



The mobile metropolis

The profile of migration from Sao Paulo is underscored by comings and goings and by internationalization

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It is a reasonably well-known fact that the metropolitan region of São Paulo is no longer a center of attraction for immigrants from abroad or from other parts of the country, as was the case during most of the 20th century. In the first decade of the 21st century, there was a significant negative balance between the number of people who came to the metropolitan region and the number of people who left; specifically, one hundred thousand newcomers came to the city, while eight hundred thousand people left for other towns in the state. A little-known fact is the new migration profile that these numbers obscure to some extent. The flow of newcomers is no longer explained by the dynamics of industry and by the employment opportunities that previously attracted newcomers. What is new is the phenomenon of reversibility, i.e., the length of time that people stay tends to be shorter, and the movement is characterized by comings and goings as well as definitive departures.

The task of describing these new demographic configurations and consequences in detail has been undertaken by the Observatory of Migration in the Center of Population Studies (Nepo) at the State University of Campinas (Unicamp), funded by FAPESP and coordinated by Rosana Baeninger, Professor in the Department of Sociology at the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences, also at Unicamp. The research project has an extensive chronological scope, extending from 1880 to 2010, and an interdisciplinary perspective, which means that new themes of

study (currently totaling 16) will develop as the research project moves forward.

“Our objective is to allow each researcher to reveal processes that the bigger numbers do not show,” says Rosana. “Our challenge is to look for new data sources—the census does not provide information on domestic migration, for example.” The end products are expected to be a themed atlas and a database. In addition to new sources, the researchers are also utilizing national and foreign bibliographies to help them understand the overall situation. One of the starting points of the project is that “the understanding of migration processes only becomes meaningful if we consider the spatial and territorial aspects.”

The researchers have concluded that in the 21st century, as had already been envisioned since the 1990s, the metropolitan region of São Paulo has been incorporated into the route of international migration. “The city’s characteristics are now much more closely focused on the international market, as part of a chain of global cities,” says Rosana. Within this broad scenario, economic processes multiply in terms of space while time becomes globalized. This is what British sociologist Anthony Giddens refers to as “disembedding mechanisms.”

São Paulo is now a destination of both highly qualified and unskilled and undocumented workers, both of whom are already part of flexible production mechanisms and fit into the capital city’s mobility. The highly qualified professionals are typically Argentines and Chileans who come to work in the city in upper-level management posi-

tions and have a two-year work permit that can be extended. According to the Ministry of Labor, the number of these professionals is currently estimated at twenty thousand. The unskilled workers are predominantly from Bolivia, who come to Brazil because of problems in their native country; this contingency is not accounted for in official statistics. It is estimated by private entities, such as the *Pastoral do Imigrante* church organization, that unskilled laborers from Bolivia total approximately two hundred thousand. Thus, says the sociologist, “100 years after the European migration, São Paulo has once again become the port of entry for international migration, this time without any government subsidies.”

As has been widely known for thirty years, most of the Bolivian immigrants are employed in the garment industry, which is controlled primarily by Asian immigrants or their descendants. Bolivian immigration is already in its second generation and has had a significant urban impact, such as through the well-known changes in the demographic profile of the Bom Retiro neighborhood, which had traditionally been predominantly Jewish and today is the center

of most of the garment industries that employ Latin American labor.

This activity is international even at the beginning of the production chain because the textiles come from South Korea. In the last few years, this sector has been implementing elaborate systems that allow the Bolivians to work seasonally, according to specific demands related to fashion launches (in summer and winter), which reinforces the general coming and going pattern of the migrants. Many Bolivian laborers come from urban regions and are professionally trained.

Working seasonally has also intensified among domestic migrants, especially those coming from the northeast region of Brazil. For example, a fairly large contingent of people earn money as street vendors, selling lottery tickets. They work for a couple of months and then go back to their home states during the high season to work in the area of tourism. Another reason for the short stays of these migrants in the metropolitan region is the fact that the cost

of living in São Paulo has risen significantly in recent years. In the past, the neighborhoods in the city’s outskirts had the potential to absorb new inhabitants. However, according to Rosana, “the outskirts are no longer separated from the city; these regions have become denser and are being re-shaped.” Departure is another characteristic of the migration profile of the 21st century in the metropolitan region of São Paulo. This is the region in Brazil that loses the highest number of people per year, especially due to domestic migration. In contrast, it is the region that receives the highest number of skilled workers.

NETWORKS

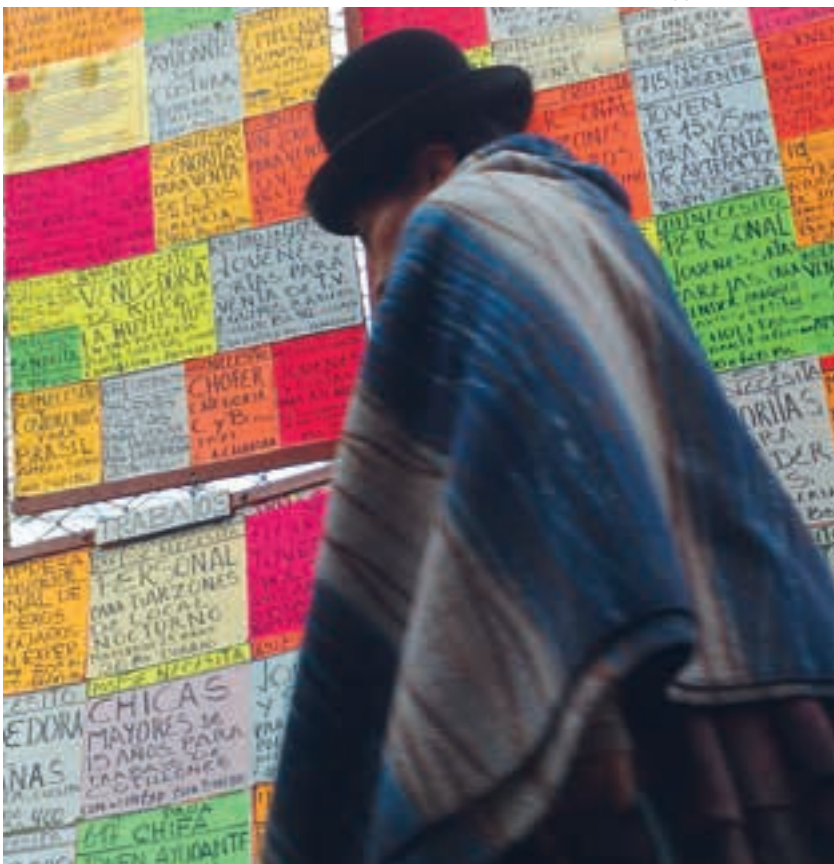
Social networks are an important element of the country’s social structure because they facilitate the movement of domestic and foreign migrants. Social networks are articulated groups that provide support to migrants who are in the metropolitan region temporarily. These groups are comprised mostly of the relatives of migrants. As a result of these networks, it is possible for migrants to leave their children in their home states while they work at seasonal jobs. Social networks operate at both ends of migration and are not a new phenomenon (some of these networks have existed for 60 years), but they have gained key importance in supporting the temporary nature of migrations between far-flung regions. These networks have resulted in the creation of organized and dynamic transportation systems, such as the buses that leave from the region of São Miguel Paulista, on São Paulo’s East Side.

The State of Goiás is currently the main destination for migration in Brazil. “It is the biggest,” says Rosana. Agribusiness has even attracted qualified labor from the State of São Paulo. In addition, grain-producing regions, such as the city of Rio Verde, offer public administration courses that attract people from outside the state.

The expansion of agribusiness in the State of São Paulo also continues to attract migrants from other regions, from the capital city, from neighboring towns, and, on a smaller scale, from abroad. Agribusiness is joined in this respect by the growth niches in the economy involved in exporting, which various regions have managed to consolidate. Ex-

In La Paz, a Bolivian walks by a sign offering employment, 2007

ANTONIO GALDERIO / FOLHARES





South Koreans in front of a second-hand furniture store in Bom Retiro

amples of this can be found in the region of Franca, which has a flourishing shoe manufacturing industry; Limeira, which has a leading jewelry industry; the furniture industry in the region of Votuporanga; and the hotel industry, supported by rodeos in Barretos. The road network is efficient enough to allow many professionals to live in one town and commute to another town for work, which results in the increase in “population density in small towns previously characterized by a shrinking population.”

Is this a return to rural regions? “No,” says Rosana. “Even though some jobs are performed in rural areas, people live in towns or in what we refer to as non-registered urban extension zones, that is, areas with urban characteristics without being officially considered as such.” This standardization has led to an increase in short-distance migration and regional commuting to the extent that a theoretical question is being asked: should people who commute such short distances be considered migrants? The professor says that, according to the related criterion in effect in the 1960s, a rural migrant’s adaptation to the modern urban environment took about ten years. In the State of São Paulo today, urban and consumption patterns are virtually identical in all regions.

IMPACT

The way in which research studies are conducted at the Observatory of Migration, which focuses on interdisciplinary interaction and cooperation with

other Brazilian and foreign academic institutions, has resulted in studies on phenomena that do not entail very high numbers yet are very important from the sociological and anthropological points of view. For example, the researchers plan to conduct a pioneering study on the social impact of the transfer of prison facilities to small towns in the State of São Paulo and on the resulting movement of groups.

A study currently underway sheds light on the migration of refugees in the metropolitan region in this century. A significant number of Colombians (and some Cubans), who left their native countries because of internal conflicts, have settled here. “Brazil has one of Latin America’s most lax rules for refugees, which has provoked this influx,” says Rosana. It is estimated that the city of São Paulo is currently home to 1,800 refugees. Among these are Colombians with families, many of whom have Brazilian spouses or children. In general, these refugees are professionally qualified but have difficulties in terms of blending in because they do not have valid diplomas. For comparative purposes, most of the refugees in the city of Rio de Janeiro are single Africans who arrive in Brazil as students and then ask for refugee status. According to Rosana, the influx of refugees and immigrants without identity

documents has created a situation that demands the development of social policies to protect their rights and to protect them from discrimination. Such social policies have not yet been implemented.

A particularly interesting study conducted by the Observatory of Migration was headed by sociologist Marta Maria do Amaral Azevedo, also of Unicamp. The study focused on the existence of the indigenous Guarani people in São Paulo. At present, there are 20 Guarani communities in the eastern part of the state and four communities in the capital city. The migration process, which originated in what is now the State of Mato Grosso do Sul in Paraguay and in Argentina, started in the second half of the 19th century. However, this process is still under way, “often creating stalemates for public policies and for the land ownership issue.” Among other issues, the study seeks to quantify this population and elucidate its genealogy. “Existing studies point to religious and economic reasons, such as the search for a land without evil, a place where it would be possible to live in the Guarani way, or according to the *guarani reko*, the way of life of this indigenous people,” says Marta. “Nowadays there are broad structured social networks based on family and religious ties. The communities engage in economic barter and practice the *oguatá* concept: walking, which can be a visit to a relative or a trip to consult a *pajé* (witch doctor), or even to go to a family reunion.” ■