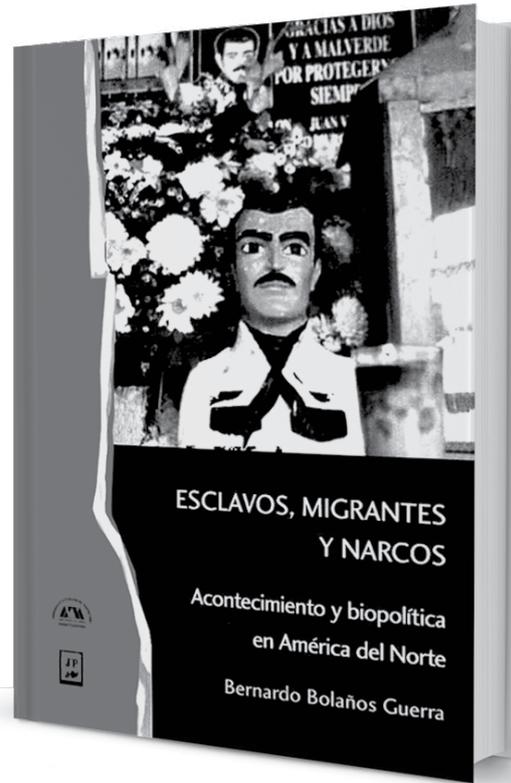


**Esclavos, migrantes y narcos.
Acontecimiento y biopolítica
en América del Norte**

(Slaves, Migrants, and Narcos. Event and Biopolitics
in North America)

Bernardo Bolaños Guerra
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Bolaños Guerra bases himself on two premises to explain and analyze the emergence of three subaltern subjectivities that have marked the historic unfolding of biopolitics in North America: slaves, migrants, and narcos. The first premise is French philosopher Alain Badiou's idea of event, referring to facts that acquire visibility through the active role of subaltern subjects. The event dislocates the hegemonic system of signifiers and throws into relief new subjectivities. For Bolaños Guerra, at the heart of the biopolitics of the United States toward Mexico there are three fundamental events that give rise to the three subjectivities in question: the abolition of slavery, which eliminates the possibility of exploiting Afro-Americans at no cost and begins temporary work programs; the end of the Bracero Program, which began the "illegalization" of the "undocumented" Mexican worker; and Felipe Calderón's war against drug trafficking, which replaces the racist trope of the "undocumented Mexican" with that of the "Mexican narco."

The second premise is the idea of biopolitics of another French writer, Michel Foucault. Biopower changes the sovereign objective of disciplinary power from "letting live" and "causing to die" and inverts it: now power has the aim of "causing

to live" and "letting die." While disciplinary power centers on individual bodies as object, biopower centers on the processes that are specific to life itself, like birth, death, reproduction, migration, and illness; and therefore, the rationality, apparatuses, strategies, and struggles or resistances they generate are also different. As Foucault says, this is an "indirect murder" because without intentionally killing, entire populations die as a result of the fact that the state is not doing something for them. The biological field controlled by biopower is fragmented into a hierarchy of races, and those at the bottom are left to die.

Based on empirical data, investigative journalism, and academic literature on the topic, Bolaños Guerra analyzes how the United States is the greatest biopower in history. In U.S. liberal and neoliberal governance, the fundamental goal is the reproduction of the system, which is why it takes measures to regulate the population favoring the preservation of the dominant groups. Recently, Canada has acted similarly, and Mexico subordinates itself completely to their biopower. For the author, the aforementioned events are spatial-temporal moments in which the biopolitics of North America has led to, facilitated, molded, and incited the emergence of the sub-

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jectivities of the slave, the migrant, and the drug trafficker. The following is my more detailed analysis of the emergence of these identities.

SLAVES

Primitive capital accumulation in the United States required the over-exploitation of the work force in inhuman, brutally violent conditions. To do that, the Founding Fathers trafficked thousands of people from Africa, giving rise to the subjectivity of the "slave." After the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century, the United States began to seek similar mechanisms of exploitation that would allow it to maintain the rhythm of the reproduction of capital that it had achieved with the African slaves. This event was the detonator of temporary work programs like the Bracero Programs, which ended at the same time as the recognition of the civil rights of U.S. Americans descended from slaves. At that moment, the undocumented worker emerged who, technically free, does not have the rights African-Americans won through their civil resistance.

MIGRANTS

Beginning with the end of the Bracero Program, the successive immigration reforms have developed strategies aimed at taking advantage of the vulnerability of the labor power of undocumented migrants. These successive biopolitical technologies, which included regularization of legal migratory status, prevention by dissuasion, and making migrants invisible through criminalization, have also now been adopted by Mexico and Canada. Bolaños Guerra says that while Canada does not criminalize, it does make migrants invisible by limiting the rights of temporary workers. He adds that Mexico, through the public policy to manage and count migrants' remittances and Central American migration, hides the biopower that acts on Mexican and Central American migrants in the United States and Canada. The author reflects on the teachings of

the past, suggesting that an event similar to Afro-Americans' fight for civil rights must occur for contemporary migrants to claim their civil rights, so they can—at least legally—escape from subordination.

NARCOS

Bolaños Guerra criticizes academic, journalistic, and political analysis that attributes the crisis of criminality in Mexico to the lack of a "culture of legality" and to "loyalty to mafia bosses," supposedly common to Latin America. The way these images are constructed is a caricature functional to U.S. and European biopower.

For the author, what has caused this crisis are the successive immigration laws and legislation banning the sale and use of drugs, which constitute technologies of power of those societies over ours. He gives the example of the emergence of the Mara gangs through the deportation of Latino gang members from the United States and the training of soldiers in the U.S. who eventually became Zetas. Categories like "illegal worker" and "dangerous narco" are the result of these technologies of power, and today, one is linked to the other. Nevertheless, Guerra Bolaños warns that biopolitics is insufficient as a concept to analyze the function of control and regulation of death—not of life—in contemporary capitalism.

THE BOOK'S ANALYTIC CONTRIBUTION

This book is novel in three ways. First, through an analytic sequence, it tells the story of the over-exploitation of labor in North America through the subjectivities and categories produced by different technologies of biopower. In particular, situating the Negro slave and the narco as the most extreme past and present of undocumented migrants is a contribution that allows us to see the partnership of policies that could be seen as isolated from each other, such as immigration and anti-drug policies.

Secondly, Bolaños Guerra recognizes that biopolitics is insufficient for analyzing violence and its consequences in Mexico because it is designed for examining the regulation of life, not of death. The author points to the limitations of biopolitics for analyzing the most recent history in Mexico of this chain of subjected subjectivities, similar to the limitations in analyzing the politics of death in other regions rav-

aged by violence like Africa. Achille Mbembe and Sayak Valencia, whose work is quoted by the author, recover precisely this analytic insufficiency in the African and Mexican cases.

Finally, the book's most important contribution—but perhaps also its most polemical—is its critique of academic work that hides the functioning of biopower and its domination of migrants. This is research aimed at producing “public policy,” a technicism that disguises the way the exploitation of Mexicans in the United States and Canada is administered and managed, rendering them invisible and putting them in conditions of complete vulnerability. The management of remittances and government programs to help them “invest” in “productive” projects are technologies just as functional for biopower as the company store or life on a to-

bacco plantation. This denunciation is lost a little in the discussion of the construction of the migrant, but it is fundamental to recover it to practice a stronger critique of the academic work that legitimizes technologies of biopower.

In general, the book *Esclavos, migrantes y narcos. Acontecimiento y biopolítica en América del Norte* is a global, critical analysis of a series of phenomena in the region that are frequently examined separately and only descriptively. This is a book rich in data, but also in critical analysis, which makes us read the integration of North America through its dystopias and subjected subjectivities, something quite uncommon in studies of the region. ■■

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