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One Border, Two Borders, Three Borders . . .

Areflection on the current state of the world's borders is undoubtedly an excessively long, laborious exercise to be summarized in a single article. However, I can allow myself a few general reflections that deal in a practical way with where we're going and the way border dynamics are developing.

Questions immediately arise: What were the dynamics of mobility and the respect for human rights at borders before the pandemic? Will the world be the same after the pandemic? That is, are we going to continue to move like before? What will change?

We know that borders are institutions created and changed by human beings in order to put at a distance those considered "different" from one's own community. Based on this, historical-political constructs have been generated, aided by lines of geographical demarcation erected from the perspective of those in power. However, these geographic and physical limits end up being deeply rooted in the social and emotional imaginary of the populations they segregate and those they enclose; this turns them into differential evidence for those living on both sides of them.

In terms of their socio-political dimension, borders are dynamic, producing on one side and the other differences in terms of degrees of economic concentration and with regard to the construction of the space that constitutes the way people institute themselves and come together. On its own, this would be a good reason to allow for maintaining people's ability to transit: generating the circular mobility that invigorates these border areas and at the same time strengthens and regenerates the socio-economic spaces on each side.

Since the 1970s, high, sophisticated barriers began to be perfected and increased along kilometers of borders in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and once again in Europe.

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None of them were built with the aim of stopping the advance of enemy armies or invading barbarians. Rather, they were erected fundamentally to avoid the uncontrolled transit of human beings, particularly the always uncontrolled flows of immigrants and refugees at a time when many of their countries of origin didn't even have the capacity to issue passports even if migrants had been able to pay for them.

The barriers erected began then to operate as a symbol of exclusion of "the others" and of the hope of protecting the people itself through the fake image of the so-called "national order." This is another ideological construct, indicative of a manifest inability by the state to govern the migration unleashed by globalization.

This is how individuals are divided between those favored by destiny and the victims of circumstances. Mobility indices in the world are a sign that characterizes our time. For some, the globalized world means an extension of space in their lives. However, for others, it is a drastic decrease in their range of action, not to mention the explosions of racism and xenophobia, until now still sporadic, but more and more frequent in receiving and transit countries. The challenge passes, then, from border policy to domestic policy, allowing us to identify different factors that make up this problem in the sheltered population. These include the scarcity of resources and competition for them among immigrants and refugees; the lack of empathy toward the most disfavored groups; and rejection of the migrant and refugee population.

This evolution of events shows us that migration is no longer represented among the population as a matter of borders. At the same time, the response of the media to these events in destination or transit countries consists merely of informing the public, in the tone of a police crime report or breaking news, without offering any context about the what these people are going through.

About Border Controls

Going back to the beginning, in recent years, national governments have increased their control and exteriorization of borders. The main measures destination countries take to oversee national borders are many and varied: reduction or toughening of legal channels for entry, the intensification of surveillance and security at land and maritime border control stations, the externalization of border management and control in third countries through cooperation agreements, the criminalization of migrants and humanitarian agents acting on the border, the creation of detention centers in third countries, and return and repatriation agreements, among others.

The final objectives of these restrictive policies are to reduce the flow of migrants and refugees and, less explicitly, to "protect" the labor market, the welfare system, and national culture from a substantial rise in immigration and ethnic diversity. If we analyze different contexts and regions throughout the world, we can link the increase in border controls with that of nativist discourses, which explain the phenomenon as an economic and cultural threat to nation-states.

In the case of refugees, an additional tactic is to strengthen transit countries with economic and military resources, in what we could call "outsourcing the border" to distance potential asylum-seekers. This is because international law mandates attending to them through regulated procedures once they arrive to the country where they refuge.

What is done to regulate the cheap labor that the first-world countries need? Paradoxically, the very countries that demand and impose these border controls continue to incorporate migrant workers into their economies, to the point that certain productive sectors in those countries have become structurally dependent on cheap, flexibly available labor. This is a contradiction seen in developed countries like Australia, the United States, or the members of the European Union, but can also be found in developing countries like Angola, South Africa, or Mexico.

The negative consequences of these control and externalization processes, in a context in which the causes that produce these movements continue to exist (forced displacement, income inequality, structural demand for immigrant labor by the developed economies, etc.), are numerous. They include the growth of flows and irregular entries; increased risks, abuses, and deaths during transit and entry; and, linked to the latter, the creation of shadow spaces or black holes along borders, where more violence is systematically inflicted against these people's rights. Another consequence would be the development of a migratory industry linked to these policies, and finally, the maintenance of unequal global distribution when it comes time to share the "burdens" or forced displacement, which continue to be borne disproportion-

ately by poor and developing countries. As has been shown in Australia and Mexico, these risks are not neutral, since they affect the poorest and most vulnerable countries more, in turn causing more people to become migrants and refugees.

We are witnessing, then, a paradigm of control and externalization of borders that goes against the transnational spaces and corridors, both old and new, created by history and international migration itself. They are spaces constructed on the basis of the transnational circulation and articulation of populations and territories whose development and potential are limited by endogenous and exogenous factors to the extent that circulation and mobility are sanctioned.

If I dared formulate possible responses to all these issues from a transversal point of view of the dynamic of borders, I would contribute the following ideas:

1. *Migratory patterns are dynamic and have diversified to the degree that local situations are changing and transforming the migratory flows themselves.* In recent years, their complexity and combined effect have increased, configuring what can be called a mixed migratory flow, a "grey area" between refugees and socio-economic migrants, regular and irregular migrants. The causes of these flows are also mixed. In some cases, they stem from economic factors, mainly the search for job opportunities and/or family reunification. In other cases, people move due to a profound political crisis involving persecution, increased violence and armed strife, and the need to protect themselves sought outside their own borders and/or through international bodies. One consequence of this is the emergence of different migratory statuses: regular and irregular migrants, internal displaced persons, circular migration, people who need international protection, asylum-seekers, detainees, deportees, and returned migrants. In Latin America, this mixture of migratory flows is clear, both toward the North, the United States, and toward the South, Chile.

2. *The reality is different from what the rules say.* Migratory policies designed by governments are not sufficient for managing either the flows over borders or later processes of integration, above all in the case of transit countries, which inevitably also become receiving countries. I must point out that these sys-

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tems also do not protect the fundamental rights of people on the move. Not only do specific measures exist in border areas, but also other practices there directly or indirectly affect the constitution, maintenance, or changes in a border and center on social interaction and control of mobility. These policies and practices make up what could be called a "vertical, elastic border," which includes not only the border itself, but extends to the entire neighboring country, such as the case of Mexico *vis-à-vis* the United States. Restrictive migratory frameworks and the rigidity that is an obstacle for regularizing migration do nothing more than translate migration into a social vulnerability.

3. *But it is necessary to say that "counter-practices" also exist.* These measures emerge in contexts of migration linked to people's precariousness: solidarity and support for forced migrants to make their journey possible, from their places of origin to their countries of transit and destination. These "counter-practices" have adjusted their services to better adapt to migrants' changing profiles. The give assistance in the form of food, shelter, medical care, legal assistance, education in human rights and health (such as, for example, AIDS prevention), and information about the risks and dangers along the route. All this help allows the migrants to make their journeys more safely and to cross the border. These humanitarian groups have involuntarily gained prominence, and thus have had an impact on politics, becoming the object of attacks from different sources.

4. *Grave violations of migrants' human rights are being perpetrated and are sharpened because mobility makes them vulnerable.* In many cases, these violations are the negative consequences of the aforementioned control policies. With the growth in irregular flows and entries, risks, abuses, and deaths increase during transit and entry, and, linked to this, of shadow spa-

ces or black holes along the borders are created. This is where human rights violations occur systematically, as can be seen in the increased extortion, kidnapping, mutilation, theft, beatings, abuses by immigration agents or police, recurring violence of all kinds (sexual violence, labor and human trafficking, accidents, homicides, the growing number of feminicides), and in the existence of smuggling rings. Part of these abuses are due to the migratory routes being superimposed on those used by drug traffickers and criminal gangs.

At the same time, many circumstances should be eliminated from the border dynamic, such as the "border returns." These morally unacceptable acts are linked to the use of violence and put people's lives at risk.

Lastly, protection during transit is another aspect that must be guaranteed: I'm talking here about people who have often been abandoned to their fate in the middle of the Mediterranean, in the Spanish case, or in the desert, in the Mexican case.

Coming Up Against the COVID-19 Crisis

The pandemic has also had an impact in terms of asylum and refugee-seekers on borders. In Spain, for example, the number of applications dropped from 118,446 in 2019 to 88,762 in 2020.

In many European countries, COVID-19 negatively affected conditions of reception, although it may have had paradoxical results. In any country, regardless of the migrant flow it had received in the past, arrivals suddenly dropped and reception systems were at "zero" levels, allowing them to react and reorganize during the crisis. In these countries, where the reception system was incapable of dealing with all the applicants with a right to assistance before the pandemic, the reduction of applications helped increase the ratio of resolutions. This meant that the service was assured by the corresponding authorities or supported by an NGO in the framework of well-established collaboration with the authorities, regardless of the paralysis undoubtedly suffered in the first moments of the health crisis.

Nevertheless, I fear that the post-pandemic mobilization will have an even greater impact on the factors that were already contributing to inequality and poverty, and therefore, to conditions of mobility. And this is something that I would dare say without any need for thorough studies about the pandemic's impact on the less developed world, simply by looking at its effects in several of them that do not yet have big plans for vaccination. Are we going to continue to mobilizing like we did before the pandemic? What will change?

In the immediate future, so-called "COVID passports" will play a fundamental role in the upcoming global scenario. Clearly, people from countries that easily adopt control measures will have to have one. However, those who for one reason or another could not be vaccinated will see their mobility restricted. Another scenario is that of people who get COVID-19 in border areas: deportations do not include PCR tests or isolation in detention centers.

Despite an increase in some measures to contain migration, such as militarization of borders, the threat of criminalization, encouraged by the false imaginary that it is migrants who are putting public health at risk, is a plausible scenario. In this sense, due to what we have been through and what is happening now, the prospect seems to be for greater restriction of mobility for migrants and refugees, as well as greater inequality *vis-à-vis* residents of destination countries.

The quest for asylum and refuge on borders is finding a solution: humanitarian aid. However, this should not be the "alternative" when asylum and refuge systems are overwhelmed by circumstances. The periodic review and evaluation of national immigration systems and a commitment by all countries to respect human life should be sufficient for outlining how people should be received in accordance with their fundamental rights and the dignity of the individual.

No matter how well-worn and evident the analysis and the solution proposed by academics around this issue may seem, there continues to be a clear-cut lack of the ability to act. Therefore, given the delay in countries' actions and their scant regard for guaranteeing real rights, the question remains: When will we begin to act accordingly?

Borders cannot continue to be factors for separation and division that may sometimes spark clashes between communities. Borders must be bridges to unite different worlds, for the development of "transborder subjects" open to interculturality, agents of change in their lands, committed to a more just, inclusive society. **VM**