

EDITORIAL

BORDER POLICIES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF WALLS: VIOLATIONS AND RESISTANCES

*Políticas de fronteirização e construção de muros:
violações e resistências*

Roberto Marinucci^o

At the end of the 20th century, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the creation of the European Union - with the agreements on the free movement of people between the signatory countries - it was believed that the era of the walls had ended. The new world scenario seemed conducive to the recognition of the fundamental rights of migrants, regardless of their nationality. However, over the years, it was realized how illusory this expectation was. The last decades have been marked by what has been defined as a true “obsession” (Foucher, 2009) for the construction of walls. At the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, there were about fifteen physical barriers on the planet. Currently, there are about seventy physical barriers and seven under construction (Langella, 2021).

In addition to the construction of physical barriers at borders, another phenomenon that has gained considerable strength was: the multiplication of external barriers to receiving countries (the so-called “border externalization” or outsourcing; cf. Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, Pickles, 2015), the multiplication of internal barriers and, above all, the multiplication of intangible barriers, bureaucratic impediments and obstacles to the integration of migrants and refugees.

More than an obsession with “borders”, according to Velasco (2020), the phenomenon can be defined as an obsession with “closed borders”, a desire for distance (Zoja, 2009), for isolation – in the etymological sense of staying on an island (*isola*, in Latin). However, it is selective isolation. In fact, the multiple mobility regimes establish distinctions, not only between the free movement of capital/goods and the restricted movement of human beings, but also between

^o Editor of Revista REMHU, Centro Scalabriniano de Estudos Migratórios (CSEM). Brasília - DF, Brasil.
E-mail: remhu@csem.org.br. Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2042-2628>.

the circulation of desirable and undesirable migrants. There is, therefore, a selection among human beings who can and cannot move freely.

If the modern world, with the Declaration of Human Rights, promised to recognize that all human beings are “born free and equal in dignity and rights”, selective mobility regimes establish a hierarchy among human beings, a new “caste” system (Carens, 1987) determined by birth (read passport), skin color, social class – and, sometimes, even religion (Perocco, 2018) and gender identity.

These new mobility regimes have constituted, in recent years, three fundamental elements, in addition to the aforementioned selectivity: the criminalization of migrants and solidary persons; the involvement of the media and of conservative and sovereigntist segments of the national population; and the militarization of borders.

The process of criminalizing migrants is an old phenomenon, but the criminalization of solidary people is recent (Penchaszadeh, Sferco, 2019). Didier Fassin himself (2019, p. 285-186) argues that from September 11, 2001 onwards, security logics did not replace, but certainly began to coexist with the “humanitarian reason” as management devices for the international mobility. In the security logic, not only migrants and refugees, but also those in solidarity, become a problem of national security. The so-called “crime of solidarity” appears.

The media spectacularization and the generation of stigmatizing narratives, disseminated even by conservative segments of civil society, connect the mobility of human beings with criminal acts or acts that are harmful to receiving societies, such as drug trafficking, arms trafficking, trafficking in people and human organs, terrorism, criminality, corruption, spread of diseases, among others. Such narratives allow spreading a generalized fear that leads to an obsession with walls and barriers.

In this sense, another aspect must be considered: the militarization of borders (Vasconcelos, Machado, 2021). If in the past this process was stimulated in the logic of “humanitarian reason” – the supposed intention of “protecting” people on the run –, today it increasingly assumes an explicitly security configuration, in which the migrant person and the solidary person become a problem of National security. Militarization aims at control, surveillance and, when necessary, repression of external enemies and their collaborators. It has, in this sense, an expressive symbolic value: it confirms, without proving, that there is an external threat from which it needs to protect itself. This narrative aims to reach both the national population, in search of external scapegoats, and the people on the move in order to trigger the so-called processes of illegalization and deportability (De Genova, 2002).

Certainly, behind the logic of walls and barriers there is also a desire for protection, for greater stability, in an increasingly uncertain and liquid world. In the history of humanity, walls were erected to protect populations from invasions. The camp residents took refuge between the fortified walls of the villages when there was any kind of risk. The wall is still permeated with the symbology of protection, security. However, we insist on stating how the nexus between wall and protection is exploited today, very often, to “invent” enemies, to create scapegoats. In an indecent vicious circle, criminalizing narratives legitimize the construction of walls that, in turn, by their mere existence, confirm the content of these narratives. As René Girard (2004) has shown, the creation of scapegoats aims to cover up the real causes of problems, not to solve them definitively.

We dare to say, from this perspective, that the walls and militarization of contemporary borders, rather than the fortified walls of medieval villages, are more like another phenomenon, even remembered in Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories: the walling up of living people. This practice, present among many peoples, aimed to cage living people between four tight walls as a form of torture, punishment or even sacrifice. In extreme cases, people died of suffocation, starvation or dehydration. The walls were erected to take away the “living space”. In this fact, there is a certain analogy with current border policies, which promote exclusion or expulsion (Sassen, 2016) of human beings from “vital” or “livable” spaces. If, as Kurz claims, “insular capitalism” produces “‘islands’, or rather, ‘oases’ of productivity and profitability, around which economic deserts arise”, or “desertified” areas (2004, p. 28-29), the construction of walls is no longer a “protection” to be configured as a walling of humanity considered superfluous or undesirable.

This is not just about unwanted foreign people. The logic of walls affects all individuals and social groups considered superfluous or harmful, because of their skin color, political opinion, gender identification, religious affiliation, social class, psychosocial abilities, age or sex. Therefore, in addition to the arguments that denounce the exorbitant costs and uselessness – in terms of protection – of the policies of building walls and militarizing borders, we ask ourselves: how policies that exclude or expel millions of human beings from “vital spaces” – of biologically and socially livable spaces – could guarantee a dignified, decent and fair future for humanity or, at least, could guarantee a future for humanity.

Issue 64 of REMHU, *Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana*, deals with the theme of walls and border policies. In the first article of the dossier, *Maurizio Ambrosini* addresses the resurgence of border policies (*confini*), focusing above all on the European Union and, specifically, the Italian case. The author emphasizes specially the selectivity of migratory policies, being open or tolerant for those who have certain political, economic and professional resources, and closed for immigrants considered unwanted. The issue of human rights does not

seem to be a priority in these policies. On the other hand, there are initiatives “from below” that challenge and contest discriminatory and exclusionary logics. The author specifically emphasizes the “humanitarian corridors” and the “sanctuary cities”, but could also be mentioned the popular mobilizations to welcome refugees in 2015 in Europe, the actions of solidarity NGOs around the world and even *Las Patronas* in Mexico. Despite the limitations, these “acts of citizenship” attest that another logic also prevails in the social fabric, contrary to nationalism and xenophobia.

While staying in the European Union, *Dirk Godenau* and *Vicente Manuel Zapata Hernández* address the issue of “insular” borders, in the specific case of the Canary Islands, the so-called “Atlantic route”. The authors, after contextualizing and analyzing the recent intensification of this flow, present the difficulties of reception management. In fact, public policies have not proved to be adequate to deal with the resurgence of flows in the context of the pandemic, and even changes in the vulnerability patterns of new arrivals (unaccompanied children, pregnant women). In addition, the article raises the debate about certain border areas – in this case the islands –, their role in the context of migration policies and their “(in)capacity” to absorb huge arrivals of migrants and refugees. One could speak of a certain “isolation” of these “islands” and other border areas in the context of immigration management in the European Union.

Luca Daminelli analyzes the border between Italy and France in the context of a pandemic. The author focuses his reflection on the health crisis and the redefinition of the border device from the perspective of flow containment. Among other aspects, the dimension of “waiting” (*attesa*) is highlighted as a structuring element of the migratory experience: where it is not possible to detain, prevent transit (spatial dimension), it is necessary to slow down the process, to procrastinate transits (temporal dimension). Daminelli analyzes this reality from the perspective of “submission”, but also of “subjectivization”, of the autonomy of migrant people, who resist from the interstices, the gaps offered by the border device, and with the support of solidary groups from civil society.

The dimension of “waiting” becomes even more serious when migrants and refugees experience administrative detention at the borders. It is on this theme that *Débora Castiglione*’s article deals with the reception of migrants in Greece and the evolution of the detention infrastructure for migratory reasons. The author specifically shows the nexus between the administrative detention of migrants and the deportation process, as well as the development of detention infrastructure in Greece based on changes in migratory flows and management policies. In general terms, the article raises the question of the use of detention as the first reception of migrants and refugees, the policies for classifying and selecting people who could be admitted and the violations of rights that this entails.

María Dolores París Pombo and Pedro Roa Ortega approach the issue from the point of view of the situation in Mexico and, more generally, in Latin America. *Paris Pombo* raises the issue of the externalization of borders and their militarization. From your article, we would like to draw attention to some aspects: firstly, the fact that, on both the Mexican and US sides, changes in governments and, in principle, in ideological approaches did not produce significant changes in migration policies in the region. A second aspect is that on both sides there is not only a tightening of restrictions, but a true “militarization” of the border, which responds to certain interests that go beyond the migratory issue. Finally, the externalization policy can be approached from a neocolonial perspective, as an external imposition, but also from the interests of the so-called peripheral countries.

Pedro Roa Ortega, in turn, presents the “successful case” of a Nigerian migrant who, after a long journey from Nigeria to Mexico, managed to have his asylum application accepted in the US. Based on the aforementioned case, the author focuses on the processes of bordering in numerous Latin American countries and, even, on the agency of migrants and refugees, their strategies of struggle. The author shows how, despite the security restrictions, the ambiguities of migratory policies, the dangers faced and the rising violations, people who migrate sometimes achieve interstices of solidarity, support networks as a result of sharing their migratory condition, religious or cultural affiliation or else by the commitment of solidary organizations and individuals. The article, among other issues, raises the issue of recent African immigration to the American continent, with its transnational, post-colonial and historical implications.

These two articles, as well as texts by Ambrosini and Daminelli, emphasize the importance of organized civil society action in promoting the rights of migrants and refugees. The centrality of this support, especially when understood as strengthening the agency and the struggle strategies of the subjects involved, becomes crucial for the “success” of the migratory project. From this point of view, it is clear that there is a real “clash” between those who promote security and restrictive policies and those who prioritize the defense and promotion of human rights; between those who want to prevent or delay the crossings, sometimes at any cost, and those who promote the rapid and safe success of the migratory project. This “clash” is fought in all areas of public life. *Damien Simonneau's* article deals with that, which analyzes the “construction of policies to militarize borders”, comparing the reality of Israel with that of Arizona, in the USA. The author's focus is “from below”, that is, from the perspective of those (politicians, security professionals, military personnel and even citizens) who have some kind of interest in promoting a political spectacle in the construction of walls.

For Simonneau, both in Israel and in the US there is a broad “pro-wall” civil coalition that works from three focuses: construction of a narrative of criminalization of migration; construction of a narrative about the militarization of the border as the only effective way to solve the problem; challenge the government’s omissions. These narratives are publicized and spectacularized, in order to make a greater impact in three areas: congress, the judiciary and the media. The process of building border policies and building walls take place, therefore, in a scenario of spectacularization as a performative ritual of maintenance of the territorial limit as a line of exclusion.

The construction of border policies precedes the construction of walls. They are the true foundations of the material and immaterial walls. Border spaces are often the mirrors of these policies of selective and subordinate exclusion or inclusion. And this also applies to the so-called internal borders. *Giuseppe Grimaldi*, in this regard, addresses the issue of migrant agricultural workers in southern Europe, with a specific focus on southern Italy. The author focuses specifically on the role played by informal intermediation (the so-called “mediators”), which links demand and demand for work and ends up promoting the formation of “ghettos”. These are interpreted as a social, legal and economic frontier, an “advanced post” (*avamposto*) that reveals characteristics of the reality of production systems in the southern European context. In other words, the ghetto with its characteristics is not a pathology, but a physiological element, consubstantial of the reproduction processes of regional agrarian neoliberalism. The article, in essence, shows how these “internal” borders, within the receiving countries, are shaped by the influence of structural factors, such as global mobility regimes and regional agrarian capitalism. The agency of migrants does not disappear, especially in the interaction with formal intermediation, but it is profoundly flattened.

The article by *Damián Bravo Zamora*, which closes the dossier, addresses the issue of building walls and closing borders from a moral and philosophical point of view. The author assumes that there are some moral principles that guide the reflection on migration ethics: the equal dignity of every human being; the fundamental value of freedom; the need to morally justify every limitation of freedom; the inexistence of natural and, therefore, immutable social orders. Based on this, Bravo Zamora reflects on the relationship between these principles, which defines “*fundamentales-sin-fundamentos*” and the arguments raised by relativism and moral skepticism. In the context of the clash between narratives for and against the opening of borders, the article brings contributions from critical rationality and philosophy.

The “Articles” section of no. 64 of the REMHU includes three texts. In the first one, *Camila Escudeiro* seeks to portray the ways of sociability of immigrants in the city of São Paulo. The author used participant observation to follow the communication vehicles of six groups, collectives and associations of migrants for about a year. The article is based on an interdisciplinary methodological construction that mixes concepts of Communication and Anthropology, understanding communication as a link and relying on the anthropological concept of mediator to interpret the data collected. The author demonstrates how sociability and interaction are part of a complex process, involving knowledge, recognition, actions, relationships; and how geography, climate and city characteristics also influence the production of meaning for migrant subjects.

Laura Gottero's article analyzes the treatment given by the media to Decree 70, in 2017, in Argentina and to Decree 138, in 2021, which came to replace it. The author analyzed articles published in national journals, with print runs and online portals. Decree 70 restricted immigration legislation in the country, expanding the causes of expulsion, weakening migrants' access to justice and creating other conditions for irregular migration. However, the news broadcast at the time created in the population an imagination that the decree could promote migration control and prevent the entry of migrants who could commit crimes in the country. The following news, regarding Decree 138, continued to reinforce this imaginary. The author demonstrates how the news contributed to misinformation about migration legislation and the influence of the media in the construction of hate speeches against migrants.

The article that closes the section has as its theme the greater exposure of the migrant population in Argentina to contamination and death by the COVID-19 virus. The authors *Ana Paula Penchaszadeh*, *Julieta Nicolao* and *Natalia Debandi* developed this study based on data from the National Directorate of Epidemiology and Strategic Information of the Argentine Ministry of Health. The authors investigated how the social determinants of health, the living conditions of migrants in the country, the difficulties of integration and access to rights can influence a greater impact of the virus on this population. The authors demonstrate how the new coronavirus pandemic contributed to highlighting a situation of historical vulnerability of the migrant population, indicating gaps in the legal and health system and in the integration of the migrant population.

In the “Reports and Reflections” section, *Idalina Pellegrini*, mscs, presents a reflection on the work of the Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters in Fortaleza - CE. The police, health and financial crisis, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, has further accentuated existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, especially with regard to the migrant population. In view of this scenario, the Pastoral in Fortaleza developed an activity of welcoming and training in entrepreneurship

for migrant women, mostly mothers. The report shares the story of three migrant women who, with the formation and help of the pastoral, managed to open their own business and generate money for their families.

João Gilberto Belvel Fernandes Júnior's book review "O estrangeiro e a cidadania nômade: A antropologia da hospitalidade" by Michel Agier ends issue 64 of REMHU.

Reference

- CARENS, Joseph. Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders. *The Review of Politics*, v. 49, n. 2, p. 251-273, 1987.
- CASAS-CORTES, Maribel; COBARRUBIAS, Sebastian; PICKLES, John. Changing Borders, Rethinking Sovereignty: Towards a Right to Migrate. *REMHU, Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana*, v. 23, n. 44, p. 47-60, 2015.
- De GENOVA, Nicholas. Migrant "Illegality" and Deportability in Everyday Life. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, v. 31, p. 419-447, October 2002.
- FASSIN, Didier. *Ragione umanitaria. Una storia morale del presente*. Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2018.
- FOUCHER, Michel. *Obsessão por fronteiras*. São Paulo: Radical Livros, 2009.
- GIRARD, René. *O bode expiatório*. São Paulo: Paulus, 2004.
- KURZ, Robert. "Barbárie, migração e guerras de ordenamento mundial". In: Serviço Pastoral dos Migrantes (org.). *Travessia na desordem mundial*. Fórum Social das Migrações. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2005, p. 25-36.
- LANGELLA, Marita. Geopolítica dei muri nel mondo 30 anni dopo Berlino. *GEOHUB*, 2021. Disponível em: <<https://geopoliticalhub.unilink.it/geopolitica-dei-muri-nel-mondo-30-anni-dopo-berlino/>>. Acesso em: 07.04.2022.
- PENCHASZADEH, Ana Paula; SFERCO, Senda Inés. Solidaridad y Fraternidad. Una nueva clave ético-política para las migraciones. *REMHU, Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana*, v. 27, n. 55, p. 149-164, 2019.
- PEROCCO, Fabio. Anti-migrant Islamophobia in Europe. Social roots, mechanisms and actors. *REMHU, Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana*, v. 26, n. 53, p. 25-40, 2018.
- SASSEN, Saskia. *Expulsões*. Brutalidade e complexidade na economia global. Rio de Janeiro/São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2016.
- VASCONCELOS, Iana dos Santos; MACHADO, Igor José de Reno. Uma missão eminentemente humanitária? Operação Acolhida e a gestão militarizada nos abrigos para migrantes venezuelanos/as em Boa Vista-RR. *REMHU, Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana*, v. 29, n. 63 p. 107-122, 2021.
- VELASCO, Juan Carlos. De muros intransponíveis a fronteiras transitáveis. *REMHU, Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana*, v. 27, n. 57, p. 159-174, 2019.
- ZOJA, Luigi. *La morte del prossimo*. Torino: Einaudi, 2009.