



*Apuntes* 84, 83-110  
ISSN: 0252-1865  
eISSN: 2223-1757  
doi: <https://doi.org/10.21678/apuntes.84.1009>

© Creative Commons Attribution 3.0  
Article received on October 1, 2017  
Final version approved for publication on October 29, 2018

# The suffering of the migrant: Cuban migration and the Ecuadorian dream of free human mobility

LUISA FELINE FREIER

*Universidad del Pacífico, Lima, Perú*  
lf.freierd@up.edu.pe

AHMED CORREA ÁLVAREZ

*University of California, Merced, United States*  
acorrea7@ucmerced.edu

VALERIA ARÓN

*Universidad del Pacífico, Lima, Perú*  
valeriaaron6@gmail.com

*Abstract.* This paper explores the tension between the concept of suffering as employed in Rafael Correa's humanist migration discourse and the migratory experience of Cuban immigrants in Ecuador. Despite the former president's revolutionary discourse, Cuban migrants face triple discrimination: social, economic and legal, in the context of both Ecuadorian and Cuban migration policies. This study contributes to the literature on migration and suffering, as well as the emerging literature on the discursive gaps inherent in Latin American immigration policy liberalization.

*Keywords:* Migration; suffering; migration policy; south-south migration; Ecuador; Cuba.

## Introduction

All science implies, among other things, the invention of the object of study. Studies of migration are not exempt from this logic. As Oboler (2006) reminds us, in many works, lives and migration experiences are studied in such a way that the migrant themselves appear as mere objects of analysis, sometimes even as laboratory specimens, instead of as human beings with diverse migratory experiences: with dreams, hopes, expectations, frustrations, and disillusionments. Similarly, Haas argues that the theories that attempt to explain migration, especially neoclassic and other functionalist theories, lack a comprehensive model of “behavior” and, therefore, treat migrants as simple “peons” who are under the influence of structural macro factors (2010). Few academics focus on the possibilities and obstacles that determine and structure the dynamics of social belonging and the construction of identity on the level of individual experience (Oboler, 2006), or in the words of Sayad, concentrate on the “immigrant suffering” (2004).

This study focuses on the tension between the concept of suffering in the humanist political discourse of Rafael Correa’s government regarding migration and the real experience of Cuban migrants in Ecuador. Suffering as a key concept for understanding the experience of international migration was developed by Bauman (1995b, 1999, 2002, 2016) and by Sayad (2004). As Bauman (2016) points out, migration policies have a direct effect on migratory experience and therefore on the potential suffering of the migrants themselves. This makes it important to understand the relationship that ideology has with the political management of migratory flow and its impact. In this context, it is especially interesting to study Latin America since many of its countries have liberalized both their discourses about immigration as well as their migration policies and laws relating to the incorporation of migrants, with an unprecedented focus on human rights (Ceriani & Freier, 2015). At the same time, the new literature on the liberalization of migration policies in the region stresses the need for studies that deal with the extent to which these policies are being implemented in practice and how they affect the well-being of migrants (Acosta & Freier, 2015; Freier & Zubrzycki, 2018).

Ecuador constitutes a paradigmatic case of the political gap between progressive discourses, based on human rights, and the lack of implementation of the corresponding policies (Acosta & Freier, 2015; Vega Solís, Gómez Martín, & Correa Álvarez, 2016). In this article, we analyze the extent to which the discourse on migratory issues between 2008 and 2017 was characterized by a recognition of suffering in the migratory experience and, consequently, by the need for a policy of humane migration and open

borders; at the same time, we compare this discourse with the experience of Cuban immigrants in Ecuador.

We find a significant gap between Correa's political discourse and the migratory experience of Cubans in Ecuador in the context of the migration policies of both Ecuador and Cuba.

In the public imagination, Cuban migration – especially before Obama's measures to eliminate the “wet feet, dry feet” policy – was seen as a privileged migration. Beyond the differences and situations of violence that other migrations have suffered in their migratory transit in the region, this study challenges popular views of Cuban migration, using Ecuador as a case study (Álvarez Velazco, 2011). Despite the migratory rights enshrined in the Ecuadorian constitution, thousands of migrants, above all Cubans, found themselves in Ecuador without any means of regularizing their migratory situation.

In addition, there is also the issue of Cuban migratory legislation, which limits the possibilities of Cuban migrants returning to the island. Initially, this limitation was applied to those who had spent more than 11 months and 29 days outside the country and then, after the 2013 reform, those who had spent more than 24 months abroad.<sup>1</sup> As we shall see later, this legislation, inherited from the Cold War period, can leave Cuban migrants in a situation of de facto statelessness (Correa Álvarez, 2017). This situation is worsened by the limitations on migratory regularization in Ecuador. Despite the opening of borders and the regulations on migration in the country's Constitution of Montecristi, free movement has been largely subordinated to the free entry and 90-day stays permitted to those admitted as tourists. In general, the possibilities of regularization under migration legislation have been slowly reduced for migrants such as Cubans.

In this context, it is worth analyzing the suffering caused by the legal limbo in which Cubans in Ecuador are placed. It is because of this political and legal dilemma that, despite the revolutionary discourse of former president Correa, Cubans in Ecuador suffer triple discrimination: social, economic, and legal.

---

1 Article 9.2 of Decree Law N° 302/2012 states that: “It is considered that a Cuban citizen has emigrated, when they travel abroad for personal reasons and stay for an uninterrupted period of over 24 months without the corresponding authorization” [translation by *Apuntes*]. It should be kept in mind that in order to return permanently, those individuals considered as emigrants must undergo a process of repatriation, following procedures established in Article 48.1 of Decree 305/2012, modified by the Regulations of the Law of Migration (July 19, 1978).

This article is the result of collaborative work incorporating several research experiences in Ecuador between 2010 and 2016, primarily in Quito and Guayaquil, which prioritized the dynamics of Cuban nationals in a broader migratory context. Thus, we were able to use not only the testimonies of interviewees but also other sources such as testimonial, journalistic, graphic, and videographic information. The main techniques we employed to obtain this information were participant observation and semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Outstanding among these are 58 interviews with Cuban immigrants and 47 with government officials or personnel as well as representatives of national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Taken together, this research gave us a set of empirical materials that served as a basis for the arguments that we present below. It should be noted that our study of suffering in the experience of migrants was inductive. We applied the concept of suffering as a framework for analyzing and interpreting the interviews but not for developing the research questions.

### **1. Migration and suffering. A theoretical approximation**

Suffering is a central concept implicit in much of the sociological literature. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Wiese (1934) noted that suffering has a direct relationship with the social, and established the predominance of social relations as a fundamental cause of suffering above anything else, such as health (1934). The notion of suffering is not usually an explicit part of research studies and thus there is no such thing as “a sociology of suffering” (Harvey, 2017; Wilkinson, 2005). According to Harvey, suffering has become a theme of relative importance in the social sciences; however, it remains largely the province of psychologists and anthropologists and, to a lesser degree, of historians and geographers (2017).

When we speak of social suffering, it is essential to refer to the work of sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. For Jacobsen and Marshman (2008), it is possible to find a sociology of suffering in Bauman’s work since while his perspective on this subject may have changed over the years, he was consistent in emphasizing its social aspects. As these authors note, social suffering supposes a description of the roots and social origins of the relations of individuals as well as the social repercussions of social, economic, and cultural conditions. Social suffering is related to the power that some groups or individuals have over others, which at the same time makes it substantively political. This conception of social suffering invites us to evaluate the concrete effect of government decisions, laws, and policies on the lives, and therefore on the suffering, of individuals.

In relation to the theorization of suffering in contexts of migration, Abdelmalek Sayad's book *The Suffering of the Immigrant* (2004) is relevant. The author argues that the phenomenon of migration should be analyzed in terms of the both the logic of the society of emigration and the society of immigration, as well as the political and historical relations between them. In this sense, he proposes the configuration of a holistic view of the phenomenon of migration, which cannot be reduced to "nothing more than the mere displacement of a labour force" (Sayad, 2004, p. 3). At the same time, he recognizes that the condition of being a non-national immediately places the migrant subject in a condition of inequality vis à vis the nationals. This position, also recognized by Zygmunt Bauman (1994), implies situations of subordination that exist both in socio-working environments and in legal or political spaces.

Although globalization has erased the distinctions between the "inside" and the "outside," it has also enabled us to continue operating on the basis of notions of "them" and "us." Bauman describes contemporary societies by noting the need to keep the "others" on the outside, which contributes to the fact that migrants are obliged to live a life of "vagabonds" due to the inequalities of global capitalism or to different "ethnic conflicts." In the "liquid modernity" described by Bauman, foreigners become a threat to the social order and the notion of purity, and therefore should be kept under constant vigilance so that they do not contaminate the social order.

In the context of the post-September 11 world, refugees, fugitives, foreigners, and refugees have been turned into scapegoats. In *Strangers at Our Door* (2016), Bauman uses cognitive psychology and psychoanalysis in an attempt to explain the impact that the stigma of being perceived as "the others," as pointless lives, has on the suffering of migrants, as well as the stigmatization that develops as a social response.

Suffering itself, for its part, tends to occur as a consequence of different factors related to immigration: discrimination, cultural differences, and different social practices, among others. These factors, related to the space to where individuals have migrated, generate feelings of insecurity, bewilderment, and confusion, leading in turn to widespread suffering.

It is also important to mention the contribution of psychology to the theorization of suffering caused by migration. In this sense, liberation psychology "attempts to identify, analyze and transform situations that legitimize and sustain the *status quo*, in which asymmetric relations between

groups are naturalized”<sup>2</sup> (Sevillano, 2010, p. 225). In line with Sayad (2004), it can be argued that migration is conceived of as a process of transition that involves the incorporation of a new sociocultural context. In this way, the dimension of vulnerability and the risk of exclusion are taken into account, and so too is the creation of mechanisms to overcome these injustices.

As should be evident, this article proposes to apply these conceptions of migration and suffering to the case of Cuban migration to Ecuador. We explore the tension between the concept of suffering in Rafael Correa’s humanist discourse on migration, on the one hand, and the experiences of Cuban immigrants, on the other. It is important to incorporate the voices of migrants through direct quotes in order to understand their migratory experiences from a more personal perspective.

## 2. Selection of the case

### 2.1 The liberalization of migratory discourses and policies in Latin America

During the last two decades, leftist or center-left governments in South America implemented discourses and policies that were exceptionally open to immigration and the rights of migrants. This marked a significant shift from the discourses that predominated during the military dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s, which were restrictive and focused on the immigrant as a threat (Ceriani & Freier, 2015). It is interesting to study the region given this turnabout to a more pro-rights position on migration. This new regional paradigm – as can be seen in the annual declarations of the South American Conference on Migrations (Conferencia Sudamericana de Migraciones, CSM) and in the documents of the migrations forums of MERCOSUR and the Andean Community – emphasizes the right to migrate, the non-criminalization of immigrants, and their access to rights regardless of their legal status (Acosta & Freier, 2015).

In some cases, governments went beyond declarations of intent and promulgated laws and implemented policies aimed at safeguarding the rights of migrants. This represented a regional referential framework in which the provision of rights seemed to establish limitations on migration suffering. The **right to migrate** was explicitly incorporated into the legislation currently in force in Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Ecuador.

Nevertheless, the treatment of this right was often declarative and lacking in content or specific guarantees. In general terms, the ambiguity

---

2 All translations from Spanish texts are by *Apuntes*.

of this treatment revealed a tension between, on the one hand, the right to emigrate, understood in relation to the citizens of the state that established the corresponding regulations and, on the other, the right to immigrate, which concerns the existence of foreign nationals. In not a few South American countries, there is a gap between political declarations signaling openness and lower-ranking national legislation that is restrictive or at least contradictory (Cantor, Freier, & Gauci, 2015; Freier & Acosta, 2015). This has configured a migratory regime that Eduardo Domenech describes as “migratory control with a human face” (2013).

## **2.2 The discursive gap in Ecuadorian migratory policy**

Rafael Correa’s discourse as president and recent Ecuadorian policies on migration are a paradigmatic example in this context. Migration and especially emigration became a priority in Correa’s discursive strategy, starting with his 2006 electoral campaign. The rights of migrants was a key theme in the development of the platform of Correa’s political movement *Patria Altiva y Soberana* (*Alianza País*), and Ecuadorian migrants were invited to be participants in the Constitutional Assembly of Montecristi (Margheritis, 2011; Ramírez & Quezada, 2014).

In what was clearly a reaction to the mass emigration of Ecuadorians after the 1999 economic crisis, the inclusion of the figure of the migrant, especially the returning Ecuadorian, became a constitutive element of a political movement.<sup>3</sup> Beyond the fact that this inclusion was the result of agendas inherited by a diverse social movement or of convictions deeply rooted in *Alianza País*, it is clear that the political invocation of migrants’ rights became an argument that Correa’s movement employed (Acosta & Freier, 2015; Freier, 2016; Margheritis, 2011; Eguiguren, 2011). Nevertheless, this discourse had limited legislative support, despite the National Assembly proposing a law that included the constitutional mandate regarding human mobility. During the Correa administration, Ecuador retained the norms on migration from the 1970s, which were highly restrictive. It was not until the 2017 electoral campaign that the Organic Law on Human Mobility (*Ley Orgánica de Movilidad Humana*)

---

3 For example, the Minister of Foreign Relations of Ecuador published an open letter, signed by Correa addressed to “all Ecuadorian citizens in the world,” in which he invited emigrants to return to their country of origin. He criticized the policies of former governments that forced Ecuadorians to leave “their beloved country,” as well as the discriminatory policies of the northern countries that received these migrants. In addition, the letter mentions immigration policies, declaring that there are no “illegal citizens, only practices that violate the rights of individuals”; it also adds that Ecuador demands rights for its citizens in other countries and promotes the same rights for immigrants in Ecuador.

was promulgated, once again as an obvious measure intended to mobilize the votes of Ecuadorians abroad.

As part of the first elections after the promulgation of the 2008 constitution, Correa promised to implement a “government of migrants.” In this way the political discourse began to be shaped around human rights (Margheritis, 2011), always in contrast to the “inhuman” migration policies of the United States and the European countries (Acosta & Freier, 2015). In 2008, Correa called the European Union directive on return<sup>4</sup> a “shameful directive” (“directiva de la vergüenza”) and also expressed his rejection of visas and passports, labeling them “inventions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Acosta & Freier, 2015).

This discursive strategy intended to mobilize the Ecuadorian diaspora is evident, for example, in Correa’s speech during his inauguration in Quito, on August 10, 2009:

I would like, as always, to give special mention to our migrants, those exiles of poverty who, expelled from their own land, had to open up new horizons and spaces in other latitudes. We will never forget those responsible for this exodus, all of us who are today united and energized through the Citizen Revolution. We say, responsibly, that migrants are not illegal; what does exist are illegal and abhorrent practices such as racism, xenophobia, *coyoterismo*. But, behind all this irresponsibility and the insensitivity of governments that never cared about the fate of their compatriots, surely because the vast majority were poor and marginalized [...] To our migrant brothers, thank you very much, this is your government. (Correa, 2007)

This quote demonstrates how Correa, through his official discourse, recognized the suffering inherent in the forced migratory experience, identifying former governments as those responsible for this displacement and, at the same time, suggesting the need for a more human and liberal immigration policy since “migrants are not illegals.”

The Constitution of Montecristi, which went into effect in 2008, is one of the most representative of the so-called “new Latin American constitutionalism.” Without doubt, among its most ambitious objectives is the constitutional regulation of the right to free movement and the aspiration to universal citizenship – in Article 416 – as a principle of international

---

4 Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:348:0098:0107:EN:PDF>)



relations. At the same time, Article 40 recognizes the right to migrate and establishes that no human being can be considered as an “illegal.” This norm, among other precepts related to human movement, constitutes a great innovation from a comparative perspective. It is the first constitution in the world to fully establish the right to migrate (Acosta & Freier, 2015).

On the other hand, the so-called “open-borders policy” was implemented through the elimination of the requirement for visas through the Executive Decree of June 20, 2008.<sup>5</sup> This measure, together with the attraction of a dollarized and growing economy, rapidly turned Ecuador into a destination for various migrants flows, both intraregional and from countries in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean – whose citizens were previously subject to restricted access – as well as Spain and the United States (Freier & Holloway, 2018).

Faced with this inflow, the government reintroduced the need for visas for citizens of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Haiti, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, and Somalia. It justified this partial reversion of the “open borders policy” as a security measure to stop human trafficking and abuse of people from these countries. However, it has been demonstrated that this concern was closely related to ethnic prejudices, racism, and Islamophobia on the part of national and international political actors (Freier, 2017) and their desire to prevent “others” from entering the country.

Now, if restrictive practices and discriminatory discourses by governments that preach exclusive nationalisms cause suffering for migrants (Bauman, 2016), the contradictions and limitations of discourses and liberalizing policies also create conditions that affect the lives of individual migrants. In this sense, an analysis of the situation of migrant populations such as Cubans under the administrations of Rafael Correa provides an opportunity to analyze the effect of these contradictions on their lives, and consequently on the suffering of the individuals who decided to migrate to Ecuador.

### **2.3 Cuban immigration to Ecuador**

While there have been Cuban citizens in Ecuador since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more arrived as a result of the 2008 open borders policy, and consequently Cuban immigrants became a visible social group in Ecuadorian

---

5 “The Ministry of Foreign Relations, Commerce and Integration reports that, by the express directive of the Constitutional President of the Republic, starting on Friday, June 20, 2008, citizens of any nationality can enter Ecuador, without the need for a visa, and stay for a period of 90 days, in application of the principle of the free circulation of persons and in order to strengthen relations between Ecuador and all the countries of the world and promote tourism” (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio e Integración, 2008).

society. According to the National Population and Housing Census (Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda) of 2010, they are the fifth largest foreign population after Spaniards, Peruvians, people from the United States, and Colombians. Despite the transnational commercial dynamics of Cuban migrants – which for many means not living permanently in Ecuador – their number is not as high as various national media outlets have repeatedly claimed (Correa Álvarez, 2014; Univisión Noticias, 2015). While it is true that between 2010 and 2016 there was a clear increase in the number of Cubans in Ecuador, there were still fewer of them compared with other nationalities.<sup>6</sup> Experts interviewed in Quito in 2011 estimated the Cuban immigrant population at around 10,000, a number that corresponds with the data on net migration (arrivals minus departures) for the period 2008-2014, which equals 14,443 individuals. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that figures on net arrivals include multiple entries by the same person during a year, which in the case of Cubans is very likely given transnational commercial practices.

Table 1  
Size and demographic characteristics of the Cuban population in Ecuador, 2008-2014

Entries (July 2008-December 2014)	Census 2010	Estimated population (2011)	Net migration (entries July 2008-December 2014)	Average age (entries July 2008- December 2014)	Percentage of males (entries July 2008-December 2014)
130,571	6,717	10,000	14,443	38	65

Sources: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INEC) (2010) and consultations with experts.

As can be seen from Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INEC) data, the percentage of Cuban male immigrants is greater than that of females (65% of entries registered between 2008 and 2014 were men), while the average age was 38. Similarly, the two most notable characteristics of Cuban migrants were, first, the high levels of education (most held university degrees) and, second, the irregular migratory status of many of them in Ecuador.

6 Estimates of Cuban nationals outside the island run to between 1.7 and 2 million people, which is a significant number for a country of slightly more than 11 million inhabitants. Although for various historical reasons the United States has been the traditional destination for Cuban emigrants, in recent years migratory routes have diversified and migrants have headed in dissimilar directions. Research by the Centro de Estudio de Migraciones Internacionales of the Universidad de Habana (CEMI) report the presence of Cuban nationals in around 150 countries (Aja, 2007; Rodríguez, 2011).

It is also important to note that the Cuban migrants' prospects for insertion in Ecuadorian society are conditioned by the assets they possess and a range of other factors, among which racial identification stands out. Although we do not have data about the ethno-racial composition of Cuban migrants in Ecuador, we do know that the majority are white-mestizo. Undoubtedly this is due, among other things, to the unfavorable economic realities faced by the Afro-Cuban population. Considering the costs of a passport, airplane ticket, legalization of documents or letters of invitation, and travel permits, when these requirements exist, the relatively small proportion of Afro-Cubans among migrants from that country in Ecuador is evidence of the unequal effects that the Cuban state has on the social order, whereby racism has been visible as a very important socioeconomic factor since the 1990s (Abd'Allah-Alvarez, 2017; Zurbano, 2013). It is important to note that, together with the status of foreigner, the Black migrant suffers from double stigmatization in practices of racial and xenophobic discrimination. This further complicates the possibilities of access to work and housing, to mention just two examples.

### **3. The suffering of the Cuban migrants in Ecuador**

As described above, the process of migration should be viewed in its totality, from emigration to immigration, to understand the implications for migrants of these experiences, which tend to be characterized by suffering.

“to immigrate means to immigrate together with one’s history, with one’s traditions, ways of living, feeling, acting and thinking, [...] and all the other social, political and mental structures of one’s society, [...] or, in a word, with one’s culture (Sayad, 2004, p. 2-4).

Emigration is seen as symptom of the disintegration of the society of origin. To the extent that migrants have to adapt to new social conditions in the society to which they migrate, emigration at the same time is constituted as a new beginning due to the fundamental rupture that takes place with the society of origin (Sayad, 2004, p. 88).

Despite the historical politicization that has weighed heavily on Cuban migration since 1959, the majority of the people who leave this country do so fundamentally in search of economic opportunities. This notion has slowly been incorporated into Cuba’s understanding of the emigration of its citizens, as Raul Castro stated on the eve of the migration reforms of 2012. The difficult economic conditions in Cuba, together with scarce possibilities for professional achievement, has led to an increasing number of Cubans leaving the country. For others, the issue is a combination of

a lack of economic opportunities and lack of freedom.<sup>7</sup> As 34-year-old Jordan puts it:

I can't stand my country. Things are very hard there. [...] In Cuba the pay is very low. There is no freedom of expression.

As Sayad explains, it is important to understand the conditions in which Cubans lived before their migratory experience, and the conceptions they have regarding this experience. Sayad argues that “Any study of migratory phenomena that overlooks the emigrants’ conditions of origin is bound only to give a view that is at once partial and ethnocentric” (Sayad, 2004, p. 29).

A comprehensive analysis of the factors that lead Cubans to emigrate is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, just as it is necessary to consider the migratory experience by taking into consideration the countries of origin and destination, it is also important to consider the ways that the migration policies in the origin and destination countries influence the migratory experience and the suffering of migrants.

This study will evaluate the current political-legal situation in which the Cuban population in Ecuador finds itself. It should be kept in mind that while Sayad’s model is fundamental for a holistic understanding of migrations, it is presented in terms of dichotomies: between a place of origin and a destination. In order to understand the migratory experience of Cubans in Ecuador one must look not only at the conditions and context in Cuba and in Ecuador, but also the influence of the U.S. political-legal framework on the Cuban population (Correa Álvarez, 2017).

### **3.1 Legal discrimination in Ecuador**

As we mentioned above, the Ecuadorian 2008 “open borders” policy is a paradigmatic example of the discursive gap that exists in South America between highly liberal political declarations and comparatively restrictive or contradictory legislation. The constitutional recognition of free movement and universal citizenship did not lead to significant changes to the traditional procedures of regulating the situation of migrants in Ecuador. Although during the first years after the Cuban revolution it was possible for Cuban

---

7 Beyond the fact that there really can be political reasons for leaving the country, and the particular experiences that configure the condition of refugees, it is important to value these opinions in the context of the dispute between Cuba and the United States and the Cuban Adjustment Act, which guarantees protection and legal status for those covered by this law and who are considered victims of the Cuban system. In Ecuador, it is possible to witness the experience of a collective in questioning the opinion of an individual who claimed to have left Cuba for economic reasons: in the midst of a fiery debate, some members of the group pressure the individual to convince them that the reasons for leaving Cuba were political.

migrants (and those of other nationalities) to acquire permanent residence visas, these conditions were later reversed.

The distancing from the declarations of openness – which were not accompanied by the implementation of important legislative modifications and were not part of political discourses – was primarily evident on the level of administrative decisions. The annulment of fraudulent marriages, the refusal to provide notary services, the requirement for unnecessary documents or the refusal to certify professional degrees in the Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (Secretaría de Educación Superior, Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación, SENESCYT) were some of the administrative measures that limited the regularization of the status of the Cuban population in Ecuador. In practice, all that “free movement” meant to the migrant was the elimination of visas and permission to stay in Ecuador for 90 days as a tourist. Given the limits on return in Cuban migratory legislation, it is understandable that those who were not able to regularize their status after 90 days were also in danger of de facto statelessness (Correa Álvarez, 2017).

The importance of access to a resident visa for Cubans in Ecuador was influenced by a double necessity: on the one hand, to avoid lengthy detention and possible deportation and, on the other, to acquire migratory status and not lose the right to live in Cuba (Correa Álvarez, 2014). Nevertheless, the administration of Cuban immigration to Ecuador in the period under analysis was characterized by constant changes: for example, in the requirements for entry or the conditions for various types of bureaucratic requirements. This should be understood in the context of both domestic and international pressures intended to stop the migratory flow of Cubans to Ecuador (Freier, 2017).

As a result, the interaction between the policies of Ecuador and Cuba put thousands of Cuban immigrants in Ecuador in a real legal limbo: many are neither citizens nor residents in the country of destination and have lost their rights (civil, political, and social) in their country of origin. As Correa Álvarez, notes:

To be part of this legal limbo signifies being vulnerable to discrimination and injustice: the impossibility of seeing family members and having no defense whatsoever against labor exploitation, means not being a legal subject; it is to be permanently deprived of freedom in an airport or a detention center for not belonging either to Cuba or to Ecuador; it is to go by way of a kind of new *capitis diminutio* to a state of silence that erases the future and hope (Correa Álvarez, 2014, p. 81).

While the fact that a visa was not required in 2008 favored the entry of a foreign population (Freier & Holloway, 2018), the regularization mechanisms that allow access to migratory status after the 90-day stay permitted by Ecuadorian legislation have not been easy. Despite the novel regulation of human mobility enshrined in the current Ecuadorian constitution, the situation of vulnerability of those migrants without regular status continues to be administered punitively based on the Migration Law, Law N° 1889 (1971) and the Law on the Status of Foreigners (Ley de Extranjería, 1971) with its respective regulations (1986),<sup>8</sup> laws that were repealed in the new Organic Law on Human Mobility.<sup>9</sup> Based on these norms, and in contradiction to the constitution, there have been innumerable detentions and deportations of Cuban migrants, as well as people of other nationalities, who had irregular migratory status.<sup>10</sup>

In accordance with the restrictive policies already being enforced, visas started to be required for Cuban citizens entering Ecuador through Acuerdo Ministerial N° 0098 (November 25, 2015). The argument that was used at the time, and continues to be repeated today, to justify restrictive measures is that they seek to protect Cuban migrants from human trafficking.

The imposition of the visa requirement, in addition to constituting an important limitation, was accompanied by the implementation of the Acuerdo Ministerial N° 00067 of the Ministry of Foreign Relations and Human Mobility (July 2015), which entered into force in January 2016, and made the Ecuadorian visa into one of the most expensive in the world. The new costs, including the processing charge, rose to 500 U.S. dollars for immigrant or permanent resident visas and \$450 for short-term visas. Although the Ecuadorian government agreed to legalize the status of Cubans who entered the country through November 2015, by April 2016 few had

---

8 The 1986 regulation currently in force replaced Regulation N° 1900 (1971).

9 On January 5, 2017, after a nine-year wait, the presentation of at least two drafts, and various meetings with social actors and institutions linked to migrant populations, the National Assembly of Ecuador approved the Ley Orgánica de Movilidad Humana to replace existing migratory legislation, which had been prepared in the 1970s under the National Security Doctrine. Following the corresponding legislative measures, President Rafael Correa ratified this law in the presence of Ecuadorian migrants in the Spanish city of Barcelona less than one month before that year's general elections. Although the new law was applauded by some organizations as an important step in the protection of the rights of migrants, it focused primarily on the rights of Ecuadorian emigrants, although it also recognized the rights of refugees, stateless persons, victims of trafficking and abuse, and foreigners in general.

10 Article 40 of the current Ecuadorian constitution established: "The right of persons to migrate is recognized. No human being shall be identified or considered as illegal because of his/her migratory status."

[Translation from the Political Database of the Americas:

<http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html>]

fulfilled the requirements to change their temporary visa for one that would permit them to prolong their stay in the country (work, study, or asylum). The legalization of university degrees was a particular problem for those who only fulfilled the requirements for a professional visa given the refusal of the Ecuadorian Consulate in Cuba to validate diplomas.

Another issue that limited the possibilities for Cubans to go to Ecuador was Ecuadorian officials' readoption of the requirement of a "letter of invitation", after this and other requirements were eliminated by the Cuban migratory reform of January 2013. The same occurred with the prohibition of Cuban professionals from benefiting from the Prometeo Program, coordinated directly by SENESCYT;<sup>11</sup> that is, Cuban citizens were excluded from participating in this program that promoted (under highly favorable conditions) links between foreign and Ecuadorian researchers living abroad and universities, polytechnic schools, public research institutes, and other institutions that were public or co-financed, and which required assistance in the development of research projects in priority sectors. In the case of the latter, the testimony of Grecia, a 44 year-old woman with a professional degree in Sports, Physical Culture, and Recreation, is highly illustrative since it shows that SENESCYT constituted an obstacle for Cubans:

SENESCYT is, let me tell you how it is, is the National Secretariat for Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. So, it is where they accept you as a professional in Ecuador. If they accept you as a professional in Ecuador, they give you a professional visa and you can work. So, when I went to SENESCYT, um, I didn't have those documents, I already asked my family to look [for them] when they came back, this was in February. On the first, the first of March, they had already changed the laws for Cubans. [...] Because when I arrive and I go to enter my file, my visa wasn't valid anymore, it was another visa, but the contract was for work. But if you don't let me into SENESCYT, how am I going to get a work contract? This is the contraposition over opposition, I don't know how to explain it to you.

Despite Ecuador's open migratory framework, few Cuban nationals have had a positive insertion experience. In general terms, the Cuban migratory experience during the two Correa governments was character-

---

11 The Programa Prometeo provided salaries that could go as high as \$6,000 a month, five months' rent (\$500), medical insurance, funds to buy books (\$2,000) and for academic trips (\$2,500) (see: <http://prometeo.educacionsuperior.gob.ec>).

ized by dynamics of invisibilization, systematic processes of detention and deportation, and the increasing precariousness of the migrant condition in general (Genova, 2002). Despite having the constitutional right to migrate, a significant number of Cuban migrants faced limitations in achieving regular migratory status. In the interviews, we found many experiences of this type of detention. José Antonio (male, 27) states that:

They let me go and said I should regularize [my status]. And finally I asked: where? And how? I don't exist! Do you understand me? Where is the possibility?

That is, processes of regularization were required that were not really available for Cuban migrants, which generated looming sentiments of confusion, desperation, anguish, and frustration, which are intrinsically related to suffering.

In this context, one should understand the various regularization strategies used by Cuban citizens in Ecuador. For example, there was an increase in requests for asylum between 2008 and 2010 even though those submitting the requests were not part of refugee populations (Herrera Vinelli, 2011). This led to a national public discussion about the “fraudulent” mechanisms used by Cuban immigrants to become Ecuadorian citizens. As is evident in our interviews, this discussion led to prejudices against Cubans and to discrimination during bureaucratic formalities, as occurred in the case of Yanet (a university professor, 41):

There was a bunch of marriages that became illegal, this, the other, and so the Cuban is disadvantaged [...] because these were marriages that were quote-unquote false and now, they will be registered, investigated.

The response of the Ecuadorian state was immediate; it cancelled around 200 naturalizations that were obtained in this way and challenged a similar number of formalized marriages, while also jailing officials who were implicated in these activities.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, many of the Cuban migrants interviewed denounced the deceitful practices employed by some Ecuadorians and said they had been cheated. For example, Robert (male, 38) states that:

Of course. They cheated me. Five thousand [...]. Of course, they took advantage. You arrive, you see, you don't know the laws, don't know anything.

---

12 See: “Cancillería anulará 174 matrimonios de cubanos por ilícitos” (*El Universo*, 2010).



Such testimonies were common and demonstrate the condition of vulnerability in which Cuban immigrants found themselves, as well as the differences between Ecuadorian citizens and non-citizens – it is the former who are familiar with legal and social norms. It is this lack of knowledge among foreigners that gives rise to situations of inequality and subordination of one group by another, as noted above. Numerous studies and institutional pronouncements – including from the Ombudsman's Office (*Defensoría del Pueblo*) – document the state's discrimination and xenophobia against Cubans.<sup>13</sup>

A significant example of the precarious situation of Cuban migrants in Ecuador can be seen in what happened between the end of June and the beginning of July 2016 to migrants in El Arbolito: 121 individuals were deported en masse to Cuba and large group of migrants were detained while clandestinely moving through the jungle of Darién. In the pre-dawn hours of June 26, the police violently evicted a group of Cubans who were waiting near the Mexican embassy in Quito to ask for a humanitarian visa to Mexico. After the eviction and several nights sleeping outside in a park in the north of the city, the group were authorized by the Municipality of Quito to move to the historic El Arbolito Park.

Days later, in the pre-dawn hours of July 6, a military operation with armored vehicles and anti-riot forces, canine units, and snipers evicted the group of almost 500 people. During this operation, 152 migrants were detained, including pregnant women, minors, senior citizens, and sick people. After violating the terms of the judicial guarantees that had been provided by jailing migrants in detention centers for common criminals, taking away their belongings, and generally violating due process, the state deported 121 individuals on Air Force planes to Cuba. This was done even though there were at least 80 rulings forbidding deportation, several deportees had proven family ties in Ecuador, and some had refugee status. In reaction to the controversy this incident caused, president Rafael Correa stated:

All those who want to live in this marvelous country are welcome, here we believe in human mobility, we believe in uni-

---

13 See "Pronunciamento Defensorial N° 005-dnrt-2010 de la Defensoría del Pueblo del Ecuador." The resolution regulates violations of the rights of persons in mobility by entities of the Ecuadorian state, especially *Operación Identidad*, carried out by the *Dirección Nacional de Migración* in June 2010 (Arcentales, 2010). See also: "Informe de verificación sobre las condiciones de detención de personas privadas de la libertad en el marco de operativos de detención de irregulares en la ciudad de Quito," prepared by the *Coaliciones por las Migraciones y el Refugio*, INREDH, and the *Defensoría del Pueblo* (2010), as well as the *Informe Temático N° 2* prepared by Javier Arcentales (2010) for the *Dirección Nacional de los Derechos Humanos y la Naturaleza* of the *Defensoría del Pueblo*.

versal citizenship but we are not going to serve as traffickers for anyone, we are not going to become a country of *coyoteros*, *compañeros*, we are going to make sure Ecuador is respected. (Telesur, 2016)

This reaction demonstrates the emphasis on security – that is, the maintenance of the logics of national security – in Correa’s migratory policy, despite his discourse on openness. The explanation for this lies in national and international pressure on the Ecuadorian government in the context of transmigration to the United States (Freier, 2017). If human mobility was promoted in that political conjuncture, it was illogical to criminalize irregular migration and the *coyotes* who facilitated, or “trafficked,” those who could not travel by legal means. This panorama amounts to “control with a human face” as described by Domenech (2013). In the case of Ecuador, the use of euphemisms and paternalistic arguments was a constant in the discursive representation of migratory control practices that were clearly unconstitutional and restrictive. Thus, a migration detention center was presented as a “temporary hotel,” migratory illegality was referred to as “migratory irregularity,” and the Cuban migrants in transit were presented as “victims” of transnational networks of *coyotes*. Through this discourse, detention and deportation, the imposition of visas, and the prohibition of entry were legitimized as measures intended to safeguard the rights of Cuban migrants.

According to Jacobsen and Marshman, Bauman demonstrates that globalization and the weakening of links of human solidarity have led to lives that are more and more **wasted and expendable**<sup>14</sup> (2008). In this sense, the migrant is understood as a subject forced into a condition of wanderer, as one whose life is pointless, who can be detained or deported and where suffering becomes an individual and private matter that cannot be translated into collective action (Bauman, 1999, 1995a). The case of Cubans in Ecuador provides a significant example of this. The process of collective deportation of the El Arbolito migrants can be read as a state action against a form of collective organization. The persons involved in this process, organized around Cuban national identity, spontaneously developed an organization using social networks. During this brief process, they were able to articulate decisions about temporary roles and functions regarding issues such as preparing food, communication, and security. The mobilization gave rise to various temporary leaderships who were able to

---

14 Translated from Spanish by *Apuntes*.

dialogue with various institutions – including the Mexican embassy, from where they requested safe conducts to go to Mexico. However, this was not a clearly defined collective – rather, it was created on the basis of temporary shared interests.<sup>15</sup>

### **3.2 The legal and political context of Cuban emigration**

In addition to the issues discussed above, it is also important to consider the effects that Cuban migratory legislation and the close diplomatic ties between Ecuador and Cuba had on the design of Ecuadorian migration policy. In 2012,<sup>16</sup> the mechanisms for exiting Cuba, which had historically been very strict, were made more flexible: various requirements such as a letter of invitation and a tariff, which in practice amounted to a kind of rental payment on Cuban citizenship, were eliminated. Nevertheless, there was one provision that remained intact despite the reform, and which is at the center of the Cuban migratory regulation: the concept of final departure, which conditioned the possibilities of return.

As noted above, after 24 months, “emigrant Cuban citizens” have a limit of 90 days (renewable) to visit the island, and can ask the Ministry of the Interior for the corresponding authorization if they wish to establish residency in Cuban territory.<sup>17</sup> This means that if Cubans stay outside the country for longer than 24 months, they lose their political, civil, and social rights, and become *de facto* stateless (Correa Álvarez, 2017). For these Cuban migrants who, unable to regularize their status in Ecuador and having lost their Cuban citizenship, this creates feelings of uncertainty and abandonment. The fact that they are not considered a citizen of any country, together with finding themselves alone in the process of legalizing their nationality, causes strong feelings of suffering in migrants, as can be seen in this interview with José Antonio:

---

15 The existence of individual fears and interests cannot be denied, but it must be asked whether any collective action is free of this type of internal dynamic disruptions. Despite the violent assault by the Ecuadorian military, the collective was helped by human rights defenders and outside organizations that even assisted with legal actions, including the presentation of a collective writ of habeas corpus for the 151 who were initially detained. Even the subsequent clandestine exit of numerous Cubans from Ecuador that followed the judicial rejection of the writ of habeas corpus was carried out collectively.

16 Decree Law N° 302 (October 11, 2012), modifying Law N° 1312, *Ley de Migración* (1976).

17 See Article 40, clause a) of Decree N° 305 that modifies the regulations of Cuba's *Ley de Migración* (July 19, 1978).

So, you don't have Cuban citizenship?

No, I don't.

You do not have citizenship of any country?

No, I don't. It is kind of a weird feeling, but how can I say I am not from Cuba, nor am I from Ecuador, I am from outer space. Right now, I am not from here nor am I from there. I am from nowhere. If I lost all rights in Cuba, you lose all rights related to education, property, medicine, everything. When I go to Cuba, I am a **foreigner**.

Many of the Cuban interviewees have had similar experiences. The implications of Cuban laws, together with the consequences of a situation of irregularity, aggravates the need for regulation of Cuban migration to Ecuador.

In addition to Cuban migratory policy, the Cuban government also had an influence on its emigrant population in Ecuador during the government of Rafael Correa. Since they were strategic allies of Correa, Cuban authorities influenced government decision-making that affected Cuban nationals in Ecuador. According to our interviews with officials and representatives of NGOs, this occurred in relation to the requirement for a "letter of invitation"<sup>18</sup> and the prohibition of Cuban professionals from benefiting from the Programa Prometeo.

In this sense, it is telling that the Consultative Council on Migratory Policy (Consejo Consultivo de Política Migratoria) justified the implementation of restrictive measures such as a prohibition on modifying the migratory category of Cuban professionals with the status of cooperants, which was based on a request from the Cuban government in the 7th Round of Bilateral Migratory Conversations (VII Ronda Bilateral de Conversaciones Migratorias) to put an end to "the hiring of Cuban doctors and professionals by public and private entities in Ecuador." The interaction of migration policies in Ecuador – opening borders without providing real opportunities for legal inclusion – and in Cuba led to a double political and psychological exclusion of the Cuban migrant both "here and there." As Sayad reminds us:

---

18 Six days after the Cuban migratory reform went into effect, through Boletín de Prensa No. 014 of the Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Movilidad Humana (MREMH) (January 15, 2013), the Ecuadorian state established the requirement for a letter of invitation, which would contribute to maintaining "an orderly migratory flow between the two countries and impede human trafficking."

The emigrant does not have the right to belong to a body politic in which he has a place of residence or the right to be actively involved – in other words, the right to give a sense and a meaning to his action, words, and existence. His exclusion means that he is not able to have a history – i.e. a past and a future or, most importantly, to appropriate that past and that future, to control that history. (Sayad, 2004: p. 227)

### 3.3 Social and labor discrimination

Social discrimination against immigrants can manifest itself in various ways and for different reasons. Thus, discriminatory practices against Cubans occur in forms ranging from political and legal discrimination all the way to mistreatment and xenophobia experienced in daily life. As Jordan explains:

Here Cubans, us, here they mistreat us [...] In general, all of us. Here we are disliked by Ecuadorians. For all I know, it's just for being Cuba.

Similarly, Liz, 42 years old, identifies xenophobic practices, which, she says, also come from other immigrants in Ecuador:

Yes, there is discrimination and I have seen xenophobia, I have also felt it. Not only from Ecuadorians but also other nationalities that are here. Because you know that when you come to another country, you want to be well received. Eh, yes, I have seen some, this can be called xenophobia.

As Bauman (2016) points out, socio-political and legal discrimination of migrants is devastating because, on the one hand, it results in complete humiliation, generally along with self-loathing; and, on the other hand, the reaction can be the opposite: a re-appropriation of self-esteem that channels feelings of vengeance against the society that engaged in the humiliation. This was one of the options for the Cuban migrants in Ecuador. In relation to the consolidation of La Florida as a Cuban neighborhood in Quito, Correo Álvarez notes: “By highlighting the performative, dynamic, and strategic character of identity, it is accentuated and used as part of the dispute for social insertion, expressed not only in the body, but also making it visible in the space” (2014, p. 113).

When it comes to the work experience of Cuban migrants in Ecuador, it is worth noting that sociological reflection on work often takes individuals belonging to the same society as its abstract subject of analysis, but when it comes to foreigners, questions have not been asked about the social function of work. Nevertheless, as Medá suggests, since work is considered as “much

more than a means of earning a living,” it has been treated as a “fundamental social relationship” or a “total social fact” (1998, p. 24).

In this same sense, work is one of the fundamental spaces where migrants can create conditions for insertion into the receiving society and establish new relationships. It is because of this that labor discrimination is a determining factor for the suffering of Cuban migrants in Ecuador, to the degree that they are unable to insert themselves in the labor logic and – following Medá – are unable to find personal fulfilment or to develop social relations. Through the interviews we carried out, we were able to observe the difficulty that Cuban migrants face when they try to insert themselves into the labor market. They arrived in Ecuador with various aspirations, which could range from setting up a business to working in different professions, although most simply seek a better quality of life, as Grecia explains:

This is what a Cuban professional mainly wants, to widen their horizons, to settle into a social life which is a bit more satisfying. Because what value is there in my being a good professional if my resources, whether because of the blockade, or because, I can't see how to develop them as I would like.

Describing the insertion of Cuban immigrants into the Ecuadorian labor market is a very complex exercise for various reasons: first, because of the different circumstances in which various migrant groups access this labor market; and second, because of the risks of trying to generalize and speak of “one experience” within the same group (Correa Álvarez, 2014). Another factor to be considered is the characteristics of the national labor market. In general terms, it can be affirmed that this market is characterized by high levels of informality and weak access to labor rights such as unionization or mechanisms that protect occupational health.

In addition to these limitations, there is a certain segmentation by place of origin in the participation of immigrants in the labor market. Our interviews with representatives of NGOs indicate that there is a concentration of Colombians or Haitians in lower prestige jobs, while other migrant groups, such as Spaniards, tend to be found in labor spaces that are more prestigious and better-paid. The Cuban population occupies what might be called an intermediate position: while it has experienced certain limitations imposed by institutions, part of this population has managed to access professional spaces. In Quito, from 2008-2010, the top four INEC census employment categories of Cuban emigrants were: service workers and sellers; new workers; scientific professionals and intellectuals; officials, *operarios*, and artisans (Correa Álvarez, 2014, p. 147).

Another characteristic of the labor insertion of Cubans in Ecuador, again according to our interviews, was transnational merchandise commerce. This was one of the most visible labor practices of the Cuban population in Ecuador, carried out by real transnational traders who, because of their legalized migratory status in Ecuador, were able to travel frequently from Cuba. This activity had a transnational character, sustained through migration networks that included family members, friends, and other trusted individuals, who were in charge of receiving merchandise and later selling it. The traders traveled to Ecuador to buy merchandise (clothes, shoes, electrical appliances, etc.) in the La Ipiales market in Quito or the La Bahía market in Guayaquil and sold it in Cuba in informal markets or door to door. The variation of these work-related roles strengthened the connection of Cuban migrants both with their place of origin and their destination.

The variation in work-related roles can, in effect, be thought of in terms of social capital and the possibilities of managing it which, in different ways, condition any process of insertion. Moreover, this variation should be understood as part of the vagaries of Ecuadorian migration policies related to foreigners, which in the case of Cubans were mediated by the processing of specific requests from diplomatic authorities in Cuba – with the aim, for example, of limiting the number of health professionals going to Ecuador. The complexity of this scenario was conditioned contradictorily by elements such as differing social valuations of the other-foreigner, which favored migrants from the countries of the North and stigmatized migrants from the global South at a time when there was a demand for foreign professionals related to economic and educational reform policies, among others (Vega Solís *et al.*, 2016; Pedone & Izquierdo, 2018).

According to data from Ecuador's National System of Higher Education Information (Sistema Nacional de Información de Educación Superior), up to 2012, Cuban nationals constituted the largest number of foreigners teaching in the higher education system, although in absolute numbers they represented only 0.8% of all teachers. The question of qualifications is not a minor one in this case. It should be kept in mind that individuals with tertiary or higher degrees could obtain a 9V visa providing indefinite residency, according to the Law on Foreigners (Ley de Extranjería) N° 1897, in effect in Ecuador from December 27, 1971. Under the provisions of this law, a large number of Cubans were able to obtain residency in Ecuador (Correa Álvarez, 2014).

The existence of individuals with legal residence and successful formal employment but with few social links with the Ecuadorian population seems to indicate that labor formality in itself is not a determinant of social

insertion. At the same time, various Cuban interviewees stated that, though their migratory status was irregular, they maintain strong affective links with their fellow workers and indicated that labor informality in itself did not constitute a barrier to the dynamics of social insertion.

Nevertheless, our research revealed a widespread feeling among Cubans that they are discriminated against and do not obtain or lose jobs because of their irregular migratory status. Yanet, who was able to regularize her status by marrying an Ecuadorian friend, expressed her consternation that the majority of Cubans are attracted by what she calls the “Ecuadorian dream” of accumulating dollars,<sup>19</sup> but later end up working just to be able to make ends meet or are not even able to do that successfully:

Of course, there are sad Cubans here, there are Cubans who have been left living on the street for six months. Living on the street, living in the airport, in buses. Yes, it is sad, ay! One dollar to eat all week, they buy a dollar's worth of bread and eat it all week. That is sad.

According to our interviewees, these were the Cuban migrants who suffered the most in Ecuador, since, as the testimony indicates, they were living lives marked by uncertainty and the absence of security for the discernable future: a situation that, following Bauman, configures the notion of “vagabonds,” of what some perceive as “wasted lives.”

#### **4. By way of conclusion**

In this article, we have used the case of Cubans in Ecuador to explore the sentiments, particularly suffering, that migration policies create among international migrants. In Ecuador, under the presidency of Rafael Correa, the 2008 Constitution of Montecristi began as an ambitious project of free movement and open borders. The migratory experience of Cubans demonstrates the gap between the progressive discourse – with its emphasis on openness and on limiting the suffering of migrants – and the implementation of migration policies. At the same time, this study seeks to demonstrate that above and beyond the political effects of this discursive gap, its impact on the suffering of Cuban migrants in Ecuador is considerable, as their testimonies demonstrate.

If, as Bauman has noted, the trinitarian framework of state, nation, and territory is ever more in dispute, we cannot deny that within the Latin American context, populist political projects such as Ecuador's imply not

---

19 The U.S. dollar is the official currency of Ecuador.



only an institutional reconfiguration of the state but also an emphasis on its territory and its borders. To a large extent, discourses about sovereignty and borders were articulated with security measures in the case of certain groups of migrants (including Cubans). This, however, should not be understood as the consequence of a simple decision by the Rafael Correa government.

It is essential to understand this change in policy in relation to the negative reaction of the Ecuadorian lower and middle classes to the presence of Cubans, in many cases fueled by sensationalist manipulation by the media, and also used strategically by opposition politicians (Freier, 2017). The dynamics of discrimination that affect the Cuban population in Ecuador can be tracked on an everyday level – as dynamics of social discrimination – but also on the institutional level. In this context, the condition of migratory irregularity has led to dynamics of discrimination and labor exploitation, but also to invisibilization in processes of detention and deportation and to the precarization of the conditions of migrants in general. It is in this context that we should understand the reorientation of the migration plans of a large proportion of Cubans in Ecuador, prompting their re-emigration, principally to the United States.

The interaction of the migration policies of the countries of origin and destination affects the migratory experience and, therefore, has an effect on the suffering of migrants. Nevertheless, the opacity of the notion of migratory suffering is maintained through epistemic foundations; this favors an approach centered on categories that contribute to the analysis of conjunctures and the confirmation of a political rationality. The existence of migrants and refugees is thus rendered a variable with heavy political implications for the governments involved.

## References

- Abd'Allah-Alvarez, S. (September 6, 2017). ¿Racismo «estructural» en Cuba? Notas para el debate. Cuba Posible. Retrieved from <https://cubaposible.com/racismo-estructural-cuba-notas-debate/>
- Acosta, D., & Freier, L. F. (2015). Turning the Immigration Policy Paradox Upside Down? Populist Liberalism and Discursive Gaps in South America. *International Migration Review*, 49(3), 659-696. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/imre.12146>
- Acosta, D., & Freier, L. F. (2017). Regional Governance of Migration in South America. In A. Triandafyllidou (Ed.), *Edward Elgar Handbook on Migration and Globalisation* (pp. 69-85). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Aja, A. (2007). [no title]. La migración desde Cuba. *Aldea Mundo*, 11(22), 7-16.
- Álvarez Velasco, S. (2011). La migración indocumentada en tránsito: la cara oculta de los procesos migratorios contemporáneos. Buenos Aires: Clacso.
- Arcentales, J. (2010). *Informe temático No. 2. Migración cubana. Recomendaciones de política pública para Ecuador incluyente*. Quito: Dirección Nacional de los Derechos Humanos y la Naturaleza de la Defensoría del Pueblo.
- Bauman, Z. (1994). *Pensando sociológicamente*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión.
- Bauman, Z. (1995a). Dream of Purity. *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, (86), 49-60. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41802659> / Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41802659>
- Bauman, Z. (1995b). *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*. Oxford: Blackwell. Retrieved from <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/3390124>
- Bauman, Z. (1999). *In Search of Politics*. Stanford University Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2002). The Fate of Humanity in the Post-Trinitarian World. *Journal of Human Rights*, 1(3), 283-303. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/14754830210156544>
- Bauman, Z. (2016). *Extraños llamando a la puerta*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Cantor, D., Freier, L. F., & Gauci, J.-P. (2015). *A Liberal Tide: Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy in Latin America*. London: University of London-Institute of Latin American Studies-School of Advanced Studies.
- Ceriani, P., & Freier, L. F. (2015). Migration Policies and Policy-making in Latin America and the Caribbean: Lights and Shadows in a Region in Transition. In D. Cantor, L. F. Freier, & J.-P. Gauci (Eds.), *A Liberal Tide: Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy in Latin America* (11-32). London: University of London-Institute of Latin American Studies-School of Advanced Studies.
- Coalición por las Migraciones y el Refugio, INREDH, & Defensoría del Pueblo. (2010). Informe de verificación sobre las condiciones de detención de personas privadas de la libertad en el marco de operativos de identificación de irregulares en la ciudad de Quito. Quito: INREDH and Defensoría del Pueblo.
- Correa Álvarez, A. (2013). Probando suerte en el sur: migración cubana en los Andes y Latinoamérica. *Boletín Andina Migrante*, (16), 2-14.
- Correa Álvarez, A. (2014). *Del Caribe a la mitad del mundo. Migración cubana en Ecuador*. Quito: Editorial Abya Yala.

- Correa Álvarez, A. (May 5, 2017). Cuba, migración y derecho. Reflexión preliminar sobre la no pertenencia. CubaPosible. Retrieved from <http://cubaposible.com/cuba-migracion-derecho/>
- Correa Delgado, R. (January 22, 2007). Ecuador: discurso de toma de posesión de Rafael Correa como presidente. Democracia Sur. Claes. <http://democraciasur.com/2007/01/22/ecuador-discurso-de-toma-de-posesion-de-rafael-correa-como-presidente/>
- Domenech, E. (2013). «Las migraciones son como el agua»: hacia la instauración de políticas de «control con rostro humano». *Polis* 35. Retrieved from <http://journals.openedition.org/polis/9280>
- Eguiguren, M. (2011). *Sujeto migrante, crisis y tutela estatal*. Quito: Flacso and Universidad Técnica Salesiana.
- El Universo*. (September 8, 2010). Cancillería anulará 174 matrimonios de cubanos por ilícitos. *El Universo*, sección política.
- Freier, L. F. (2016). *A Reverse Migration Paradox? Policy Liberalization and New South-South Migration To Latin America*. (doctoral thesis). The London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom.
- Freier, L. F. (2017). Open Doors (for Almost All): Ecuador's Tourist Visa Policy between Populist Social Liberalism and Racialised Security Concerns. In L. F. Freier (Ed.), *A Reverse Migration Paradox? Policy Liberalisation and New South-South Migration to Latin America* (doctoral thesis). London: LSE.
- Freier, L. F., & Acosta, D. (2015). Beyond Smoke and Mirrors? Discursive Gaps in the Liberalisation of South American Immigration Laws. In D. Cantor, L. F. Freier, & J.-P. Gauci (Eds.). *A Liberal Tide: Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy in Latin America* (pp. 33-55). London: University of London-School of Advanced Studies-Institute of Latin American Studies.
- Freier, L.F., & Holloway, K. (November 1, 2018). The Impact of Tourist Visas on Intercontinental South-South Migration: Ecuador's Policy of «Open Doors» as a Quasi-Experiment. *International Migration Review*. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0197918318801068>
- Freier, L. F., & Zubrzycki, B. (2018). How do Immigrant Legalization Programs Play out in Informal Labor Markets? The Case of Senegalese Street Hawkers in Argentina. *Migration Studies*. Unpublished.
- Genova, N. de (2002). Migrant «Illegality» and Deportability in Everyday Life. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, (31), 419-447.
- Haas, H. (2010). Migration and Development: A Theoretical Perspective. *International Migration Review*, 44(1), 1-38.
- Harvey, D. C. (2017). A Quiet Suffering: Some Notes on the Sociology of Suffering. *Sociological Forum*, 27(2), 527-534.
- Herrera Vinelli, S. L. (2011). La política internacional de refugio como resultante de la política burocrática: un análisis a partir del caso de solicitantes de refugio cubanos en Ecuador (Master's thesis). Flacso-Ecuador. <http://hdl.handle.net/10469/9293>
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, INEC (2010). *Población y demografía*. Quito: INEC.
- Jacobsen, M. H., & Marshman, S. (2008). The Four Faces of Human Suffering in the Sociology of Zygmunt Bauman. *Polish Sociological Review*, 161(1), 3-24.

- Margheritis, A. (2011). "Todos somos migrantes" (We are all migrants): The Paradoxes of the Innovative State-led Transnationalism in Ecuador. *International Political Sociology*, 5, 198-217.
- Medá, D. (1998). *El trabajo. Un valor en peligro de extinción*. Barcelona: Gedisa.
- Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio e Integración. (June 11, 2008). Eliminación de visas de turismo para ingresar al Ecuador. *Boletín de Prensa*, (398).
- Oboler, S. (2006). History on the Move ... Revisiting. *The Suffering of the Immigrants from the Latino/a Perspective*. *Qualitative Sociology*, 29(1), 117-126. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-005-9007-4>
- Pedone, C., & Izquierdo, I. (2018). Programas de atracción de académicos: los casos del subprograma de cátedras patrimoniales en México y del Programa Prometeo en Ecuador. *Archivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas*, 26 (94).
- Ramírez, J., & Quezada, G. (2008). Derecho a migrar, derecho a quedarse. La movilidad humana en la Nueva Carta Magna. In *Memorias del Primer Congreso Latinoamericano sobre Migración Internacional: Voces del Sur*. México: Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México.
- Ramírez, J., & Quezada, G. (2014). Política migratoria y avances en movilidad humana en la nueva Constitución del Ecuador. In *Con o sin pasaporte. Análisis socioantropológico sobre la migración ecuatoriana* (pp. 205-224). Quito: IAEN.
- Rodríguez, M. (2011). El sujeto migrante latinoamericano en Estados Unidos: una breve comparación con el migrante cubano. In B. Feldman-Bianco, L. Rivera Sánchez, C. Stefoni, & M. I. Villa Martínez (Eds.). *La construcción social del sujeto migrante en América Latina. Prácticas, representaciones y categorías* (pp. 147-180). Quito: Clacso-Flacso.
- Telesur. (July 16, 2016). Correa asegura que derechos de cubanos deportados se respetaron. Telesur. Retrieved from <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/Correa-asegura-que-derechos-de-cubanos-deportados-se-respetaron-20160716-0043.html>
- Sayad, A. (2004). *The Suffering of the Immigrant*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Sevillano, J. M. (2010). Contribuciones de la psicología de la liberación a la integración de la población inmigrante. *Intervención Psicosocial*, 19(3), 223-234.
- Univisión Noticias. (November 26, 2015). Ecuador impondrá visa a cubanos para disminuir migración hacia Estados Unidos. Univisión Noticias. Retrieved from [www.univision.com/noticias/inmigracion/ecuador-impondra-visa-a-cubanos-para-disminuir-migracion-hacia-estados-unidos](http://www.univision.com/noticias/inmigracion/ecuador-impondra-visa-a-cubanos-para-disminuir-migracion-hacia-estados-unidos)
- Vega Solís, C., Gómez Martín, C., & Correa Álvarez, A. (2016). Circularidad migratoria entre Ecuador y España. Transformación educativa y estrategias de movilidad. *Revista Migraciones*, (39), 183-210.
- Wiese, L. von (1934). Sociology and Suffering. *International Journal of Ethics*, 44(2), 222-235. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2378236>
- Wilkinson, I. (2005). *Suffering : A Sociological Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Zurbano, R. (March 23, 2013) For Blacks in Cuba, the Revolution hasn't Begun. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/24/opinion/sunday/for-blacks-in-cuba-the-revolution-hasnt-begun.html>