

Logistics

<https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.6208>

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LOGISTICS: *A dominant rationality of power in contemporary migration governance that presents itself as neutral technical expertise in the "efficient" administration of resources, data, infrastructures, and migrants. Far from being a mere operational category, logistics is a producer of value: it legitimizes the extraction of capital from migration through legal and institutional channels and enables the militarization and corporatization of borders in "crisis" management. Rooted in European colonial expansion and the trafficking of enslaved peoples, logistical rationality has continuously reorganised populations, territories, and mobilities in service of capital accumulation—from nineteenth-century whitening projects to contemporary border externalisation, deportation infrastructures, and digital surveillance platforms across Latin America, designing geographies that connect disparate territories.*

Keywords: logistics; migration governance; militarisation; humanitarianism; Latin America

Over the course of the first three decades of the twenty-first century in Latin America, there has been a sophistication of migration control, especially stemming from the neoliberalisation of migration governance under precepts such as governance and humanitarianism—more evident since the so-called “Venezuelan exodus” and the “Venezuelan humanitarian crisis,” to which other conjunctures understood within the framework of crises are added (Herrera and Berg 2019; Domenech and Dias 2020; Ceja 2024; Domenech 2025). In this context, logistics has become a dominant rationality in the control of migrants, territories, resources, and information, increasingly organised in a transnational, continental, and global manner. Critically studying logistics allows us to understand diverse forms of capital extraction with great expansive potential, through the rationality of spatio-temporal efficiency; the new corporate, business, and military configurations of migration governance; and the design of geographies that connect very dissimilar territories in Latin America, through the installation of infrastructures and the implementation of technologies, facilitating the containment, circulation, detention, and deportation of migrants.

Definition

Logistics is an apparatus of power (Neilson 2012) that presents itself as a central technical asset in the field of migration governance in the “efficient” administration of resources, data, infrastructures, and migrants. It legitimises a specific rationality regarding problem-solution and loss-gain calculations in migration administration. Therefore, logistics is a producer of value, including within migrations (Mezzadra 2020; Andersson 2015). And although the illegal and illegalised forms in which value is extracted from migrants and migrations are much more frequently noted, viewing logistics as a legitimised operation of governance allows us to look at legal forms of capital extraction, or beyond the legal/illegal binary.

If in productive capitalism capital accumulation was concentrated in production, today, the centrality of the process is found in circulation, governed by logistics and the financialisation of the economy (Mezzadra and Neilson 2019). Within this framework, and in the web of unequal economic and ecological exchanges, logistics imposes itself as a rationality of calculation and spatial practice that reorganises capitalism on a planetary scale through the reconfiguration of relations and the movement of information, goods, and people (Chua et al. 2018; Mezzadra and Neilson 2012; Tsing 2009). This has led major logistics companies and platform economies, such as *UPS*, *DHL*, Amazon, Mercado Libre, Walmart, and Uber, to play a central role in the global political economy. Evidence supporting the prominence of logistics is that the workers of these companies, such as delivery drivers, became essential workers during the *COVID-19* pandemic. Indeed, many of them were migrants (Souto de Andrade 2022; Álvarez Velasco 2021).

A Brief Genealogy

And while logistics underwent a “revolution” in the commercial field starting in the 1960s and 1970s, its origins trace back not only to commercial knowledge but also to military expertise linked to European colonial expansion. This is evident in the massive trafficking of enslaved people to the Americas (Harney and Moten 2013), the extermination of Native populations in the Americas, Asia, and Africa, and the massive expropriation of natural resources such as timber, gold, and silver, as well as the production of other commodities like sugar cane (Mintz 1996) and coffee (Trouillot 1982).

In the process of the formation and consolidation of nation-states in the Americas, logistical rationality has enabled the colonisation, extermination, and ethnocide (Souza Lima 2010) of Native populations in borderlands and potentially productive territories, giving

continuity to colonial and imperial forms of European expansion. It has also facilitated the distribution of national and non-national populations to convert “empty” territories into productive spaces for capital. Examples of this include the various settlement campaigns in different national Amazonian territories, the Chilean and Argentine Patagonia, the Sonora and Chihuahua deserts in Mexico, and the “Far West” (the Frontier) in the United States.

Logistics has also been present in historical processes of migration administration, allowing us to trace a genealogy in the formats of migration governance. For example, in the installation of infrastructures for the reception of European migrants in cities such as Buenos Aires, São Paulo, and New York during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for their subsequent distribution to regions of Argentina, Brazil, and the United States as part of high-profit and national whitening projects (Seyferth 1997).

Logistics constitutes one of the central tasks in organisations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as well as humanitarian organisations with leading roles in “humanitarian crisis” and “migration crisis” situations, such as the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). In fact, the IOM emerged as a logistical organisation tasked with the transfer and resettlement of “uprooted” persons after World War Two (Pécoud 2017). Although it has refined its identity discourse in recent years as it expands its prominence in global migration governance and across the American continent, its work in administering migrants through transport remains one of its founding myths.

The So-Called Crisis, Infrastructures, and Technologies

Within the framework of so-called “humanitarian crises” and “migration crises”—which we understand not as mere conjunctures but as formats for governing subalternised populations (Ceja 2024)—logistics is mobilised by humanitarian actors as a central task to “alleviate suffering.” First, it enables effectiveness and speed in the distribution of goods and services related to health, shelter, food, water, and sanitation for those framed as “vulnerable.” Second, it encompasses two of the costliest aspects of interventions: the procurement of supplies and transportation. Third, since logistics manages the tracking of goods across the supply chain, it possesses the capacity to extract and store data that allow for the readjustment of interventions or learning for future operations (Thomas and Kopczak 2005). However, it is worth highlighting that more than just the administration of goods and resources to “alleviate suffering,” logistics facilitates the administration of

migrants and migration, transforming them into a highly profitable commodity for diverse sectors such as the military, security, humanitarianism, and transportation.

Through the installation of infrastructures in dissimilar geographies across various countries (Moulin Aguiar and Magalhães 2020; Vasconcelos 2021; López Reyes and París Pombo 2023; Ceja 2024; Alvites 2025; Bonilla Mena 2025), as well as the implementation of certain logics of migration governance and United States border externalisation within existing institutional infrastructures (Fernandes and Pachi 2021; Yépez Arroyo 2021), the use of digital technologies (Domenech et al. 2022; Cogo and Camargo 2025), and the contracting of transport companies for the transfer of migrants (Campos-Delgado 2025b), logistics enables the administration and datafication of migrant populations. This allows not only for control but also for speculation. This configuration shapes national, regional, and continental American territories as hierarchical and networked spaces through corridors (Álvarez Velasco et al. 2021; Domenech 2025), where various intermediate cities beyond national borders become “border” spaces (Balibar 2005; Mezzadra and Neilson 2016)—territories of waiting, “transit” zones, detention, or deportation—as well as transnational border and aerial spaces (Del Monte Madrigal 2025). To cite just a few examples, we can consider Mexico City and Guadalajara as border territories of waiting via the *CBP One* platform (Vargas León et al. 2025; Kocher 2023); the Belo Horizonte International Airport in Confins, Brazil, as a key site of deportation (Santos and Fernandes 2024); and Tecoluca, El Salvador, with the Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT) as a site for the incarceration of migrants. Added to this are various programmes for the distribution and “integration” of migrant populations into the “interior” of national territories, such as Operation Shelter (*Operação Acolhida*) in Brazil for Venezuelan migrants (Facundo 2020; Ceja 2024) or the Local Integration Programme for Refugees (PIL) in Mexico (Betancourt 2025).

Recent research on migration infrastructures, such as those cited here, has brought important critiques to migration governance and humanitarianism. The notion of logistics complicates this phenomenon by examining the rationality that legitimises the installation of such infrastructures and the relationality between national administrative traditions and transnational governance formats, subsumed under the logic of capital extraction. A focus on logistics also allows us to observe the way in which migrants actively apply logistical rationality and negotiate with infrastructures and technologies for their own ends (Staničić and Montoya Galvis 2023; Chan 2024; Chan 2025). Various studies have shown that infrastructures, camps, and occupations become spaces of migrant resistance and collective

care (for example, Correa 2019; Palma-Gutiérrez 2021; Cogo et al. 2023; Campos-Delgado 2025a; Cavalcanti, Lyra, and Tavares 2025).

Conclusions

From a critical perspective, far from naturalising logistics as a technical operation, it is vital to understand how logistical rationality enables the presence of highly diverse actors in migration management based on their supposed logistical expertise (Ceja 2025), which is presented as part of a “logistical solution” to “crises,” thus renewing the mechanisms of migration control (Domenech 2025). This alleged know-how enables the military, business, and corporate management of borders and migrations. Today, we see major transnational companies and corporations providing transportation, logistics, and information technology (IT) services. This also allows—as seen in some cases in Latin America—for the militarisation of borders and migration control under a logistical justification. Finally, logistical rationality and its extractive goals enable the transformation of migration—understood as a “problem” (Sayad 2010)—into a highly profitable commodity from which many sectors benefit.

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