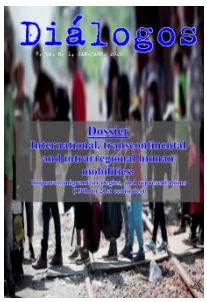

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Dissident Subjectivities and Immigration Controls in Contemporary Central American Exoduses

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Key words: Human mobility; autonomy; migration agreements; dissidence.

Dissident subjectivities and immigration controls in contemporary Central American exoduses

Abstract: This article reflects on the relationship between recent Central American regional mobility processes, the conformation features of subjectivities that respond, and the control measures aiming at deterring migratory movements. It addresses some angles of the approach to the autonomy of migration and specifies given examples in which this relationship is present.

Palabras clave: Movilidad humana; autonomía; acuerdos migratorios; disidencias.

Subjetividades disidentes y controles migratorios en los éxodos centroamericanos contemporáneos

Resumen: Este artículo reflexiona en la relación entre los procesos de movilidad regional centroamericana recientes, los rasgos de conformación de subjetividades que responden y las acciones de control con que se intenta disuadir los procesos migratorios. Aborda algunos ángulos del enfoque de la autonomía de las migraciones y precisa ejemplos concretos en los que están presentes dichas relaciones.

Palavras-chave: Mobilidade humana; autonomia; acordos migratórios; dissidência.

Subjetividades dissidentes e controles de imigração nos êxodos contemporâneos da América Central

Resumo: Este artigo reflete sobre a relação entre os recentes processos de mobilidade regional da América Central, os aspectos de conformação das subjetividades que respondem e as ações de controle com as quais são feitas tentativas para impedir os processos migratórios. Ele aborda alguns ângulos da abordagem da autonomia da migração e especifica exemplos específicos nos quais esses relacionamentos estão presentes.

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Introduction

In October 2018, two seemingly distant, unrelated events took place. The first occurred at a record-breaking London auction on the fifth of the month, when the famous graffiti artist Banksy's piece, *Girl with Balloon*, was sold for over a million sterling pounds. However, what made this extraordinary was not the sale itself. Just moments after being sold, the piece began to self-destruct by means of a mechanical paper shredder built into its frame.

Looking beyond the circumstances of the piece's destruction, there is a symbolic implication here as it relates to human mobilities. There is an allusion to the context of the Syrian mobilities through the representation of a young refugee girl with a red heart-shaped balloon floating out of her hand. The image was used to raise awareness about the humanitarian needs of the hundreds of thousands of citizens forced to leave their country who, since the conflict began, had amounted to a total of 6.7 million displaced persons outside Syrian borders by the end of 2018 (IAHCR, 2019).

As this was occurring in London, thousands of kilometers away the second event was taking place, when late in the day on October 12th approximately 160 Honduran people convened a meet-up via social media and WhatsApp messages at a bus station in San Pedro Sula to set out on the first trip across several territories and borders with the intention of arriving to the United States. The original group soon incorporated more people and groups from El Salvador and Guatemala along the way; other collective departures would take place in the days to come, eventually constituting at least five larger groups identified between October 2018 and January 2019 (regarding the routes and specific departure dates of these groups see ARROYO, CANO, PARÍS, RUIZ, PALACIOS and MARISCAL, 2019). Beginning with the first groups' departure, configurations that to date had been infrequently registered in regional mobilities were observed; walking in a collective and visibilizing their group condition as a strategic method to confront border and territorial discourses and security practices designed in terms of states of transit and destination.

Just as the girl with the balloon in the Bansky piece was shred, the Central American people mobilizing over land have also experienced the blunt force of currently implemented migratory policies. The year 2019, on top of the already inherently risky trip, has witnessed the intensification of the authoritarian siege on mobilities, unilaterally ordered by the Trump Administration and with implications in Mexico, whose new authorities had promised a change in their approach to Central American migration. The governments of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador later submitted to United States ordinances and consecutively approved their constitution as “third safe countries,” forcing those who transit through their territory irregularly to wait for their asylum resolution in a country other than their own, but always in one of these Central American countries.

It is not only States' migratory policy actions that are harmful to persons in mobility. Certain perceptions generated by the groups´ passage took harsh opposing positions regarding their presence in Mexican territory. A study carried out by the Universidad del Valle in Mexico (2019) found that close to 83% of the people consulted digitally indicated that the arrival of Central American migrant persons caused issues. Among the primary problems indicated was an increase in delinquency and poverty. In the face of escalated security-focused migratory control and perceptions that oppose human mobilities, the only way available to people is to move as a group and visibilize themselves as a collective subject.

The present article is intended as a reflection on new features in the recent regional mobilities and their relation to the implementation of migratory policies by countries such as the United States, Mexico, and the three main countries that account for the most significant levels of out-migration (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras). This will take the form of an in-depth look at the link between human mobilities and their contexts, the corporalities represented in the events that have occurred since October 2018, and the recent implementation of supraregionally designed policies that have been acritically adopted by regional governments. The dimension of migrant corporalities is addressed from the perspective of the autonomy of migration, which defines structural elements as processes conducive to the displacement of population, but above all explains the factors present in subjectivities, their responses, and mobility strategies.

The article opens with a brief overview of the regional context and the sociopolitical reasons that explain population mobilities; it goes on to address some notions with which to locate what are referred to here as "new forms" of mobility and their relationship to political factors. It then alludes to possible readings using the category of corporalities and proposes possible explanations for the implementation of control-based migratory policies and the externalization of borders, policies designed by the United States and carried out by Mexico and the three northernmost countries of Central America. It closes with some brief reflections on the context of human mobilities in the region.

Contexts of the Recent Central American Mobilities

What we have termed "new forms of mobility" here refer to the circumstances that began to surface in October 2018. Despite the fact that a variety of narratives insist on calling the Central American migrant groups of that period "caravans," instead we will employ the idea of humanitarian corridors, containing within them subjectivities of highly diverse characteristics. Under this premise, the following section gives an overview of some elements of regional and national context, ideas of the autonomy of migrations useful for reflecting on the relationship

between mobilities and migratory policies, and three cases taken from the historical backdrop of recent mobilities.

A variety of political, institutional and structural factors intervene in the emigration of the Central American population, which some estimates calculate between 12% and 14% of its total. The responses found by people in mobility are perhaps the only ones that enable them to overcome the conditions of poverty, violence, and exclusion in which they live. This context must be understood in terms of the relationship between migration and the neoliberal economic model, the forced nature of the displacements, and the role of violence in the consolidation of a humanitarian crisis that continues to reproduce itself in the region as a whole, as evidenced in recent research on the subject (LOPEZ CASTELLANOS, 2018; CONTRERAS, 2018; CUELLAR AND MORENO, 2018). In the case of the relationship between neoliberalism and mobility, the economic strategies implemented on a regional scale are determining in the continual departures of the population. As López Castellanos indicates (2018, p. 14, my translation):

> Central American neoliberalism, in addition to dearticulating already reduced industrial activity and transferring part of it to the maquilas, ratified the historic function of the periphery in the international division of labor: exporter of raw materials and manual labor, which also had consequences in the migratory sphere, in its routes, cycles and specificities, in the form of an exponential increase, as shown in multiple studies.

The impact of the neoliberal economic model on less-favored populations has converged with other social, institutional and cultural determinants that force many people to look for opportunities in other latitudes. For Cuéllar and Moreno (2018), the traits of colonial continuity in economic and cultural areas, social instability, chronic inequalities, and imbalances produced at micro and macro territorial levels also are a part of such processes. The seizure of indigenous land, the institutionalized violence brutally carried out against women's bodies as well as those of sexually diverse people, girls, children, and young people, are specific manifestations of the dimensions produced by the forced displacements begun in the three northern countries of the region with a high internal component of mobility.

In regards to violence as a cause of regional displacements, actors such as gangs and *maras*, drug trafficking cartels, and State actors are said to produce "forcible evictions that result in the internal displacement of indigenous and peasant communities." (IAHCR, 2018, p. 20). The effect of multiple forms of violence against the bodies of people is direct, which implies that the scars left by mobility on corporality are products of the same contexts of origin: people are exposed to highly dangerous situations as they are likely to become victims of abuse, physical and sexual violence, trafficking, exploitation, and dangerous traveling conditions. Domestic violence, femicide, and hate crimes are situations which girls, women, and LGBTI people are exposed to, forcing them to leave

their homes, neighborhoods, and communities, first for other regions in their countries and then outside national borders. It is noteworthy that LGBTI persons were precisely the first to arrive to the border between Tijuana and San Diego in the context of the mobilities of October and November 2018, and their case will be examined later in this article.

In addition to this aggression towards sexually diverse populations, forced internal displacement is produced as a consequence of forced eviction and the accumulation of aggressive extractive economic activities against territories and the environment at the community level. As the IAHCR states (2018, p. 23):

> The Commission has also been made aware of—and intervened in— situations of internal displacement linked to other causes, such as so-called evictions of indigenous and peasant communities associated with largescale business activities (including sugarcane and oil palm farming, ranching, metallic and nonmetallic open-pit mining, hydroelectric plants, and agroindustry).

The growing criminalization and persecution of those defending human and environmental rights, community leaders, and journalists, all of which have publicly defended and protected the victims of violence perpetrated by businesses and the State, have pushed them out of their communities and countries due to the threats and risks they are exposed to. These dynamics are determining in the out-migrations of the population from the three northermost, Spanish-speaking countries of Central America. In the case of El Salvador, it is estimated that over 200,000 people were displaced in 2016 as a consequence of "threats, homicides, attempted homicide, and/or bodily harm." (IAHCR, 2018, p. 22). Guatemala calculates 257,000 internally displaced persons as a product of "organized crime and drug trafficking, gangs, disputes over territory, extortion and/or refusal to pay, sexual violence, murders, and forced recruitment of children and youths." (IAHCR, 2018, p. 23). The Honduran scenario represents the most dramatic regional scenario in terms of forms of violence and human mobilities. According to the IAHCR, 174,000 Honduran people were in danger because of "persecution and insecurity in the community, threats, murders, bodily harm, extortion, and sexual violence, appropriation of homes, abduction, or forced recruitment." (2018, p. 23).

The aforementioned dimensions have grown in the last five years, a period in which changes in the dynamics, volumes, and velocities of the mobilities outside the region converged, particularly beginning in 2014, when the *crisis of unaccompanied Central American minors* (ACUÑA, 2016) was declared and irregular entry into Mexico by persons proceeding from the three countries of the northern region of Central America increased. The most notable changes in the dynamic of regional mobility were the consolidation of Honduras as a producer of mobility (it exceeded Guatemala in the registers of people detained trying to enter the United States through irregular channels) and the

transformation of Mexico into a destination territory, caused in part by the toughening of migratory measures implemented by the United States, as well as the increase in refugee applications by people from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras in this same period (CUELLAR Y MORENO, 2018).

The regional determinants are linked to the specificities of the national scenarios that have created conditions provoking the forced departure of their populations towards the United States, mainly, and Mexico, as an emerging destination in the last few years. In the sections that follow these scenarios are summarized.

The Honduran Exodus

The first people who took part of the "humanitarian corridors" starting in October 2018 were Hondurans. Approximately 150 people met up on the afternoon of October 12th at a bus terminal in San Pedro Sula to start their trip towards Guatemala, then travel through Mexico and eventually try to cross the border between the latter and the United States. By nightfall, the group had grown to consist in a collective of approximately 1,200 people. The reasons are wide in scope and multidimensional. Honduras is the principal producer of poverty in the region, with 60% of its population in this condition (CUELLAR AND MORENO, 2018). From the mid-eighties onward as a consequence of the implementation of the national security doctrine, first, and later, in the late nineties, with the impact of Hurricane Mitch, population movements became consistent.

Recently the exoduses have responded to the structural and subjective effects of social violence generated by multiple actors, as referenced above. These conditions began to manifest themselves with increasing intensity beginning in 2009, following the first *coup d'etat* and further intensifying after the events that led to electoral fraud in late 2017, which instated their current president. In this period, institutional fragility, the persecution of social, environmental, and student leaders, and people from the LGBTI community have been prevalent and generated permanent displacements.

While violence and insecurity are enough reason to leave one´s country, the complete inaction of the State in terms of protection is an important factor that forces hundreds of Hondurans to leave (GUTIERREZ, 2019). Even so, there are specific types of violence that act as immediate motivators, like gender-based violence against women, which explains their incorporation during the humanitarian corridors of 2018 and 2019. They flee not just violent domestic spaces, but also their communities where they are exposed to robbery, kidnapping, extortion and sexual violence at the hands of crime groups if their demands are not met.

The Honduran State, police, and judicial authorities dismiss complaints of this nature because, allegedly, the complaints against drug trafficking and organized crime are more important and must be preferentially processed (GUTIERREZ, 2019). This context has also been detrimental to the LGBTI community, to the point of forcing their departure as a survival mechanism. The discrimination and violence against members of this community is continual and systematic. Between 2009 and 2014, 174 violent murders of LGBTI persons were registered (CIDH, 2018). There is no updated data for recent years, but one may assume that the statistic has increased.

One of the specific dimensions of the Honduran scenario is the displacement of the Garifuna community. According to Castillo (2019), their scarce visibilization in the context of these 2018-2019 mobilities is not because their migration has decreased. On the contrary, exposition to internal racism, their specific forms of mobility, and cultural dynamics have provided them with tools to make the trip to the United States. The displacement of the Garifuna community is one of the primary manifestations of historic mobility to the United States and has intensified in recent years due to aggressive driving out movements from their territories. These are caused by neoextractivist operations in development projects carried out by the Honduran State and private corporate interests focused on economic and touristic activities in locations where ancestral dynamics favored the settling of these communities several centuries ago. The combination of both State and private interests has been lethal and has produced the mobility of the Garifuna community. As Castillo states (2019, p.4):

> The Honduran State and foreign investors alike regard the Caribbean coast as "empty spaces" (Hale, 2011) for profit. It is seen as empty because its residents have always been marginalized by the government, left to poverty, and domination by the drug trade. But today, in the name of development, the coast has been turned into an attractive site for mega-projects, monocultures mining, special development zones and oil explotation. Today, these "empty spaces" stand to be are literally emptied by the third expulsion of the Garifuna population. The State has declared war on these communities through racialized policies of expulsion.

This summary of some of the main characteristics of the Honduran scenario enables us to determine why, in the most recent regional exoduses, their participation is intense in volume and causalities. Should the situation not improve, it is possible that they continue to be referenced in studies and in the international press as one of the main collectives in the Central American mobility.

Guatemala: Transit and Departure

Guatemala presents extreme conditions of historical exclusion, vulnerability, racism, poverty, and inequality that produce the exodus of the population. A report on Human Rights elaborated by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR, 2017) points to these historical and structural determinants, combined with the impact produced by the internal armed conflict which lasted 36 years in this country. Extreme poverty is pervasive among the indigenous population, and its incidence is three times as that among the non-indigenous population. Chronic undernourishment, which also affects indigenous and rural populations intensely, makes it one of the countries with the highest percentages globally. It is hunger, also, and not only violence, that provokes the population movement towards the United States (MIROFF Y SIEFF, 2019). The problem intensifies and takes on critical dimensions when it does not receive a satisfactory response from the Guatemalan State. On this topic, the IACHR has said that (2017, p. 12):

> This dire situation is framed in a weak State structure, institutions with insufficient resources, and a persistent problem of corruption and high levels of violence. The low levels of tax collection in Guatemala hamper the State's ability to provide basic public services and adopt public policies that guarantee the rights of the most resource-strapped sectors.

The processes of uprooting, forced eviction, and expulsion of indigenous and rural communities are the primary issues present in the contemporary Guatemalan society (IACHR, 2017; COPELAND, 2019). The roots of contemporary forced eviction and expulsion can be traced back to the early nineties, when there was a massive expansion of monoculture crops for exportation, brought about by a convergence of actors, among them Guatemalan property-owners, international capital and State security forces, with the participation of the United States government (COPELAND, 2019). As a result, the production of corn, the indigenous communities and their environment were violently and forcefully displaced in the name of so-called "national interest." This displacement has not ceased, continuing into the present, with profound effects on entire communities and spaces that have been destroyed and devastated by businesses and private extractions with the complacency of the State.

Other forms of violence, as is the case of those produced against women, also generate mobilities. The current processes of violence continue to exact brutality against the bodies of women, as if they were a horrific continuation of the atrocities committed against them in the period of internal armed conflict, when they were subject to systematic rapes and tortures. The numbers provided by Torres (2019, p. 2) are conclusive: in a period of 18 years, between 2000 and 2018, 11,250 women were brutally murdered. In recent years, Guatemalan mobility was generally intense

and decisive, so much so that during the second Obama administration a little over 200,000 Guatemalan people were deported, and Mexico´s consolidation as a destination country was manifested in an increase of asylum applications (TORRES, 2019).

El Salvador: Old and New Dynamics

In late October 2018, a WhatsApp group rallied for a departure by land towards the United States to attempt to join the Hondurans who had departed first. They were expected to leave on October 31st, at 6:00 AM, from Plaza Salvador del Mundo and requested people to bring two pairs of pants, three shirts, a sweater, water, and medications as all their "luggage". An audio message unmistakably declared the group´s determination in the voice of a man who seemed to be the coordinator of the event: "We're immigrants anyway; we're going to cross one way or another". The information was succinct but indicated a determination to leave, the certainty that accompanies the social capital of those who have tried in the past to enter the United States once, twice or even three times (SALVADOREÑOS, 2018).

The narratives about Central American mobilities had long held the Salvadoran scenario as a paradigmatic case. Their diasporas in the United States are statistically significant and represent by far the expression of a historical departure that began during the 1980s, when the internal conflict worsened to the point that a great deal of its population left the country. As mentioned earlier, the processes of regional mobility gained great momentum since 2014 as a result of the devastating impact of the economy and violence in national contexts. Since then, displacement has been constant and to this date have not ceased.

The variables that explain the Salvadoran exodus, current, recent, and past, are multiple. Obviously, the economic dimension is fundamental and proceeds from the neoliberal reforms imposed in the country, but there is also the impact of extractive practices, droughts resulting from climate change and the aftermath of the civil war of the eighties (CHAVEZ, 2019). These conditions combine with two elements of the current context: over one third of the Salvadoran population remains in poverty, and rural and urban violence cause the population to cross its borders.

The paradox of the recent departures of Salvadorans is immediate: the marks of violence, the extortion of many residents by organized crime groups like gangs, forced them to silently seek survival for a long time. Consequently, they disappeared from their family and community contexts all of a sudden, because to announce their departure was like signing a death sentence. Despite this, the current visible and collective forms of mobilization are perhaps unprecedented in the case of El

Salvador and show the breadth of the scenarios where violence, poverty and inequality combine to push the forced departure of the population.

Two final observations illustrate the complex dimension of a phenomenon that links historical conditions and elements specific to this juncture. On one hand, the continual departure of the LGBTI population and the scarce possibilities for the protection of their needs proceeding from an absolutely conservative state. On the other, the displacements as a consequence of processes of devastation of community and local ecologies resulting from rampant real estate development, that among other consequences has caused the concentration of land ownership, job insecurity, the appropriation of water, and pollution (GUTIERREZ, 2019).

Disruption, Visibility, Insurrections in the Central American Human Mobilities: Some Notes from the Perspective of Autonomies in Migration

The period preceding the mobilities initiated in October 2018 exhibited more or less established forms in intra- and extra-regional transit. Regarding intra-regional displacement, there were three clearly identified types of mobility: by land with a work and/or tourist visa, by sea, which present risks such as the possibility of falling into the hands of criminal gangs, the interception by migration authorities and, in the specific case of passing through the well-known Darién Gap, the marshland and mountainous rainforest located at the border between Panama and Colombia, surviving harsh climatic conditions and the actions of organized transnational crime, and, finally, the most frequent mobilities between four countries of the region (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, excluding Costa Rica), as part of the Central American Free Mobility Agreement or CA-4 Visa (LOPEZ CASTELLANOS, 2017).

In the case of extraregional mobilities, transit through Mexico took on varying forms: use of the coyote or *pollero*, who moves migrant persons either during their trip or at the border crossing into the United States, different routes of the freight train called “The Beast” and traveling by bus through different zones of the country (LOPEZ CASTELLANOS, 2017). These forms respond to the increase of migratory controls developed by Mexican authorities as a response to the increased volume and intensity of Central American displacement since the year 2014, as indicated above. The transit through Mexico presents permanant risks for people, such as extorsion, robbery, kidnapping, human trafficking, injury, irregular operatives by the Mexican immigration authorities, and the actions of transnational organized crime groups. A study by the Red de Organizaciones Defensoras de Migrantes, cited by the El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, COLEF [El Colegio de la Frontera Norte] (2019, p. 5) states that the migrant persons interviewed indicated that they had

experienced some type of violence on their trip, such as robbery (76%), kidnapping (3.8%) bodily harm (5%), and abuse of authority (2.9%).

Far from representing an isolated event, the increase of violence against migrant persons who travel through Mexican territory hints at the structural violence experienced in that country as a consequence of the implementation of the flexible accumulation model (CUELLAR AND MORENO, 2018). The modifications in the forms, routes, and exit and transit strategies represent a response from the migrants to the conditions that make their transit burdensome and to the implementation of border security policies that are harsh and increasingly impenetrable. They are unprecedented forms in contemporary Central American mobilities, as claimed by the COLEF (2019, p. 5, my translation):

> The migrant caravans constitute an option for mobility that facilitates visibility, accompaniment and protection for migrants on the part of social organizations, media and human rights organisms. This largely explains the growth of the caravans that left between October and November of 2018 from Honduras and El Salvador; they represent a relatively safe and cheap form of mobility compared to the very high costs of using coyotes.

The *caravanization* of the recent Central American mobilities (SOLALINDE GUERRA AND CORREA CABRERA, 2019) must be discussed because it detracts from an adequate analysis of the processes experienced at the collective level on the journey. Here, we propose instead a further look into the role of subjectivities in the mobilities and their relationship to the design and implementation of supraregional policies of control and securitization, an aspect that produces an impact on the bodies and biographies of those in mobility. This reflection takes as its starting point the notion of the autonomy of migrations (CORDERO, MEZZADRA AND VARELA, 2019), the disruptive character of the migrant person (DURAND, 2019; ROLDAN, 2019), the politics of visibility in corporalities (PARRINI, 2017), and an understanding of collective mobilities as dynamics of self-defense and insurrection (VARELA AND McLEAN, 2019).

In said proposals, a political and strategic dimension of the mobility that surfaced with force and novelty in the recent period is brought to light, without disavowing the structural, historical, and emergent determinants that give rise to it. What is new is the visible and collective dynamic, in some cases organized and with a proposal of communication until now barely used in Central American migratory processes, a proposal that wittingly makes use of social media and WhatsApp to articulate calls to action and monitor the routes used along the way.

It is in the method where novelty seemingly arises and a sort of subjectivity emerges, that although determined by the same reasons which have forced people to migrate for several decades now, is understood as permeated by new characteristics in their political and insurgent agency (CORDERO, MEZZADRA Y VARELA, 2019). These references to politics and insurgency, of

course, beg the question of whether or not people in mobility perceive or conceive of themselves from those levels of awareness attributed to them. Certainly there is a provocative tension that must be studied about the realities of migration, its new dynamics, and the subjectivities constructed. Viewing the case of Central America through this lens implies a reflection about political subjectivity as a whole, especially since people in the region have been denied the construction of substantive citizenships, legitimacy, and representation. Thus, the inquiry about the role of migration as a way to acquire a political identity that has been denied in their countries of origin is valid, although it does not detract from the newness of the forms and the impact that the current mobilities bring about.

The Autonomy of Migration

The autonomy of migration is based on the idea that the migrants defy borders and control measures as insurgent political subjectivities through their practices of escape and disobedience. This element is key to an understanding of the mobilities produced in the Central American region in late 2018: if there was a noteworthy event during October and November, it was the response and corporal resistance of the migrants in the humanitarian corridors when faced with the barriers awaiting their arrival at the borders in Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States (ACUÑA, 2019). The traditional causes of Central American regional mobilities have been attributed to violence and the absence of opportunities, as if they could act on people as passive receptors, but did not speak to them as dynamic and active. As stated by Cordero, Mezzadra and Varela (2019, p. 13, my translation): "The elements of autonomy of migratory movements and their political features in a global context are ignored, and it is precisely in this context that attempts to control and direct the flow of the elements of liberty present in the mobility of persons arise."

The contributions of this notion of autonomy consist in criticizing the scholarship that explains the impact of contemporary migrations first and foremost through the Nation-State and propose migrant subjectivities as the primary category to understand its dynamics in the case of Latin America. Its use in a reading of the Central American context is central, as it locates in a specific spatiality the breakdown of the controls and power of the State, that is, in the border regiments that were crossed by these mobilities, as well as the new forms of organization and disruption that they adopted.

Disruptivity and Visibility

The notions of disruptivity of migrants and their constitution as a collective subject complement the proposals of the autonomy of migration, as they place agency on the migrant subject (DURAND, 2019; ROLDAN, 2019). Durand states that the modification and transformation of the established rules produce such disruptivity. The migrants' positioning at the margins of the States questions forms, norms and procedures, producing alternative ways to regulate or contend. The Mexican government certainly did so in response to the 2018 events and their aftermath in 2019, through the early granting of humanitarian visas as an emergent mechanism to contain the situation taking place at its borders and different routes of passage, although they would later suspend these benefits. In this regard, Roldán (2019) discusses the collective character of the subject constituted during the exoduses of 2018 and 2019. There is a correlation between this collective nature and the notion of resistance and constitution of political subjectivities in the mobility proposed by the autonomy of migration since it is from this collectivity that borders are trespassed and the ensuing migratory controls imposed under security mechanisms placed by States at the destination and along the way.

One of the disruptive actions provoked by recent mobility processes was becoming visible, that is, the action of leaving behind the anonymity of previously produced migratory movements which sought routes not monitored by Mexican authorities, even when they were the ones preferred by perpetrators of crime and extortion, who used these tactics to intimidate migrants. The notion of migrant visibility is recalled by Parrini (2017), who explains it as a possibility to show the heterogeneity and diversity of migrant persons versus the gazes that intend to invisibilize them and not recognize their existence, so that others “could not help but look at them” (PARRINI, 2017, p. 2, my translation). It points to the difference between the circumscription and the uncircumscription of migrant corporalities: whereas the former produces control, authority, and power, the latter produces the response, the refusal to be restrained, the defiance.

This notion is key to an understanding of the recent regional migration process. Visibility acts as a strategy, implies ruptures between anonymity and non-anonymity, it states and exposes the routes, the diversities, the ways of walking, of planning routes, of collectivizing and organizing to stand tall against the power of borders, governments, and crime and irregularity. It is a way of eluding the paradox of touch, as understood by Parrini (2017, p. 3, my translation):

> From the perspective of our interrogatives, the migrant woman or man can be touched with no consequences (one must only look at the repeated sexual assaults experienced by many women and some men), at the same time, they are untouchable insofar as strange, undesirable and undocumented. Central American migrants are localized, throughout the country, at the real and symbolic edges of the territories and spaces they transit through.

The issue of visibility is key to the comprehension of the current Central American regional migratory scenarios because of the strategic and political character they represent.

Struggles, Resistances

The struggles and resistance of migrant self-defense are resources of political and collective interpellation (VARELA and MCLEAN, 2019). For these authors the novelty of the Central American transmigration of 2018 is to be located not so much in its collective expression, which in their view had previously been produced in other migratory movements during the second decade of the XXI century, but rather in the media representation produced along its migrants visibly walked down the international highways of Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico, and because of the very size of the exoduses.

The authors view these processes as a crisis of civilization due to the impact on the bodies and the lives of the displaced peoples, particularly the children who are confined, detained and even killed by the migratory authorities of Mexico and the United States, as well as the families that wait for an opportunity to cross borders and struggle for their lives. Faced with the conditions experienced in their countries of origin and during the trip, the migrants resort to insurrection as the response and the method and is expressed in a variety of explicit and latent actions rooted in migrant struggles, as the authors term them. The actions can include hunger strikes, lock-ins in churches, demonstrations or caravans, riots in detention centers and the latent migrant chains to transit without permission or stay undocumented in the cities of transit or destination. Definitively, we are dealing with an articulated strategy of insurgency against the consequences of the neoliberal model implemented in the region and an insurrection against the government of borders in the different countries. As stated in Varela and Mclean (2019, p. 165, my translation):

> This way of transmigrating as an organized social response to the violences of the State and the market against migrants, in terms of self-protection and putting emphasis on their bodies, their histories and their patrimonies in the migrant corridor between Central America and Mexico. It aims at demonstrating that the exercise in self-defense and developing migrant political agency is a historical construct of migrants who walk in search of a decent life.

The previous dimensions contribute new points of view, little examined in an academia that has placed more importance on historical-structural perspectives and the economic and labor causalities of the mobilities. What is proposed here, then, is an analysis of migrant subjectivity from its response processes in mobility, its corporalities as marked by the dynamics of control and

security, and its insertion as a political and collective actor. We suggest decolonizing the understanding of migrations (PIÑEIRO, 2017), turning to other narratives and epistemologies, other categorical frameworks and other ways of understanding processes of mobility from, between, and towards the Central American region.

Bridges, Diversity, Pictures, Policies

What follows are examples observed in the 2018-2019 mobilizations where the relationship between migrant subjectivities, borders, responses, and migratory policies characterized by rigor, territorial monitoring, and the discourses of border power were observed.

The first case is a situation experienced by the first groups of the October 2018 exodus upon arriving to the border post located between Tecún Umán and Ciudad Hidalgo over the Suchiate River, groups marked by the response and migrant struggle. The second example describes the dimensions of the displacement and mobility experienced by persons from the LGBTI communities that saw in the exoduses a strategy for survival, but also for producing a politics of dissidence. Finally, we include a reflection on the notion of uncircumscribed bodies as illustrated by the image of the Salvadoran Oscar Martínez and his daughter Valeria, who died on June 23, 2019 while trying to cross the Río Bravo swimming to arrive to the United States.

The section ends with a brief reflection about the process of implementing migratory policies and their effects on the corporalities and biographies of the people mobilizing.

The Bridge of Desperation

The border zone between Guatemala and Mexico is part of a transnational territory of grand dimensions, characterized by a long-standing population, commercial, and historical articulation. Ramos, Coraza and Martínez (2018) refer to this zone as a multivariable, complex phenomenon whose territory is a continual corridor of human mobility that, in response to specific circumstances, takes on notoriety and social and political importance. It represents a space of confluence of geopolitical dimensions characterized by tensions and disputes related to the limits and continuities established sociopolitically. The Suchiate River plays a significant role as a border line, one of historical continuity between both countries. Its significance as a complex and multiscale (local, regional, cross-border) territory suggests a past dynamic associated with territorial security that, in turn, led to the prevalence of Mexican military forces for border protection.

It was so during the period of Central American conflicts in the eighties, during the Zapatista uprising of 1994 and recently during the fight against narcotraffic and terrorism, discourses of threat

hegemonically launched from the United States (SEGURA, 2015) and echoed in the subregional Central American group, particularly in the countries of the north. The context of growing militarization at the border zone between these two countries underwent a turning point post-September 11, with national security alerts becoming notorious on a global scale. This is followed by the implementation of the Southern Border Plan in 2014, designed to deter irregular Central American migration.

This precedent, revised and updated today, implies a continual discursive and practical construction regarding supposed threats represented by the transit of populations in conditions of migratory irregularity, or, as in the case of the events taking place since October 2018, throngs of people in contexts of forced mobility that seek to cross from Guatemala to Mexico using their bodies as a tool and as a resource. As stated by Ramos, Coraza and Martínex (2018, p. 69, my translation), "we can see a materialization of the global vision resignified in categories such as security, border and migrations, concentrated at the limit/border between these two countries. This affects not only the dynamics of international relations but also the urban and daily life dynamics of the persons who inhabit the space."

This border zone was a critical point during the period of the humanitarian corridors mentioned throughout this article. Conceived of as a homogenous group that left from Honduras, it actually consisted in five different groups originating from both Honduras and El Salvador, incorporating Guatemalans as they passed through (ARROYO, CANO, PARIS, RUIZ, PALACIOS Y MARISCAL, 2018). The first group left from San Pedro Sula the morning of October 13th with close to 1,200 people, a number that continued to increase, becoming 2,000 and then 3,000 upon arriving to Guatemala two days later. This group splits up to take different types of transportation to continue moving and advancing through Guatemalan territory: buses, cargo trucks, and private vehicles. On October 17th they arrived to the border between Guatemala and Mexico, specifically to the Casa del Migrante in Tecún Umán. With the arrival of the first group, a security protocol was activated by the Mexican government, which deployed federal police, military groups, and immigration agents. They warned that the entrance of those who did not present a valid visa would not be permitted and that they would receive asylum applications for processing.

Between the 18thand 19th the first migrant crossings into Mexico began, using rafts made of recycled materials (tires and wood) as a transportation system to cross the Suchiate River. The Mexican migratory authorities then initiated a process of regulated entrance in reduced groups, an action that enabled them to review migratory documents. Given the urgency to cross, on the 19th a large group of migrants broke the fence and entered Mexico, and was detained by Mexican authorities. About this migratory crossing, Enseñat (2018, p. 5, my translation) states that:

> Following the tension, the security forces took control of the situation and contained the migrants between the fences, leaving them stranded on one of the bridges that crosses the Suchiate River. From there, in Ciudad Hidalgo, they began to be moved on buses towards Tapachula, where the immigration station Siglo XXI is located. Other migrants, faced with the desperation of waiting on the bridge, threw themselves into the river to cross by swimming to the Mexican shore.

The scenes of containment and rupture observed on the Rodolfo González Bridge express, on one hand, the paradox of the constitution of a spatiality of impenetrability arising from security criteria, and the response from the migrant corporalities who confronted the authorities and material obstacles (fence, security enclosures) imposed by Mexican migratory authorities, on the other hand. As Varela and Mclean (2019) state, the strategies to overcome the migratory blockade acquire in this way a political nature as specific forms of struggle in which the interposition of bodies is utilized as a strategic mechanism of crossing when faced with the prevailing dynamic of securitization.

As for the events experienced on October 19th, an article published by the independent newspaper *Plaza Pública* (PRADILLA, 2018) recounts how the bridge became a sort of prison during the hours that hundreds of migrants remained trapped and how, in the midst of the uncertainty, they improvised practices that would enable the people there to be as comfortable as possible: small tents made of cloth for refuge from the heat, transporting small bags of water to deal with thirst.

The imperative of collectivizing the journey, of traveling in a group, produced the turbulent encounters between the migrants and the security enclosures installed between Guatemala and Mexico: first they overcame the metal fences, then they were faced with the Mexican migratory police, who gassed them and beat them in response to their superiors´ orders to not let the group pass unless to individually register their arrivals. The result was the incident on the bridge, "the bridge of desperation" as an independent Guatemalan media outlet called it in the report published on October 20th and accompanied by explicit photographs depicting the exchanges between migrant persons and the riot police crowded together to bar them from passing.

Despite the crowding as they waited for the opening of the gates of migration on the Mexican side, despite the hunger, the exhaustion and the uncertainty, or rather, as a product of all of these factors, several migrant persons decide to evade the moment of detention and throw themselves (once more with their bodies as their only resource) into the waters of the Suchiate River, to make it to the other side no matter what. Between October 19th and 20th, the Mexican migratory authorities opened the gates, the crowds on the bridge moved and part of the group continued on their way after clearing through the appropriate revisions and registrations. They did so as refugee applicants, a status that allowed them to transit through Mexican territory and in this way arrive to the crossing between Mexico and the United States. The securitized spatiality of the

bridge and the way in which the migrants decide to transform it, modify it, overcome it, mark a turning point in the migratory march: to confront the blockade processes with the body as a form of resistance.

The Visible Marks of Diversities

On November 12, 2018, one month after the first group left San Pedro Sula, the border city of Tijuana witnessed the arrival of the first people in mobility to their territories. There were between 75 and 85. They were all from LGTBI collectives, in particular from Honduras, although there were also Salvadorans and Guatemalans. The arrival of these groups produced adverse reactions among the residents of Tijuana. In reality, such reactions were also experienced along the route; they summarize the complexity of this process for groups of sexually diverse people. Ranging from acceptance to rejection, they had to traverse not just the migratory path, but also the perceptions, discriminatory discourse, and practices of invisibilization that they habitually experienced in their contexts of origin. Certainly, the decision to migrate carried a double victimization: that experienced in their countries and that produced continually on their trip.

However, it is interesting to examine not just their performativity as a group inside the humanitarian corridors, their role in their creation and operation, or their constitution as transgressive and visible corporality, all this not just as an act coming from the body, but also as a fundamentally political event. The people of the LGBTI collectivity usually experience situations that compromise the exercise of their basic human rights. Faced with this situation, the displacements are first produced inside their countries of origin. As the IACHR reports (2018, p. 21):

> Likewise, practices of discrimination and violence against LGBTI people have been identified, resulting in their forced displacement and that of their relatives. Some organizations in the region's countries have said that the States have not taken steps to remove cultural barriers that prevent those groups from enjoying fundamental rights, creating a situation of extreme vulnerability and exposure to violence and discrimination that forces them to move from their usual place of residence.

The first group arrived in Tijuana in private buses that they financed with their own funds. They took off from the main group for two reasons: to respond to the manifestations of rejection and discrimination they received during the first days of travel by their own travel companions and publicly mobilize their specific agenda, given the historical behaviors that detract political importance to their reflections, demands, and approaches. This practice, enacted consciously and objectively by the group, responded to a visibility that was sought and assumed. A policy of visibility in migrants, so named by Parrini (2017), is to clearly and forcefully expose the features of

the difference, so that it contributes to position the political character of their struggles and approaches.

This explains the heterogeneity that makes up the recent Central American mobility groups and questions any attempt at homogenization that the discourses and narratives about these movements have produced. It even questions a certain imaginary about an amorphous march, almost in droves, which was positioned by the first images that were produced of these movements. The interstices, the edges, and breaks in the same groups, account for the heterogeneity and diversity within and suggest that despite the discourses of causality (violence, dispossession, unemployment), each specific person or group has had and its own motivations to leave their community or country in search of better opportunities.

A variety of journalistic reports on the presence of trans people within the migrant groups (MORENO, 2018; GILET, 2018) described in detail the clothes they wore while they were mobilizing. However, beyond the reference to their outfits, the political nature of visibility, the ways in which they assumed spatiality when they arrived at the border and the search for a positioning of their interests and problems must be recognized. This is undoubtedly the feature that should be highlighted, because it encourages a consideration about the complexity of the accompaniment processes in the groups that mobilized, of the formation of solidarity networks to support these particular groups, but also the emergence of continuous practices of discrimination and rejection that increased as they left their countries and moved in the ways they did to reach their destination.

An element that must be put into perspective is the use of civil figures and *de facto* figures that are still relegated in their own countries. In the first days of their stay in Tijuana, eight couples decided to marry and make visible their vows in a collective ceremony: a feature in which subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and the politics of visibility are evidenced as a result of the mobilizations using the novelty form of the collective as both method and strategy.

Endearment and Pain in the Analysis of a Photograph´s Content

Over several years studying the regional migration issue, we have observed several photographic images related to the topic. Some we have produced; others have been made by interested third parties. In this observation, we started from an academic search exercise. The interest has been there, it has been evident and has supported us as content and as a methodology, to register different facets of spaces, places, faces, situations, related to the subjectivities incorporated in the migration. Barthes (1990, p. 65) has called the dichotomy between that interest which comes

from the subject who observes, in this case the researcher, and the lacerating arrow that shoots out of the image, "the chance that appears", the punctum.

On June 23, 2019, there were two more deaths of migrants at the Rio Bravo border, a passage historically referenced by those trying to cross from Mexico to the United States. These would be two more deaths, of the more than 7,500 identified between 1998 and 2019, were it not for the dramatic state of the bodies. They were Oscar Martínez and his daughter Valeria, both Salvadorans. They were captured in an image already shared by hundreds of websites and social networks. It is precisely in their bodies that the objective of the present reflection is condensed: to show how the corporalities taking part in the recent dynamics of human mobility are penetrated, crossed by the political circumstances that seek the control and the security of the border, and how the uncircumscription that Parrini points to creates risks that jeopardize the lives of people in the mobility.

The photograph shows the father protecting his daughter during the crossing as he places placed her inside his shirt. That is how they died, how they were found. Taken by the reporter Julia Le Duc, it presents the two bodies against the waters of the river; "they emerged together, in an embrace," she stated in a later interview. She also declared that she did not expect anything from the images, that she pressed the shutter like she had so many times, capturing bodies like heavy blocks floating in the waters of the river. But the punctum would reflect back another meaning, other signifieds. The image reveals the paradox of migrant subjectivity in the context of narratives of power. Behind the pain of the photograph, the punctum that pierces, is Oscar´s quest to evade the police and immigration controls at all costs. To keep his daughter safe, to get to the other side, to *uncircumscribe* himself. They dare to dissent from the established order and the power of borders, intervening, once more, with their bodies themselves. They did not make it, but they revealed the potential and the force that they put forth.

Migratory Policies and Impacts on the Bodies of Migrant Persons

The signatures on a so-called "agreement" between the three northern countries of the region and the government of the United States diplomatically titled "asylum cooperation agreement," also known as the "third safe country agreement," in practice imply that these countries will receive refugees that the United States does not want to immediately accept and who will be sent to their territories to wait for a resolution to their application. All of these signings occurred in 2019. First was Guatemala on July 26th, then El Salvador on September 20th, which coupled it with the creation of a border patrol as if to say *no one is leaving this house*. Finally, Honduras sealed their agreement on September 25th.

Institutional weakness, the absence of conditions to guarantee protection to people that, as we have detailed in this article, are forced to leave their countries due to the vulnerability and the forms of violence they experience, as well as the restrictive and securitization tendencies observed in the recent period at both the extra and intra-regional level, do not guarantee the success of the political and diplomatic approach of the United States administration on the issue of migration, in particular regarding the Central American region.

The implementation of these agreements must be interpreted as a tactic to ensure the continuity of a policy that to a certain extent aims at outsourcing and externalizing not just its approach, but its system of protection for Central Americans in search of refuge. It is a sort of "return policy" for what the United States considers a problem coming from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, back to the expelling countries themselves. The three countries accounted for 35% of total asylum applications to the United States and among them they did not receive 400 applications in 2018 (RAUDA, 2019).

This is perhaps a brief summary of the latest actions on regional migration policy in recent history, with the participation of the United States as a key actor, the mediatized involvement of Mexico and attempts by their new administration to transform, at least in discourse, their hard-line on the issue of migration, which due to pressure from the government of the United States and the absence of autonomy and capacity to respond on the part of the Central American governments indicated above has been unsuccessful. Desperation in the face of inoperance, the closing of the borders, and the odds of returning to the place where many people left forcibly, push towards unsafe mobility patterns also characterized by many painful and irreparable losses, such as those of Oscar and his daughter Valeria or the five Guatemalan children who at the time of writing this article had lost their lives at the hands of border immigration authorities because of the precariousness of their confinement.

Besides from the impact of the unilateral agreements between the north of the region and the United States is the increasing complexity of Mexican migration policies, applied in practically the whole of their territory and oriented towards deterring, detaining, and pushing out of their borders the growing Central American migration. This operation, initiated in its modern incarnation after the implementation of the Southern Border Program in 2014, was oriented towards militarization and containment at the border zone between Mexico and Guatemala and has implied a prolonged strategy of verticalization of the borders, as it has been called by Torres and Yee (2018) in their analysis of policies of irregular Central American transit control in the period between 2007 and 2016.

What is new in the broadening of policies of verticalization developed years ago with an aggressive plan of operations and arrests across the country, is the consolidation of a securitization

framework in situ via the construction of a National Police Force oriented towards detaining any body in movement with an irregular profile, as has occurred in these mobilities. In the first months of the implementation of this plan, a grand total of 45,000 migrant persons in irregular migratory condition had been detained, echoing United States policy in Mexico and the other three countries involved. Without a doubt, the implementation of such actions of supra- and intraregional policies directly impact the subjectivities of the persons in mobility. Upon the writing of this article, border detentions are still being produced, Mexico fulfills a role as a vertical wall, and the silence of the regional governments point to a pessimistic horizon in terms of mobility, respect, and compliance with human rights.

Final Reflections

In mid-2018, a group of over 500 international experts called for the validation of informed, scientific approaches to migration that have been continually produced in the field of public policy. It revealed a dispute between approaches, lines of thought, and positions regarding the issues experienced between the academic and the political spaces. In the regional context, a continual, constant reflection about the recent changes presented in the processes of population mobility must delve deeper. The new methodologies with which people are undertaking the project of migration, using their bodies as a resource, must be recognized and adequately labeled. This implies a necessary tension in the semantic field with which, for example, the media and its different reverberations construct an agenda about regional problems.

The previous allusions to the different signifieds of the caravans to understand the phenomena of regional mobility is not just an epistemological exercise. It is a qualitative leap in the construction of narratives of migration: just as we must discuss categories such as non-accompaniment, subjects without agency, and migratory crisis, we also must contest the claims of actors uninformed about these dynamics. The year 2019 has represented an enormous challenge in regards to human mobility in the region. It is the year in which policies deterring migration and originating in the United States advanced; proof of this is the ordinance in Mexico and its corollaries in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, to detain regional mobility at all costs, using disproportionate force and migratory controls.

As a result, the rate of deaths and missing people in regional mobilities is rising, more subjectivities are harmed and compromised during their individual and identity-based projects. To try to predict what will happen in the immediate future is difficult, but without a doubt a complicated future is on the horizon for the region. In particular, the frameworks of policy implementation defined on the national level are not immediately visible. In their place, methods of

externalization and verticalization are resorted to, responding more to the visions of the primary destination country of the mobilities than to their own necessities as a region. It is to these realities that we should pay attention to as academia, institutions and organizations, in order to deepen our understanding and integral approaches.

As a result, more disappearances and more deaths are happening in regional mobilities, more subjectivities are beaten, and their individual and identity projects compromised. Trying to guess what will happen in the immediate future is not an easy task, but a really convoluted panorama looms on the horizon. In particular, the policy implementation schemes defined from national settings are not immediately visible. Instead, we resort to outsourcing and verticalization methods that respond more to the visions of the main destination country of the mobilities, than to the needs of the regional group. To these realities we must pay attention from the academia, institutions, and organizations, to deepen their comprehensive understanding and approach.

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