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MOBILITY OF BOLIVIAN FAMILIES IN VILLA 20 (CABA, ARGENTINA): PROBLEMATIZING THE NOTION OF PLURILOCALITY

MARIELA PAULA DÍAZ

I. INTRODUCTION

Urban studies in general, and especially in Latin America, have historically focused on the informal and precarious working-class habitat. Towards the end of the 20th century, studies about enclosed urbanizations stood out. This aspect is analyzed by geographers and architects as the transition from the “compact city” to the “diffuse and fragmented city”. The issue of international migration and its distribution and settlement in cities was analyzed by the classic theorists of the First Chicago School (Urban Ecology) in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century under an assimilationist view. In Latin America, and in particular in Argentina, the emergence of this issue as an academic problem is relatively new, dating from the 1970s. However, it boomed at the beginning of the 21st century due to a series of social conflicts that interrelations between migratory processes and city slum issues have made visible (Vacotti, 2017). The so-called ‘mobility turn’ broke through at the start of the 21st century with the publications of Urry (2000 and 2007) and Cresswell (2006). It is an epistemological turn as it sets out a reformulation of social sciences, not just those traditionally connected to mobility studies (Cosacov & Di Virgilio, 2018). This article falls within this last perspective looking to contribute (albeit preliminarily) to the field of study on the residential mobility of migrant homes from a transnational (or transborder) scale, looking into the emergence of plurilocal or pluri-residential practices. These comprise a type of circular residential path that links their origins and destination, questioning the cited classic studies and the present definition in demography, taken from international entities and national censuses. On the other hand, the confluences between urban and migratory studies proposed from this (recently emerging) perspective are considered as a contribution that fuels the dynamic approach of spatial mobilities, thus contrasting the concept focused on the classic assimilationist and definitive migration. The main goal of the article is to analyze the links between the homes of Bolivian migrants, residents of Villa 20, located in the south of CABA, with their places of origin and their links with the socioeconomic and sociodemographic aspect within the context of the current local re-urbanization policy (2015-2019). This with the goal of looking into and questioning the existence or not of plurilocality (at a transnational scale) in migrant homes in the fourth most populated slum in the city, which have a considerable

number of Bolivian heads of household (HOH), some 42%, that outnumbers both those born in Argentina (34%) and those from other neighboring countries (23% Paraguayan and 1% Peruvian) (IVC Census, 2016). According to different research projects, migrants from neighboring countries transform the working-class habitat through their daily practices, that are focused on reproducing their needs. These are conditioned by migratory experiences, and at the same time reproduce certain logics of their countries of origin. Therefore, local policies and urban planning need to incorporate an analytical vision about the main migratory flows, which are not just conditioned to practices of the subjects, but are influenced by them (Perissinotti, 2016).

Residential plurilocality is a broadly studied subject in Bolivia, emphasizing the rural-urban links, predominantly of Aymaran and Quechuan population (Antequera Durán, 2020; Díaz, 2017), within the framework of the country's urbanization process. Thus, using this information, we wonder whether these residential practices can be analyzed on a transnational scale in the context of the reproduction strategies of Bolivian migrant's homes, and to what extent can the strategies of other migratory flows of the “Global South” be explained. As a result, the following questions are telling: What types of connections do migrant homes keep with their places of origin? What relationship can be established with the insertion of the HOH in the job market, that is to say, with the class structure? Can all types of links with their places of origin be analyzed as plurilocal practices?

Within the background information, although we have an important amount of scientific work regarding individual paths and their connections to work and family dynamics (Dureau, 2018), transnational migration from the perspective of plurilocality has only been partly studied in Latin American countries for the south-south migration. As for Bolivian migration, there is research with diverse theoretical viewpoints and methodological strategies in the main destination countries: Europe (Spain mainly, and Italy); USA (Hinojosa, 2006; Ledo, 2020; Pedone et al, 2012); Argentina (in different cities of the country); and Brazil (Miranda, 2019, González, 2016, Cravino, 2014; Malimacci, 2012). This issue was also addressed in Argentina for other migratory flows from neighboring countries in the city of Buenos Aires (Vacotti, 2017; Sassone & Mera, 2007), as well as in other cities of the country (Matossian, 2010; Perissinotti, 2016). However, in this study, the idea is to analyze, albeit preliminarily, the possibility of plurilocal practices in the homes of migrants on a transborder or transnational scale and, in this way, contribute to the field of urban studies with an analysis perspective (from a more local view) that is at a very early stage in Latin America, with the exception of Bolivia.

In Argentina, although the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires (AMBA, in Spanish) has been consolidated as the hub of the Southern Cone migratory subsystem; that is to say, it concentrates the largest proportion of neighboring immigrants, Bolivian migration has spread over different points of the country. In CABA, it is particularly concentrated in the southern area of the city, which has an important number of slums and informal precarious settlements where the informal real-estate

market was the intermediary for access to urban land for the most impoverished working-class sectors (Mera et al, 2015). It is interesting to point out that almost half (49%) of the population in the census of the city's slums was born outside Argentina (especially in Paraguay and Bolivia)³. However, it is worth highlighting that these have historically represented (from the 19th century to the present day) between 2% and 3% of the total Argentinean population. The theoretical and methodological perspective is outlined below, which mainly goes back to the concept of plurilocality from the residential mobility turn, from a quantitative methodological strategy, while preliminary results are presented of the migrant collective as a whole. Finally, some brief conclusions are made.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of “plurilocality”, from the perspective of residential mobility, is understood as a practice of displacement that is part of the everyday dynamic of all individuals, expressing different ways of living and, therefore, of appropriating -materially and symbolically- the territories and cities on different spatial and social scales. This article specifically focuses on the residential mobility of the migrant community on a transnational/transborder scale, as part of social reproduction strategies. In other words, this mobility is a practice of displacement over the border (material and symbolic), thus complementing terms defined as opposites (mobile and immobile) (Benedetti, 2018). As a result, it raises doubts about the national perspective that defines migration as the movement of population towards the territory of another State, reinforcing the idea of the border as an object, instead of understanding it as a social construct and process. Transborder mobilities can also generate multiple dynamics and an impact on the construction of subjectivities and family organization, thus complicating the ethnonational (homogenizing) view of the migrant collective (Irazábal Zurita, 2014; Pedone, 2011). Studies about the plurilocality of migrants from rural areas in the main Bolivian cities provide signs about the meaning of this concept. On facing diverse approach strategies, here we understand plurilocality as a practice that produces a type of circular mobility, a kind of transnational or transborder residential path where people have houses in a “here” and “there”, and economic, political and/or social responsibilities and interests in both places. Returning to Portes (2012), these mobilities form part of the bottom-up globalization that breaks with the essential premise that labor remains local, while capital has a global reach. This is how worker swallows could be an example of circular mobilities, but not necessarily labeled as plurilocal practices. Furthermore, the form acquired by residential mobility, at a transnational and national scale, is conditioned by political, economic, structural and

institutional factors (Di Virgilio, 2017). The conclusions of Benencia (2008) stand out for the Argentinian rural area, about the links that Bolivian migrants maintain with their original communities depending on class structure. At an urban level, this hypothesis is supported by Di Virgilio (2007), who mentioned a greater residential mobility of families of working-class sectors living in the AMBA, generally associated to migration processes. As a result, this new interpretative (transnational) framework raises the question about the economic position of migrant homes and their link with the intensity of transnational or urban-urban or rural-urban plurilocal residential mobility.

For this reason, it is necessary to return to the segmentation studies on the job market, a market that is characterized by its informality, precariousness and low incomes (Cerrutti & Maguid, 2006), considering the migratory condition (and gender). This job market segmentation can be tied into the notion of “racialization of class relationships” (Margulis & Urresti, 1999) and implies the historic construction of an otherness that establishes inequalities and relationships of inferiority and superiority based on “supposed racial” traits that overlap with other inequalities, like for example, gender. The latter due to patriarchal relationships and those of domination of one gender over the other. It is worth clarifying that job informality is a trait of Latin American countries given the dependent insertion of the region in the international division of work, even though there is a kind of heterogeneity or disparities among them. At a conceptual level, there are two definitions of job informality, the so-called legal or social one and the production one (Tornarolli et al, 2012). The legal definition has been chosen in this study; and for its measurement, the pension fund payment, whether by employers or by independent workers with no employees, is used as the main indicator. Several Bolivian research projects make a difference between consolidated (stable) and unconsolidated (unstable) informal activities. This distinction refers to an additional trait of precariousness of informal activities that alludes to job instability, becoming an impoverishment indicator of the workers⁴. In this sense, a lack of internal homogeneity of working-class sectors (and migrant homes) stands out, as it can be seen that there are layers that are poorer than others, which has consequences on transborder residential mobility. In this way, migrants constitute the impoverished fraction of a country's working class, but an internal inequality can be found that reveals the complexity of the Latin American social class system.

III. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative methodological strategy was chosen, along with the use of primary and secondary data sources (particularly reports of public entities), to reach the goals of this paper. The results presented in this article are considered partial, as they form part of a larger

³ In CABA, following the pattern of the country, the Paraguayan (21%), Bolivian (20%) and Peruvian (16%) community have the highest representation versus all the migrants (Census, 2010).

⁴ The working-class includes both formal and informal employees and low-qualification independent workers with no responsibility for employees (Elbert, 2015).

research project focused on a multi-method strategy that combines qualitative and quantitative procedures. This strategy is considered appropriate to address the topic proposed on different social scales: as a migrant collective and as an individual or family unit. Here, the results will be presented using the first scale mentioned.

The primary quantitative data comes from applying surveys to 60 homes of Bolivian migrants. It was applied at the end of 2018 with a non-probabilistic strategic sampling, where the selection of sample cases is qualitative in nature (following theoretical saturation). As in all research processes, there is a “back” and “forth” between the theory and empirical data, which is key for the scientific construction of an object of study. The survey questionnaire is part of a larger-sized plan. As a result, it comprised diverse thematic blocks. The following variables stand out to meet the proposed goals: indigenous self-identification, district and area (urban or rural) of origin, the existence of pension fund payments and HOH job instability to measure work precariousness and informality, following the theoretic definition adopted; finally, who returns, where they return to, and especially the reasons behind this.

This study, to begin with, will not only allow looking into existing links with their country of origin, but also finding out who (among those who regularly return) carries out plurilocal practices and under what conditions they carry them out. However, the results presented are considered as preliminary as it is felt that, in a later work, in-depth biographical interviews will be made using the initial survey on a subsample of migrant homes, which would allow representing the standard cases.

The survey was applied by people from a slum organization, mainly comprising Bolivian migrants, who stood out; it was made after the research plan had been presented in a neighborhood meeting, where the work proposed to “survey and be surveyed” was accepted and carried out. It is considered that the strategy used resulted in a successful fieldwork, providing highly reliable data.

Finally, the period of time chosen is due to the current transformations linked to a concrete policy. The slums of CABA, prototype par excellence of a precarious and informal working-class habitat, have been subject of diverse habitational policies, but since 2015, under the leadership of Horacio Rodríguez Larreta, a set of re-urbanization laws that seek urban, economic and cultural integration mediated by a logic of international indebtedness, were approved (Díaz, 2019; Arqueros et al, 2020).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Migration and mobility: Are we seeing plurilocal practices?

Villa 20, an informal and precarious working-class habitat prototype, forms an ethnic Bolivian enclave as this is the migratory flow with the highest weight among the HOHs

considered. As was pointed out in the specialized bibliography, the Bolivian collective is the least feminized and has a (nuclear) family profile, whose main reason to migrate was a lack of employment. From the entire sample, the presence of just 33% of women as HOH stands out, who form single-parent homes (90%).

In addition, the homes demonstrate a strong migratory cohesion by ethnic group (Aymaran or Quechuan), district of origin and urban or rural area, forming a strong migrant cohesion in line with this “triple” belonging (Table 1). In other words, adults (HOH and spouse) in a same home come from the same district, area and perceive themselves as belonging to the same ethnic group (Aymaran or Quechuan). A similar process was observed among rural area migrants in El Alto, Bolivia (Díaz, 2017). This data opens a problem for academic and official studies that solely emphasize the ethnonational question of the migrant, highlighting their “Boliviality”. In future research, the political and social conditions that enabled these multiple identities can be studied in further depth, as can other structuring elements.

Table 1. Migratory cohesion indicators. Total adults of the home in Villa 20, born in Bolivia, as a percentage. 2018.

Source: Own preparation.

Most adults of the home (HOH and spouse) self-identify as Quechuan or Aymaran. This trait is linked with their places of birth in Bolivia. In both cases, the population of the following districts dominates as Quechuan: Potosí (48.3% of the HOH, and 67% of the spouses) and, to a lesser extent, Oruro (12% and 15% respectively). Also, those from the District of La Paz, where the Aymaran people are concentrated, stand out, although with a lesser weight, (10% of the HOH). They mainly come from the urban area (60% of the spouses and 62% of the HOH), although fewer have a rural origin, which is considered significant (40% and 38% respectively).

According to Hinojosa (2006), the internal migration and urbanization processes in Bolivia (rural-urban or urban-urban), along with international migration, are phenomena that maintain their unity, especially under neoliberal globalization. In Bolivia⁵, according to the 1950 Census, only 26% lived in urban areas, while by 2012 an exponential increase had occurred (reaching 67%). This data reflects, to a certain extent, the acceleration of the Bolivian urbanization process (from the 1980s onwards with the application of Decree N°21.060, which deepened neoliberal globalization) towards the Santa Cruz – La Paz – Cochabamba route, displacing the Oruro – Potosí – La Paz mining and administrative line, that had dominated towards the end of the 19th century. This last line was the driver of the internal and international migratory flows, which maintained its

⁵ According to CEPAL, Bolivia (along with Ecuador, Paraguay, and Nicaragua) is characterized by a moderate urban transition that sped up after the 1952 Revolution.

importance in the context of the crisis of the neoliberal model, that was broken as a result of the series of Aymaran working-class rebellions in the 2000-2005 period⁶.

Most families (58%) return to Bolivia at some point of the year. In general, the entire nuclear family or the adults of the home without the children (50%) make the journeys back to their country of origin: mainly to the birthplace of the HOH (50%), to both places of origin (HOH and spouse) (21%), or to a lesser extent, solely to the birthplace of the spouse (12%⁷). In this way, these circular movements provoke constant family reconfigurations and breakups that raise doubts about the classic and demographic view of migration.

The following are highlighted as the reasons that were mentioned most: a) visits to family members and/or friends (91%), b) returning during harvesting and seeding periods (3%) and c) to build their house (6%). Although it is considered that addressing the reasons requires a qualitative in-depth approach, from previous studies it can be stated that one of the reasons behind the regular return to the rural (and urban) area is the presence of family members and/or the ownership of land (and/or house). It is worth clarifying that rural communities in Bolivia have the particular aspect of understanding collective land ownership and an individual or family possession of the plot, as well as having a specific social, economic and political organization. This situation generates certain obligations with the original rural community, like for example, participation during harvesting and seeding periods, exercising public positions, among others. In any case, non-compliance could put at risk plot possession (as well as community prestige). This question is pertinent if we bear in mind the rural weight among migrants who return to Bolivia: among those who return to both birthplaces (57%) or just the birthplace of the spouse – Quechuan women (52%).

For this reason, the perspective of Antequera Durán (2020) is mentioned, who defines Bolivian plurilocality as an occupation strategy of different ecological and economic grounds (as well as different social and cultural aspects), that reproduce a certain Andean rural (historic) logic. As a result, bearing in mind the clarification about the term used, motives b) and c) configure situations that indicate, albeit preliminarily, the presence of plurilocality. Likewise, motive a) would need to be investigated in greater depth, as this could also imply certain family or community-based obligations that are behind a particular type of plurilocal circular mobility.

It is worth introducing analysis about material resources or conditions that enable the return, or not, to their birthplaces. The bibliography about the segmented integration of migrant homes in the job market is returned to, due to the racialization of class relations as a crucial element (albeit not the only one) to understand plurilocality practices.

Among the most common jobs of the HOH are bricklayers (37%), textile workers or seamstresses (22%), cleaners who belong to

cooperatives (15%), street market traders – itinerant or with fixed positions (7%). With the exception of bricklayers and cleaners (in general they work for the GCBA), who in general receive pension fund payments (58% and 89%, respectively), the rest are informal. Women dominate in cleaning and street trading tasks, demonstrating a lack of employment and higher illiteracy levels versus men. In addition, multiple inequalities are seen, which arise, in this case, from the crossroads between gender and migratory groups.

Migrants are inserted in a segmented and precarious way into the job market, constituting the impoverished fraction of the working-class of a country, as instability is present in both formal and informal jobs. Although there is a predominance of informal and unstable jobs (60%), there is also a minority of formal and unstable workers (35%). Hence there is inequality within the migrant working-class where the former (quantitatively higher) experience greater poverty than the latter. This situation has repercussions on the possibility of returning (or not) to Bolivia. While 100% of the homes with a HOH in a formal unconsolidated job return to Bolivia, 55% of the homes with a HOH in an informal and unstable job cannot do so.

Table 2: Return to Bolivia depending on the HOH's job insertion. Total homes of Bolivian migrants in Villa 20, in percentages. 2018. Source: Own preparation.

This new information allows going into further depth and questions the hypothesis of the research mentioned (Benencia, 2006 and Di Virgilio, 2007), introducing new analysis variables (gender, migration, occupational quality, etc.). In this way, these preliminary results show a heterogeneity / inequality within the migrant collective that has repercussions on transborder plurilocal practices and mobilities. The most impoverished families, among those the single-parent homes, have the least possibilities of returning to Bolivia. Finally, it is left pending to investigate how these plurilocal practices are linked with family reproduction strategies that go beyond the national or local (neighborhood) scale, as well as their impact on the aforementioned migratory cohesion.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Paraphrasing Portes (2012), we can conclude that transnational plurilocality represents a novel perspective, although not necessarily a new phenomenon. Likewise, not all migrants are plurilocal and nor should all types of circular mobility be called plurilocal. This alludes to a type of transborder residential mobility that is moved by social, economic and political responsibilities and obligations that, in the rural community, are particularly linked to the individual possession of a plot

⁶ 50% of HOH, state having emigrated between 2002 and 2010.

⁷ 15% of the households return to other places where they lived. This issue is outside the proposed goals.

of land. It is interesting to mention that although the adults of migrant homes who were interviewed mainly come from urban centers, rural origin acquires a particular relevance to understand plurilocal practices. As a result, we can state that urban and rural are not two separate areas, but rather a completely interconnected territory. In addition, the importance of the rural cohesion of migrant homes to explain plurilocal practices falls within the aforementioned triple identity belonging (ethnic, geographic area and district of origin), which raises questions about the official and academic discourses focused on ethnonational definition. This issue deserves more in-depth study in future approaches.

Although plurilocality can be a practice of the minority, it has a concrete macrosocial impact, forming part of the reproduction/appropriation strategies of families that transform the territories. This perspective goes beyond the neighborhood view and links us with other territorial scales. The data disclosed shows signs of a transnational or plurilocal life that reconfigures family relations and maintains a link with the type of labor insertion of the HOH in the CABA, thus returning to previous studies on the issue, aiming to contribute with new dimensions of analysis. In this way, it is concluded that the job segmentation of migrant homes (which overlaps with other inequalities like the racialization of class relationships and gender) is not homogeneous.

In spite that, in general, they are destined to have informal and/or unstable lower quality jobs, the existence of a fraction of unconsolidated (or unstable) formal jobs suggests an ever more complex social stratification. In this way, as previous research has mentioned, working-class sectors have a higher residential mobility compared to the middle class. But, as a hypothesis, it can be suggested that the poorest families (among those, the ones that have a Quechuan woman as the HOH) have fewer possibilities, building family reproduction strategies on a neighborhood or local scale. Finally, although this study perspective does not intend to understand the practices of all migratory flows, returning to what Antequera Durán suggested, the desire to research about the presence of a common residential mobility pattern for migrants with an indigenous (Andean) and/or rural background arises, starting from a multi-method methodological strategy that allows capturing the standard cases on different social scales.

