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Migration flows from a long-term perspective

Pedro Paulo A. Funari*

Abstract: The paper deals with migration in a long-term perspective. From the earliest times, our hominid ancestors were in constant move, focusing on migrations flows in the contemporary context, that is, particularly in the wake of the demise of the Cold War (1947-1989) and the new multipolar world. It also includes a word on Brazil in this context. It concludes by considering migration as a challenge to societies and scholars alike.

Keywords: Migration. Long-term. Hominids.

Introduction

Migrations are probably at the root of the human endeavor. From the earliest times, our hominid ancestors were in constant move, so much so that archaeologists such as Clive Gamble (1993) and Chris Gosden (2004) consider that humans are first and foremost walkers and colonizers. This has always challenged the understanding of human relations, for more often than not this perpetual move led to cooperation and exchange, but also to conflict. The famous dictum attributed to Heraclitus (Fragment 53), Πόλεμος Πατήρ πάντων, “conflict is the father of all things”, has been discussed by several modern social thinkers, such as Heidegger (1993), in the context of the difficulties associated to the contact of moving humans. For the humanities and the social sciences, as is proven

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by this very conference, migration flows engender social interaction with mixed consequences and they are a particular challenge to social theory.

In this lecture I will thus propose first a long-term view of migrations flows, from the earliest times, but mostly in historical contexts, that is, including clashes, state interaction, law issues and humanitarian concerns. After this brief overview of the historical setting, I focus on migrations flows in the contemporary context, that is, particularly in the wake of the demise of the Cold War (1947-1989) and the new multipolar world. Migrations have been increasing in rich, middle income and poor countries, leading to a variety of issues, not least to ethical questions relating to human rights. Human rights concerns and popular perceptions are however not always in tune and this raises a key issue: national versus universal rights. The modern world since the late 18th c. has been centered on nation states and universal rights, notably human rights, are constantly clashing with narrow, national, definitions of citizenship rights. This is thus a key challenge for social sciences and the humanities: how to deal with a postmodern world, where new connections and global communications clash all the time with a modern, narrow, national approach and understanding of society. This is indeed a big challenge. The case of Brazil, even though marginal in the world stage in relation to interstate human flows, is worth considering. Even if the number of foreign migrants (be they legal or illegal) is not really high in proportion to the population, it is still a challenge for social theory. Human rights as a universal category is at odds with a prevailing approach grounded on the nation state. The paper then concludes by emphasizing that the key issues facing the social sciences and the humanities is thus related to dealing with global versus national perceptions and the contradictions generated by those clashes.

Migrations from a long-term standpoint

We are used to focus our attention on our times and circumstances and even to consider it as unique and different from anything before. This is an illusion not only of ordinary people,

but of scholars themselves, as attested by the introduction of a new geological era, the Anthropocene, as if we were always prone to consider that our generation is facing the most relevant change in history. This is not to deny the changes in climate in our planet, nor the human responsibility for our destiny, but in geological terms all those changes are tiny, in relation to the huge changes in the last several hundred million years. The point is that we do tend to think that our experiences are unique and time changing, while a long-term view may challenge some of those certainties. This is the case with migrations, a very human endeavor. The humanitarian disaster in the Middle East since the invasion of Iraq in 2001 has brought with it a series of human miseries, not least the spreading of refugees from several countries into poor and rich, neighbouring and far away areas. Such is the case, right now in early 2016, with refugees from the Syrian civil war, from 2011 onwards. Hundreds of thousands of people fled the war into neighbouring Jordan and Turkey, and from there to Europe. In 2015 alone, more than a million migrants settled in Germany. The deposition of Muammar Gaddafi (1942-2011), in Libya in 2011, led to a demise of a unified state and to a growing migration flow from Subsaharan Africa into Europe. In this case, the main cause of the influx is not directly war, but the social conditions in very poor countries, lured by the very rich European societies. We are thus mesmerized by those images of our present day, but migration is not a transient phenomenon, but it constitutes in a way our human condition.

Figura 1

Nationalities



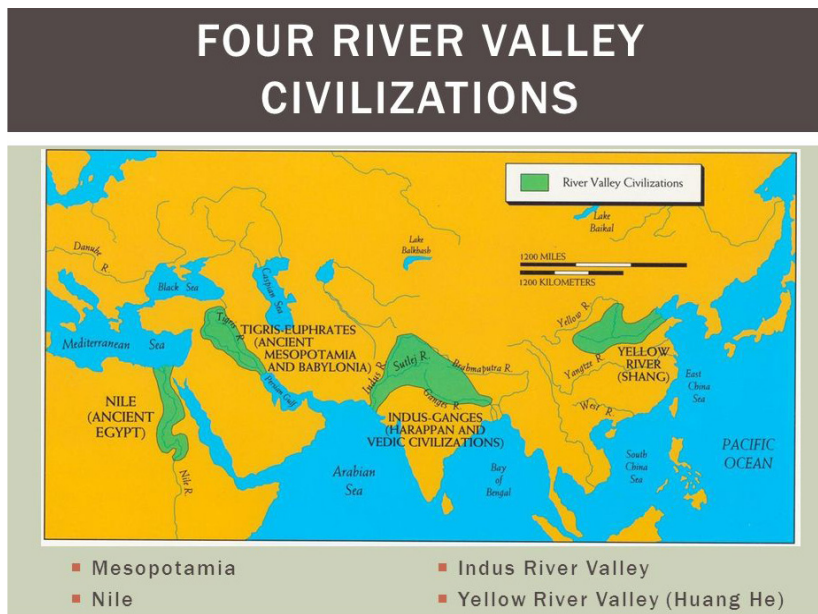
Source: Mail Online¹

Let's then turn to our human condition. From our earliest ancestors, the hominids in Africa, millions of years ago, the primates have been characterized as nomads, as travelers, in short and long distances. Nomadism stayed with humans for millions of years. Agriculture, in the last ten millennia, fostered a more stelled life-style, as did the first cities somewhat later on, but still we can say that even our own modern species, the homo sapiens, lived more than 90% of the time as nomads, until the last few millennia. This means that as a species, humans are inherently migrants and settled life is a recent, learned cultural trait.

Settled life is thus a modern feature and for that matter always a transient situation for humans. Agriculture enabled settled life but

it did not end migration, to the contrary. Slash and burn agriculture, as in South American lowlands, was dependent on constant move. Settled life in areas dependent on irrigation, such as in valleys of the Nile, in Egypt, of the Tigris and Euphrates, in Iraq, of the Indus, in Pakistan, Afghanistan and India, of the Yellow River, in China, were responsible for the spreading of cities and settled life and contributed to the invention and spreading of writing, as well as to the increase in importance of settled life.

Figura 2



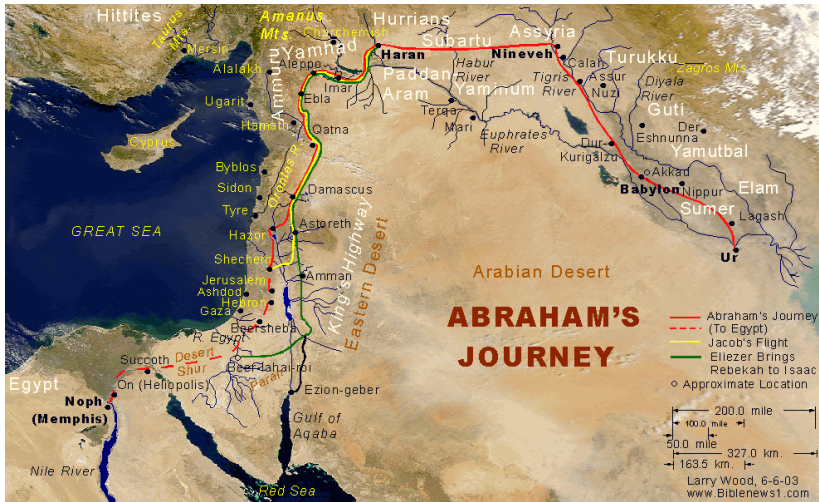
Source: Slide Player²

This is so impressive, that the so-called urban revolution, a term coined by archaeologist Vere Gordon Childe (1892-1957), a long time ago (CHILDE, 1950), was and still is a key concept for understanding civilization as settled life. The ten features of urban life, as defined by Childe (1950) are the following ones:

1. "In point of size the first cities must have been more extensive and more densely populated than any previous settlements" (p. 9).
2. "In composition and function the urban population already differed from that of any village... full-time specialist craftsmen, transport workers, merchants, officials and priests" (p. 11).
3. "Each primary producer paid over the tiny surplus he could wring from the soil with his still very limited technical equipment as tithe or tax to an imaginary deity or a divine king who thus concentrated the surplus" (p. 11).
4. "Truly monumental public buildings not only distinguish each known city from any village but also symbolise the concentration of the social surplus" (p. 12).
5. "But naturally priests, civil and military leaders and officials absorbed a major share of the concentrated surplus and thus formed a 'ruling class'" (p. 12-13).
6. "Writing" (p. 14).
7. "The elaboration of exact and predictive sciences - arithmetic, geometry and astronomy" (p. 14).
8. "Conceptualised and sophisticated styles [of art]" (p. 15).
9. "Regular 'foreign' trade over quite long distances" (p. 15).
10. "A State organisation based now on residence rather than kinship" (p. 16).

However, even in those settled areas, there has been a constant peaceful or otherwise flux of people throughout history. The story of the Hebrew patriarchs, wandering in between deserts and cities, is symptomatic of this constant, most of the time peaceful, migrations. Abraham wandered towards Mesopotamia, while Joseph towards Egypt (Genesis and Exodus).

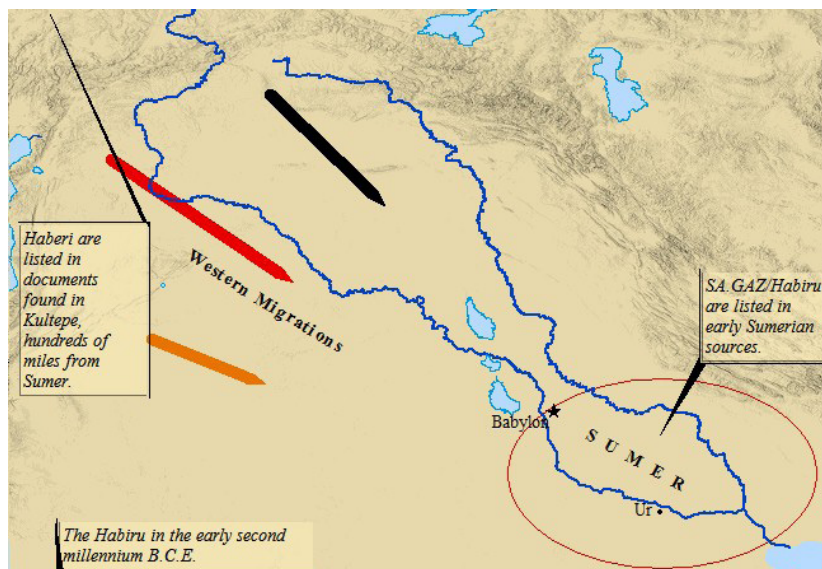
Figura 3



Source: Precept Austin³

Even if those Biblical stories are more symbolic than factual, they reveal this thousand-year long migration. As important though are violent migrations, known as invasions, such as those Semitic ones who conquered Sumerian cities in the third millennium BC and established Akkadian kingdoms.

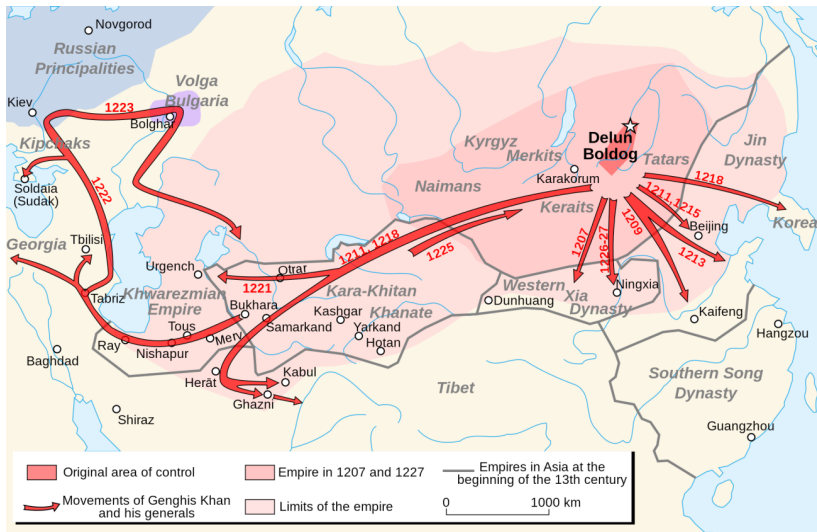
Figura 4



Source: Israel-a-history-of.com⁴

This process would happen again and again in Mesopotamia with such invaders as Assyrians, Persians and Greeks, to name but a few of them. Egypt was also invaded by Nubians from the South, the Hyksos and Sea Peoples, from the East, before the Assyrians, Persians and Greeks conquered it. The same applies to other areas, such as in the Yellow river in China, with among others the Mongols and the Manchu.

Figura 5



Source: Wikipedia⁵

For the western world, migrations are immediately linked to the ones in the late Roman period and to the end of the Roman Empire. Since the second century AD, in western Europe there has been a constant, sometimes peaceful, migration of people from the Northeast, most of them Germanic, into the Empire and since the early 5th c. violent migration destroyed the formerly western provinces. Germanic tribes settled as south as North Africa. During the next few hundred years, Europe witnessed peaceful and violent migrations from several directions. The muslims conquered North Africa, Sicily and the Iberian Peninsula, while the Vikings or Normans conquered Britain, but also Normandy and the Sicily. Several other migrations took place, such as the Turkish, but the main point is that peaceful and violent migrations were constant features of settled life in Europe and in a way they shaped later on processes of forging national identities, as in the case of the migrations of Angles and Saxons to Britain and of Germanic tribes to the Rhine area to Germany.

Figura 6



Source: 6th Grade Social Studies⁶

Modernity and migrations

Modernity would bring with it a couple of concepts and policies which would shape the way modern states consider migration. The Ancien Régime was grounded on a hierarchical understanding of society, so that all those peoples submitted to the king were subjects of the realm: French were those who were subjected to the king of France. Industrialization, urban life, the Enlightenment and the establishment of the modern nation state, from the late 18th c. onwards, would establish the state as social contract polity, no longer with subjects, but with citizens with roughly the same language, culture, and formal rights, as stated in the French human rights declaration. This is a huge change in perception and as it introduced an aspiration for equality for citizens, it left out aliens, considered at best as nationals of other countries. It is no coincidence the fact that the French human rights declaration refers to French citizens rights.

The same applies to the American declaration of independence, in 1776, including citizens and excluding aliens, such as... slaves!

The second feature of modernity is imperialism. The French, soon after the declaration of human rights, 1789, under Napoleon, set up an imperial project, including the famous Expedition to Egypt (1799). The French and the British were soon to conquer several areas of world, setting up huge empires, and establishing thus a clear distinction between citizens rights and the subjection of peoples in Asia, Africa and beyond. The French in Algeria or Vietnam, the British in India or Kenya were migrants of imperial powers, while the migrations of subjected peoples to the imperial power, such as was the case of Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969) and Jomo Kenyatta (1891-1978), were of the dispossessed. The Second World War (1939-1945) would be a turning point, for several reasons. For the first time, a universal organization was founded, the United Nations, which soon adopted its own human rights declaration, in 1948. There is a clear reference to migration, limiting it, though, to nation states:

Article 13.

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14.

(1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

Decolonization took though several years, including violent wars and the destruction of millions of people. This led to a new migration from the former colonies to the former imperial powers, such as was the case with the Pakistanis and Indians in the United Kingdom, or the north Africans in France. In the case of the United States, the process was a bit different, even if in the case of Puerto

Rico, it was very similar to the European one. In relation to the main migration stem, from Mexico, it is related both to the economic magnet of the American economy and to the fact that a huge part of the American territory was conquered from Mexico after the American independence in 1776. Is it migration, or a return of Mexicans to former Mexican territory?

Figura 7



Source: Ducksters⁷

It is by now clear that contemporary migrations are nothing new, nor exceptional, and the most recent ones are related to the nation state and imperial rule. I focused on the West, for several reasons, not least the fact that it shaped the discussion of migrations and human rights in the last three centuries, but also because the United States and Europe are still responsible for a huge part of the world production and consumption, not to mention the fact that the per capita income in this area is several times bigger than in the second economic power, China. The West is thus an unavoidable kernel for our discussion of migration and human rights. That

is not to say that migrations are not important elsewhere, to the contrary. In China, there has been an unprecedented migration from the countryside to the cities in the last few decades, possibly the largest and wickiest in world history. In China, even though all Chinese are citizens, migration affects those millions who migrated to cities and still do not have the legal permit (户口簿, hùkǒu bù) to live there, generating a legion of stranded people in a precarious situation. The Chinese New Year rush is the most impressive contemporary move of people from the places where they live to the places where they were originated and to which they are still assigned in legal terms.

Figura 8



Source: The Wall Street Journal⁸

A word on Brazil

It is worth mentioning a word on the Brazilian case. Native Brazilians inhabited the whole territory of what would become Brazil and they were nomads, in constant peaceful and violent move. When the Portuguese arrived and settled in the 16th c., there has been a destruction of most of them, as well as the voluntary or otherwise mix of population. Migration intensified, with the introduction of enslaved Africans and with the wandering of the mixed Portuguese and Native Brazilian population in the backlands in search for precious stones, minerals, and Indians to be enslaved. This internal colonization (*sensu* Ferreira, 2010) continues up to the present, with several waves of migrations from the south to the northwest, or from the northeast to the southeast. Those excluded from citizenship rights were a majority for several centuries, enslaved or simply illiterate and poor. Immigrants from Europe, the Middle East and Asia, since the late 19th c., were also subjected to several limitations, first as aliens, then as not of proper old stock. Only in the last few decades, formal rights were extended to all citizens, irrespective of ethnic background, wealth or education. Even so, as in any modern nation state, aliens have limited rights and the naturalization is a difficult path.

Figura 9



Fonte: IBGE. Atlas geográfico escolar. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2007. (Adaptado)

Source: Geografia para a vida (ENEM, vestibulares, concursos etc...)⁹

The social sciences and the humanities on migrations

In those circumstances, what are the challenges for the the social sciences and the humanities? First and foremost, migrations must be seen through the long-term lenses of history, so that we accept the fact that there has never been a situation without migration. To the contrary, migration is at the root of human society. More than that, modern nation states are all the result of successive migrations, some more obvious than others. The main challenge though relates to the modern nation state understanding of human beings as split between citizens with equal rights and aliens. It is so much so that migrations within countries are usually conceptually split from international migrations. Southern Italians in North Italy, as they

are citizens of the same nation state, are considered as different from Southern Italians in Switzerland, just to mention a well-known case. There is thus a somewhat unconscious assumption that there is something natural about the split between some people with full rights, and others who do not share those rights for the simple reason that they are considered aliens. This is however a very recent perception, grounded on the nation state. It is not natural, it is a historical contingency and as such it may be challenged.

In fact, there is a long tradition, in several cultures, to consider humans as equal, with no distinction at all. Some social theorists would argue that this is only possible if there is some kind of religious piety, or a deity, so that all humans would be equal before god. It is indeed the case of the one of the earliest expressions of respect for the other, as in the Leviticus 19, 18: תַּבִּיחֶיךָ עַל רֵעִי, “but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”, in the King James translation, reinstated by Jesus (Mark 12:31; Matthew 22:39). Other statements of respect for the other refer to some kind of divine commandment, such as the Cyrus declaration, dated of the 6th c. BC. Some critics thus consider that modernity and the death of god would hinder any such humanist approach, considering humanism as a mere construct, even if well intentioned. The critique stem from several standpoints, not least a postmodern one, considering that there is no universal human category, so that human rights or equality are only possible when humans accept god as a mastermind. As this is no longer the case for several people, this is at best but an illusion, at worst a cynical move to defend unclear political goals.

This is probably the main challenge for the social sciences and the humanities. It is not clear whether a common human condition is a concept dependent on religion. Whatever the case may be, it is also not clear whether human equality is accepted as desirable, as a desideratum. On the contrary, capitalism depends on the acceptance of inequality. The nation state is also grounded on a clear divide between citizens and aliens and this explains the difficulty for modern democratic nation states to deal with migrations. If there are accepted differences in status between citizens and aliens, as is the case in all countries today, it is only inevitable that xenophobic ideas may be popular, gaining ground in the United States and in

Europe, even in the most rich, democratic and open societies, and more so in other contexts. This is the main challenge for scholars. If we accept the main tenet of our modern times, the nation state dividing citizens and aliens, we can only struggle against discrimination from an idealized standpoint. If we do challenge the nation state and its tenets, as I consider it proper, we still face a world of nation states. Migrations may be a sign of humanity, as I stated in this paper, or as a dangerous feature of social life at the root of the most ferocious xenophobic ideas and practices. The respect for the other is perhaps wishful thinking, but still it is much better than accepting bigotry travestied as a lawful distinction of humans, some with rights, others deprived of them.

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OS FLUXOS MIGRATÓRIOS A PARTIR DE UMA PERSPECTIVA DE LONGO PRAZO

Resumo: O artigo trata dos fluxos migratórios em uma perspectiva de longo prazo. Desde os tempos mais recuados, nossos ancestrais hominídeos estavam em movimento constante, com foco em fluxos migratórios no contexto contemporâneo, ou seja, em particular no período posterior à Guerra Fria (1947-1989) e ao novo mundo multipolar. Inclui, ainda, uma consideração ao Brasil nesse contexto. Conclui por considerar a migração como um desafio tanto para a sociedade como para os estudiosos.

Palavras-chave: Migração. Longo prazo. Hominídeos.

Notes

- ¹ Available at: < <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3222405/How-six-wealthiest-Gulf-Nations-refused-single-Syrian-refugee.html>>. Access on: 23 nov. 2017.
- ² Available at: <<http://slideplayer.com/slide/8698748/>>. Access on: 23 nov. 2017.
- ³ Available at: < http://preceptaustin.org/biblical_maps.htm>. Access on: 23 nov. 2017.
- ⁴ Available at: < <http://www.israel-a-history-of.com/ancient-sumerian.html>>. Access on: 23 nov. 2017.
- ⁵ Available at: < https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongol_invasion_of_Europe>. Access on: 23 nov. 2017.
- ⁶ Available at: < <http://nsms6thgradesocialstudies.weebly.com/the-fall-of-the-roman-empire.html>>. Access on: 23 nov. 2017.
- ⁷ Available at: <http://www.ducksters.com/history/westward_expansion/>. Access on: 23 nov. 2017.
- ⁸ Available at: < <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2014/01/27/map-visualizes-chinese-new-year-migration/>>. Access on: 23 nov. 2017.
- ⁹ Available at: < <http://joapauloprogeo.blogspot.com.br/2015/08/crescimento-migratorio-no-brasil-e.html>>. Access on: 23 nov. 2017.

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