



# SPATIAL MOBILITIES, MIGRATIONS, TRANSIENT STAYS AND PERMANENT TRANSITS: STUDIES OF SOCIO-SPATIAL PROCESSES AND FORMS

MOBILIDADES ESPACIAIS, MIGRAÇÕES, PERMANÊNCIAS TRANSITÓRIAS E TRÂNSITOS PERMANENTES: ESTUDOS DOS PROCESSOS E FORMAS SOCIOESPACIAIS

MOVILIDADES ESPACIALES, MIGRACIONES, PERMANENCIAS TRANSITORIAS Y TRÁNSITOS PERMANENTES: ESTUDIOS DE PROCESOS Y FORMAS SOCIOESPACIALES



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**ABSTRACT**: Population dynamics, with emphasis on migration and permanence, must be understood both as complementary and a multi-determined phenomenon, have always been present in the academic field. However, due to the dynamism inherent to the most diverse societies, migration and permanence are total social facts that can help to understand the ways in which socio-spatial relations are produced and reproduced in contemporary society, especially at the beginning of the 21st century. Research on these themes in human geography may present specific or even general dynamics, including population dynamics. This text is the result of a reflection based on an interdisciplinary reading of mobility and migration (bibliographic research) and research findings that have produced empirical evidence. This text hopes to contribute to the debate on spatial mobility, migration, temporary stays, and permanent transits. Finally, it revisits debates, some already established in the academic field but in need of updating, especially in population geography.

**KEYWORDS**: Spatial mobility. Migration. Permanence. Permanent transits. Transient stays.

RESUMO: A dinâmica populacional, com ênfase no par migração e permanência, que devem ser entendidas, ambas, como fenômenos complementares e multideterminados sempre estiveram presente no campo acadêmico. Entretanto, pelo dinamismo inerente as mais distintas sociedades, a migração e a permanência são fatos sociais totais que podem auxiliar na compreensão dos modos como são produzidas e reproduzidas as relações socioespaciais na sociedade contemporânea, sobretudo no início do século XXI. Pesquisas com essas temáticas na Geografia humana podem apresentar dinâmicas específicas ou até mesmo gerais, dentre elas, as dinâmicas populacionais. Este texto é resultado de uma reflexão a partir de uma leitura interdisciplinar sobre mobilidades e migrações (pesquisa bibliográfica) e resultados de pesquisas que produziram evidências empíricas. Espera-se com este texto contribuir para o debate sobre mobilidades espaciais, migrações, permanências transitórias e trânsitos permanentes. Por fim, revisitar debates, alguns já cristalizados no campo acadêmico, mas carentes de atualizações, sobretudo na Geografia da População.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**: Mobilidade espacial. Migração. Permanência. Trânsitos permanentes. Permanências transitórias.

RESUMEN: Las dinámicas poblacionales, con énfasis en la migración y la permanencia, que deben entenderse como fenómenos complementarios y multideterminados, siempre han estado presentes en el ámbito académico. Sin embargo, debido al dinamismo inherente a las más diversas sociedades, la migración y la permanencia son hechos sociales totales que pueden ayudar a comprender las formas en que se producen y reproducen las relaciones socioespaciales en la sociedad contemporánea, especialmente a principios del siglo XXI. Este texto es el resultado de una reflexión basada en una lectura interdisciplinaria sobre movilidad y migración (investigación bibliográfica) y resultados de investigaciones que produjeron evidencia empírica. Investigaciones sobre estos temas en geografía humana puede presentar dinámicas específicas o incluso generales, incluida la dinámica demográfica. se espera que este articulo contribuya al debate sobre movilidades espaciales, migraciones, estancias temporales y tránsitos permanentes. Y, por último, revisitar debates, algunos ya cristalizados en el ámbito académico, pero necesitados de actualizaciones, especialmente en Geografía de Poblaciones.

**PALABRAS CLAVE**: Movilidad espacial. Migración. Permanencia. Tránsitos permanentes. Permanencias transitorias.

#### Introduction

Migrations, both internal and international, along with their diverse typologies, spatialities, and temporalities, remain highly relevant, present not only in the socio-spatial structures of countries but also in the agendas of academic research. This persistence can be explained, at least in part, by a fundamental factor: the generality of these social phenomena, which occur across different spaces, even though they manifest with specific characteristics and distinct expressions, presenting both patterns and particularities within the social structures and dynamics of all countries, whether affluent nations of the "North" or poorer ones of the "South" (Baeninger, 2015; Baganha, 2004; Brito, 1996; Levy, 2002; Menezes, 2002; Póvoa Neto, 1997; Sassen, 2010; Sayad, 1998; Todaro, 1969).

As a visiting researcher at the Center for Studies in Geography and Territorial Planning at the University of Coimbra, Portugal, within the framework of a binational cooperation project, one can observe population dynamics in the Portuguese context and identify the issue of Portugal's depopulation (social desertification), particularly in the interior regions (referred to as "deep Portugal"), alongside the concentration of population along the coast. Simultaneously, the country faces challenges related to illegal immigration, especially of families and individuals from Eastern Europe (Ukraine), Portuguese-speaking African excolonies, and Brazil. Migrations and their diverse typologies have always been part of Portuguese population dynamics and constitute an integral component of its social structure. However, there is a marked trend of decreasing populations in rural areas and overall national population decline as a result of international migration in times of crisis. During field visits to Noisy-le-Sec (a suburb of Paris), illegal migration also appears as a significantly visible phenomenon. In European academic research groups, the study of migration, its flows, meanings, and implications is a recurring theme.

In the Brazilian context, migration and its various typologies remain central in research agendas due to their significant socio-spatial presence within the social structure and their contribution to major structural transformations in society, particularly in relation to population redistribution, redistribution of economic activities, regional asymmetries, and issues associated with the lack of social and economic cohesion. Therefore, at the local level, understanding spatial mobilities, migrations, transient stays, and permanent movements within a specific historical and social context remains crucial, taking into account the social and economic environment in which social groups and families are embedded, as well as their social trajectories and patterns of spatial mobility, and sometimes social mobility. Each phenomenon

studied requires careful attention to its meanings. Analyses must also consider broader elements, such as economic dynamics, recognizing that periods of economic growth or crisis can affect migratory dynamics (flows) or even the permanence of potential migrants (individuals or families) in their places of residence. The theoretical framework allows for the analysis of spatial mobilities, rural-to-rural, rural-to-urban, and urban-to-rural migrations, areas of population loss and gain, and stages of productive restructuring, with particular attention to emerging migratory processes (Baeninger, 2015), represented by selected migratory trajectories and circularities within the network of relationships. While every migration process involves spatial mobility, not all spatial mobility constitutes migration.

Spatial mobility—including *migration*, its various forms, and *circularities*—should be understood as a socially constructed and multidetermined phenomenon (influenced by society, the economy, national and international governments, environmental factors, etc.) that manifests across different social contexts and spaces. In migration research, it is essential to be sensitive to both material and immaterial elements underlying the choice between staying and leaving. Frequently, spatial mobility is perceived by actors as an opportunity for upward social mobility, although no direct relationship necessarily exists between spatial and social mobility; it more often represents a means of expressing poverty (in its multiple dimensions) and precarious inclusion in destination areas.

Understanding these social phenomena through specific studies in Brazil—examining structures, social networks, relationships, and practices, as well as rhythms of life, settings, and the places where people live, work, and spend their time—can contribute to the comprehension of social processes both from a micro-level perspective and in relation to broader phenomena. These include, for instance, economic dynamics or governmental policies, which can indirectly influence or (re)shape migratory processes, particularly public policies and, more specifically, social policies. It is essential to recognize that population dynamics—including spatial mobilities, migrations and their diverse typologies, as well as forms of permanence (immobility)—are multidetermined social processes, or total social facts, which must be studied in ways that allow for the understanding of the various underlying elements of migration and permanence, as well as their meanings for the social agents involved. This text emerges from a reflection grounded in an interdisciplinary reading on mobility and migration (bibliographic research), as well as from empirical studies that have produced evidence on these topics, with particular attention to the Brazilian experience (highlighting field research, including a series of semi-structured interviews). It offers the reader a discussion of spatial mobilities, migrations, transient stays, and permanent movements. Finally, it revisits debates—some already established in the academic field but in need of updating—especially in Population Geography, focusing on migration and its multiple meanings in the early twenty-first century, both material and immaterial, including areas of attraction and repulsion.

# **Spatial mobility and migrations**

Spatial mobility and its various forms, including migration, are not new phenomena. Local experiences in Brazil indicate that migration is a continuous process and forms part of social reproduction strategies, including as a factor encouraging the permanence of migrant families (particularly temporary migrants) in their places of origin.

The topics of migration and permanence are recurrent in academic research, particularly within Anthropology, Geography, Sociology, Social Psychology, and other disciplines, which—whether consensually or not—have undertaken considerable efforts to understand the meanings, contexts, and, to a lesser extent, the significance of population movements in diverse empirical settings.

Specifically regarding migration, the persistent focus on this topic within Brazilian academic research can be attributed to the fact that spatial mobility, across different periods and with varying temporalities and meanings, is a significantly prominent aspect of national dynamics. At the family level (micro perspective), spatial movement has historically been and continues to be a constitutive element of diverse social reproduction strategies, albeit with varying characteristics depending on the reality of each family group—whether elite, middle class, or economically disadvantaged. This highlights the relevance of migration across different strata of Brazilian society, even when these movements carry different meanings and implications (Becker, 1997; Brito, 2009; Fazito, 2010; Felix, 2008; Gaudemar, 1997; Maia, 2004; Woortmann, 1990).

For Bauman (1999, p. 8, our translation) "immobility is not a realistic option in a world in permanent change." From this more extreme perspective, spatial mobility is an increasingly prominent phenomenon in the dynamics of diverse societies, functioning as a social process that induces rearrangements. The movement of individuals—and, one could add, families—entails crossing multiple boundaries—not only geographic, but also cultural, political, and linguistic (especially in the case of international migrants)—which transform societies from the local level to the scale of an entire country.

In contemporary societies, embedded in social, technical, and informational networks, individuals experience a multiplicity of places under varying circumstances and with distinct intentions, made possible by spatial mobilities, including migration.

Spatial mobility—including migration, its various forms, and circularities—should be understood as a socially constructed and multidetermined phenomenon (shaped by society, the economy, national and international governments, environmental factors, etc.) that manifests in different social contexts. In migration research, it is crucial to be sensitive to both the material and immaterial factors underlying the choice between staying and leaving. Spatial mobility is frequently perceived by the actors involved as a potential avenue for upward social mobility, although there is not necessarily a direct relationship between spatial and social mobility. Rather, it often reflects the capacity to express poverty (in its multiple dimensions) and social exclusion. In contexts of forced displacement, attention must be given to the factors driving compulsory departure, such as governmental policies, economic and spatial restructuring, or aggressive agribusiness expansion.

The migrant is a diverse category, produced and reproduced within a network of relations—including family, labor market, and broader societal ties—but in socially less dynamic environments, spatial mobilities and migration play a crucial role as potential guarantees for securing the material conditions necessary for the survival of the individual and their family group.

In settings with limited income-generating opportunities and low labor market dynamism (economic crisis), individuals are compelled to adopt spatial mobility as a strategy for the social reproduction of their group. Circularities, migration, and the migrant are thus produced as outcomes of a specific economic environment, and spatial mobilities—including migration—emerge as a means to pursue new work and life experiences, as well as alternatives to provide improved material conditions for the family group, even if this entails distancing oneself from one's place of residence, thereby weakening bonds with one's circle of affection (family, friends, neighbors, etc.).

Even when approached from an interdisciplinary perspective, spatial mobility or migration tends to be predominantly analyzed through a macrostructural lens in the study of population flow dynamics (Menezes, 2002). In the broadest and most general sense, migration constitutes one of several forms of spatial mobility and can be understood as the relocation of people from one region to another. This movement occurs in various forms, influenced by

multiple factors (multidetermined), including the pursuit of employment and income, social advancement, access to transportation, and other considerations.

Economic and demographic analyses of migration often seek to explain the phenomenon through the lens of attraction and repulsion factors (Sassen, 2010). From this perspective, economic poverty, the absence of a labor market (formal or even informal), and low wages are considered indicators that characterize a repulsion scenario, corresponding to the migrants' places of origin. Certain regions are therefore regarded as more "repulsive" due to their social and economic environment. The lack of a dynamic labor market is often highlighted as a central element that shapes the phenomenon of repulsion.

This approach reflects a predominantly economic interpretation of attraction and repulsion, which has become largely established in migration research but still requires further critical examination. One hypothesis that warrants deeper investigation is that, when attempting to understand the meanings of migration for the agents themselves, the concepts of attraction and repulsion are insufficient if one moves beyond an economicist perspective on social processes. In other words, while labor market dynamics and the potential to earn an income may act as drivers of migration, it is equally important to consider the material and immaterial factors influencing the decision to leave or remain (even temporarily).

Within the Humanities, and particularly the Social Sciences, migration manifests in diverse ways across different times and spaces, precluding a single, universal definition of the phenomenon. This diversity poses challenges to understanding migration, complicating the systematization and collection of related data and estimates, and, more critically, calling into question the heuristic value of the concept itself. Nevertheless, the notions of "regions of attraction" and "regions of repulsion" are nearly ubiquitous in such studies, with few exceptions.

National and international literature on migration suggests that migratory flows share some universal and structurally similar characteristics. However, each migratory flow occurs within a specific historical and social context. Human movements are influenced by social, cultural, economic, political, and even environmental relations, which often vary considerably.

Social processes surrounding migration are shaped by particularities that give the phenomenon highly specific characteristics, even though some elements recur—for example, the pursuit of better living conditions across diverse migratory flows in very different societies. In this sense, the multiple meanings of migration should be carefully captured and analyzed through evidence generated by qualitative methodologies.

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Migration is frequently used as a synonym for spatial mobility (Becker, 1997), involving a portion of a given population and resulting in changes in social (interpersonal relations), productive (relations of production), and physical environments. As a social process, migration provokes rearrangements, since the movement of individuals—and one could add families entails crossing multiple boundaries, not only geographic but also cultural, political, and linguistic, particularly in the case of international migrants. Consequently, the phenomenon carries a diverse set of meanings for those who migrate, those who remain, and for the places of origin and destination of the social agents involved.

The factors influencing spatial mobility vary according to specific historical realities. One of the earliest studies on migration was conducted by Ravenstein (1885) in Great Britain, who published his findings as the "empirical laws of migration" to explain general population displacement processes, taking into account factors such as technology, sex, and economic conditions. He also analyzed particular population dynamics in Great Britain, which do not necessarily recur in other empirical contexts or that occurred within highly specific historical and social circumstances.

According to Ravenstein's "law of distance," most women tended to undertake shortdistance movements, in contrast to men, whose relocations were generally longer. The factors shaping this population dynamic were linked to the higher costs of migration, material conditions, and access to information. A greater distance from the place of origin increased the uncertainties and costs associated with being a migrant. Psychological factors and the need to adapt to a new residence or job could also influence the migratory process.

Another point raised by Ravenstein (1885) is the concept of stepwise migration, proposed as a strategy to reduce costs associated with long-distance movement. For example, rural migrants would first relocate to small or medium-sized towns before eventually moving to larger cities. This process was facilitated by the advent of new technologies and improvements in transportation, which even allowed for the skipping of certain intermediate stages, such as rural migrants moving directly to medium-sized cities before reaching major urban centers.

Although the application of stepwise migration (shorter moves followed by longer ones) is no longer fully adequate for understanding contemporary migration—given the advancements in transportation and information systems that facilitate long-distance migration for individuals or families with sufficient resources—two elements in Ravenstein's study remain present, directly or indirectly, in almost all research on population dynamics: the existence of migration streams and counter-streams (return migrants).

Migration dynamics in the European context (specifically Great Britain) were characterized by movements of departure and return. As migrants moved in a particular direction (stream), there would be a counter-movement in the opposite direction (counter-stream), albeit with lesser intensity. Despite the variety of variables present in the migratory process (age, sex, distance, etc.), Ravenstein considered economic factors as the primary determinant of migration.

Ravenstein's studies were conducted during the Industrial Revolution, a period when migration to cities represented an opportunity to earn higher wages in urban-industrial regions. This context underscores the premise that migratory streams were primarily economically motivated. Precisely because it is historically situated, Ravenstein's classic work demonstrates how individual and collective migratory behaviors are influenced by very specific socioeconomic environments, characterized by the particularities of a given historical period.

Three complementary or supplementary approaches can be employed to study migration:

1-The individual perspective (microstructural approach/neoclassical models);

2-The historical-structural approach (considering the prevailing economic and social context);

3-The household perspective (analyzing families or households as the reference unit for understanding and examining migratory processes).

Some studies explain migratory movements within the neoclassical framework, which conceptualizes migration as an individual decision made after rationally evaluating its costs and benefits. This calculation typically includes financial and material returns over a defined period, taking into account migration expenses and potential gains at the destination. Employment opportunities and income prospects are highly influential in the decision-making process (Massey, 1990), along with considerations of various costs (housing, food, transportation, etc.) and benefits (employment, higher wages, improved living conditions, etc.).

However, this analysis appears to have considerable limitations. In the decision to migrate, there does not seem to be a clear separation between the family and the individual. Although migration of the entire family is less common than individual migration—and the

latter is influenced by a set of internal factors within the family of origin, such as household size, the extent of family landholdings, income, and educational levels—the decision to migrate (including that of the individual) can be a collective deliberation. This is often because the family must bear the costs associated with spatial mobility or migration.

A persistent challenge in analyzing the meanings of spatial mobility lies in distinguishing the gains of the migrating individual from those of the family that remains. Despite the geographic distance between them, remittances sent by migrants to their places of origin are not uncommon. Individual migration is frequently motivated by the intent to send financial resources to relatives remaining in the migrant's home locality. Thus, a decision that may initially appear individual can in fact constitute a kind of collective project. Those who remain depend substantially on the resources remitted by migrants. The fact that young people and singles are more predisposed to migrate than married individuals (Mincer, 1978) can be explained, for instance, by the desire to secure employment and support their family, or more broadly, as part of a family's social reproduction strategy.

According to the historical-structural approach, migration is understood as a process shaped by the prevailing social, economic, and political conditions of a given historical context. The economic and social contextualization of the environment in which a migrant or potential migrant is embedded is used to identify the underlying causes of population displacement. A central perspective of this approach emphasizes regional asymmetries, which play a fundamental role in the migration phenomenon (Harris; Todaro, 1970), as more prosperous, dynamic regions with greater employment opportunities tend to attract more people.

An important aspect of this approach is the relationship between labor supply and labor scarcity. Contexts with labor shortages attract more migrants because they offer more enticing employment opportunities. Conversely, regions with an excess of labor tend to pay lower wages. This relationship results in a certain equalization of wages across different regions, mediated by migratory processes: the migration of workers increases wages in regions losing labor, while the reverse occurs in regions receiving migrants.

To illustrate this approach, Lewis (1954) elucidates his migration model using two contexts: one capitalist (urban-industrial society) and the other subsistence-based (agrarian/agricultural societies). In the latter, where labor is abundant, wages are lower than in the urban-industrial society, which offers fixed, higher, and more attractive wages. Migration to the city and labor shortages in rural areas increase agricultural wages, reducing the gap

between rural and urban wages. Thus, wage adjustment between distinct spheres (rural and urban) occurs as a result of migration.

However, this explanation is considerably limited in understanding certain empirical realities in Brazil, particularly given the role of family labor in subsistence agriculture. In these contexts, work is predominantly performed by family members, and paid labor (temporary or permanent) is rare. This pattern is observed, for example, in the Northeast of Brazil, in the northern and northeastern regions of Minas Gerais, and in the interior of Espírito Santo. Furthermore, in urban Brazil, unemployment rates remain significantly high, despite data from 2013 indicating the lowest rate since 2002 (IBGE, 2013). By 2016, there were 11.8 million unemployed individuals in Brazil (Carvalho, 2016), representing the seventh-highest global rate in percentage terms (11.6%). In this sense, there is a distinction between the existence of attractive wages and actual employability, as the former does not necessarily imply the latter.

Understanding the meanings and significance of spatial mobility, based on the material and economic situation of the agent's family of origin, relates closely to neoclassical microeconomic theory (Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969). From this theoretical perspective, migration is the result of regional asymmetries, primarily reflected in wage differentials between regions (the migrant's region of origin and destination) and employment rates (Harris; Todaro, 1970). It is widely acknowledged that labor markets and their dynamics constitute an important factor shaping spatial mobility, as noted by the New Economics of Labor Migration (Stark; Bloom, 1985; Stark; Taylor, 1989). However, it is also crucial to consider all other material and symbolic elements underlying spatial mobility, such as the decision to leave driven by a sense of non-belonging to the place of origin, which may be motivated by diverse immaterial factors, including homophobia, misogyny, racism, and sexism.

The dynamics of the labor market, lack of social infrastructure, and low income from participation in the local labor market, among other factors in the migrant's region of origin, can influence the outflow of individuals from these areas. Other elements are also present in the phenomenon of mobility, such as the departure of young people seeking to avoid remaining in subordinate positions within the family hierarchy. Therefore, it is necessary to understand a set of factors shaping mobility practices, including instances in which individuals migrate as a strategy to ensure the family's continuity in its place of origin.

A third approach tends to integrate the two perspectives—the neoclassical (micro) and historical-structural (macro)—under a household (or family) perspective for analyzing migration processes. A central element of this approach is the understanding that migration

decisions are not made individually but collectively by a group of people (families or households), acting to maximize expected income, mitigate risks, and cope with the challenges of an imperfect labor market. The decision may involve individual migration or the relocation of the entire family (depending on available resources), with family members placed in different productive sectors to minimize risks. The key aspect of this approach is that the family, rather than the individual alone, becomes the reference unit for analyzing both migratory processes and factors associated with staying.

This proposal, which emphasizes both the objective and subjective aspects of spatial mobility and permanence, seeks to contribute to the debate on economic reductionism while providing a nuanced understanding of mobility types and conditions of permanence. Using the concept of migration without such a qualification risks diminishing its heuristic value, rendering it vague or meaningless. Accordingly, it is essential to recognize the multidimensional nature of both spatial mobility and permanence, drawing on contributions from all theoretical approaches while privileging the household/family perspective.

Spatial mobility, as a constitutive element of the social and economic reproduction of populations, possesses specificities that must be carefully identified and qualified as a social fact, shaped by numerous elements and framed within a concrete historical, social, and geographic reality.

This analysis assumes that an individual's social trajectory may be extensively marked by a history of spatial mobilities, with departures varying across time and space and taking on different meanings, including the possibility of improving material conditions (food, clothing, transportation, access to healthcare, etc.) and immaterial conditions (acquisition of status by the individual leaving the family and community to "conquer the world"). Considering the various types of mobility and the potential existence of supporting networks (social, political, religious, economic, and labor), the pair of concepts—transitory permanence and permanent transit—is proposed as an introduction to the debate, highlighting the dynamics of spatial mobility that the concept of migration alone may fail to capture or may inadequately explain.

In this study, migration is conceived as a social process that reflects part of the complexity of both the society of origin and that of destination, particularly regarding the social and economic environment. Through the lens of migration, one can observe highly specific historical contexts and elements at the local, regional, and even global scales that influence the configuration of spatial mobility and permanence.

While migration may have a positive dimension, both socially and economically (Brito, 2009), for those who leave—forming the basis for a calculated migration decision—it can simultaneously serve as a strategy to improve the living conditions of those who remain. Migratory experiences may ultimately constitute a project to sustain permanence in the place of origin, with spatial mobility emerging as one of the key determinants of this social fact.

## Beyond repulsion and attraction: limitations of economistic approaches to mobility

Due to the inherent dynamism of diverse societies, migration and permanence are total social facts that can aid in understanding how social relations are produced and reproduced in contemporary society, particularly in the early twenty-first century. These phenomena manifest in both specific (micro) and broader (macro) forms, such as migration flows driven by economic dynamics, even though a satisfactory understanding of migration requires attention to both material and immaterial elements surrounding the phenomenon.

In the literature on migration, both classical and recent studies, certain areas are framed from an economicist perspective as "regions of attraction," such as the São Paulo Metropolitan Region, in contrast to so-called "regions of repulsion," such as the Northeast of Brazil, the northern and northeastern parts of Minas Gerais, and the interior of Espírito Santo. Research on the circulation of people—including departures and returns, transitory permanence, and permanent transit—necessitates a careful analysis of what is highly problematic: the so-called "regions of attraction and repulsion," understanding social mobility as part of the dynamics of social reproduction of these families or individuals. Beyond this, migration studies often construct theoretical and methodological frameworks to investigate specific social universes, primarily based on economic aspects.

From a macrostructural perspective, such as in neoclassical and Marxist approaches, spatial mobility emerges as a reflection of regional economic imbalances (Carleial, 1994; Gaudemar, 1977; Lee, 1966; Todaro, 1976). Population flows function as a marker of regional asymmetries, driven by differences in income, wages, and labor market dynamics, among other factors. In this macrostructural view, the formation of these flows results from individual decisions. As a structuring element of spatial mobility, migration is seen as a consequence of regional characteristics: regions of attraction and regions of repulsion (pull-push factors), determined by economic and infrastructural elements.

Focusing research on so-called "areas of attraction" may reveal temporary movements of labor migrants, which are ongoing and involve multiple generations (migrant parents, migrant children, migrant relatives). This represents a type of mobility that challenges conventional concepts of regions of origin and destination, as well as the notions of repulsion and attraction, and, more fundamentally, the very concept of migration.

Throughout individuals' life courses (marriages, births, formation of new households through matrimony, etc.), they may depart (migrate) and return to their places of origin, many of which are labeled in the literature as "regions of repulsion." This mobility may mark both their personal histories and those of their families. While departures may influence relocation to cities or other regions of the country, spatial mobility is frequently motivated by the desire to return to one's land of origin. It is also a key mechanism for the economic sustainability of these families, serving as a significant factor in maintaining the family unit within the production system and potentially determining the migrant's settlement in rural areas, in agricultural activities, and in their place of origin. Leave to stay. Remain in the rural world. Or migrate to remain residing in small towns with limited labor markets, that is, within a restricted field of possibilities.

In the Brazilian academic field, migration is often studied without fully considering the diversity present in this social universe, which is also observable at micro-analytical scales, such as in the bodies and lived experiences that reflect ethnicity, race, class, gender, sexuality, among other factors. These aspects can illuminate the motivations for migration (or permanence) of people residing in particular locations and with similar socioeconomic conditions. Economic factors and the labor category help explain spatial mobility, circularities, and migrations, but they have inherent limitations. These analyses tend to explain the formation of mobility, circularity, and migration primarily in terms of repulsion and attraction. Among the repulsion factors are economic poverty and unemployment, whereas attraction factors include opportunities for better jobs and wages. These factors typically represent systemic conditions at a certain scale, across an entire region or country.

Research conducted by our team provides compelling evidence that explanations based solely on repulsion and attraction have significant limitations. Studies carried out in the northeastern region of Minas Gerais indicate that "repulsion factors" adequately explain why certain individuals (or families) engage in trajectories of spatial mobility (circularities and migrations). They clarify the motivations for departure or relocation, but do not account for why people and families with similar socioeconomic conditions do not migrate. Evidently, numerous other variables are at play. One potential contribution is to explain spatial mobility, circularities, and migration by considering less systemic variables. Another important point is that focusing solely on the individual is insufficient. Migration may appear as an individual project, but the decision is always collective. Migration is a socio-spatial production.

Another aspect, highlighted in population studies, concerns the nature of spatial mobility—that is, individuals or families circulating temporarily without a complete population transfer from "stagnant" regions to "modern" regions. These are cases of permanent transits and transitory permanence.

The spatial categories that appear in the literature as "areas of attraction" are reductive: the variables are almost always economic, reflecting the dynamics of capitalist expansion in the country. Internal migrations are understood as resulting from the formation of inequality between Brazilian regions, driven by the centralization of industrial activities in certain cities, such as the emblematic cases of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (Becker, 1997. However, the rationality of emigration is far more complex than the mere classification of areas as attractive or repulsive. Evidence from research in so-called repulsion areas, when combined with data from attraction areas, can contribute to a broader understanding: the unique characteristics of migration and circularities in Brazil, the formation and reproduction of migratory flows, regional asymmetries, and the material and immaterial conditions that make emigration a possibility and permanence a form of resistance—that is, leaving in order to stay. Departure as a possibility of permanence.

Migrations constitute nodes and flows that emerge as a territorial or scalar moment within a multidetermined dynamic and a variety of intersecting processes, often concentrated in particular hotspots. From a historical-structural perspective, migration is understood as a process influenced by the social, economic, and political context of a given historical moment. The economic and social contextualization of the universe in which a migrant or potential migrant is situated is used to identify the underlying causes of population displacement. One of the main perspectives of this approach is based on regional asymmetries, which play a fundamental role in the migration phenomenon (Harris; Todaro, 1970), as more prosperous, dynamic regions with greater labor opportunities tend to attract more people. Importantly, transitory migrations can inherently carry the possibility of return to the point of origin.

From a macrostructural perspective, Lopes (1971) analyzed migration in Brazil as a process of population transfer from "stagnant" regions to "modern" regions, reflecting a dynamic representative of the expansion of capitalism in the country. Internal migrations were

understood as resulting from the formation of regional inequalities, driven by the concentration of industrial activities in specific cities, such as the capitals São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro<sup>2</sup>.

In Singer's (1976) analysis, during the 1970s, rural areas constituted spaces of population repulsion, primarily due to the concentration of land in the hands of large landowners and, in certain regions of the country, the predominance of subsistence farming with limited production. This was a consequence of insufficient arable land, credit constraints, and difficulties in commercialization, among other factors. According to the author, these regions functioned as "producers" of labor for the more dynamic regions of Brazil, which attracted the most significant migratory flows.

Closely aligned with Singer's perspective<sup>3</sup>, Durham (1978) reiterates that migration results from regional inequalities, which lead populations to move from backward and stagnant areas to "developed" and "modern" regions. In Brazil, from the 1930s onwards and intensifying in the 1950s with industrial growth, there was a major population shift toward cities, with rural areas serving as a "breeding ground" for migrants.

For some scholars, Brazilian population mobility is primarily linked to industrialization and the country's urbanization process. These macrostructural analyses highlight a functional relationship between regions, so that, in the distribution of Brazil's population, certain areas, such as the Northeast, acted as suppliers of labor, primarily for the industrialized Southeast. This perspective contributed to a certain consensus by suggesting that socio-spatial mobility was economically motivated, with migrants seeking to enter the labor market, increase income, and improve well-being (Martine, 1982), ultimately aiming to enhance their living conditions.

Other scholars, however, interpret the phenomenon as a strategy for the social reproduction of families, thereby incorporating the meanings of migration for the groups or agents involved in this social process. Garcia Júnior, for instance, in his book *Sul: a caminho do roçado*, demonstrates how migration represents a condition for the social reproduction of peasant families in the Northeast. Published in the 1990s, the work shows that the departure of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> However, the most significant change in Brazil's employment structure occurred with the shift of workers from the primary sector to the tertiary sector, bypassing industrialization, and with a strong prevalence of informal occupations, even though "from the 1960s onwards, the concentration of urban industrial activity and the promotion of agricultural modernization were phenomena that progressed together in the country, generating flows of considerable magnitude toward urban contexts" (Becker, 1997, p. 349, our translation).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> From a materialist perspective, Singer (1973) analyzes internal migrations in Brazil in relation to structural transformations. Like any social phenomenon, internal migrations are historically conditioned, resulting from a broader process of societal change. According to the author, there is a distinction between structural determinants, which drive movements, and the subjective factors and personal characteristics of the migrants. For Singer, the causes of migration should be sought at the origin, in the elements that stimulate departure, and in those that render other localities attractive.

peasants from the Northeast to the Southeast does not necessarily signify a permanent exit from their place of origin, as there is always the possibility of return, confirming that the phenomenon is temporally bounded.

At a general level, it cannot be ignored that economic factors carry significant weight when a family or an individual decides to migrate, even though, in certain social contexts, remaining in place may not be a viable option. According to macrostructural approaches, labor market dynamics, regional asymmetries, inter-regional wage differences, and the possibility of securing employment greatly influence the choice of destination and can be decisive in the migration process.

However, even with the strong influence of economic factors in this process, it is equally necessary to consider the multidetermined nature of both migration and permanence. Issues of gender/sex, formal education or schooling, age, individual and group aspirations, and feelings of belonging (or lack thereof), among many other aspects observable in biographies or life histories, can shape the phenomenon of departure and residence. Accepting that the migration agent rationally evaluates their locality of origin in relation to others and considers departure as an alternative, the same evaluation may also determine that the departure is temporary, depending on the field of possibilities present in each specific social context.

While economic factors may prevail, noneconomic aspects—such as the sense of not belonging to the social world of origin—can help explain why migration does not always occur due to dissatisfaction with work or earnings in the place of origin and can clarify the potential influences on the decision to remain or to migrate.

In research conducted with peasants in the state of Sergipe, Woortmann (1990) concluded that migration was not merely a consequence of precarious living conditions but an integral practice within the very strategies of social reproduction of this group. Garcia Jr. (1989) and Woortmann (1990), unlike authors engaged in macrostructural studies, focus their analyses on the social agents of migration and argue that the departure of some individuals may represent a condition for the continued residence of the peasant family in their place of origin. By demonstrating the circulation of people through departures and returns, they move away from the concept of regions of attraction and repulsion, understanding social mobility as part of the reproductive dynamics of these families.

In line with these "microstructural" approaches, Silva and Menezes (2007) showed that the migrant belongs to a social reality defined by family and neighborhood ties, values, and ideologies, which shape a sense of belonging to a particular social and cultural space—a set of

concrete and particular situations. This assertion leads to a reflection, grounded in empirical realities, that prevents reducing the dynamics of "leaving and staying" solely to economic factors, understanding it instead as a total social fact (Sayad, 1998). In other words, spatial mobility can have diverse meanings, not limited only to opportunities for labor market insertion or income improvement.

It is considered that individuals, or the families to which they belong, cannot be treated merely as statistical indices (figures), nor as passive actors in relation to economic forces determined by contexts external to the family. To a large extent, they are active agents in these processes, in which departure may result from numerous factors not strictly economic, although the pursuit of employment can often be one of the primary determinants shaping this phenomenon.

In the northern and northeastern regions of Minas Gerais, the thirty economically poorest municipalities of the state are located (Batista, 2016), and this poverty is particularly pronounced among rural populations. Insights gained throughout undergraduate and graduate studies, as well as previous research conducted in this region, point to the necessity of expanding investigations to better understand spatial mobility, encompassing differentiated times and spaces and diverse meanings, as these data add greater complexity to demographic flows.

Another relevant issue for research concerns the permanence of rural families in their region of origin—whether by choice or due to the impossibility of migrating—and the factors conditioning this permanence. In particular, the "meaning" of remaining in place should be analyzed in greater depth. At the regional level, migratory flows are associated with two sociocultural phenomena: spatial mobility, especially of rural families, driven by economic reasons (search for work and income), and the process of deurbanization (Costa *et al.*, 2008), resulting from the abandonment of the countryside as a place of work and residence. This discussion supports Haesbaert's (2009, p. 246) argument that "the migrant is a very complex category, and at its extreme, we can say that there are as many types of migrants as there are individuals or social groups involved in migratory processes."

Understanding the meanings and significance of spatial mobility, based on the material and economic situation of the agent's family of origin, refers to the neoclassical microeconomic theory (Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969). From this theoretical perspective, migration is the result of regional asymmetries, particularly marked by wage differences between regions (the region of origin and the destination of migrants) and employment rates (Harris; Todaro, 1970). It is

undisputed that the labor market and its dynamics constitute an important element in shaping spatial mobility, as highlighted by the New Economists of Labor Migration (Stark; Bloom, 1985; Stark; Taylor, 1989); however, it is essential to consider all other elements—both material and symbolic—that may underlie the phenomenon of spatial mobility, for example, departures motivated by a sense of non-belonging to the place of origin, driven by various immaterial factors such as homophobia, racism, and sexism.

The dynamics of the labor market, the lack of social infrastructure, low earnings derived from participation in the local labor market, among other factors in the region of origin of the agent of spatial mobility, can influence the departure of individuals from these areas. However, there are additional elements present in the phenomenon of mobility, such as the migration of young people as an attempt to avoid remaining subordinate within the family sphere relative to their parents. In other words, it is necessary to understand a set of factors that shape mobility practices, including the departure of individuals as a strategy to ensure the continued presence of the family group in their regions of origin.

That said, statements about "regions of repulsion" generalize by considering economic factors as the determinant of migration (even if temporary). At their extreme, such interpretations amplify stigmas by focusing solely on labor market dynamics and economic considerations, projecting negative valuations onto so-called regions of repulsion. These readings fail to account for the perspectives of people who live intensely in these places and attribute positive valuations—being, belonging, participation, and so forth—that economic analyses cannot capture. Finally, these so-called regions of repulsion are largely determined "from the outside," through academic texts or reports from development agencies, in contrast to those who inhabit these regions and construct readings beyond purely economic terms, often based on cultural considerations. The production and representation of regions of repulsion can be contested by the residents themselves, whose deep, complex immersion imbues these spaces with symbolic meaning that seeks to deconstruct socioeconomic stigmas—typically associated with poverty—while emphasizing cultural richness, the cohesion of social relations, a sense of belonging, and other positive valuations. An emblematic case is the Jequitinhonha Valley (MG), where the local population draws on literature, poetry, music, handicrafts, and other cultural expressions to symbolically contest regional meanings and reinforce the concept of a "Valley of Culture."

#### **Final considerations**

Spatial mobility, as a constitutive element of the very dynamics of social and economic reproduction of populations, possesses specificities that must be carefully identified and qualified as a social fact, determined by numerous factors and framed within a concrete historical, social, and geographical reality.

This analysis assumes that a social trajectory can be long, marked by a history of spatial mobilities, with departures that vary across and between times and spaces, assuming different meanings. These may include the potential improvement of material conditions (food, clothing, transportation, access to medicine, etc.) as well as immaterial conditions (the possibility for the individual to gain status by leaving their family group and community to "conquer the world"). Considering the various types of mobility and the potential existence of supporting networks (social, political, religious, economic, and labor-related), the pair of *concepts—transitory stays* and permanent transits—is introduced into the debate to demonstrate the dynamic of goingseeing-living-being-returning, or even going-seeing-living-staying, without disregarding the possibility of return.

Migration in this study is approached as a social process that reflects part of the complexity of the migrants' society of origin, particularly the social and economic environment. From the migratory phenomenon, it is possible to identify highly specific historical contexts and elements at the local, regional, and even global scales that influence the configuration of spatial mobility and permanence.

Consequently, this research, guided by the following theoretical and methodological assumptions within the framework of Population Geography, may address themes that remain latent in research agendas: (i) understanding why individuals or families migrate largely helps explain the social, cultural, economic, and even environmental universe of their place of origin; (ii) migration—whether temporary or permanent—significantly impacts the continued presence of individuals and/or families in their places of origin; (iii) in areas marked by high migration rates, some individuals or families with cultural or economic/monetary capital similar to those who migrate remain, often resulting in a form of immobility; (iv) understanding migration may provide insights into permanence and the conditions under which certain social groups choose to remain; (v) migration, demographic transition, and aging; (vi) productive and spatial restructuring and migration, among others.

If migration carries a positive dimension, both socially and economically, for those who leave—which serves as the basis for a calculated decision to migrate—it can simultaneously represent an option for improving the living conditions of those who remain. Remittances to places of origin and the purchase of specific goods (stoves, refrigerators, clothing, shoes, etc.) indicate that, although the migratory phenomenon may occur individually, the decision to depart is made with consideration for the individual's reference group. Ultimately, migratory experiences may constitute a project aimed at sustaining permanence in the place of origin, and spatial mobility (with or without social mobility—movement within the social structure) becomes one of the key determinants of this socio-spatial reality.

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