new draft law on migration (Ordinance No. 2,162/2013) centered on migrants as subjects of rights, the I Conference on Migration and Refuge (COMIGRAR), held in June 2014, promoted the social participation of migrants and refugees. On the other hand, her administration followed the guidelines of international organizations such as IOM, UNODOCR, and ICPMD on the (dual) protection of migrants and borders more straightforwardly than in the previous Lula era. Significant investments in anti-trafficking policies and the National Border Strategy (ENAFRON) encompassed security policies against internal opponents and national defense policies against external enemies, transnational organized crime, human trafficking, terrorism threatening urban areas, and the fight against drugs. This emphasis on securitization, shaped by global policy agendas and formats, contained, as Hirata (2015) argues, the potential to clash with local economies and exchange systems. In the government's "developmentalism" of that time, the interest was mainly in large hydroelectric projects and agribusiness, without taking into account traditional knowledge and local exchange systems, as happened with the construction of the Belo Monte hydroelectric plant and its detrimental effects on the social organization of traditional populations in the surrounding area. (Pacheco de Oliveira and Cohn 2014).

South- south international migration

Meanwhile, since the end of the Lula era, immigration to Brazil has increased and diversified. Between 2010 and August 2024, there were more than 1.7 million residence registrations, 450.7 thousand applications for refugee status, and 146.1 thousand recognized refugees (Table 1). In the first year of the historical series, 2010, there were 45,200 residence registrations, 619 refugee applications, and only 103 recognized refugees in the country. These figures show the extent of the migration phenomenon in the country.

Table 1:

MIGRATION REGISTERS - Brazil, 2010 to 2024 (January-August)	
Immigrants	1.700.686
Refugees	146.109
Asylum seekers	450.752

Source: Prepared by OBMigra, based on data from the Federal Police (SisMigra) and (STI-MAR) and CG CONARE, Applicants for recognition of refugee status and decisions, August, 2024.

The majority were Venezuelans (757,800) and Haitians (223,600), but Bolivians, Colombians, Argentines, Chinese, Paraguayans, Uruguayans, Peruvians, Cubans, Angolans, Senegalese, Syrians, Bangladeshis, Nigerians and Indians were also among the main nationalities settling in Brazil. From the Global North, only the numbers of US immigrants were of any significance. Let us analyze the records by migratory typology. It is possible to see in the residence records the reflection of what was possible to advance in the new migration law, such as the reception of Venezuelans and humanitarian workers and family reunification (Table 2).

Table 2:

Number of immigrant registrations, by year of registration, according to category typologies - Brazil, 2010-2024 (January-August).	
Typologeas	2010-2024 (January-August)
Total	1.700.686
HUMANITARIAN RECEPTION	141.074
VENEZUELAN RECEPTION	493.356
SOUTH AMERICA AGREEMENTS	328.679
STUDIES	124.070
BORDERS	20.835
RELIGIOUS MISSION	21.163
FAMILY REUNION	254.713
LABOR/INVESTMENTS	262.733
OTHERS	54.063

Source: Prepared by OBMigra, based on data from the Federal Police, National Migration Registration System ((SISMIGRA), August, 2024.

The formal labor market employs a small share of the working-age immigrant and refugee population. Estimates indicate that, between 2010 and July 2024, more than 230,000 vacancies created for immigrants and refugees were in formal jobs, the majority of whom are Venezuelans and Haitians. The economic sectors that employ the most immigrants and refugees are services, industry, especially at the end of the agribusiness production chain, and trade (Table 3).

These immigrants and refugees live mainly in the Southeast (36.6%), in the State of São Paulo (25.6%), due to the more substantial labor market for immigrant labor, and in the North (29.5%), especially in Roraima (22.3%), as it is the main gateway for Venezuelan migration to the country. The states of Paraná (7.3%), Santa Catarina (7.0%), and Rio Grande do Sul (5.7%), located in the south, also receive an important part of the immigration due to employment opportunities.

Table 3

Movement of migrant workers in the formal labor market, by month and type of movement, according to sectors of economic activity - Brazil, January - July, 2024.			
Sectors of economic activity	January - July, 2024		
	Admitted	Fired	Balance
Total	177.189	134.628	42.561
Agricultural	11.891	10.229	1.662
Industry	55.515	37.749	17.766
Construction	14.237	10.507	3.730
Trade and repair	35.351	28.196	7.155
Public administration	619	69	550
Education, health and social services	4.832	3.704	1.128
Domestic services	7	4	3
Others services	54.737	44.170	10.567

Source: Prepared by OBMigra, based on data from the Ministry of Economy, harmonized base RAIS-CTPS-CAGED,, July 2024.

These changes in the behavior of international migration in the country, closely linked to the relaxation of legal regulations and, later, to the new 2017 Migration Law, were accompanied by quantitative changes, with a significant increase in the volume of migratory flows and requests for recognition of refugee status; and qualitative changes, with the central axis of these migrations shifting from the Global North to the Global South.

In this context, the resolutions of the CNlg continued to regularize the documents of the migratory contingents that began to arrive in Brazil, composed mainly of climate disaster refugees from Haiti, asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East, as well as Chinese and South Americans, in a conjuncture marked by the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 and, in the case of Haitians, especially by the earthquake of 2010. For example, the massive migration of Haitians who, due to the natural disaster, arrived through the country's northern arc without the necessary documents to enter the country precipitated the need for new regulations as the refugee law (Law No. 9, 474 of 1997) does not cover the status of "climate refugees" fleeing intense natural disasters. Therefore, humanitarian visas were issued. Because the bureaucratic process is simpler and faster for these visas, asylum seekers fleeing conflicts in the Middle East also receive humanitarian visas. These measures streamlined the procedures for registration, control, and regularization of the

migratory situation, thus circumventing the lack of human rights-based legislation to some extent. These various government actions were ultimately the result of demands from civil society. (Feldman-Bianco, 2018)

The enactment of the 2017 migration law: changing geopolitics and emerging processes of securitization and militarization

Against this backdrop, the approval of the new migration law (Law No. 3445/ 2017) was ultimately an achievement of international migrant social movements that, together with organizations working with migrants and refugees, had long been demanding legislation with a human rights focus. However, in an apparent paradox, the formulation of legislation that conceived of migrants as subjects of rights took place at a time when, along with the process of regionalization of migration policies linked to the constitution of a global regime for the control of international migration, the policies of technocratic regulation of migratory flows generated new ways of organizing and classifying migratory flows, which were also adopted by South American countries, including Brazil, in its eagerness to become a global player. Thus, the old categories and classifications of undesirables subsumed into the “new threats” identified by the international community, such as drug trafficking, terrorism, human trafficking, and undocumented migration (Domenech, 2015).

The law resulted from a negotiation between those who emphasized legislation based on migrants as subjects of rights and those who defended the continuity of the foreigners’ statute. As a result, the migration law presents a text in which more than half of the articles aim at expelling, preventing entry, and extraditing immigrants. The mobilizations around the presidential sanctions, already under the Temer government (2016-2018) reflected these clashes. On the one hand, the Ministry of Foreign Relations and social movements composed of immigrants, refugees, the Church, academics, and NGOs took a firm stance against presidential vetoes. On the other hand, the Ministry of Defense, the National Security

Cabinet, and the Federal Police lobbied for vetoes on articles that allegedly threatened border control, national sovereignty, and the safety of citizens. (Feldman-Bianco, 2018) While the new law focused on human rights, President Temer's sanction of 18 vetoes reinforced the prevailing notion of immigrants as a problem and accentuated the criminalization of migrants. Among the vetoes, we highlight the amnesty for migrants, the revocation of expulsions decreed before October 5, 1988, the mandatory stay of migrants already in the country who have committed a crime, and the free movement of indigenous and traditional populations across borders. (Feldman-Bianco, 2018) A significant example of the securitization process initiated by the Temer government was the case of arrests for migratory reasons. Although Article 123 of the new law (Brazil, 2017a) states that no one will go to prison for reasons related to migration documentation, the regulation of this law (Brazil, 2017b) opened the possibility of imprisonment of migrants in an undocumented situation (Machado, 2020).

As well summarized by Acosta, Espinoza, and Brumat (2018), by making possible the arrest of undocumented migrants while they await expulsion, the outcome is legislation that contradicts the 1988 Constitution. Also, besides delegating extensive powers to the Federal Police in matters relating to the admission, residence, and expulsion of non-nationals, the 2017 decree does not specify the conditions for granting humanitarian residence to non-nationals, leaving this decision to be made jointly by the Ministries of Justice, Labor, and International Relations in another phase. Given this situation, although civil society representatives continued to highlight the advances of the new law's changing paradigm - from national security to a focus on human rights - they drew attention, simultaneously, to the "setbacks" that guided the process of law regulation.

It was against this scenery that, under pressure from the executive, Senate rapporteur Tasso Jereissati excluded the CNig from the new law during discussions at the Senate level. The alleged reason was the Council's decision to change its CNlg acronym for the broader CNM, thus indicating its role as the National Council of Migrations. However, as Sprandel's (2018) analysis suggested, given

the new correlation of forces, President Temer lacked the interest in strengthening a council that had for more than a decade updated with celerity and a humanitarian spirit the migration legislation through resolutions and ordinances to the demands of the ever-changing migratory reality. Subsequently, as the law regulation processes segmented the CNlg's activities between the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of International Relations, and the Ministry of Labor, its sphere of action became limited to analyzing labor issues in the context of immigration, becoming further restricted to issues concerning skilled workers, immigrant investment, including the green economy, and digital nomads. Since then, as we can see, Brazilian migration policy has become segmented, leaving space for the influences of international agencies, particularly the IOM.

To the extent that the regulatory process has raised the specter of the old Foreigner Statute and, consequently, the old securitization agendas, we can situate the new law within the framework of a policy of increasing securitization and militarization adopted by the Temer government, through which the Ministry of Defense, the Office of Institutional Security of the Presidency and the Federal Police have regained power, even leading to the creation of a new Ministry of Public Security. This policy also reflected Decree No. 8,903/ 2016, which established the Integrated Border Protection Program and organized the actions of the federal public administration units to implement it and strengthen the prevention, control, inspection, and repression of cross-border crimes. (Feldman-Bianco, 2018).

This securitization and militarization agenda overlapped with and expanded Brazil's role in the global fight against drug trafficking, human trafficking, and terrorism. It also reflected the country's changing positioning on the South American continent, indicating new geopolitics that included alliances with Colombia, Peru, and the United States, especially against Venezuela and the resulting categorizing of Venezuelans crossing the Brazilian northern border as refugees rather than immigrants entitled to humanist visas. In this context, a critical step towards the militarization of the migration issue, in line with aspects of the policies of the global institutions for the "management" of immigration and their security policies, was the creation by decree 9,285/2018 of the Operação Acolhida

(Welcome Operation) directed to the reception and management of the Venezuelan migratory flows on the border between Brazil and Venezuela. This new policy delegated the control of the reception and (supposedly temporary) stay processes to the military forces in the border town of Pacaraíma, Boa Vista (capital of the state of Roraima), and Manaus (capital of the state of Amazonas).

Although it is an inter-ministerial operation, *Operação Acolhida*'s militarization relies on the Ministry of Defense's control of the entire budget. In Brazil, immigration continues to be a matter of national defense. *Operação Acolhida* is a screening process at the border, coordinated by the army and supported by UNHCR and IOM. This screening processes immigrants' requests for documentation, presenting two alternatives: a request for refuge or two years of temporary residence, which can become permanent after that period.

After the screening, those immigrants who wish to relocate to other parts of the vast Brazilian territory are sent to shelters initially run by the military. These immigrants had generally applied for refuge, facilitated by the new CONARE (National Council for Refugees) policy aimed exclusively at Venezuelans. In addition to the concentration of decision-making power in the hands of the military with an overt securitization logic, in these shelters, which Machado, Vasconcelos (2022, p. 1220) have called "hybrid refugee camps," all kinds of relationships common to refugee camps take place, such as the exclusion of immigrants and refugees from the urban setting and the military control of the shelters, hence implying forms of restricting the mobility of the sheltered.

Besides the violations observed in the shelters and the "interiorization" program (Branco-Pereira, Quintanilha, 2021), we can highlight how this "welcoming" operation articulates two dimensions of the new Brazilian immigrant reception policy: the first is the declared intention to remove the visibility of immigration from the eyes of Brazilians. The shelters are located on the outskirts of the cities and serve to gather immigrants and make them invisible to reduce the "nuisance" they may cause to the cities where they are located. The second dimension is "interiorization," which we can see as a continuation of the first: the intention here is to dilute

the significant presence of these immigrants in Roraima within the vast Brazilian territory, not to create places with significant numbers of Venezuelans.

Later, under the far right Bolsonaro government (2019-2022), CONARE approved the normative Resolution No. 29/2019 that generated “accelerated” procedures for granting refuge. Based on this possibility, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security issued Technical Note No. 3/2019, describing the situation in Venezuela as likely to justify refugee applications. From that moment on, Venezuelans were granted refuge collectively, without necessarily being judged individually. Machado and Branco-Pereira (2025) point out that this process was essentially a policy of “anti-communist” struggle by the Bolsonaro government, similar to the case of Cuban refugees in the USA.

While, as we have seen, the Temer neoliberal administration (2016-2018) increased securitization and militarization and undermined social protection and fundamental rights, Jair Bolsonaro’s election and his attempts to destroy democracy from within (Levitsky, S.& Ziblat, D., 2018) drastically fostered the advance of highly destructive capitalism to the detriment of the environment, science, education, technology, democratic institutions, and human rights. In this regard, the actions and strategies practiced by his administration promoted social setbacks and an escalation of violence involving the reduction of social rights and the extermination of the dispossessed and those who challenge traditional moral values: homosexuals, lesbians, and transgender people, a sign of part of the continuous attempts to destroy the rule of law.

The Bolsonaro government’s decision to withdraw Brazil from the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration was part of this scenario, representing its alignment with the exacerbated nationalism and draconian policies of Trump and other far-right allies. This decision meant the suppression of human rights in Brazil’s migration policies and the escalation of violence against migrants, refugees, and other displaced people. However, despite this withdrawal, the IOM continued to actively influence Brazilian migration policy through its funding priorities, such as

the trafficking of human beings as well as within the realm of the militarized Operation Welcome. In addition to the repatriation of refugees already granted, as in the case of the Paraguayans, its administration maintained the securitization of borders, preventing both the exit and entry of immigrants in a context exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, as a long-time supporter of the civil-military dictatorship and, by extension, of the Foreigners' Statute, Jair Bolsonaro, as a congressman, opposed the approval of the 2017 Migration Law, on the grounds that international migration was solely a matter of national security. Therefore, it is no coincidence that one of his first acts as Brazil's President was to transfer the CNIG to the Ministry of Justice and Social Security just after abolishing the Ministry of Labor. He diminished the number of representatives of ministries, employers, and trade unions on its board, ended the participation of observers, and reduced the number of its meetings. In this way, he sought to minimize even more the CNIG's role in constructing migration policy.

Throughout the Bolsonaro government, there were a series of other security measures, with the consequent criminalization of immigration. We can highlight the Ministry of Justice and Public Security Ordinance No. 666/2019, later reissued in a slightly watered-down form as Brazilian Ministry of Justice and Public Security Ordinance No. 770/2019, which - because it is still in force - provides for the summary deportation of the so-called "dangerous people," even if they have guaranteed refugee status. Without ever defining precisely what "dangerous people" are, the decree is a kind of wild card for the federal police to deport immigrants in defiance of migration law summarily.

The securitization and criminalization of migrants were further aimed at Brazilian international migrants, even though the 2017 migration law makes it the constitutional duty of the Brazilian state to protect them in transit abroad from any form of state violence in the host country. However, already at the beginning of his administration, President Bolsonaro decided to revoke the General Secretariat for Brazilian Emigrants, founded in 2007, as well as the Council of Representatives of Brazilians Abroad, created in 2010 in

response to the demands of the global social movement of Brazilian international migrants (Dias, Ribeiro, França, 2024). Also, during his administration, the only question on Brazilian international migrants was removed from the 2020 census, further made undocumented Brazilian migration invisible (ibid 2024: 10). Most of all, in flagrant contradiction to the current Brazilian legislation, his government accepted and facilitated Trump's unilateral decision to repatriate the "undesirable" undocumented Brazilians, thus ex-acerbating their vulnerability. As Dias, Ribeiro, and França showed, Brazilians had a sharp increase in awaiting deportation from the USA during Jair Bolsonaro's term, from 10.530 in 2018 to 94.212 in 2022. Furthermore, contrarily to the bilateral agreements established in 2008 by the Brazilian state with foreign countries concerning the charter flights to Brazil with deported Brazilian citizens since the Temer administration, there was a relaxation of prior norms, which used to demand that "its citizens return with a valid passport and only after all appeals had been exhausted". This easing of norms continued in the Bolsonaro era (Ibid, 2024).

Consequently, these and other measures make it clear that, at least since Temer's administration, the main feature of migration policy in Brazil has been the development of a securitized and criminalized stance on the movements of people across borders. However, if securitization is key to understanding this movement in Brazilian migration policy, another movement is increasingly evident in what is happening in the current Lula administration (2023-). The foundation of this new position has been the failure of the current government to revoke past Temer and Bolsonaro government decrees on migration policy.

Still, all of this is only surprising if we do not take into account a second dimension of recent migration policy to which Brazil is increasingly subject: the policy of border externalization. (Casa-Cortes, Cobarrubias, Pickles, 2015; Cobarrubias, 2020; Menjívar, 2014; Zaiotti, 2016). We can say that all the above-mentioned policies and the new ones of the current Lula administration are border externalization policies, especially following the imperatives of US policy, orchestrated under the umbrella of international agencies such as IOM and UNHCR (and paralleling the European

deployment of Frontex which extends bordering and surveillance into African states).

We can see a continuity in immigration policies from Temer to Lula: there is a subaltern securitization in the current externalization of borders. Operação Acolhida, in addition to the forced refuge for Venezuelans, has become a policy to prevent migratory movements from reaching the US: it detains immigrants for a while, internalizing them with a migratory status that pre-vents them from leaving Brazil (and trying to get to the US)—which does not always work. (Vasconcelos, Machado, 2022) In other words, we can see that the center-left has adopted a far-right model of “border control” that is subservient to the interests of different countries and international agents. The most relevant indication was the publication by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security’s Department of Migration (DEMIG) of Technical Note No. 18 /2024). In short, this Note limits the possibility of those who stop in the international area of Brazilian airports to apply for refuge. Claiming that there is a growing number of cases related to the smuggling and/or trafficking of migrants, they propose a change in the rules that will allow the Federal Police to direct everyone in this transfer area to their final destination, ignoring requests for refuge. In practice, this bill gives the Federal Police the power to sort out migrants who may or may not be seeking refuge, which violates both the Migration Act and the Brazilian Refugee Act.

This evidence allows us to say that these processes of continuous securitization/criminalization of immigration and the subordination of the externalization of borders, articulated by the major international agencies (in the interests of the European countries and the US), are the most evident tendency of immigration policies in Brazil, making even far-right and center-left governments indistinguishable when it comes to the phenomenon of migration.

The citizen’s constitution, health and social assistance for immigrants

As mentioned above, the apparent political consensus at the end of the military dictatorship that reigned in the country

between 1964 and 1985 was that it was necessary to universalize, under isonomic conditions, access to certain fundamental rights, such as health, education, housing, social assistance, and decent work. The emphasis on equal access to rights and justice in the law text stemmed, among other things, from the debates sparked by the political mobilizations that began during the dictatorship. The recognition of the interconnectedness of the policies needed to guarantee these rights is in some cases more evident, as in the case of the axis formed by health, welfare, and other social security policies (grouped under the name of Social Security), and in others less evident, as in the case of housing, the promotion of decent work and education policies.

The 1988 Federal Constitution has a dedicated a chapter on Social Security with the objective of guaranteeing the universalization of fundamental rights. The Social Security System comprises the Unified Healthcare and Social Assistance Systems (SUS and SUAS) and the Public Pensions System. Both the SUS and SUAS are guided by the paradigm of universal access. In both cases, the State must create equal conditions for adequate access through policies to promote equity (Brazil 1988, 1991, 1990, 1993).

In the specific case of migrants, Article 4, VIII of the Migration Act guarantees “access to health and social assistance services and social security, by the law, without discrimination based on nationality or migratory status” (Brazil 2017a). In addition, other normative instruments guarantee migrants’ access to social security policies, such as Ministry of Health’s Ordinances No. 940 of 2011 and No. 2,236 of 2021, which guarantee this right even when it is impossible to present documents, and Law No. 13,714/18, which ensures access even when the user cannot provide proof of residence.

In practice, however, several obstacles remain. First, migrants, especially when racialized, report experiences of denial of care and racism in health services (Ventura, Yujra, 2019; Bran-co-Pereira 2023, 2024; Granada *et al.*, 2021; Granada *et al.*, 2023). The lack of intercultural mediation and language translation mechanisms has been a primary barrier to access for migrants (Steffens, Martins, 2016; Branco-Pereira, 2020a; Bersani, 2022; FENAMI,2023). This

issue has acquired great relevance in developing health policies for migrants, with the implementation of cultural mediation programs by municipalities, such as Porto Alegre, and states, such as Goiás. In addition, the Ministry of Health, in Technical Note 08/2024, recommended “creating local strategies for the provision of cultural mediation services in health facilities” (Ministry of Health 2024a). Recent research has argued that the careless instrumentalization of the notion of culture and interculturality can produce racist, essentializing biases and reinforce stereotypes of various kinds about migrants (Hamid, 2019; Branco-Pereira, 2022).

Moreover, the H1N1 pandemic has accelerated the creation of migration control measures based on the logic of health protection, following an international trend towards the militarization of biosecurity interventions (Segata *et al.*, 2023) and humanitarian action (Machado, Vasconcelos, 2022). The link between immigration and the circulation of COVID-19 led Brazil to enact measures to control the flow of Venezuelan migrants, the only national group subjected to specific movement restrictions during the pandemic, even if they had permanent residency rights. For example, Decrees Nos. 120 and 158 of 2020 specifically cited the inability of the SUS to provide treatment to “foreigners infected with the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus” as a reason for closing the land borders with Venezuela and prohibiting Venezuelans from entering the country, whether they had permanent residency or not (Brazil 2020a, 2020b).

Finally, the emergence of tensions between the paradigms of universality and equity (Branco-Pereira, 2023) that guide health and social assistance policies is worth noting. From this perspective, developing policies to guarantee fundamental rights that consider the specificities of migrant populations could undermine the systems’ universality while creating access privileges and increasing discrimination. Moreover, these tensions have often forced historically marginalized groups, such as Brazil’s Black and Indigenous populations and racialized international migrants, to compete for tiny portions of the budgets for the development of health and social assistance policies. After all, SUS and SUAS are universal but live on quotas (Viegas, Penna, 2013). In this way,

equity policies that have the potential to reduce inequalities are often discouraged for fear of compromising the universality of the system.

The absence of public policies guaranteeing fundamental rights is also evident in access to housing. Some municipalities and states have created a specific network of reception centers for migrants and refugees as part of the services offered by SUAS. These centers aim to temporarily accommodate families and individuals, especially newcomers. Although they are sometimes part of the SUAS network, they consist primarily of confessional civil society organizations. However, this network does not provide places to meet their intense demand. It is, therefore, common for migrants to move to squats, especially in large urban centers, whether or not linked to housing movements (Zelaya, 2017). There is high internal mobility in cities such as São Paulo. Migrants first live in the center, where there are more squats and a concentration of specific services to support their needs. However, they move later to the fringes of the city, particularly the East Zone, in the case of São Paulo. This trend follows the racialization of the territorialization of large cities (Rede Nossa São Paulo, 2023), with African and Haitian migrants often moving to neighborhoods with higher proportions of black population (Pastrelo et al., 2019). The absence of measures to guarantee migrant populations access to sustainable and permanent housing policies responds to the logic of the inadmissibility of the permanent presence of specific populations, producing “displacement” by chronicling the provisional status of their presence in the country (Domenech, 2015; Verás, Villen, 2020; Machado, Pardue, 2020).

Regarding the right to education, under the Foreigners’ Statute, access to basic education depended on having a regular migration status. The 2017 Migration Act, on the other hand, in line with the 1988 Constitution, establishes the right of immigrants to access education on an equal basis with nationals, guaranteeing the right of access to public education and prohibiting discrimination based on nationality and/or migratory. Only the municipality of São Paulo has a public policy for teaching Portuguese in the municipal school system. In addition, there are few institutional training programs for

education professionals on migration, which sometimes leads to the stigmatization of particular migrant groups, the misinterpretation of the rights of these populations to access education, and the pathologizing of cultural differences (Branco-Pereira, 2020b).

Additionally, access to higher education has benefited from the multiplication of affirmative action programs for refugees to enter Brazil's public universities at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The majority of places are for those with refugee status, which excludes a large contingent of migrants with other types of residence permits. Although there is no official data on the effectiveness of these programs in incorporating refugees into universities - considering, for example, the dropout rates observed in the places designated for these affirmative actions - these quotas make it possible to turn the right to education into a reality in higher education. Furthermore, validating diplomas for international migrants or Brazilian returnees also represents a significant obstacle to entering the labor market, with costly and time-consuming procedures. The validation of higher education degrees has become a substantial obstacle for immigrants accessing the job market.

Finally, racialized migrants are often victims of labor exploitation and work analogous to slavery, especially in urban contexts (Suzuki, Castelli, 2022; Suzuki *et al.*, 2020). Through Operação Acolhida, the federal government's actions during the Bolsonaro administration have contributed to this situation, making recurrent work mediation to job vacancies that ended up being analogous to slavery (Branco-Pereira, Quintanilha, 2021). The intensification of the internalization of migrants to cities in the south of the country highlighted the growing presence of migrant labor in meatpacking and slaughterhouses (Granada *et al.*, 2021) - for example, the federal unit with the highest number of records of migrants in primary health care is Santa Catarina, known for its meatpacking industry (Ministry of Health, 2024a). In addition, a large proportion of migrants in large cities rely on informal work as their primary source of income, with fluctuating incomes, no social security benefits, exposure to police violence, and exploitation by consignors of the items they borrow to sell as well as by loan sharks and informal lenders.

Despite the “citizen” orientation of the 1988 Constitution, immigration policies have focused on establishing parameters to guide the regularization of migration and the granting of documents, often neglecting to develop policies to guarantee the fundamental rights of migrant populations, especially those who are racialized and come from the fringes of global capitalism. In this way, in the absence of structural policies to guarantee fundamental rights from a perspective of equity, migrant populations become primarily dependent on the work of confessional and secular civil society organizations, which are often subject to the parameters set by national and international funders, such as the requirement to serve exclusively Venezuelan migrants in projects funded by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the United States Department of State. (Branco-Pereira, Balieiro, 2024).

Migrant activism, grassroots mobilization, advances and setbacks

In the last decade, processes of consultation and social participation of migrants in the production of public policies have become more frequent (Feldman-Bianco, 2018; Carneiro, 2017; Ruano, Botega, 2014). In 2014, the 1st National Conference on Migration and Refuge (COMIGRAR) mobilized more than 5,000 people among the 202 municipal, state, virtual (for Brazilians abroad) and free conferences held (UNHCR 2014). Ten years later, the 2nd COMIGRAR took place, mobilizing about 12,000 people in 138 municipal, state, or free conferences (Ministry of Justice and Public Security 2024). The objective of the 2nd COMIGRAR was to contribute, through the proposals discussed and approved by its participants, to the elaboration of a plan for the implementation of the National Policy on Migration, Refuge, and Statelessness, which the federal government has been drafting since the beginning of 2023, but which not yet produced results that incorporate the proposals submitted by civil society.

Amid this process, in June 2023, the Ministry of Health established a working group to develop, among other things,

a proposal for a National Health Policy for Migrant Populations (Ministry of Health 2023). The working group was under the authority of the Department of Public Health Emergencies of the Health and Environmental Surveillance Secretariat of the Ministry of Health, responsible for epidemiological surveillance in Brazil. Organizations and activists pointed out that this could lead to interpretations linking the policy to the treatment of migrants as epidemiological vectors and, therefore, threats. In addition, the original decree creating the working group only allowed civil society participation under strict conditions. After pressure, the Ministry of Health included provisions for the involvement of civil society organizations in the WG (Ministry of Health 2024b).

The Primary Health Care Secretariat of the Ministry of Health also published the above-mentioned Technical Note No. 8/2024, with guidelines and best practices for health managers and professionals on “Access to Health Care for Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons with-in the Framework of Primary Health Care in all Brazilian Territories” (Ministry of Health 2024a). In point 8.3, the Note advises health managers and professionals to consider only the documents listed in its text as valid for issuing the National Health Card. Before the publication of this Note, there was no national guidance on which documents could be considered valid for issuing the SUS Card. Moreover, the legal framework that governs the SUS does not allow the presentation of “valid documents” as a condition for providing care (Brazil 1988, 1990, 2011, 2017a, 2021). The guidelines set precedents for the violation of migrants’ rights to access the SUS by making access to health care conditional on the presentation of “valid documentation,” making undocumented migrants and those in situations of labor exploitation and withheld documentation by employers particularly vulnerable.

Finally, we must highlight the inadequacy of health data collection systems for identifying data on the presence of the migrant population, a fact made even more relevant by the COVID-19 pandemic (Branco-Pereira, 2023). Most forms that collect data and information on SUS users do not have a field for “nationality” or “country of origin.” Indigenous people in mobility in Brazil, such

as the Warao, are not listed for identification - leading professionals to identify them in official data systems as Brown Brazilians. In addition, the various systems organized under DATASUS are often not interconnected or linked to other official migration databases. That way, the analysis of access data for migrant populations becomes a challenge, making it difficult to design equity policies that take into account their specificities.

Urgent challenges

In this essay, we first sought to determine whether and to what extent the 1988 Citizens' Constitution has influenced the formulation of a migration policy based on fundamental rights and the demands of social movements. In the course of this analysis, we realized that to understand the negotiations and clashes that have underpinned the development of migration policies, we had to consider the continuities of the civil-military dictatorship (1965-1985) in the process of the country's re-democratization against the backdrop of neoliberal capitalism and the construction of a new global migration control regime. From this perspective, it has also become crucial to trace the influences of the international organizations behind the construction of migration policies in Brazil, at least since the Temer administration (August 31, 2016-December 31, 2018).

The key to understanding the accommodations, negotiations, and clashes in making Brazilian migration policy is that despite the massive demonstrations for the end of the dictatorship's twenty-year rule in Brazil, the return to democracy resulted from conciliation rather than rupture. One of the symbols of this rapprochement was the promulgation of Law 6,683/1979 by President João Batista Figueiredo after widespread social mobilization during the dictatorship. This far-reaching and controversial law, also known as the Amnesty Law, pardoned all those involved in "political or related crimes," i.e., not only the militants who opposed the military regime but also the agents of repression who committed torture, murder, and disappearances of political prisoners until 1979. This law, which is currently before the Supreme Court of Justice, is an

integral part of the democratic reconstruction of the country, which sometimes masks existing polarizations.

From this perspective, it becomes comprehensible for the FHC government's decision to avoid confrontation with the military and, thus, instead of creating a new migration legislation, rebuild the CNlg to circumvent the anachronism of the Foreigner's statute. As we have shown, for twenty years (1996-2016), the quadripartite National Immigration Council became Brazil's leading forum for debates on migration. Considered an example of good practice by the International Labor Organization (ILO), this Council has implemented and coordinated migration policies through decrees and resolutions based on human rights, especially concerning the regularization (and, thus, control) and labor protection of migrants, and has also carried out relevant labor protection actions, including for the Brazilian diaspora.

In this regard, Public Defender João Chaves recalled in his *MigraMundo* piece of June 13, 2022, entitled "Where is the CNlg, the National Immigration Council?" that this council "was characterized by inclusive and positive practices that anticipated various movements enshrined in Migration Law no.13,445/2017[...] further asking "With this history, why is there no talk of the CNlg after the Migration Law? His question is pertinent and urges reflection on what has happened to Brazilian migration policy since the passage of this 2017 Migration Law to understand why there is a need to know where the CNlg stands.

In his piece, João Chaves (2022) also states that the 2017 Migration Law symbolizes the power of civil society and human rights in Brazil. Approving new migration legislation was indeed an achievement of migrant social movements that, together with organizations working with migrants and refugees, had long been demanding legislation with a human rights focus. Suffice it to recall that the discussions within the Special Commission, whose rapporteur was Orlando Silva, had strong participation of migrants and agents working with migrants in drafting the version approved by the National Congress, focusing on migrants as subjects of rights. Nevertheless, we shall also remember that the Migration Law 13445/ 2017 resulted from an accommodation between those

who emphasized legislation based on migrants as subjects of rights and those who defended the continuity of the old statute. It was, therefore, a conciliatory law that the legislators could approve.

However, we should also recall that the mobilizations around Dilma Rousseff's impeachment and Michel Temer's rise to Brazil's presidency broke the conciliation politics built at the end of the civil-military dictatorship, bringing existing polarizations to the surface. At that juncture, as we have seen, the social movements' efforts in favor of the approval of the new law without sanctions had no effect. President Temer's vetoes and the regulatory process brought the specter of the anachronistic Foreigner's Statute to the new legislation, signaling his neoliberal administration's turn to increasing securitization and militarization policies toward migration, the undermining of social protection and fundamental rights and the attempts to exclude CNlg from migration law. In addition, Article 120 of this law, which deals with the National Policy on Migration, Refuge, and Statelessness, was left without development. Meanwhile, law regulation (Decree 9199/2017) segmented migration policy between the Ministries of Justice and Public Security and Foreign Affairs, limiting CNlg's actions to issues related to labor migration. This paradigm shift symbolizes the difference between the CNlg's human rights procedures for creating humanitarian visas and border control for Haitians based on exceptional cases and the militarization of Operation Welcome for Venezuelans with the support of international organizations, which resulted in border externalization policy.

Subsequently, polarization has increased dramatically throughout President Bolsonaro's far-right government (2019-2022). With his emphasis on destroying democracy from within and promoting destructive capitalism, President Bolsonaro, as we have seen, has further promoted securitization, the criminalization of minorities, undermining the very notion of human rights in favor of 'freedom of expression.' His administration further destroyed the policies created for Brazilian migrants abroad while supporting the US repatriation of Brazilians back to Brazil, which is still in effect. Moreover, soon after his inauguration, the elimination of the Ministry of Labor and the transfer of the CNlg to the Ministry

of Justice and Public Security (decree 9873/2019), along with the exacerbated securitization of the migration and refugee issues, further reduced this Council's structure and field of action. Although omissions or exceptional cases are once again the responsibility of the CNlg, its primary goal, besides issuing residence work permits, seems to be targeting migrants with social and economic capital who can bring income and investments to Brazil.

With Lula's return to the Brazilian presidency in 2023, we are witnessing a return to conciliatory politics since at no time did his administration attempt to review and revoke the vetoes and regulations of the 2017 Migration Law nor demilitarize or discontinue the Operação Acolhida or Operation Welcome which, while initially planned to be temporary, has already lasted for eight years. Nor were the actions of the Bolsonaro era, which further criminalized transnational migrants residing in Brazil (such as former Minister Sérgio Moro's Ordinance 770/2019) and Brazilians who have left the country, such as the agreement facilitating the deportation of Brazilians from the United States, canceled.

In the current Lula administration, we continue to be confronted with a policy of securitization and criminalization, as shown by the recent decisions restricting entry permits in Brazil. DEMIG Technical Note 18/2024, which favors the externalization of borders, states that "passengers without authorization will be obliged to return to their country of origin or continue to the destination indicated on the ticket." By comparison, applications for temporary visas and residence permits for humanitarian purposes, in the case of Haitians (Brazil: MSP/MRE 42/2023) and Haitians (Brazil: Interministerial Ordinance MJSP/MRE No. 51/2024), have become subject to "the existence of shelter capacity by a civil society organization with which the Union has signed a cooperation agreement, under the terms of Law No. 13,019, of July 31 2014, in a selection notice promoted by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security". In addition to being an affront to human rights and family reunification, this delegation of state responsibilities to civil society runs the risk of encouraging the expansion of a migration industry. Overall, these policies, together with the subordination to the externalization of borders articulated by the major international agencies in the interests of European countries and the United

States, suggest Brazil's submission to the technocratic regulation of migratory flows promoted by the global international migration control regime, at least since the creation of Operation Welcome.

These recent governmental resolutions were developed and signed apparently without much discussion. Since the 2017 Migration Law regulation, migration policy has been segmented mainly between the Ministry of Justice and Public Security and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Currently, the National Secretariat of Justice of the Ministry of Justice and Public Security concentrates, in addition to the Migration Department, the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE), the Coordination for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants, the reformed CNlg and the Migration Policy Coordination, which is in charge of developing the national migration, refugee and statelessness policy by Decree MJSP/2023. Thus, this centralization of different bodies in the Ministry of Justice and Public Security symbolizes the strength of the securitization paradigm, which is far from the perspective of immigrants as subjects of rights, as stated in Article 5 of the 1988 Constitution.

Given these segmentations, despite the many proposals presented at Second COMIGRAR, there is still no information on how this material will help formulate the national policy on migration, refugees, and statelessness regarding fundamental rights. Meanwhile, as we have shown, in the absence of structural policies to guarantee basic rights from a perspective of equity, the migrant populations continue to depend on the work of confessional and secular civil society organizations, which are often subject to the parameters set by national and international funders, such as the requirement to serve exclusively Venezuelan migrants in projects funded by the IOM, USAID, and the United States Department of State (Branco-Pereira, Balieiro, 2024) - funds that in this new Trump era are disappearing.

The current context, therefore, poses outstanding challenges. Against this scenery, it makes sense to ask why the CNlg, which used to be a forum for discussing and constructing human rights-based migration policies, is no longer mentioned. Thus, taking into account the activism of migrants and the social mobilizations of migrants and refugees, as well as the social participation of

professionals who provide assistance to migrants and refugees or who deal with the issue of migration and refugees, there is a need for a call to action to change the course of the current government policies—against securitization and in favor of fundamental rights.

In this period of struggle, we need to recreate a forum to assume the role of guardian of migration legislation (even responsible for the evaluation and revocation of the aforementioned securitizing policies and actions) and to build a national policy on migration, refugees, and statelessness democratically, based on legislative recommendations, the transversality of human rights and the respect of the 1988 Constitution regarding the fundamental rights of both Brazilians and foreigners. To this end, it is necessary to bring a) multipartite and interministerial composition - with representatives from different government bodies, workers, businessmen, academics, and observers from civil society - to include different visions in the construction of public policies; b) the holding of social participation forums that bring together the government, migrants, refugees, and stateless people, as well as organizations that work with these displaced people and academia; and c) previous experiences in articulating the rights of Brazilians and immigrants in the legislative process; and d) previous experience in articulating issues related to emigration and immigration, such as, on the one hand, policies based on fundamental rights and aimed at the Brazilian “diaspora” abroad (in fact included in the current Migration Law) and, on the other hand, the formulation of policies to accompany immigrants arriving in Brazil.

Likewise, considering that most international migrants, refugees, and stateless people live in cities, we propose formulating policies at the local level based on the transversality of fundamental rights, which could lead to the formation of cities of solidarity. Most of all, in these dark times, with the rise of the far right and the return of Trump to the US presidency and his criminalizing and deportation policies against immigrants, the Brazilian government urgently needs to rethink the prevailing security policies in favor of policies directed to Brazilian international migrants, immigrants, refugees, and stateless people in Brazil as subjects of rights and by extension, the defense of democracy.

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6



THE FEMINISATION OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION Debates, implications and challenges

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Introduction

Female migration, whether internal or international, has always been part of human movement across the world. However, it was only in the last few decades of the 20th century that a process began to bring migrant women more explicitly into the agenda of scientific research and the discussion of migration policies, as an object of study and attention to the diversity of their needs.

In this context, for some, the idea emerged that we are facing a process of feminization of migratory flows. This concept presents interesting challenges due to the diversity of interpretations it has prompted and the difficulty in defining it.

The feminization of migration should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes both quantitative and qualitative aspects of migration processes. This approach helps to

understand how the dynamics of sex and gender influence both the direct participation of women in migratory flows (Sassen, 2000; Herrera, 2005) and the contexts in which they remain in their home communities while others migrate (D'Aubeterre *et al.*, 2003). While some studies indicate an increase in women's participation in migratory flows (Castles, Miller, 1993), others offer a more complex and historically nuanced view (Donato, Gabaccia, 2016). Thus, the concept of feminization of migration is used not only to highlight changes in the proportion of women who migrate but also to analyze the motivations, conditions, and social, cultural, and economic effects that these movements produce in the territories involved.

This debate has been promoted not only from the academic field but also in dialogue with other social actors in the political field, third sector institutions, social movements, and others. More specifically, we refer to the dialogue that occurs between all these institutional actors concerned with understanding that it is possible — and for some, even necessary — to assume the management of migration, and other social actors who seek to keep the principle of migration as a human right on the public agenda.

However, as Battistella (2020, p.17) emphasizes, it is not enough to know the rights of the migrant population, but it is imperative to respect and promote them. The primary responsibility lies with the State, which often systematically violates the human right to migrate. Therefore, the author adds, civil society must act to remedy these deficiencies, seeking to do so through collaboration among the various non-governmental actors committed to the defense and protection of human rights.

In the course of the struggles that civil society organizations have historically undertaken, they have sought to place the need to understand migration as a human right on the public agenda. However, some are concerned that the concept of the migrant should not be universalized. In other words, there is a constant concern to recognize not only male migrants but also women, minors, the elderly, and LGBTIQ+¹ individuals, each with their

¹ Acronym used to represent a wide range of sexualities and identities. It stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual. The + represents all those not covered by these letters. For more information, see: <<https://>

unique needs for access to public services that respect their integrity and humanity.

This chapter proposes, in the first section, to contextualize the genesis of what has been called the feminization of migration, with its epistemic nuances, without the pretense of being exhaustive but in the spirit of a broad understanding of the implications and challenges of this conceptualization. At the same time, in the second section, some possibilities of conceptual relationships are elaborated, based on already completed research in the area, which allow us to address the thematic areas that we consider fundamental. These selected thematic areas are: the role of the gender perspective in the study of migration and, in this context, the phenomenon of the invisibility of women, family adjustments, the analytical possibilities of the intersectional perspective, and the impact of migration policies. Before the final reflections, the third section presents a brief analysis that seeks to identify some of the characteristics of the scientific production associated with this phenomenon.

1 Origin and diversity of approaches

If we consider that the verb feminize means to give or grant the condition of being feminine to someone or a phenomenon, for the purpose of this reflection, it is possible to identify a certain tension between, on the one hand, the attempt to quantify the phenomenon of the feminization of migration and, on the other, a process of acquiring feminine characteristics of international migratory movements in which it would be possible to trace patterns and trends. Marinucci (2007) identifies three main trends in understanding this phenomenon. First, feminization, interpreted as an increase in the number of female migrants; second, as a change in the analytical criteria of the migratory phenomenon through the inclusion of the gender approach; and finally, feminization as a transformation of the profile of female migrants.

www.ucr.ac.cr/noticias/2023/5/17/que-significa-lgbtqia-y-persona-no-binaria.html#:~:text=LGBTQIA%2B%20son%20las%20siglas%20utilizadas,esten%20contempladas%20en%20estas%20letras.

The concept of the feminization of migration in the 1980s functions as an analytical tool to describe both the increase in women in migration processes and the structural and qualitative changes in the nature of their participation (Rothschild, 2009). In its initial definition, the term linked this phenomenon to the globalization of production and the need for more flexible workforces to increase competitiveness, which led to an increased demand for female labor in traditionally undervalued and precarious sectors such as domestic work, garment, care industry, sex industry, and electronic product assembly (Moreno, 2002; Rothschild, 2009; Sassen, 2000).

This process, based on what Saskia Sassen (2000) called the “feminization of survival”, exposes how global structural inequalities have shaped women’s work and migration trajectories.

For a long time, the gender dimension was virtually ignored in the social analysis of migration because the universal “neutral” male referent was considered legitimate enough to represent all migrants, while data always showed that female migrants were numerically represented similarly to male migrants (Catarino, Morokvasic, 2005). Between 1960 and 2015, the number of female migrants doubled, but the same happened with the number of male migrants and the world’s population (Donato, Gabaccia, 2016). In other words, we are talking about a trend in terms of concrete migration records that follows the growth of the world population.

These variations and trends in international migration records can be mainly thought of as manifestations or consequences of the transformations that have been occurring in gender social relations, with the implications this has generated, depending on the society, concerning the social roles of women and men. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, there is interest in understanding the epistemic change that has occurred in the field of international migration studies when the presence of women became an object of study and interest in the migration policies of some countries.

This occurred approximately from the 1960s (Donato, Gabaccia, 2016), when this paradigm shift began, meaning the presence of migrant women, who had always been present in migratory flows, started to draw more interest. This trend consolidated in the academic sphere at the turn of the century. In

these first decades of the 21st century, research on migrant women and their relationship with the need to rethink public migration policies has multiplied, for example, and thus problematize their incorporation into the labor market and their integration into transit and destination societies.

As a result, changes in the demand for labor and various types of services, often feminized, are identified, generating changes in the way the labor market responds to these demands. These are feminized and precarious market niches or, in the words of Mirjana Morokvasic (1984), “sexually segregated labor markets”. This highly segmented labor supply for certain profiles of female migrants is known as the sexual and ethnic division of labor (Catarino, Morokvasic, 2005), which for many female migrants become life opportunities, as they present themselves as the possible path to survival and, therefore, also to the realization of personal and family projects (Dutra, 2017, 2013).

Consequently, the idea of the feminization of migration refers much more to the awareness of what the presence of migrant women implies in this phenomenon, that is, the domino and multiplier effect that these moving feminine and racialized bodies have on the societies of origin, transit, and destination, in a dual game of presence in one place and absence in another. These are bodies whose traditional place in many societies was and continues to be that of motherhood, procreating life and caregiving, functions that many migrant workers fulfill and add to the role of providing security and economic stability for their families.

2 Gender perspective and migration

The analysis of international migration cannot be separated from the reflection on the impact of gender social relations and how they manifest in who migrates, from where and to where, under what conditions, how different forms of incorporation into the labor market occur, or how these migrations affect their home communities and family units.

At the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, the geographer and cartographer E. G. Ravenstein, who developed the laws of migration, had already made some considerations about the

differences in male and female migrations (Assis, 2017). However, it was only a few decades later that the gender dimension began to be incorporated into the scientific analysis of this phenomenon.

It was within the framework of the development of gender studies in general, as well as feminist academic perspectives in particular, that the proposal to think in terms of the feminization of migration emerged. This concept has not been consensually adopted and, when used, refers to multiple forms of signification, as discussed in the previous section.

In this context, we can think that, from the field of migration studies and gender studies, it is worth proposing that the challenge is to transcend the impact of this nomenclature, the feminization of migration, and, as Donato and Gabaccia (2015) propose, to reflect on an effect of invisibility and lack of relevance that for centuries has affected the phenomenon of female migration. Additionally, we can consider its implications for family adjustments and the formulation of migration policies, which will be developed further below.

2.1 The invisibility of women in migration studies

During much of the 20th century, migration studies were marked by an approach centered on the male experience, which was considered the predominant paradigm. Within this framework, migrants were primarily conceptualized as men who moved to meet labor demands, while women were relegated to the role of passive companions, without agency and without significant economic impacts (Marinucci, 2007).

This androcentric bias is significant for the invisibility of women's contributions to the prevailing economic system and the reproduction of the prevailing system in general, through both unpaid and paid labor. This invisibility reinforced gender stereotypes and did not encourage the generation of disaggregated data, preventing a comprehensive understanding of the real impacts of women's participation in migration processes. In this regard, Szekely (2024) proposes that

The disaggregation of migration data by sex is necessary but not sufficient to understand the experiences of migrants of diverse genders. Gender identities, such as the habitual fusion of sex and gender, constrain data collection practices. Gender responsiveness must be fully integrated into the collection, production, use, analysis, and dissemination of migration data. These gender-inclusive data will strengthen migration policy, reduce the risks and vulnerabilities of all migrants, and contribute to achieving the goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to “leave no one behind.”²

In this sense, sex-disaggregated statistical data greatly contribute to analysis from a gender perspective. However, they are not sufficient on their own; it is necessary to complement them with qualitative research, which, along with those on the front lines of serving and assisting the migrant population, can provide more elements to avoid the temptation of homogenizing the experiences of men and women. Additionally, why not advance to an intersectional perspective that allows us to know, for example, which women we are talking about, how they identify themselves beyond gender and nationality? We can continue advancing and ask ourselves: Are we not at a point where statistics could disaggregate data beyond the binary of male vs. female migrants, allowing for other possibilities of self-identification?

In other words, it is necessary to advance in the generation of disaggregated data in order to contribute, together with qualitative research, to provide information that is more consistent with the reality of migrants. These are fundamental inputs for those making decisions about migration policies and for those carrying out the difficult task of assisting and protecting these populations in transit.

2.2 Family adjustments, intersectional perspective, and migration

Human mobility processes are crossed by critical situations that demand, for example, family arrangements and necessary

² Available at: <<https://www.migrationdataportal.org/blog/four-reasons-why-we-need-gender-mainstreaming-migration-data>>.

adjustments for adaptation, which overwhelm the usual forms of organization that existed prior to migration. Some researchers argue that the gender perspective is essential for “[...] the analysis of migration systems and the dynamics of transformation of contemporary societies; and that migrations alter gender systems at their focal points, such as family and economic relationships” (Zavala de Cosío, Rozée Gomez, 2014, p. 15).

To illustrate the changes in family relationships, we cite the work of Covagnoud (2014), which analyzes what she called the transition from biological kinship to domestic and practical kinship. In other words, she analyzes the figure of the biological mother who migrates to improve the family’s social mobility and, at the same time, the figure of what she calls the domestic mother, the one present in everyday life, who remains responsible for these children. Less frequently, but still noteworthy, there are also cases of women who migrate, leaving their children in the care of male figures, such as fathers, requiring an experience of motherhood at a distance, mediated entirely by communication technologies, with all the complexity that this involves (Dutra, 2013). All these processes of social and family readjustment, crossed by migratory experiences, are reconfiguring the functions and tasks traditionally assigned to feminine and masculine duties.

On the other hand, if we consider the self-organized caravans of migrants, deportees, asylum seekers, and refugees that began in October 2018, in an attempt to cross Mesoamerica en route to the United States, we observe that these events can be understood as another form of social organization of migration that sought to respond to a political and social situation in the countries of the region. Varela (2020) proposes understanding the caravans as a new form of transmigration that made visible a structural reality, as is the case with the familiarization of migratory flows through Central America (*op. cit.*, p. 246).

Based on this proposal by the author, we can identify the complexity of analyzing social issues intersected by international migratory dynamics and the necessary incorporation of a gender perspective. According to Varela (2020), in the last decades of the 20th century, in this region, migration to the United States was primarily carried out by men in their reproductive phase; in the

early decades of the 21st century, the process of feminization of migratory contingents occurred; then, what was called the “crisis of migrant minors” (*op. cit.*, p. 246) emerged, who were moving alone, and more recently, the phenomenon of caravans with their characteristic of collective family subjects in transit. In the author’s words, “we are witnessing a flow mainly composed of family units with different characteristics [...] moving *en masse* from the most violent and poor cities in the world” (*Ibidem*).

In this sense, the historical and concrete evidence of people in mobility, as well as those working in reception and humanitarian services (Botega *et al.*, 2020), show us that it is necessary to approach migration from a broad gender perspective. Thus, the processes of feminization, masculinization, and familiarization of certain migratory flows should be understood beyond the individual or collective subject of migration.

This implies a more sophisticated analysis of the migration process that includes various aspects of mobility experiences: the (re)constitution of (new) mixed and transnational families, the liberation and autonomy derived from migratory empowerment or disempowerment, participation in the labor market, adaptation processes to new cultures and gender regimes, the experience of new forms of discrimination, racism, and sexism; the negotiation of new identities, including gender and sexual orientation identities, the prejudice/neutrality of migration policies, and adaptation to new ways of being/acting/living/feeling in relation to the society of origin and destination (Padilla, 2013, p. 5).

The recognition of gender as an unavoidable social marker for the analysis of migration has been complemented by the need to recognize other social markers, such as: class, racial, and ethnic dimensions (Crenshaw, 1991; Viveros, 2009), nationality (Assis, 2017), sexual orientations and gender identities considered deviant from the norm (Cunha *et al.*, 2020), as well as mother tongues and those adopted during the migratory trajectory (Barbosa, São Bernardo, 2017), which opens up a significant space for an intersectional perspective in migration research.

This perspective emerges as a theoretical and methodological approach to understanding social power relations and the contexts

in which social inequalities are produced (Magliano, 2015). Both in the social sciences in general and in migration studies in particular, there was a process of consolidating the use of the intersectional perspective. It was no longer necessary to just understand the lived experiences of migrant subjects, men and women, understanding their singularities, but to make the analysis a more complex space that includes other dimensions overlapping with gender.

The intersectional perspective has not been free from criticism regarding limitations in its implementation, possibly because its broad acceptance as a theoretical proposal was not accompanied, with equal intensity, by empirical research (Magliano, 2015). However, this does not exempt us from recognizing its contribution, in the case of migration studies, as the author points out, in research on the labor trajectories of migrants. The intersectional perspective, for example, enabled the overcoming of viewpoints that, a priori, presumed a supposed homogeneity among migrants working in the same economic activity, and allowed for more elements to be added to the analysis of public migration policies.

2.3 Migration Policies, Gender, and an Intersectional Perspective

There is a close relationship between how migration policies are conceived—understood as institutional responses to the causes, characteristics, and effects of population movements to or from a given territory (Mármora, 2017)—and the social, political, and cultural dynamics that frame them, both in the receiving society and in the societies of origin of people in transit.

These dynamics are crossed by a hierarchical organizational logic in which sexual, ethnic-racial differences, nationality of origin, professional qualifications, and the type of available documentation, for example, translate into social inequalities. In other words, markers of inequality that overlap and condition the possibilities of accessing public services and the ability to regularize migratory status in the transit or destination societies of migrants.

In this sense, we understand that the inclusion of a gender and intersectional perspective allows us to comprehend the difficulties arising from the implementation of migration policies that aim to

encompass the migrant population universally, homogenizing their conditions and not taking into account the singularities and needs of this population (Magliano, 2015).

Pedone *et al.* (2014) sought to understand the links between migration policies and the forms of organization of Latin American migrant families in Spain. This allowed them to identify forms of family reorganization being implemented by migrants in the context of the global economic crisis and the tightening of migration control policies in European countries at the time. The authors emphasize that these various forms of reorganization appeared to be strongly conditioned by the legal status of each of their members.

[...] in the context of a widespread economic crisis and a drastic reduction in employment [...] both statistics and our empirical results show a greater impact of loss on men. Once again, migrant women reaffirm their role as head of the household, demonstrating their commitment to the tasks of reproduction and supporting their homes wherever they are (Pedone *et al.*, 2014, p. 134-135).

According to Battistella (2020), each state guarantees the protection of its workers within its territory, but the type of protection varies greatly based on the occupation and the state's standards.

[...] skilled workers are protected both in terms of living and working conditions and in terms of remuneration and benefits associated with their occupation. Unskilled workers enjoy less protection because they have fewer bargaining power and are more easily replaced. Many migrants perform unskilled work. These are heavy or undesirable jobs that are ignored by citizens, hence there is foreign demand. In terms of regulation, states have statutes that establish the rights and duties of workers. Not all occupations are regulated in the same way. In particular, temporary jobs, such as nurses, babysitters, caregivers, or domestic work, generally offer less protection to the point that, in many states, they are not included in workers' statutes. These are occupations for which migrant workers are generally hired (Battistella, 2020, p. 6).

Under a feminist perspective, the recognition of the economic and social contribution of migrant women has led to the adoption of more inclusive policies, for example, in the protection of domestic workers or the recognition of the labor rights of transnational caregivers. However, progress is uneven across regions and significant gaps remain between international discourse and local practices. The challenge is to translate empirical evidence and civil society demands into effective legal and structural transformations that go beyond rhetoric.

3 Scientific production: processes for identification and analysis

As mentioned earlier, the scientific debate is intersected by an interaction that occurs between researchers and other sectors of society involved directly or indirectly with migration and its implications: the migrant population itself, institutional political actors, civil society organizations, among others.

This debate in the scientific field is mainly materialized in the publication of articles, books, and other media. In this sense, understanding the main characteristics of an important part of the scientific production allows us to add value to the analysis as we can start identifying the elements that support it.

For this purpose, a bibliographic database was created to serve as a platform for initial analysis. In addition to the compilation, we began extracting and analyzing relevant data, providing a preliminary view that guides further in-depth analyses.

To identify as many documents as possible related to the concept of the feminization of migration, a systematic search was conducted to create an integrated database. Four academic databases were consulted: Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, SciELO Citation Index, and Crossref.

Searches were specifically conducted in the “Title” field to identify records that included variations of the terms “migration” and “feminization”³ in their titles. As a result of the searches, 170

³ During the analysis, it was identified that the words associated with “migration” shared the root *migra*, while the words related to “feminization” shared four types of roots: *feminiza*, *feminisa*, *feminize*, and *feminise*. Identifying these roots allowed

records were identified, to which two exclusion criteria were applied: manual elimination of duplicates and a language filter, as publications in English, Spanish, and Portuguese were considered for the analysis.

3.1 Bibliometric analysis

Through this analysis, we seek to understand the characteristics of existing scientific production, including document types, publication languages, and temporal trends, as well as the relevance of the most cited authors. This approach allows identifying some patterns that can guide paths of reflection.

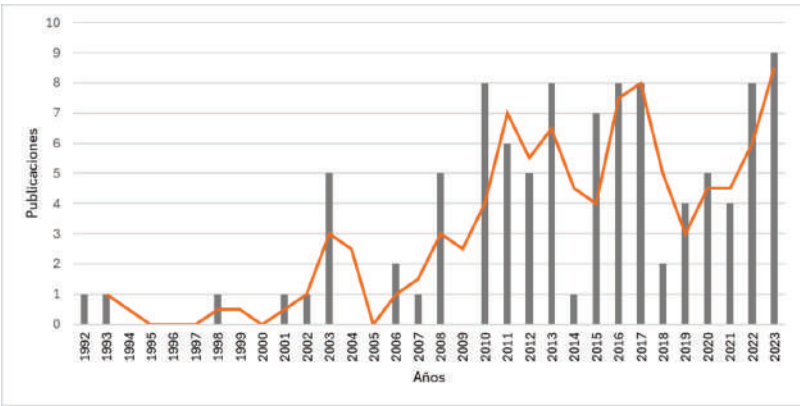
Document Type: Articles represent 61% of the total, confirming them as the predominant format in scientific production on the feminization of migration. Book chapters represent 18% and reports, 7%.

Language: To analyze language trends and the number of publications per year, only records categorized as Articles, Book Chapters, and Books were selected, as these represent formats with more consistent editorial processes. Regarding language distribution, it was identified that most records were published in English, with a total of 64 records (61%), followed by 31 records in Spanish (30%) and 10 records in Portuguese (9%).

Figure 1 shows the temporal distribution of publications on the feminization of migration between 1992 and 2023. Although a general trend of growth in the number of publications is identified, this increase does not follow a strictly linear or exponential pattern. This fluctuation suggests that the concept of the feminization of migration may not be steadily consolidating in the scientific field, raising questions about sustained interest and conceptual evolution in related academic production.

for the construction of an efficient Boolean operator for identifying specific literature: (migra) AND (feminiza OR feminisa OR feminize OR feminise).

Figure 1: Evolution of Publications on the Feminization of Migration Over Time (1992-2023)



Note: n = 101. A filter was applied to select only the records corresponding to articles/book chapters/books. Records from 2024 were excluded, as it is still an ongoing year at the time of analysis.

Source: Own elaboration within the scope of this research.

Most Cited Authors: We sought to determine which authors could be the most influential by analyzing the references extracted from the identified texts. It should be noted that each author was counted only once per text, even if they appeared multiple times in the same text. Table 1 shows the authorship's that appeared in 10 or more of the 106 analyzed texts, reflecting their significant influence on the scientific production that uses the nomenclature feminization of migration.

The concentration on certain influential authors also suggests the existence of references whose work has guided lines of research, critical debates, and comparative approaches across different contexts.

Authorship's	Number of Texts in Which They Appear	Percentage of Texts in Which They Appear
Saskia Sassen	28	26,4%
Stephen Castles	28	26,4%
Mark Miller	22	20,8%
Arlie Hochschild	20	18,9%
Patricia Pessar	20	18,9%
Rhacel Salazar Parreñas	19	17,9%
Mirjana Morokvasic	17	16,0%
Eleonore Kofman	16	15,1%
Brenda Yeoh	14	13,2%
Donna Gabaccia	14	13,2%
Pierrette Hondagneu- Sotelo	14	13,2%
Hania Zlotnik	13	12,3%
Barbara Ehrenreich	12	11,3%
Katharine Donato	12	11,3%
Claudia Pedone	11	10,4%
Douglas Massey	11	10,4%
Nicola Piper	11	10,4%
Gioconda Herrera	10	9,4%
Laura Oso	10	9,4%
Sylvia Chant	10	9,4%

Note: n = 106. Only the texts identified in Stage 1 and Stage 2 that contained bibliographic references were considered.

Concluding reflections

The study of international migration, as well as the humanitarian work carried out with people on the move, enhances the observation of concrete elements of sociocultural transformation in the processes of social interaction. For example, we refer to power relations and their resulting asymmetries in the communities of origin, transit, and destination of migrants, to the values and roles attributed in the family sphere according to a historically and culturally rooted division of sexual and ethnic-racial tasks; all elements that, in non-

mobility situations, would manifest differently over time and space.

The social changes manifested in the act of migrating, whether by individual or collective subjects, such as in the previously mentioned process of familiarization of transmigratory flows (Varela, 2020) and, earlier, the so-called feminization of migrations, present us with important theoretical, methodological, ethical, and political challenges. These require the commitment of those involved in projects aimed at improving the quality of life of the migrant population, as well as, fundamentally, the commitment of those producing knowledge about the phenomenon.

Scientific production linked to the concept of the feminization of migration, as well as migration from a broad gender perspective, clearly demonstrates that migrant women play a fundamental role in destination countries, mainly through their insertion in labor sectors characterized by high precariousness, such as care services (domestic or institutional). In their countries of origin, the socio-economic impacts are mainly manifested in terms of remittances, while the socio-emotional impacts are mainly manifested in the content of family and community interpersonal relationships. Thus, the analysis of the feminization of migration allows us to deepen the dynamics interwoven by structural aspects such as: sex/gender, inequality, exclusion-discrimination, and globalization processes.

Regarding the characteristics of scientific production on the feminization of migration, it is worth noting that despite the growth in publications at certain times, this is not constant and there are declines. Therefore, there is not a constant and consolidated interest in the use of this concept itself, but this does not mean that female migration and all the additional phenomena to which it is linked are not being researched.

In this sense, we emphasize the need to investigate in more detail the strategies of female resistance and agency, new family configurations, migrations between low and middle-income countries, labor relations in emerging sectors, and connections between migration, assistance, and social policies. The feminization of migration remains a field of study in transformation, requiring innovative theoretical and empirical approaches to capture the complexity of women's international mobility experiences.

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7



LOVE LETTER

An Investigation into Implied Passion (IPI) memory work on migration

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*To David Córdoba, as my praxis is partly
sustained by his work of care.*

*To the mothers searching in Mexico and Latin America.
To their dedication and courage, to their gentleness.*

This work is a loving defence that invites us to exercise an ***Implicit Passion Research (IPI)*** to study what we have called the “global government of migrations” but also to build memory around migrant struggles in the migratory corridors of Latin America in times of techno-facies and total war against migrants. A text that draws on years of researching these issues and seeks to be a kind of cooking workshop for those who prepare their daily practice that nourishes radical hospitality or those brave enough to train to be chefs in the neoliberalised academic life. This text is an exercise in putting my research practice on paper and sharing it with those who read this love letter.¹

¹ This writing exercise is the product of many experiences and dialogues in common with working groups that I have been fortunate to be part of. I would first like to thank my colleague Vanessa Maldonado, for her careful reading, suggestions and dialogues

A couple of years ago already, in the framework of the second International Conference on Migration and Refuge of the Scalabrinian Centre for Migration Studies (CSEM), in postcovid but pretrump2 Tijuana, I wrote a love letter to migrant defenders (Varela; 2024) with the fear that my ignorance of the theology that underpins their practice would open a crack in credibility, breaking the pact between reader and author that every text requires to be enjoyed, appropriated and validated as a discourse, in my case, a socio-scientific one.²

To my surprise, that first love letter was widely read, discussed, embraced but also refuted by religious and secular advocates through one-on-one dialogues, mediated over a beer or a pizza, and many more months with a screen in between. In short, a conversation started that I am grateful for and from which I have learned significantly. This loving missive circulated so widely that I was invited again to write for a collective book whose main audience are migrant advocates.

With deep gratitude for the invitation to continue in dialogue with the Scalabrinians, I write this new love letter to propose a how-to, what I call in my classes the “kitchen of our research” to weave the memory of migrant struggles and radical hospitality.

This love letter is therefore about the Implicit Passion Research (IPI) that I am submitting to the conversation as an epistemic and methodological proposal to dialogue with other methodological crafts that serve us to ethnographically analyze forms of defense, self-organization, latent and visible struggles, forms of accompaniment, documentation and advocacy to build memory around human mobility in the present crisis.

with this piece. I owe Samanta Zaragoza, Gabriela Martínez, Gabriela de la Rosa, Valeria Moscoso, my friends and colleagues in the collective Narrando Fronteras desde los Feminismos and many other compañeras for the knowledge about feminisms that I bring up in this work. To all of them I offer my sincere thanks.

² By pact between readers and author, I refer to a very nourished discussion in reception aesthetic studies that recognises the active role of the receivers of messages that an author writes for them (Eco, 1996; Palacios, 2022; Pérez, C., 2013).

Introduction

Between the publication of that love letter (Varela, 2024) and now that I am writing this text, there have been a series of collective losses and health crises of our own, many state massacres against migrants and their families. Between my first love letter to defenders and the publication of this last one, we have witnessed many practices of life and many practices of death against migrants. Since then and until now, practices that we in critical migration studies call radical hospitality are still in force. Let's start by defining radically hospitality, which is one of the tasks that the editors of this book have asked me to define and develop.

Radical hospitality was academically defined by an Iranian professor, Sharam Khosravi, who lives in Stockholm. *I am Border* (Khosravi 2021) is an autoethnographic book in which the anthropologist narrates his migration journey, the causes that made him first an international forcibly displaced person and then an asylum seeker in Sweden.

In his reflection, Sharam recounts the experiences that saved him from death during his journey to the global north. Khosravi calls these exercises of solidarity radical hospitality, and by this he refers to all the exercises of welcome, accompaniment, listening, dialogue and agreement that people and collectives in the societies through which he passed. People, practices, institutions that supported him to stay alive, not to lose hope and to stay sane (Social Research Channel, 2021).

A similar way of theorising hospitality³ is that which Mahmoud Traoré (Traoré and Le Dantec, 2014) proposes in his book *Departing to tell*, an autobiography in which he is a Senegalese carpenter and migrant advocate. In his beautiful book, Mahmoud narrates the journey he undertook to migrate from Senegal to Spain, through the Sahel, the Sahara, Libya and the Maghreb. In this work of memory, Traoré explains the exercises of solidarity and even the frontal disobedience he witnessed against the governments and paralegal

³ I know very little about it, but I am aware of the existence of a very broad theological discussion on this concept in different faiths, and it is also a widely discussed topic in modern philosophy. I start from that of the authors mentioned in this love letter only for pedagogical purposes.

forces that govern the transits to Europe through North Africa. Traoré thinks of these exercises of latent and manifest, personal and collective struggles as forms of radical hospitality. The embrace of a family, the work with which he is employed in a neighbourhood business, the tracks between walkers, the affection, the water in the middle of the desert that someone shares, are for Mahmoud the proof that humanity is part of him, and he is part of it.

And it is with these two exilic intellectuals that I propose to define radical hospitality as the strategies of care, support, listening, recognition and affection that people and institutions (secular, religious, state, autonomous) exercise in favour - of themselves, recognizing the humanity that neoliberalism wants to eliminate - and in favour of the migrants they support.

From my perspective, migrant defenders also exercise this radical hospitality, something that is of course not free of tensions and relations of power and domination, as are all human relations. And it is how to exercise it, not the radical hospitality itself, that concerns me in this second love letter.

This love letter is an epistemic bet, a proposal that builds bridges between different actors and experiences of research, advocacy and migration; that is why, in addition to defenders, this socio-scientific essay is also aimed at young researchers who are doing their theses, journalists who are in the field building memory about the caravans of migrants or the passage through the fierce Darién jungle. And, above all, I hope that this message of affection and reflection will reach other recipients: the migrants themselves.

I sincerely hope that this work will serve to unleash reflections, memories, anger, hopes and questions among those who read it. So let's get started.

1 PRA, the ancestral grandmother of IPI

To understand migration, to explain the practices of radical hospitality, to dismantle hateful and criminalising narratives, it is important to start from the question of not what to do, but how to do it. Or both, in fact. And on this occasion, rather than focusing on what to do, which I outlined in my first love letter to migrant

defenders, I'm interested in highlighting the "how" of our practices. About what we do and create with migrants.

I learned to do research in Mexico City, between university strikes, indigenous uprisings and massive rock and reggae concerts. My mother, Isabel Huerta Parra, a university professor who survived not only the Tlatelolco massacre but all the subsequent years of Mexico's dirty war, practiced participatory action research when she lectured her students at the College of Humanities about this insurrectionary UNAM high school. So, I think I learned to do research in my mother's belly when she studied with her students the medicinal plants and their uses in indigenous and peasant communities in the state of Morelos, in central Mexico. Later, when I was studying for my CCH and my degree, IAP was practiced as the basic method for praxis. Those were different times. I am talking about the Mexico before the war against the people at the beginning of the 21st century.

Participatory action research - which according to some sources was first proposed by Kurt Lewin in 1946 - reached its peak during the 1970s, when it was constructed as an alternative to the productivism and technicism of the paradigm that had been practised by research for development (R+D). Thus, PAR has its genesis in the coordinates of research for action (R+A), its central idea being that research can also be carried out *by participating*, hence it became known as PAR, for the exercise of a sociology committed to the social actors with whom knowledge is constructed (Fals Borda, 2009).

That is to say, although Participatory Action Research corresponds in historical time to R&D (research for development), its theoretical scaffolding differs from the latter, since Participatory Action Research its theoretical basis is different from the previous one, since Participatory Action Research was intended to be a "liberating alternative" to the practice of social research and is more connected to the work of modern thinkers such as Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire and Pablo González Casanova, among others. The aim of this form of research is not to "resolve the social anomalies that impede progress", but rather to pursue the civilising "development" of specific societies,

considering the collective subject, its knowledge and practices, and seeking to make understandable the resistance generated in the social reality in which it intervenes.

Participatory action research has been intensively used in Latin America since 1970 and one of its main references is the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (see especially 1970 and 1986), who at that time combined the Marxist paradigm (and its economic perspectives of the possible and the desirable), with the pedagogy of the oppressed that has Paulo Freire as its most well known reference.

Regarding the normative ideals of this methodological approach, it should basically be emphasised that participatory action research is a form of research that is based on the intention of to link the exercise of empirical research with processes of social transformation that bring about collective responses to “social problems” felt to be central to a given community.

Through action research, the aim is to deal simultaneously with knowledge and social change in a way that unites theory and practice. Participatory action research aims to articulate research and social intervention with the knowledge, know-how and needs of local communities, prioritising popular knowledge as a source of knowledge and the production of certainty.

Therefore, another of the fundamental elements of this perspective is the objectifying rupture of the social subjects that intervene in the reality that participatory action research seeks to transform. For this methodological paradigm, the subject (researcher)-object (researched) relationship is meaningless.

This methodological tradition proposes a new contribution to the problem of how knowledge can provide institutional or instituted power to those who lack it without creating, during the process of knowledge construction, new relations of domination.

At the same time as this conversation in social and anthropological studies, including communication and aesthetics in Latin America, the feminist turn in the social sciences was taking place, which ended up completing the discussion on the objectivity of socio-scientific studies. With it, research agendas changed, while at the same time opening dialogues that, in my opinion, led to a

virtual paradigmatic revolution from which we researchers benefit today.⁴

As Carmen Cariño explains it, making a critical reading of the discourses of black and Chicano feminisms,

The contributions of black feminism, in the United States, have put forward fundamental elements of standpoint theory; they emphasise a collective perspective, which argues for the importance of experience as well as consciousness in the work of black women activists and scholars ... From Collins' perspective (2012, p. 109) the legacy of struggle constitutes one of the main elements of black women's 'standpoint'. This shared point of view does not imply that they have identical experiences or that they interpret experiences in similar ways. That is, "it does not mean that there is a homogenous black women's point of view" (Collins, 2012, p. 111). Collins (2012, p. 113) also argues that: "A key reason why the views of oppressed groups are repressed is that self-defined views can stimulate resistance" (Honey, 2020, p. 281-282).

As for me, we could go on *ad infinitum* recovering the voices of black, indigenous, black and bi-national feminists to think about how to do our work in defence of human rights and a sentient sociology. But that will be the subject of another love letter for sure, for the moment just to name thinkers such as Yuderkis Espinosa, Diana Gómez and Karina Ochoa (2014), María Lugones (2008), Aura Cumen, Lorena Cabnal (2010), Dorotea Gómez (2017) and Alejandra Araíza (2020), just to mention a few, because their work has placed at the centre the commitment to a feminist epistemology that starts from ourselves, from experience, that makes memory a pillar of social science for praxis. Starting from ourselves, authorising our voice, thinking collectively, with others, to heal and re-exist.

For now, let us return to IPI and why it completes PRA with the feminist turn in the social sciences.

During the consolidation of the Falsbordian approach, the certainty was built that to achieve scientific rigour in this methodological orientation, it is a condition that all "truth" be the

⁴ I owe my colleague Vanessa Maldonado the route of readings, debates, authors and perspectives with which she enlightened me to write this essay on this feminist turn.

result of a collective, dialogical construction, resulting from the abstraction of the concrete into epistemic clues that can be used to interpret and transform the specific reality in which one acts. For this reason, the involvement of the protagonists of the research is essential, because such involvement ensures the correspondence between problems and solutions felt by the community in which participatory action research is carried out.

From this methodological tradition, priority is given to working with people who identify collectively with the aim of transforming their environment, based on critical knowledge of the reality around them and the implementation of a set of strategies and proposals.

Another very important antecedent of IPI is militant research. From the perspective of militant research, inquiring to understand social phenomena implies *starting from oneself*, accepting that the personal is political and recognising that self-awareness can be a mechanism for building collective action and organisation. Militant research seeks to produce thought from transformative practices to empower and promote activism in a virtuous procedure that moves from practice to theory, with the aim of renewing practice.

Since PRA has been tried out to work with migrant communities, there have been many episodes of struggle, many books, many meetings and many theses. Between the time of the teacher Fals Borda and the current total war against migrants and their communities, as much has happened as you have inscribed in your memories or have inherited pieces of history from your ancestors or trainers. I have also received this memory of the processes and have participated in a few episodes of migrant struggle.

That is why it seems necessary to me now to go beyond the master Fals Borda, to complement him with what I propose to call ***Implicating Passion Research (IPI)*** to study what we have called the “global government of migrations”, referring to the sum of devices and technologies of control to govern migrations, permanence and full membership of societies where migrants get stuck waiting or decide to stay, whether in transit zones or in the northeast they are pursuing.

Research on the implication of passion to understand contemporary migrations

As the master Fals Borda (1981) would say, I feel that in order to study contemporary migration we must let ourselves be immersed in the daily lives of those who pass through the migratory passageways in Latin America and around the world. Thus, IPI is the way I name all the exercises of defense, accompaniment, documentation and advocacy to build memory around the struggles of migrants, but also the exercises of border control and racism.

As I have already written, migrant struggles can come to life in overt forms, as when migrant families form caravans or walking contingents in the Darien jungle or in southeastern Mexico. Migrant struggles also come to life through exercises of latent resistance, counter-conduct as Foucauldian would call it (Estevez, 2017), as when refugees collectively take care of themselves to endure the wait in transit or as they understand the north they have managed to reach and organise for survival (Álvarez Velasco and Varela-Huerta. 2022).

IPI involves active and radical listening, as Marí Cruz Acosta (2019) calls it, or listening against the grain, as Yatzil Narváez (2024) proposes.

I think of “listening against the grain” as the responsible, ethical and aesthetic gesture of attending to the already audible and intelligible narratives of those who walk through history and resonating with them, for which it is essential to make use not only of a critical theoretical body, but also of a concrete body ready for the other person; listening against the grain requires learning to hear the sounds, to read the gestures and subtexts, to offer oneself to the other person and to offer accommodation to their anxieties and joys with our listening (...) What I propose here, as Lenkersdorf (2008) did years ago, is to learn to listen differently. This proposal places the co-responsibility of the practice on the listeners, and not only on the transmitters. Listening against the grain implies knowing oneself in an embodied, situated and mediated process; it encourages the responsibility of immersing oneself in the language of the other person, in their gestures, subtitles, intertexts, silences, in the distinction between voice and word also deserves an epistemic and ontological discussion, which makes it possible to account for the biases, hierarchies and privileges that can sustain

it. Listening against the grain also emerges as an aspect of political subjectivity in the moment in which it becomes a refuge for the other person, an element that produces hospitality, by offering itself as a support for the other person's intimacy and ensuring fidelity to the narrative that is then expressed... (Narváez, 2024, p. 305-306).

In addition to listening against the grain, a fundamental part of the IPI I propose, it is sustained by taking part in collective care work to sustain life while migrating or when returning through deportation.

The main research strategy for going through an IPI process is to inhabit the drift of the accompanying migrant communities, following them, documenting their daily lives: the tiny, the small, the everyday. Contrary to the dehumanisation of those who claim that migrations are always crises, IPI attempts to weave a memory of migration and is based on the certainty that migrations are the driving force of the history of peoples, but also of the people who are the *prota-gonists*, accompany them or watch them pass by.

Practicing IPI to understand migration means also opening up spaces, even giving up our own spaces as academics and advocates, so that migrants and their families can ***take the floor***, make the media, patrimonialize the narratives about their experiences, authorize their place of enunciation and be considered producers of epistemes of migration studies.

Perhaps a major challenge for IPI is to implement an anthropology of power, as Alethia Fernández de la Reguera (2023) taught us from her feminism when she studied migration stations (prisons) in Mexico. To exercise an anthropology that scrutinises state institutions, their officials, that triangulates the versions of this migrant knowledge with the perpetrators of the daily violence against them. IPI implies taking on the challenge of weaving an anthropology that leaves a systematic record of this other genocide, the one that former US President Joe Biden called the "total war on migrants", in addition to the one that looms over the Palestinian people and which is also happening before our eyes and is transmitted in real time by socio-digital networks.

I feel that in addition to asking those who migrate about their experience, as scholars of migration we must commit ourselves to carrying out an IPI that asks the perpetrators of crimes such as the fire and state assassination in Ciudad Juárez in Mexico in March 2023 (Gallegos, Carmona and Minjares, 2024) for their version of events. Tracing the chains of command, building academic, journalistic and artistic expertise, so that the crimes can be documented, so that other peoples in other times can recognise the forms of violence, but also the resistances of which we are witnesses and protagonists.

That is why IPI adheres to the epistemological vigilance that guarantees academic rigour in the vein of black, Chicano and black feminisms. The IPI on practices of death and practices of life among and of migrant communities is based on the socio-anthropological traditions of oral history as a source of diverse truths and exercises a dialogue of knowledge to recognise the plurality of the narratives that weave the memory of these migrations (Covarrubias Pasquel, A. and Guity Avila, S., 2025; De Garay, 1997).

IPI considers the senses, sensations, emotions and the body as research tools and repository of ancestral and contemporary knowledge. It is written in the key of autoethnography and recognises the power of the “literature of the self” of feminist canons that are not afraid of the desire to name themselves (Babani, 2023).

IPI and its results are narrated in transmedia formats (Truax, 17/12/2019), using digital, but also analogue and community platforms, not to return knowledge to those who are experts (the migrants themselves) but to translate, to institute spaces of epistemic justice for those who are the protagonists of migrant struggles.

IPI is tastier when cooked collectively, over a low heat and in the company of chosen friends and family who, even if they are not experts, know how to listen and bring us back to what is ours, to the tiny and the everyday, to life.

IPI will not always be funded, although many academics are doing epistemological activism so that this way of understanding the world is recognised as a methodological craft and strategy for solving research questions and consultancies in the world of the macronationalization of the humanitarian industry that I addressed in my first loving missive to migrant defenders (Varela, 2023).

When I say epistemological activism, I am referring to the binomial I thought of when I had to decide whether to put my investigative drive, my hours of work and sleep into journalism, activism or the classroom. I think you guessed it; I decided to go to the classroom. My family changed its story for the public university and molded mine by being the daughter of a single mother. Also, as Nadia Babani (2023) narrates, since I became a mother myself, times became shorter, and territories became rooted in creation. That is why the IPI I practice also involves supporting other researchers in their degree and research work, building epistemic collectives such as the working group *Narrativas de Fronteras desde los Feminismos* (Ríos Infante, V.; Ríos Infante, G. and Covarrubias Pasquel, C., 2024) from where we think in common to act in the academy.

For me, epistemological activism is the practice of imagining concepts and categories that problematize reality, but also the capacity to collectively activate political imaginaries in order to find paths for praxis that are compatible with our practices of care, upbringing and celebration of life. Thinking to transform reality, inhabiting the academic world collectively and making the toolbox we keep oiled in the social sciences intelligible to the communities we work for. To inhabit the world as intellectuals, but also as mothers, as women, as teachers, as journalists, as daughters, as researchers, as trade unionists, as chroniclers, as neighbours, as friends and, at the same time, to crack the coloniality of being, of power and of knowledge that has instituted universities (Jaramillo, 2013) that discredit neighbourhood, everyday, popular knowledge.

To put the body, to feel the rage, to organise the collective response, to weave memory, is priceless, but our sustainability and dignified working conditions make it possible for us to become consolidated researchers and to accompany, validate and listen to the younger ones, without getting sick or saddened until we stop believing. For this reason, IPI knows how to pause to heal, to go through mourning, to pamper ourselves in congresses and seminars that are a respite to think about our professions and what it hurts to practice them, and to prepare applications for permanent and well-paid positions in universities that need us without leaving our sleep and our dreams behind in the process.

IPI does not produce truths, but versions in process, concrete postcards based on what we feel and think in the field, on the ground, in dialogue with others. IPI is a loom where migrant struggles have a place as episteme.

IPI draws on the theoretical traditions already outlined in this section and the ethical premise that exercising epistemological activism in the university, or in work as migrant defenders, embraces the normative ideal of making our houses of study and centres of refuge and radical hospitality **institutional sites for victims' truth**.⁵ Were, through incorporated anthropology (Esteban, 2004) and against the grain listening, we can exercise what other scholars have called processes of epistemic justice:

By epistemic justice we are referring to justice as a pluriversal societal value that should guarantee all invisible, discriminated and subalternised subjects the right to be recognised and treated as producers/creators of knowledge on their own terms and in their multiple languages and tongues. This right is rarely recognised among ordinary people and less frequently respected by the instituted and instituting powers because there is a dominant universal way of knowing in which the hierarchy of knowledge/power puts modern Western science and its experts above it, or because capitalism seeks by all means to commodify all spheres of life, including that of knowledge and knowledges (Leyva, 2016, online).

To this exercise of multiversification knowledge and university institutions and producers of scientific narratives, we must add the need to make our shelters, networks of defenders and school classrooms spaces of restorative justice to build memory on contemporary migrations, the practices of life and the practices of death against them.

⁵ This idea came to me while reading Sandra Gerardo's doctoral thesis (2025) on the massacre of migrants in Cadereyta, Nuevo León, in May 2012, with anguish and rage. This research is, from my point of view, an exercise in epistemic justice for the families of the victims of this crime of the market and the state.

3 Working with IPI to preserve the memory of migrants' struggles

On restorative justice

The Protocol for Prevention and Action in Cases of Discrimination, sexual Harassment and Labour Harassment in Civil Society Organisations (Ambulante et al, 2020) is the result of a participatory action-research process based on months of collective work and critical reflection by eight Mexican civil society human rights organisations and is an exercise that, from my perspective, goes beyond and complements the paradigm of transitional justice and complements it with the normative ideal of restorative justice.⁶

First, let us recall that transitional justice refers to a series of mechanisms for accessing truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition following periods of conflict, repression and/or large-scale, high-impact levels of violence that led to the commission of such gross and massive human rights violations that the state is unable to respond with the ordinary justice system (Gómez, 2013).

According to the International Center for Transitional Justice, transitional justice

[...] is a specific field of activities, mechanisms and processes, through which it seeks to address the causes, consequences and legacy of a large-scale, high-impact phenomenon of violence. The application of TJ seeks to elucidate the facts and contexts in which violence occurs, combat impunity, compensate victims for the harm suffered and prevent the repetition of the events that caused it, with a view to the consolidation of a constitutional democracy. The four pillars that constitute the JT canon are: truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition (López, 2018, online).

Whereas Restorative Justice is the term for a set of values, principles and practices that seek to promote respect and responsibility in human relationships. More than a model or programme, it is a paradigm that represents a new and broader approach to the complexity of human relationships that allows us to understand why conflicts and violence arise, when the damage

⁶ I am grateful to Valeria Moscoso, human rights defender, for bringing me this applied knowledge about restorative justice in Mexico.

was caused and the actions and strategies taken by the individuals involved, but especially those affected, consider necessary for reparation. The three main values promoted by this paradigm are: respect, responsibility and the centrality of relationships (Díaz, 2008).

This restorative paradigm has procedures that involve:

1. the ones who have been harmed and those closest to them (including family members),
2. the persons who have caused harm as well as those who are closest to them (those with whom they have the strongest links), as well as
3. the community of reference that is relevant to those involved, both in the present and in the future. The latter make up the web of relationships that have also been affected by the episode of conflict or violence, and are therefore stakeholders, acting as observers and accountabilities in the process (Ambulante *et al.*, online).

When Ambulante and others (2020) worked on this protocol and translated it into the needs of civil society organizations for the prevention of sexual harassment and violence, I learned from studying it to deal with an episode of institutional violence at the UACM against a student and against myself as an *active witness*⁷ against this violence, that this paradigm must challenge migration studies at university, those who work in the field of defending the human rights of migrants, those who exercise radical hospitality, but above all among state bodies obliged to guarantee the applicability of the human rights of migrants.

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⁷ The legal concept of active witnessing, enshrined in the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, Belém do Pará (1994), establishes the need for the society in which violence against women occurs to denaturalize these practices and make its indignation and action explicit, in order to break the patriarchal pact of silence that leaves acts of violence unpunished.

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I believe that it is up to us, defenders, academics, humanitarian workers within the network of temporary shelters where radical hospitality is practiced - all of these different levels are not exempt from power relations and hierarchies - to ensure that our spaces of action are consecrated as spaces of memory that recognize migrants as political subjects with the right to tell their truth, so that the violence against them is named, brought to justice, measures of reparation are built and, above all, so that the violence against them is named, brought to justice and, above all, measures of reparation are built, and, above all, so that the **violence** against them is named, **dealt with and** , above all, **so** that reparation measures are built, between the state **and the** society in which these political actors reside, **guarantee, in addition to the non-repetition of these patterns and**

⁸ The legal concept of active witnessing, enshrined in the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, Belém do Pará (1994), establishes the need for the society in which violence against women occurs to denaturalize these practices and make its indignation and action explicit, in order to break the patriarchal pact of silence that leaves acts of violence unpunished.

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episodes of systemic violence, a public discussion that paves the way for the reconfiguration of the current social pact that has so far tolerated total war against migrants and their communities through the legal production of illegality and the state of exception for migrants, displaced persons and refugees on the American continent.

Following Sandra Gerardo (2024), who researched the psychosocial effects of the relatives of the victims of the massacre of migrants in Cadereyta, *the non-repetition* of these patterns of violence represents a demand for justice on the part of the families of disappeared migrants in Mexico.

In conclusion

I began this text by saying that I am grateful that my love letters are read with interest among migrant defenders. I wrote this article in response to CSEM's invitation for this collective book with the central question of what hospitality practices should be implemented in these times of technofacias in the world in general and in Latin America in particular. I therefore first defined what radical hospitality means for me and other interpreters of migration, and concentrated most of this effort on thinking about a specific form of radical hospitality, the epistemic hospitality in universities. I developed the concept of IPI and explained that I propose to practice it in order to build processes of memory and reparation, a restorative justice that makes universities and hostels institutional spaces for the truth of the victims of neoliberalism, of the total war against migrant communities, but also that these are spaces from which the social conditions are built for migrants to take the floor as actors, not as props, but as protagonists of the collective history that shapes us.

I end this text with a reflection that seems necessary in these times of hatred, techno-facism, neo-macartism in the world, reacting to a triggering question that was launched by our hosts, the Scalabrinians, to think about praxis in the defence of migrants: How to build solidarity without victimising migrants and refugees, but unleashing processes of citizenship for all?

The notion of citizenship as an act (Aguilar, 2020) has been in vogue for years among those who study migration and social movements. However, these acts of citizenship by migrants come up against an increasingly high wall, and the fact is that, contrary to citizenship becoming a legal device, we are witnessing the curtailment of freedoms, rights and legal guarantees packaged in this notion, its gradation that intersects the oppressions of citizens with fewer rights than others according to their race, class, age, gender, sex-affective preference, passport, etc. (Varela, 2015).

Moreover, now not only are the reasons for belonging to a political community not broadened or the affiliation not translated, but in these times of technofias, we are witnessing the legal elimination of portions of the population, for example, through the annulment of temporary statutes, as in the case of the current US administration, which erased the legal identity of half a million people in March 2025 (BBC; 2025).

I therefore believe that one way to de-victimise migrants is to recognise that we are in a world where the legal, social categories and even the narratives of modernoliberal democracy are exhausted, worn out. And that we need to activate a common political imagination. Migrants and extraordinary sedentary beings, or those who have not yet migrated, to defend legal statuses such as the right to legal existence and transnational citizenship. And, perhaps, through the work of memory that is constructed from IPI, we can hack the narratives and practices of hate that are currently being used against migrant communities, their families and their defenders.

So, this is my love letter, pierced by rage, anchored in the radical tenderness of knowing that we are together, trying to build a world where all worlds fit. Thank you for reading me.

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MIGRATION IN THE CLIMATE AND SOCIOECOLOGICAL CRISIS

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Introduction: the climate crisis as a systemic crisis

Analyses of climate change, as well as the links between migratory processes and climate, have proliferated over the last two decades. This text adopts a specific perspective, viewing climate change not as a byproduct of general human activity but as the result of a particular civilizational project—a specific way of thinking, using, and organizing nature within the capitalist world-ecology. According to Kothari *et al.* (2019), official analyses by the UN and governments often fail to critically examine the deep-seated structural forces driving ecological degradation. While these bodies may acknowledge environmental issues, they typically overlook the underlying economic, political, and social systems—particularly capitalism and neoliberalism—that contribute to environmental harm. Consequently, their approaches tend to focus on superficial solutions, legitimizing the neoliberal policies that perpetuate ecological crises.

Following the historical-theoretical perspective developed by Jason Moore, capitalism is not merely a socio-economic formation; it is a socio-ecological product that has impacted all life on Earth since its origins, traceable to the conquest of the Americas in 1492 and the establishment of the triangular trade over the following two centuries (Williams, 1944). Capitalism did not simply constitute an economic formation; it defined itself as a civilization based on the separation between humanity and nature, where nature is either a resource for profit or an obstacle to be overcome by any means necessary, including extreme measures such as genocide and ecocide. If these are the constitutive premises and historical content of the capitalist world-ecology, then climate change is the result of a worldview that sees life on Earth as a set of utilities and obstacles to be exploited or surpassed, with the belief that this exploitation can be infinite, just as the growth sought by this mode of production is pursued without limits. According to Moore's analysis, "the unfolding climate crisis is not anthropogenic; it is capitalogenic" (Moore, 2023, p. 565). Consequently, "we must carry forth a message of a concretely interrelated climate crisis born of capitalism as a world-ecology of power, profit, and life five centuries ago. We live in the Capitalocene - the "age of capital" - not the Anthropocene" (Moore, 2022a, p. 8).

We chose this study option in line with the assumption that attributing climate change solely to humanity overlooks significant inequalities in wealth and power. Radical thinkers and climate justice activists argue that labeling climate change as anthropogenic (human-caused) effectively places blame on those who are already marginalized. Instead, they propose the term 'capitalogenic' (caused by capital) to better reflect the role of capitalist civilization in driving the climate crisis.

Climate change is thus recognized as an internal limit to the functioning of the capitalist world-ecology - a limit to its reproduction. It is not an external reality, a coincidence, or an accident but is constitutive of the very logic by which the capitalist world-ecology operates. This has numerous systemic consequences, including the definition of an internal limit within the socio-ecological system itself, whose logic of functioning is

now entering an irreversible crisis. However, this does not mean that an alternative way of thinking and organizing socio-ecological relationships is necessarily imminent. Paraphrasing Gramsci (1971, p. 276), one could argue that while the past lingers and the future has yet to assert itself, civilization may produce “monsters”. Among these monsters may be the ruling classes’ attempts to maintain their power by acting as if no systemic crisis is underway.

Jason W. Moore himself highlights how ruling classes have historically been uninterested in changing their ways of operating within climate crises: “it’s worth noting that ruling class metabolisms are famously “sticky.” Predator classes generally refuse to adjust economic interests and belief systems inherited from previous climate eras. Climate ‘adaptation’, historically, has been spearheaded from below, favoring resistance and revolt” (Moore, 2022b, p. 6).

The Conferences of the Parties exemplify how the actual transnational approach to the climate crisis fails to challenge power dynamics inherent to the capitalist state; instead, it consolidates appropriation practices, thereby reinforcing the position of the global capitalist elite (Federici, 2018). Paradoxically, this cross-border coordination has distanced decision-makers even further from local socio-ecological concerns, legitimizing top-down responses as the only viable solutions in public discourse. This shift paves the way for new leading agencies to emerge through state-capitalist alliances under the guise of crisis management (Arrighi, 2004).

The roots of this capitalist drive, conceived as the only credible solution to combat the consequences of climate change, can be traced back to what Federici describes as “the end of History”: the global market triumph at the end of the socialist experience, which coincides with “a uniform world commodification called westernism and democracy” (Federici, 2018, p. 44). By omitting the ongoing class struggle, accepting the market mechanisms of the liberal era, and internalizing the capital’s strategy of conquest and pillage, “improving our survival conditions”, becomes the only goal of our life within an unchanged context (Federici, 2018, p. 44-45). This persistence may manifest in war, new processes of subjugating nature, and mere domination.

Recent events indicate that the dominant political-economic classes are organizing their strategy around three main axes: (1) the growing number of wars worldwide; (2) the acceleration and expansion of extractive and neo-extractive processes; and (3) the strengthening of authoritarian political regimes, marked by the rise of the extreme right in many formally democratic countries. These trends converge toward establishing a global regime of permanent war.

Understanding current migration processes and migration management policies requires situating them within these systemic trends that characterize the climate crisis as a systemic crisis within the capitalist socio-ecological formation. This means that climate change is not just another factor of instability; it constitutes the very matrix of the web of life, shaping the historical form of multiple socio-ecological processes. However, despite the absence of an approved legal definition of environmental migration, the climatic parameter has been added to the formal list of reasons for population displacement. This inclusion contributes to the segmentation of the conceptual framework by naming the underlying socio-ecological conditions separately in order not to address them as a single systemic crisis of the capitalist system. Official analyses by the UN and governments, for instance, emphasize a series of ‘drivers’ of migration, as defined by the International Organization for Migration (IOM)¹, encompassing various motivations - economic, political, environmental - conceived as disconnected. These criteria determine the level of protection granted or denied to a person in movement, establishing a hierarchy in the control of bodies. The systemic nature of climate change implies that the processes connected to it cannot be addressed through a fragmented list of problems but must be understood and tackled in their interactions.

An example of this holistic approach, consistent with the analysis proposed here, can be found in Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1967 speeches “The Three Evils of Society” (King, 1967a) and “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence” (King, 1987). In these discourses, King highlighted the interconnectedness of racism, poverty, and militarism, recognizing, for instance, that ‘the criminal

¹ See <<https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/environmental-migration>>.

nature of war undermines the quest for justice at home' and, more broadly, that:

there is at the outset a very obvious and almost facile connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I, and others, have been waging in America. A few years ago, there was a shining moment in that struggle. It seemed as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor – both black and white – through the poverty program. There were experiments, hopes, new beginnings. Then came the buildup in Vietnam and I watched the program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war, and I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in the rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube. So, I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such (King, 1987, p. 201).

In other words, King urged his audience and fellow activists to recognize the systemic linkage between war and poverty, emphasizing the importance of addressing these issues together rather than in isolation. In his discourse connecting the Vietnam War to domestic issues like poverty and racial injustice, King argued that the war diverted critical resources and attention away from fighting poverty, ultimately making the war an enemy of the poor. As a result, he felt compelled to oppose the war as part of the broader struggle for social justice.

In his speech titled "Beyond Vietnam", King (1987) also explored the connection between truth and war, echoing Gramsci's assertion of truth as a revolutionary force, as well as Michel Foucault's concept of *parrhesia* (courageous speech). King acknowledged the difficulty of opposing government policies, especially during times of war, stating: "even when pressed by the demands of inner truth, men do not easily assume the task of opposing their government's policy, especially in time of war. Nor does the human spirit move without great difficulty against all the apathy of conformist thought within one's own bosom and in the surrounding world".

In essence, King invited us to confront reality, even when it is dominated by systemic violence. He encouraged us to seek out and understand the power relations that sustain and reproduce such violence, with the goal of questioning and overcoming violence as a normalized mode of interaction.

Examining the current war regime through King's lens highlights existing power relations and the tensions they generate on a global scale. According to Federici (2018, p. 31), we are witnessing a moment of what she calls 'general impoverishment,' as evidenced by the lowered life expectancy of the proletarian class, often situated in the Global South:

Confident in its military arsenals, convinced that the '99 per cent' has no alternative, the capitalist class today abandons all pretense of progress, declares that crises and catastrophes are inevitable in economic life, and eliminates the guarantees obtained from more than a century of workers' struggles.

The post-pandemic period has been marked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, followed by the renewed war on Gaza in 2023. Both events have once again revealed the inextricable link between militarization and impoverishment in both the occupying and occupied countries - on the one hand, through the diversion of public funds from citizens for the purposes of war, and on the other, through the appropriation of value-generating resources and lands. Simultaneously, global commodity prices, particularly for fuel and cereals - key measures of global markets - have surged to levels reminiscent of those seen during the 2008 Global Food Crisis, which spurred social justice movements across the Global South (Martiniello, 2015). As in 2008, the current global conjuncture has been accompanied by speculative activities from global capital, publicly justified by the ongoing wars. Capital expansion through speculation has severe repercussions on the fragile import-export balances of states burdened by high public debt, forcing them to pay more for the same commodities and driving them deeper into debt to avoid bankruptcy. Closely tied to military power, the debt crisis is "a key instrument which allows international capital to shift power relations among classes in both poles of the debt relations in its favor" (Federici, 2018). This mechanism has not

only impoverished the global proletariat, whose purchasing power has sharply declined, but has also exacerbated global inequalities, further entrenching poverty along racial fault lines (Alietti, Padovan, 2023). It is along these lines that migration move today.

1 Climate change as inhabability

The processes of socio-environmental transformation driven by capitalist logic—and by specific actors—have historically and contemporarily intersected with the issue of planetary habitability. Capitalist logic, characterized by the cheap appropriation of life forms historically utilized to expand the productive base and maximize profits (Moore, 2015), presents significant challenges. Achille Mbembe has explored this dynamic, emphasizing the biophysical and sociopolitical conditions that both enable and constrain life. He argues that living environments are not merely given but are actively co-created and co-produced by humans in interaction with other life forms, as well as related chemical and physical processes. Mbembe highlights that the present and near future are marked by an expansion of uninhabitable areas for humans - a trend driven by ongoing climate change and the dominant economic and market forces that sustain these conditions².

The concept of a planet's habitability was initially developed in astrophysics, defining a habitable planet as one where temperatures are suitable for the presence of liquid water. Specifically, "habitability is characterized by a circumstellar habitable zone, commonly defined as the range in orbital distance within which a world can maintain liquid water on its surface" (Arnscheidt, Wordsworth, Ding, 2019, p. 60). To the best of our knowledge, liquid water is the critical determinant of whether a planet is considered habitable. Translated into the context of life on Earth, this means that without access to water, life is impossible.

Water is, therefore, a fundamental element upon which various life forms depend. When access to water is jeopardized, as seen in Gaza, where in 2018, 90% of the population lacked

² For an introduction to Mbembe's analysis about this topic it is possible to follow the seminar "Climate, Sustainability, Inequality Seminar: Notes on Planetary Habitability", available at this address: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1AKvMN5ock>.

guaranteed access to drinking water (von Medeazza, 2019), or through the privatization of this essential resource in various regions of the world, it renders living environments uninhabitable. The way water is conceptualized, distributed, governed, and utilized is crucial to the habitability of living environments. Its unavailability, for example due to appropriation practices driven by the logic of primitive accumulation, results in the privatization of social reproduction (Roberts, 2008) and renders living environments so hostile that inhabitants are either forced to leave or are trapped in conditions of poverty and danger (Ojeda et al., 2015).

Global access to water remains unevenly distributed. According to World Bank data, in 2022, 91% of the world's population had access to at least basic drinking water services. However, in some countries, this percentage falls dramatically—to as low as 36% in the Central African Republic. Despite these alarming disparities, extractive capital often obscures appropriation processes by employing broad, abstract concepts detached from a critical analysis of capitalism. While drought is undeniably a consequence of global warming, the phenomenon of water precarity cannot be fully understood without examining the socio-economic framework in which it occurs. Focusing on drought in isolation enables the state-capitalist alliance to evade accountability by framing water scarcity as a purely environmental issue, divorced from the power dynamics of appropriation and governance. As King argues, this approach disregards the need for a truthful restitution of power dynamics driving the web of life.

According to Alietti and Padovan (2023), habitability is closely tied to spaces shaped by what they term *environmental racism*. This concept emphasizes not only the responsibility of high-income countries—both as major consumers and producers—toward the Global South but also highlights the intersection of racism, environmental degradation, and segregation. Drawing on Marquez (2014), the researchers cite examples from North America, where the racialization of “discarded communities” relegates them to unhealthy suburban environments.

While segregation is often associated with North America, the relationship between territorial, geographical, urban, and climatic marginality and racialization is a global phenomenon. Across the

world, the “wretched of the earth,” as Franz Fanon described, are confined to the peripheries of the global economy. These patterns are reinforced by the historical legacy of colonization, which continues to dictate which spaces are deemed habitable or uninhabitable. The urgency of addressing environmental racism is heightened in the current context of post-pandemic war, widespread impoverishment, and the rise of far-right ideologies in the Global North. Here, the political elite have centered “security” – encompassing energy, food, and other domains – in public discourse, while sidelining the concept of sovereignty. Sovereignty, in contrast, challenges resource-grabbing policies and opens possibilities for resistant forms of climate adaptation (Moore, 2022b, p. 6).

In this political climate, the strategic use of language reflects an unwillingness to deviate from neoliberal policies. International agencies regulating human movement often invoke “adaptability” rather than “habitability,” signaling fundamentally different approaches to migration and its socio-ecological dynamics. Adaptability to the climate crisis is framed not as a moment of “resistance and revolt” (Moore, 2022b, p. 6) but as a measurable, technocratic formula dictated by global governance criteria. This framing shapes future migration regimes by determining who may move and who must “adapt.” It aligns with the notion that migration is a form of adaptation in regions where insufficient action has been taken to mitigate the effects of the climate crisis. The International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2009) has described migration as a “failure of adaptability,” a perspective that avoids challenging the capitalist system as a world-ecology of power, profit, and life (Moore, 2022).

Among scholars of international migration, Saskia Sassen has explicitly referenced the concept of habitability through the notion of massive habitat loss. According to her analysis, since the 1980s, a significant shift has occurred, driven by various processes that have diminished-andcontinuetodiminish-thehabitabilityofmanyregions around the world. This has contributed, among other outcomes, to the emergence of new migration patterns (Sassen, 2014; 2016).

2 Migration in the context of the war regime

The relationship between human mobility and socio-ecological changes requires recognizing its significance beyond the current historical context and placing it within a broader temporal framework. In other words, the link between migration and socio-ecological transformations can be analyzed across various levels and historical periods. Fully understanding this relationship necessitates an examination of long-term processes closely tied to the capitalist world-ecology (Moore, 2015) and the specific historical conditions that have shaped them.

One key set of processes involves the history of migration and human mobility, which, since the dawn of modernity in the 15th and 16th centuries, has been characterized by power dynamics that have reshaped and often disrupted living environments. These transformations have given rise to both mobility and enforced immobility, often marked by violence (Saito, 2021; Smith, 2021). Numerous examples illustrate how land ownership, agriculture, and population survival are interconnected - a relationship central to what Marxist scholars identify as the phase of primitive accumulation (Marx, 1976, Part Eight). This connection has also been crucial in other phases of primitive accumulation within the capitalist mode of production, such as the Conquest of America, the expansion of the sugar frontier (and later other commodities) (Moore, 2000, 2009; Mintz, 1996), and the establishment of the transatlantic slave trade during the 16th and 17th centuries (Williams, 1944).

The second set of processes involves the ongoing revitalization of primitive accumulation mechanisms, as identified by Marxist scholars like Rosa Luxemburg (1913), David Harvey (2003), Massimo De Angelis (2004), and Silvia Federici (2018). This trend has taken new forms, particularly since the 1980s, including the proliferation of privatization processes of public goods and services and new enclosures (such as fencing common lands and water resources – commonly referred to as land and water grabbing) – linked to structural adjustment policies promoted by major international organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Midnight Notes Collective, 1990; Chossudovsky,

1997; Tomba, 2013). Additionally, this process of accumulation is reflected in the opening of new commodity frontiers (Tsing, 1999; Moore, 2000).

Historically, processes such as primitive accumulation in Europe, transatlantic slavery after 1492, and the ongoing resurgence of primitive accumulation mechanisms have had profound impacts on human mobility. These processes have drastically altered living environments, often rendering them either uninhabitable or suitable only under severe social and political subjugation and widespread poverty. As Federici (2018, p. 37) argues, the primary goal of new fences is precisely “making mobile and migrant labor the dominant form of work.” The contemporary labor force, the “most geographically mobile since the advent of capitalism,” must be detached from the land—an identity metaphor for belonging, community networking, and local resource management—in order to ensure “low wages, community disorganization, and maximum vulnerability to courts and police forces” (Federici, 2018, p. 37).

A classic example of the relationship between historical and contemporary primitive accumulation processes, socio-environmental transformation, and human mobility is provided by Marx (1976, p. 878) in *Capital*. Marx describes how the dissolution of feudal retainers and the usurpation of common lands in the late 15th and early 16th centuries forced masses of ‘free’ and landless proletarians into the labor market. These dispossessed individuals frequently resisted their new circumstances, becoming wandering paupers who were compelled to leave their homelands. They were subjected to harsh laws against vagabondage and were often whipped, branded, and tortured by draconian measures intended to force them into the discipline required for wage labor. Marx notes: “They mainly were the agricultural folk first forcibly expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded and tortured by grotesquely terroristic laws into accepting the discipline necessary for the system of wage-labor” (Marx, 1976, p. 899).

The renewal processes of primitive accumulation have deepened over the centuries, continuously driving the dual forces of dispossession and displacement, affirming that “accumulation requires the attenuation of the peasantry, which, in turn, requires

the dispossession of peasants. Those peasants, displaced, become a floating population, with uncertain prospects" (Smith, 2021, p. 154). The rapid and profound transformation of living environments due to enclosures, land and water grabbing, and the private appropriation of commons during endless primitive accumulation turned many peasants and shepherds - once relatively autonomous in their social reproduction - into internally or even internationally displaced persons. As in the first long primitive accumulation, between the 16th and 18th centuries, these individuals became entirely dependent on charity or public assistance, including the police, to avoid internment in emerging prisons and workhouses (Bauman, 1982). In summary, as noted, "proletarianization is not inevitable. Only one outcome is certain when farmers are expelled from the land: migration and precarity" (Smith, 2021, p. 152-153).

Similar patterns of mass internal migration occurred during the processes of primitive accumulation in the colonies, where many small producers, once expropriated and impoverished, remained trapped in poverty. Unlike in Europe, many of these individuals did not become proletarians due to the limited development of capitalist enterprises in these regions - areas primarily focused on extraction activities within the capitalist world-ecology (Moore, 2015). Additionally, they did not migrate to industrialized areas, as seen, for example, in the historical case of colonial Algeria (Bourdieu and Sayad, 1964). In his 1961 work *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon (1963) explores the urban-social consequences of land dispossession in this post-colonial state. Fanon examines the socio-political function of suburbanization as a means of creating labor pools in Algeria. He observes, "dream of every citizen is to get up to the capital, and to have his share of the cake. The local districts are deserted; the mass of the country people with no one to lead them, uneducated and unsupported, turn their backs on their poorly labored fields and flock toward the outer ring of suburbs, thus swelling out of all proportion the ranks of the lumpenproletariat." (Fanon, 1963, p. 186). Fanon's response is a call to bolster the political dimension of decentralization: in "the underdeveloped countries, we ought to seek every occasion for contacts with the rural masses. We must create a national policy, in other words a policy for the masses. We ought never to lose contact with the

people which has battled for its independence and for the concrete betterment of its existence.” (Fanon, 1963, p. 187)

The link between migration (both internal and international) and socio-ecological transformations, driven by the domination and violence characteristic of the colonial period, is also essential to understand contemporary mass poverty (Patnaik, 2012; Raychaudhury, 1985). This connection also underlies the migratory systems that later developed between former colonies and colonizing countries (Sassen, 1996; Sayad, 2004).

In recent years, scholars have identified similar processes linked to the crises in community and peasant agriculture resulting from land expropriation and enclosure for export production, reforestation for carbon credits, or mineral extraction (Muñoz and Villareal, 2018). For instance, Silvia Federici (2018) has pointed out that the continued growth of international and internal migration is driven by both the ease with which capital can move—destroying local economies and resistance—and the entrepreneurs’ determination to exploit every resource, including oil and minerals. Moreover, Federici (2018) interprets colonialism as a period that established the conditions for the current phase of primitive accumulation, rather than as a phase of its ultimate realization. According to the scholar, colonial domination never managed to dismantle communal ownership of land in certain areas, particularly on the African continent (Federici, 2018). This has justified narratives about the backwardness of Africa, which is described as to be modernized through what she calls the rationalization of agriculture (Federici, 2018).

Saskia Sassen (2014, pp. 81-82) recognized that the scale of land acquisitions is marked by numerous micro-expulsions of small farmers and villages, leading to an increase in displaced people, rural migrants moving to urban slums, and the destruction of villages and smallholder economies. Over time, this has resulted in much dead land. Some countries are characterized by a long history of displacement induced by land dispossession. One exemplar case is the area named Montes de Maria in Colombia, interested by the implementation of state-led adaptation and mitigation projects, that, in connection with established previous forms of

government and expropriation of local populations, have sustained “the displacement, suffering and deteriorating conditions of local populations” (Camargo and Ojeda, 2017, p. 62). Another example regards the construction of some dams in Sudan. The construction of the Merowe Dam “contributed to the displacement of tens of thousands of people, and the loss of their means of livelihood” (Razaz Basheir, Abdelrahman, 2023, p. 179), illustrating the fact that the complete disregard for the livelihoods of local communities and their needs - because they have less value than the economic and political interests that disrupt them - creates the conditions for their displacement or, in any case, the crisis of their living environments. Finally, Chowdhorya and Mohanty (2023, p. 2023) emphasized that “the logic of dispossession includes loss of humanity as well as loss of materiality. Dispossession incorporates refugeehood, migrancy, and subjectivity within a state of exception. The study of migration, refugeehood, and displacement is about polymorphous dispossession and disruption that spiral across time and space. Being dispossessed means that individuals are disowned and degraded by various normalizing powers in society”.

In recent decades, processes of dispossession and displacement have intensified within the broader framework of time-space compression, leaving a lasting imprint on the capitalist mode of production and the organization of commodities and nature (Harvey, 1989). However, their origins extend far beyond this timeframe, intertwining with the reproduction of conditions of primitive accumulation - what Moore (2023) describes as “the long 1492”, referring to the enduring colonial structures set into motion in 1492. Building on this historical perspective, part of the literature - particularly in political ecology and related fields - demonstrates that the connection between spatial mobility and the creation of inhospitable living environments is neither incidental nor natural. This relationship is not limited to the distant past or the present but is a recurring political reality in the history of the capitalist world-ecology. It reflects the systemic need to sustain access to “cheap natures” and maintain a labor force available for low-paid or unpaid work. These systemic needs demand the constant activation of primitive accumulation. Consequently, this

recurring theme is closely linked with the strategies of dominant actors, who continuously seek to reactivate these conditions, thereby shaping the socio-spatial dynamics of displacement. Robert McLeman (2017, p. 12) argues that the link between migration and land remains the primary explanation for people displacement:

A key driver of land degradation in traditional pastoral regions today is a growing trend toward land enclosure and the conversion by governments of communal tenure to private tenure, so as to facilitate commercial development and intensification of livestock and agricultural production.

The magnitude of the nexus dispossession-displacement has led some scholars to question the concepts of climate or environmental migrants or refugees over the past two decades. For example, Lydia Ayame Hiraide (2022) argues that the term “climate refugee” is problematic, as it often reinforces racialized discourses that further marginalize vulnerable populations. Instead, she proposes the term “ecological displacement” to more accurately capture the various environmental and non-environmental factors that drive people to migrate, including but not limited to climate change. The term “ecological displacement” is intended to be more inclusive and to humanize those most affected by environmental and social crises. Specifically:

unlike the historical use of the term refugee, the notion of ecological displacement works to recognize the ways that entire ecologies contribute to migration or displacement, whether they consist of political violence, resource scarcity, flooding, or (as in many cases) two or more simultaneous drivers of such nature – something which the current UN Convention does not do (Hiraide, 2022, p. 277).

Without adopting an explicit critical stance on the liberal system, Jane McAdam (2012) offers an alternative definition of ‘climate migration,’ which typically addresses only floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and weather conditions with a short, intense duration. She prefers to frame this concept as “migration in the context of climate change” or “climate change-related movements”, viewing the climate crisis not as a direct cause but as a factor that, alongside economic, political, and social factors,

amplifies the risk of displacement (McAdam, 2012). Several estimates on the effects of climate change on migration are given for the different regions of the Global South in the article written by Almulhim *et al.* (2024). After recalling that “in the year 2020 alone, over 40.5 million people were forced to relocate, with 30.7 million of them being directly impacted by natural hazards. Floods and storms were responsible for the displacement of 14 million individuals each, with Asia and the Pacific being severely affected regions, experiencing substantial human displacement and damage to buildings and infrastructure” (Almulhim *et al.*, 2024, p. 1), citing data by IPCC (2023), IFRC (2021), and IDMC (2021), they propose a series of data and estimates broken down by regional areas.

As several scholars, including De Haas, have pointed out, these estimates are problematic. They often serve to construct a perceived threat for global north states to combat while simultaneously depoliticizing the issue of climate change. Given these challenges, it is more useful to focus on data related to ongoing displacement processes, though these too are subject to criticism due to the lack of a clear, agreed-upon operational definition. According to UNHCR’s data, internal displacement is primarily linked to war and armed conflicts, though environmental crises are playing an increasingly significant role:

protracted displacement is typically the result of conflicts and war. Meanwhile, millions more are displaced due to climate change-related disasters such as floods, storms, earthquakes, and wildfires which have ravaged countries around the world. The most recent figures gathered by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) revealed that 68.3 million people remained internally displaced due to conflict and violence (United Nations, 2024).

Other fundamental data regard people displaced due to extractive economic processes. These data are not collected in a systematic manner, however, a number of examples can be given to understand their extent, especially focused on the link with land grabbing (Feldman *et al.*, 2012; Vigli, 2015; Rizzo, 2021; Cavanagh, 2017), and the so-called development-induced displacement (Hagena, Minterb, 2020). These examples also concern the contradictory function of climate change mitigation and adaptation

policies, which, especially in countries of the global South, favor displacement processes. For instance, Sara Vigil (2018), studying several regional cases, concluded that:

when climate projects are implemented in countries where human rights protection is low or inexistent, they are de facto serving as a mechanism to legitimize the expulsion of the most vulnerable and to further reinforce and centralize the control of natural resources in the hands of the political and corporate elites which are responsible for climate change to begin with.

In addition, it is necessary to note the systemic importance of the relationship between war and structural ecological crisis and living environments: the recognised link between war and ecocide, especially in the current times. For example, about the war conducted by Tsáhal (IDF) in the Gaza strip, Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director, declared in June 2024:

Not only are the people of Gaza dealing with untold suffering from the ongoing war, the significant and growing environmental damage in Gaza risks locking its people into a painful, long recovery. While many questions remain regarding the exact type and quantity of contaminants affecting the environment in Gaza, people are already living with the consequences of conflict-related damage to environmental management systems and pollution today. Water and sanitation have collapsed. Critical infrastructure continues to be decimated. Coastal areas, soil and ecosystems have been severely impacted. All of this is deeply harming people's health, food security and Gaza's resilience (UNEP, 2024).

The nexus of war, ecocide, and occupation had already been highlighted in this territory earlier. For example, Paul Guernsey (2021, p. 1) recognized that “infrastructures of settler perception obfuscate the ways in which Native communities experience environmental emergencies as cycles of settler colonial violence and ecocide. Emergencies such as global warming are described as ‘human-caused’ rather than directly linked to settler colonialism, capitalism, and White supremacy”.

Further evidence in support of the ecocidal nature of the current wars comes from Ukraine. In July 2022, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) published a report to recognize that “preliminary monitoring of the conflict in Ukraine points to significant impacts on urban and rural environments that could leave the country and region with a toxic legacy for generations to come” (UNEP, 2022). In 2023, Oleksandra Shumilova *et al.* (2023) published an article about the impact of the war on water management, concluding that numerous water infrastructures, including dams at reservoirs, water supply and treatment systems, and subsurface mines, have been impacted or are at risk due to military actions. The ongoing conflict poses significant threats to sustainability, with far-reaching implications not only for Ukraine but also globally, hindering progress towards clean water and sanitation, the conservation and sustainable use of water resources, as well as energy and food security.

Several articles have highlighted cases of environmental damage caused by conflict, including those in Ethiopia and Myanmar, reminding us that “the insidious environmental consequences of conflicts often linger long after the bombs fall silent” (Anyadike, 2024). A study analyzing 193 cases demonstrates the profoundly detrimental effects of war on the environment. Aerial bombings, in particular, result in severe damage, including the destruction of conservation efforts, deforestation, soil disruption, and degradation of soil health. Wars also lead to wildlife extermination, loss of ecological niches, and heightened atmospheric and water pollution. Despite widespread knowledge of these effects, military leaders and personnel have demonstrated limited awareness of environmental consequences. Furthermore, postwar restoration efforts remain insufficient to address the ecological damage caused by warfare (Meaza *et al.*, 2024).

At the same time, it is possible to recognize the ecocide linked to the political economy, assuming the conclusion proposed by Eliana Cusato and Emily Jones (2024, p. 61):

It is furthermore clear that the proposed definition of ecocide also needs to be analysed within the wider framework of international law and how the latter not only regulates, but

produces the 'environment' (and vice versa). In this vein, we have suggested to situate the 'new' crime of ecocide within the broader political economic dynamics of international law. This is necessary, we have argued, because international law is deeply embedded in extractive capitalism, operating to uphold a particular vision of political economy that defines nature as a resource, object, or commodity to be appropriated, managed, or exploited.

The link between war and genocide has been connected over the last 30 years to genocide and/or forced mobility in some territorial contexts. The case of Sudan is among those of longer duration. Louise Wise (2022), for example, worked with the framework of the genocide-ecocide nexus to examine the relationship between environmental destruction, capitalist expansion, and genocide in this country. She discussed how multiple rural, primarily subsistence and place-based communities on Sudan's exploited peripheral regions have been affected by these dynamics over several decades, especially from the 1970s, especially due to ecologically destructive extraction through large-scale mechanized agriculture, exploitation of water resources, and oil extraction.

The devastation of living environments during wars - which can go so far as to identify the ecocide-war nexus and, in specific cases, the ecocide-genocide nexus - is also connected to what Jim Glassman (1992) called the strategic nexus between counterinsurgency, ecocide and the production of refugees. He recognized that "in the twentieth century, the interconnections between environmental destruction and population transfer simply became more plain - in large part because more advanced technologies of destruction (both military and non-military) made the possibility for massive environmental destruction and population dislocation more obvious. Counter-insurgency planning, which incorporates ecocide as a tactic, merely acknowledges this obvious connection and attempts to spur on the generation of refugees" (Glassman, 1992, p. 29-30). With a very deep historical sense, he concluded that:

From this perspective, the production of environmental refugees through ecocide is not something that can be fought merely by opposition to militarism. Rather, the roots of social and environmental transformation in the

development of capitalism must be addressed. The story of counterinsurgency as a tool for producing environmental refugees is only the history of capitalism “drastically and brutally speeded up” (Glassman, 1992, p. 30).

Statistics and especially projections on environmental and climate migration support an emergency approach: especially with reference to disturbing metaphors (Grantee, Kohut, 2020) or future predictions with hundreds of millions of displaced human beings (for example, see Kamal (2017). Following this perspective climate migration became a threat for the social and political order. There is a subtext to many public discussions around climate change and migration, that a warmer world will lead to hordes of people fleeing poorer countries for wealthier ones, threatening the safety and the economy of any place they go. Institutions like the US Department of Defense (2021) and the United Kingdom’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Boas, 2015; Warner, Boas, 2019) framed climate change and climate-induced migration as a potential security threat. Such framing has fueled media panics and xenophobia (Tong, Zuo, 2019). According to De Haas, a narrative of the climate migration apocalypse has been constructed: “Media, politicians, environmentalists and migration experts have increasingly claimed that the effects of global warming, especially on sea-levels, rainfall patterns, and extreme weather events such as hurricanes will lead to massive population displacements.” The effect is that “to link this issue with the specter of mass migration is a dangerous practice based on myth rather than fact. The use of apocalyptic migration forecasts to support the case for urgent action on climate change is not only intellectually dishonest, but also puts the credibility of those using this argument - as well as the broader case for climate change action - seriously at risk” (De Haas, 2020).

Consequently, the so-called present and projected environmental and climate migrations justify the deployment of an enormous control apparatus—a low-intensity war waged against migrants along the borders of wealthy regions of the planet, as is already evident in Europe, the United States, and Australia. To align with this analysis and the perceived necessity for the “defense of national borders,” the migration policies of the extreme right have

become mainstream, supported—except for minor nuances—by most governments and international institutions.

Following this approach, current global migration policies reinforce a system of climate apartheid. As noted by Jennifer L. Rice, Joshua Long, and Anthony Levenda (2022), and echoed by figures such as Desmond Tutu (2007) and Philip Alston (2019), this system is characterized by unequal vulnerabilities to the climate crisis. The unjust implementation of climate-focused infrastructures, policies, and programs often protects privileged groups while marginalizing, harming, and criminalizing those whose lives have been rendered more fragile by climate change.

Having outlined the policies underpinning climate apartheid, it is crucial to recognize their extension into what can be termed a *regime of war*. Initially conceived as a mechanism to control and prevent migration, this regime now operates more broadly, affecting environments and populations in ways that constitute both ecocide and genocide. A stark example of this is the treatment of the Rohingya people, where systematic violence and environmental destruction are deeply intertwined (Mukul *et al.*, 2019).

This regime of war not only perpetuates but also reinforces right-wing extremist and (neo)extractive policies that fuel global inequalities. These policies, rooted in the exploitation of natural resources and the marginalisation of vulnerabilized populations, are intrinsically linked to the broader framework of climate apartheid. By prioritizing the interests of the powerful and wealthy at the expense of the environment and the oppressed, this regime exacerbates global divisions and deepens the injustices that characterize the current world order.

Thus, the regime of war, with its focus on militarization and repression, is not simply an instrument of environmental control, but also a crucial enabler of global and climate apartheid. It ensures the continuation of systems that disproportionately affect marginalized communities, whether through direct violence, environmental degradation, or the denial of basic human rights. In this way, it sustains and intensifies the very inequalities that climate apartheid aims to consolidate.

3 A structural effect: constitutive violence against migrant people, especially potential refugees

The increasingly intense and accelerated processes of displacing populations from their living environments since the 1990s have been accompanied by the militarization of borders. This has led some analysts to propose the concept of a “global climate wall” (Miller, Buxton, Akkerma, 2021), which is connected to the scenario of “climate apartheid” evoked by the United Nations in 2019 (Alston, 2019; United Nations, 2019). Catherine Besteman (2020) has introduced the concept “militarized global apartheid” to highlight the profound inequalities in spatial mobility worldwide, particularly in connection with the militarization and externalization of border control policies, which are justified by security rhetoric and support the reassertion of white supremacy within the new racialized global order. In many migratory contexts, violence becomes a normalized and routine experience for people seeking better or safer living conditions (Rossi, 2021), exposing them to the possibility of torture (Perocco, 2020).

It is useful to highlight that looking at migration through the lens of brutality and torture completely changes its character, its reasons, the questions to be asked. Taking on this gaze means leaving behind, at last, the dominant gaze of the state and the migrant societies. It means adopting the viewpoint of the people who migrate, looking, from their perspective, at the forces active in diminishing their strength and agency in the securitization of both internal and external borders. The intertwining of torture and migration is particularly relevant as migrations are increasingly governed and defined as issues of public order and security, security, of course, for some populations, but not all. Security that does not concern those who cross seas, deserts, and mountains; those who are forced to wait months or years in reception facilities or refugee camps; those who may be separated from their children; those who may be locked in camps awaiting decisions about their fate. Through this form of biopolitics, enacted on people’s bodies, torture emerges as a phenomenon of our time. Despite being unequivocally prohibited by international law, it persists due to its grounding in the concept of the “special rights of the enemy,” a

framework often applied to migrants, particularly those potentially seeking protection,

In other words, recognizing the systemic nature of violence within migratory processes fundamentally changes our understanding of the characteristics and reasons for migration, as well as the questions we need to ask. It underscores the awareness that migration is not just a journey through space and time but also an epistemological journey (Sayad, 2006). Adopting this perspective means shifting away from the traditional state-centered view of migration and instead embracing the perspective of those who migrate. This involves examining the networks composed of military and paramilitary apparatuses, police forces, and control technologies that proliferate to manage a portion of humanity on the move. It also involves looking at the forms of organization that migrants themselves create in exercising the autonomy of migration (Mezzadra, 2011).

The ideas of a “global climate wall” and “militarized global apartheid” aptly capture the intersection of climate change, inequality, and the securitization of borders. By emphasizing the role of militarization and global inequalities in mobility, these concepts draw attention to the broader forces that shape migration patterns and the experiences of migrants. They also encourage a shift in perspective, urging a move away from state-centered views of migration to a more human-centered approach that considers the lived experiences and agency of migrants. In this way, one can understand the active role—direct or indirect—of the state in facilitating the regime of migratory violence, even when this does not require the first-hand intervention of its bodies. This role is generally clear in border externalization policies, which delegate the exercise of violence or human rights violations against migrants and potential asylum seekers to third states. At the same time, violence is understood as a relational form that affects some territorial contexts, as in the case of the Mesoamerican region, characterized by a “cannibal capitalism” (Fraser, 2022), in which “violence exercised by organized crime goes hand in hand with state violence, fueled by the lack of opportunities for employment, health, education, and minimum living standards. In other words,

migration [...] has multi-causal motivations, sometimes referred to as a flight from violence and, for the most part, is defined by the migrants themselves as a flight from poverty and its consequences" (Varela Hurtado, 2019, p. 105).

Conclusion

The relationship between migration and socio-ecological transformations reveals a complex historical dynamic, embedded in the mechanisms of capitalist accumulation and political violence used to allow and to legitimate extraction activities and dispossession of commons, lands and water. Historically, processes of primitive accumulation - begun with the European colonization of America, the transatlantic slave trade, and the enclosure acts in England - have significantly reshaped living environments, often rendering them inhospitable or subordinating populations to extreme forms of social and economic subjugation.

The resurgence of primitive accumulation mechanisms in recent decades, characterized by the privatization of public goods and commons, land and water grabbing, and the further expansion of commodity frontiers, continues to drive profound socio-environmental changes. These processes often result in the displacement of populations, as seen in contemporary cases such as large-scale land acquisitions for export production, reforestation projects, and mineral extraction. This ongoing displacement and dispossession reflect a broader pattern where capitalist accumulation needs the continual creation of vulnerable populations, dependent on charity or state assistance and violence, and often subjected to harsh living conditions.

The current context of migration and displacement is also deeply intertwined with the broader framework of climate change and environmental degradation. The concept of "climate apartheid" underscores the disproportionate impacts of environmental crises on marginalized populations, who are often the target of militarized border controls and discriminatory policies. This has led to the emergence of a "global climate wall," where migration – especially that which takes place outside the migration policies of states,

exercising, even in dramatic and very violent ways, the autonomy of the right to escape - is increasingly militarized and criminalized, reinforcing global inequalities and exacerbating the vulnerabilities of displaced communities and persons.

The violence inherent in these processes - ranging from the systemic brutality faced by migrants to the destruction of livelihoods through war and ecocide - reveals how contemporary migratory patterns are shaped by both historical legacies and current geopolitical and economic forces. The links between war, environmental destruction, and migration illustrate a broader ecocidal logic that prioritizes the interests of powerful actors while marginalizing and displacing populations made vulnerable.

In conclusion, understanding migration within these broader socio-ecological and historical frameworks is essential for addressing the root causes of displacement. This perspective emphasizes the need to move beyond simplistic narratives of climate refugees or economic migrants and critically examine how systemic violence, capitalist exploitation, and environmental degradation intersect to shape the lived experiences of displaced populations. Recognizing these connections can help inform more equitable policies that address both the immediate needs of displaced people and the underlying conditions that act on their displacement and living conditions.

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