

Chapter 1

De-Bordering Justice in the Age of International Migrations: An Introduction



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Abstract This chapter introduces and discusses the concepts that are in-depth articulated in the volume. International migration is presented here as a test bench where the normative limits of institutional order, its contradictions and internal tensions are examined. Migrations allows to call into question classical political categories and models. Pointing at walls and fences as tools that reproduce enormous inequalities within the globalized neo-liberal system, this chapter presents the conceptual tensions and contradictions between migration policies and global justice. We challenge the conceptualization of justice as a relationship between citizens of the same country and the State and argue that, in our globalized world, nation-state cannot constitute the basic unit of the theories of justice. We argue that an integral approach that includes the complex and interconnected forms of structural inequalities and transcends the borders of national sovereign states is required. Avoiding the methodological nationalism and the exclusionary biases that inform current migration and border control policies, this chapter finally places attention on the most marginalized subjects of the migration chain: migrant women workers. We point out the importance of addressing transnational structural inequalities and bringing social reproduction to the center of global justice theories.

1.1 Introduction

An increasing number of people –of increasingly different origins– are moving across national borders to establish themselves in a growing number of destinations. Today, all countries are involved in migration flows in one way or another, being

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sending, transit, or destination countries. This makes migration a social phenomenon of growing complexity and magnitude with increasingly heterogeneous flows, causes and political impact. Understanding the process of migration requires a deep and nuanced analysis not only of its genesis (Massey 2012) but also of all its practical implications. This is a preliminary step to evaluating normative and practical implications of current migration policies and elaborating new conceptualizations of global justice.

On a planet whose fertile and inhabitable lands have been decreasing for a long time due to factors such as climate change, the growth of the world population—which is higher in less prosperous regions—will foreseeably push many people to abandon the land of their birth. Migration is certainly not new in history; however, it has taken on specific characteristics in the context of globalization. In its most recent phase, the conditions in which individuals embark upon the migratory journey changed in three ways at least. First, given its pronounced neoliberal course, globalization impelled the concentration of wealth in few countries. Not only it generates multiple dynamics of social inequality on the planet, but it also ensures the systemic reproduction of such inequality (Piketty 2014; Bourguignon 2015). The income and wage gap among countries is so large that global inequality is greater than inequalities existing within any one country (OECD 2015; Milanovic 2016). Second, the global village's media do not know borders and make these inequalities even more apparent by allowing the immediate comparison of one's own condition with the opportunities available in other parts of the world. Third, the improvement and increasing affordability of means of transport, together with the hyperconnectivity provided by the latest technological advances, facilitate mobility and allow migrants to maintain permanent relationships with those they leave behind. To these circumstances a series of deeply interwoven constraints can be added, some of which greatly impact either sending or destination countries: demographic decline has been recorded for some time in industrialized countries; numerous barriers prevent emerging countries from placing in the market their products in competitive conditions; discrimination and/or persecution of certain ethnic and cultural minorities; proliferation of wars and violent conflict.

Despite the confluence of these multiple factors, some of which are circumstantial while others are structural, the transit of people across borders controlled by nation-states has not, until now, grown as much as it might be expected. In relative terms, migration flows at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century were much larger than current migration flows. The magnitude of current international movement of people remains relatively moderate in statistical terms: 3.4% of the world population, or some 258 million people, live in a country other than the one where they were born (UN DESA 2017). Nonetheless, migration flows—including those of refugees—toward Western democracies grew rapidly since the beginning of the new millennium (some 85 million in absolute terms, with a 49% increase since 2000).

Since 9/11, this situation is perceived by public opinion in Western countries as a 'migration crisis' of unmanageable magnitude. Public opinion hardly takes into account that, at the global level, South-South flows of both refugees and economic