

Fall 9-1-2012

Cross-contextual examination of current Latino issues: International/Intranational research and pedagogy

Jonathan Bruce Santo

University of Nebraska at Omaha, jsanto@unomaha.edu

Juan F. Casas

University of Nebraska at Omaha, jcasas@unomaha.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/psychfacpub>

 Part of the [Latin American Languages and Societies Commons](#), and the [Psychology Commons](#)

Please take our feedback survey at: [https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/](https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE)

[SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE](https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE)

Recommended Citation

Jonathan Santo; Juan Casas, University of Nebraska at Omaha *Journal of Latino/Latin American Studies* (2012) 4 (2): 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.18085/llas.4.2.d66n28842mk343q0>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Psychology at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Psychology Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.

Cross-contextual examination of current Latino issues: International/Intranational research and pedagogy

Jonathan B. Santo & Juan F. Casas
University of Nebraska at Omaha

This special issue contains articles that examine Latino individual and community level issues in various locations around the world. The articles bridge research and theory across disciplines and include studies incorporating a variety of methodologies to examine these important areas. These articles begin to fill some of the voids where a systematic and robust corpus of knowledge is lacking. The contributions address topics ranging from issues of undergraduate coursework, literature, transnational relationships and socioeconomic examinations. Finally, each contribution provides a context in how these important transnational adaptations may play out among individuals of other races and ethnicities.

Keywords: Latino pedagogy, Latino research

In 2010 a group of international scholars, students, policy makers, community organizations, workers and grass-roots organizers came together in Omaha, Nebraska for a summit to discuss the issues of human mobility, the promise and challenges of development and political engagement. This Cumbre was co-sponsored by the Office of Latino/Latin American Studies (OLLAS) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, the International Network on Migration and Development (INMD), the National Association of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC) and a variety of local and national organizations. This special issue, the second of two consecutive issues, contains papers that were presented at Cumbre 2010. We begin the introduction to this issue by presenting the conference theme statement (Gouveia & Benjamin-Alvarado, 2010) so that the reader gets a sense of the scope, importance and context of this gathering.

Cumbre theme statement

Cumbre takes place at the very moment when we will be assessing the full impact of the global economic crisis on migrant, Latino and Latin American communities. Looming large will be a political landscape where policy-makers still

lack a comprehensive vision for sustainable human development across the globe, for this hemisphere, and for the Great Plains. The contradictory and, at times, undemocratic, free-market policies that have paraded as 'development' have wreaked havoc with many of our communities and displaced millions of people from their land. While this may conjure up images of the "South," these policies were largely gestated in, or with the consent of, the "North." The impact is felt as much in European cities as it is in places such as Omaha, Nebraska.

While goods, capital and services are free to move with ease, thanks to a development model that encourages deregulation, human mobility is subject to increasingly harsh rules and increasingly treated as a crime committed by willing offenders. In the United States, one Department of Homeland Security program, the so-called "287g," deputizes local police forces to act as immigration agents. Italy's new immigration law sets up citizen patrols and makes it a crime to aid unauthorized workers. France requires certain nationality groups to obtain double visas to enter the country. The Dominican Republic entertains a constitutional reform to deny, native-born descendants of unauthorized Haitians, the right to citizenship. While the European Union issues a "Return Directive" and the U.S. seeks to speed up

deportations, the logical and ethical questions of why people migrate and what rights all workers and families should enjoy, regardless of where they reside, continue to be pushed to the sidelines of policy discussions and enforcement actions.

Much of human mobility today is neither the result of choice, nor conditioned by 'natural' advantages or disadvantages that may lie on either side of the origin-destination divide. People, especially the most disadvantaged, are increasingly forced to either move or cling to precarious jobs or impoverished communities as the promise of development fades. Nebraska farmers, Latin American rural dwellers, California farmworkers, unemployed factory workers, children and a growing number of middle class professionals are increasingly on the move. Thousands die every year at the reinforced gates of their intended destinations. Few ponder whether these mothers, children and job-seekers deserve to be criminalized and punished for their journeys in search of nothing more than a place to work and a life with dignity for their families.

Public discussions about the 200 million people living outside their country of origin and the millions more migrating within their own countries, seldom go deep enough to consider the failure of development as the root cause of these different phenomena. Nor do they afford us meaningful arenas to critically engage with diverse and multiple publics in a collective search for more just societal models. If the current economic crisis has abated by May 2010, we will likely be asked to believe that all is well. If this is so, we would again have lost the opportunity to engage in a critical conversation about how this promise of development often rests on policies and practices that generate brutal inequality, environmental destruction, forced migration, human and labor rights violations and discontent. Moreover, any discussion about the moral and ethical implications of unjust public policies will likely be viewed as external to policy-making, which,

too often, is informed by short-term political considerations.

As the first decade of the century comes to an end, the promise of development, born during the early post-colonial era, has lost credibility at home and abroad. In some quarters, steps are being taken toward alternative visions, but these are still too timid. New and old hierarchies of social citizenship are reconfigured and certain ethnic, racial and income groups are disproportionately excluded from health care, education and internationally-guaranteed rights. Large numbers of working poor are subject to state and non-state violence, racism and xenophobia. The psychological and socio-cultural impacts of these phenomena on children, women, men, families and entire nations are understudied and under-addressed. International organizations speak of a transformed vision still to be realized. As 2010 is upon us, narratives of hope and inclusion are crashing against shrill voices of hate and a dangerous fortress mentality that is increasingly taking hold in nations and local communities at home and abroad.

This raises a final question as to what kinds of civic engagement, social action and political participation strategies are required for the better of these tendencies to prevail. At least two important developments are of interest. The first is the growing presence and visibility of civil society organizations dedicated to positive social change. These range from human rights organizations to migrant, transnational and Latino organizations across the world, in Latin America and in the region. The second is a growing number of global forums bringing together governments, academics, and civil society. These bodies are advancing novel agendas for development and migration rooted in principles of equality and the defense of human, labor and civil rights. Latin America is emerging as a new leader in this area. Seldom are we given the opportunity to learn about these important and alternative policy-making bodies or how local communities and organizations can

partake of, and inform, their initiatives. It is our hope that Cumbre 2010 widens the space so that the private sector, grassroots organizations and other stakeholders can actively engage and begin the work of resetting policy agendas from the interior out—not just from the centers of power inward.

Contexts of current Latino international and intranational research and pedagogy

If international media coverage and political discourse at both local and national levels are any indicators, issues relating to Latino individuals and communities would appear to be one of the central topics of recent decades. A proper analysis of these issues requires a complex, thorough and nuanced understanding of the myriad of factors that play into the processes and patterns that can be observed. Moreover, it requires both international and intranational level examinations. The articles that follow begin to address some of the most current issues of the various contexts of Latino research and pedagogy with the additional strength of providing multidisciplinary lenses to the subjects at hand.

Children of Mexican immigrants: Crisis and opportunity

Sandra Nichols highlights in her paper the potential for children of Mexican immigrants being on track to becoming a large, poorly educated, and disadvantaged segment of the U.S. population. In particular, she points out that Mexican-origin youth make up 15% of all children aged 17 and under (Pew, 2010). Moreover, nearly 11% of Mexico's population has shifted to the United States, in search of opportunities unavailable at home. Lastly, as the labor market increasingly demands workers with at least some college education, only 9% of Mexican Americans hold college degrees compared to other ethnic groups. These details combine to portray a coming social and

economic future with dire consequences for the children of Mexican immigrants.

These details also serve to underscore the need to address the potential challenges these youth are expected to face in the near future as they hope to enter the job market. A key concern is to avoid the same outcomes of the past with significant numbers of second- and third-generation Mexican Americans in particular become trapped in an underclass of menial jobs, poverty, and sometimes criminal lifestyles.

With these issues at the forefront, this paper uses a combination of theory and practice to explore new approaches for improving the prospects of Mexican-origin youth. One theory that is explored in detail concerns the segmented assimilation model, highlighting a path for immigrant incorporation into American society while maintaining a strong connection to their Mexican cultural origins and parental language. One of the possible trajectories remains the classic path of upward mobility, with eventual incorporation into the mainstream of American social and economic life. To contribute to that effort, this article takes up one of the factors identified by segmented assimilation theory as a predictor of second-generation outcome: the importance of maintaining a connection to the parents' culture of origin, of having a cultural reference point.

Specifically, this is achieved by focusing on the activities of the Los Haro Support Committee, a Mexican hometown association in Napa, California. The article includes various illustrations of the use of the Los Haro Summer camp as a means of maintaining a connection to the parents' culture of origin through using the experience as a cultural reference point. Lastly, the article touches on the potential incorporation of a bi-national community service program involving Latino college students serving as mentors and role models for under-privileged youth in their own communities named MexiCorps (in contrast to the AmeriCorps and the PeaceCorps). MexiCorps is a concept for a program designed to address the three separate,

but closely linked needs discussed in Sandra Nichols' article: (a) increase the numbers of Mexican American youth who attend and graduate from college; (b) provide mentoring and support to help Mexican-origin families and their children incorporate and succeed in U.S. society; and (c) work with Mexican hometown associations to strengthen their capacity to implement projects both in this country and in their home communities in Mexico.

International marriage brokers and the migration industry

The paper by Cogua-Lopez examines International Marriage Brokers and the role they play in furthering Colombian migration by fostering connections between Colombian women and men in the United States. Cogua-Lopez notes that the number of Colombians admitted into the United States as fiancées between 1999 and 2008 grew by more than 320%. The paper provides some context for this growth by providing a historical overview of the understudied marriage brokering industry and the role of technology in stimulating the rapid rise of brokered international courtship and marriage. Moreover, this article considers the fundamental question of whether international marriage brokers fit the common definition applied to the migration industry. The data analyzed in this paper makes a particularly important contribution to the literature because it includes official governmental statistics as well as semi-structured interviews with International Marriage Broker company officials and a content analysis of information contained in 68 different International Marriage Broker websites.

Homeland Security records for the year 2008 reveals that Colombian women alone made up 43% of the South American women admitted into the U.S. as fiancées to U.S. citizens. Specifically, 1,433 Colombian women were admitted into the U.S. as fiancées of U.S. Citizens, this compares to 1,902 women from

the remaining South America countries combined. Moreover, among the main findings is an interesting analysis of how Colombian women are portrayed to U.S. men and how U.S. men are portrayed to Colombian women. In both cases it is clear that an idealized version of the "imagined" foreign partner is used to create interest in the website. Cogua-Lopez notes that Colombian women are portrayed both as the embodiment of sexuality/sensuality and as women who align with traditional customs and moral principles. In short, they are typically characterized as being highly attractive, family/home oriented, highly educated and successful and open to establishing relationships with older, average-looking men. U.S. men on the other hand are portrayed in similarly idealistic ways to Colombian women. Their marketing describes U.S. men as emotionally stable, economically secure, individuals who do not display macho attitudes and who are also very attractive. Cogua-Lopez's cogent analysis suggests that a complete understanding of migratory patterns and experiences needs to include the role of International Marriage Broker's role in facilitating the mobility of individuals. Similar to labor recruitment agencies, they are paid to facilitate the mobility of people with the promise of helping them realize their goals. The process and the medium vary but at its root the premise is the same. These parallels are made explicit in this scholarly examination.

Using a service learning component in a Spanish readings course on human rights

Karina Elizabeth Vázquez's article analyzes the pedagogical implications of a university course, Spanish Readings on Human Rights with a Service Learning Component. In general, the article discusses the combination of cultural readings and community service learning in foreign language classes so as to dismantle generalizing perceptions, prejudices, stigmas, and stereotypes. Specifically, this pedagogical

practice in the foreign language classroom emphasizes linguistic and cognitive skills in order to promote critical thinking in both languages, Spanish and English.

One issue discussed in the article is the need to use an epistemological approach to avoid various negative social and pedagogical consequences. In particular, one concern is that “students are not engaged in developing critical thinking skills necessary for creating a socially just and democratic society”. Moreover, a main objective emphasized for this type of course is that students develop critical thinking skills in order to better understand their society they inhabit. As such, a combination of humanities and human rights in the foreign language classroom are used to engage students in a critical approach to cultural practices by underscoring race, gender/class, ideological, and political prejudices that may be part of students’ understanding of culture itself.

At its center, the article by Karina Elizabeth Vázquez discusses the experience on individual critical thinking and the effects on the community at large. At the critical thinking level, the classroom experience aimed to explore the various ways of approaching Latin American societies and society in general. Students were encouraged to critique the tools they used to from impressions of other groups and cultures ideally eschewing social inequality and stereotypes. Meanwhile, at the community level, the Service Learning project was designed to have an impact at numerous levels. As an example, the students’ and professor’s active participation in the project and through the interpretation and translation services for the Hispanic members created an opportunity for dialogue between community and student members.

Finally, the article illustrates how the class integrated humanities, human rights to create a cognitive restructuring of gender, class, and language stereotypes associated with migration and employment. To conclude, the promotion of an integrative experience based maintaining

respectful interactions to avoid focusing on inequality or rights violations by discussing the irrationality of antagonisms.

Failures of democracy and development represented in Latino literature

There is a long-standing tradition of cultural and historical critiques and self-reflections through literature, particularly in Latin America. The writings of Rodrigo Rey Rosa, who is known for his sharp portrayals of everyday life and of the crime and violence that occurs regularly in Guatemala, are no exception. The paper by Garcia included in this special issue examines two of Rey Rosa’s novels, *El cojo bueno* (1996) and *Noche de piedras* (2002) in particular. In this paper Garcia provides an interesting examination of representations of crime, criminal investigations and of the pervasive impunity with which so many acts take place in this cogent analysis of these two novels. One of the things that make Garcia’s examination so useful is that it considers the socio-political and historical context in which these texts appear. For example, Garcia notes that *El cojo bueno* is published the same year that the Peace Agreements are signed in Guatemala, ending a civil war of over thirty years and which brings on a “neoliberal peace” (Jonas, 2000) where there is less armed conflict and a transition to a market economy. Of course, many of these changes within Guatemala are changes in form and not necessarily of function. For instance, as Garcia notes, the political violence that so dominated the historical landscape in the preceding decades is converted into criminal violence and acts of delinquency by organized mafias dedicated to illegal economic activities that penetrate institutions at all levels and which serve to destabilize the security of the country and its citizens.

The plot of *El cojo bueno* surrounds the kidnapping of Juan Luis Luna. Kidnapping is a violation which has increased incrementally since the peace agreement in Guatemala (Vela,

Sequén-Mónchez & Solares, 2001). During his captivity, Juan Luis is mutilated by his kidnappers some of whom include former classmates. Upon his release, Juan Luis leaves Guatemala eventually settling in Morocco. While there he believes he recognizes one of his captors, Sefardi, though he never confirms his identity. Later, Juan Luis returns to Guatemala and by chance sees la Coneja, another of his captors. This series of occurrences leads Juan Luis to begin investigating the circumstances surrounding his kidnapping. Among the things that make this novel so brilliant is that it explores multiple points of view (kidnappee, kidnapper) as they relate to this formative event. In addition we can see an exploration of time; is it linear or does it have qualities that are reiterative and circular. Finally, the theme of vengeance is examined especially as it relates to how one can view the judicial system in Guatemala, personal ethics decisions and what it may or may not say about you as an individual. All of these complex layers are deftly navigated, articulated and scrutinized by Garcia.

The story of *Noche de Piedras* is intertwined with *El cojo bueno* in that it involves a character introduced in the latter story, la Coneja's ethically challenged lawyer. The novel relays the interwoven lives of a solitary detective (Emilio Rastelli), a young man of means (Joaquin Casasola) and a six year-old adoptive Belgian boy (Silvestre). In short the story, which takes place in a single day, relates the events surrounding a friend of Joaquin's who, while driving, hits and critically injures Silvestre. Silvestre's mother hires the detective, Rastelli, to investigate the incident and the social standing and background of the driver. The series of events relayed in the novel allows Rey Rosa to uncover for the reader an enmeshed web of corruption that involves lawyers, reporters, police, private investigators, friends and family. This network of lives lends itself to Rey Rosa to comment on the dishonesty and exploitation that the author observes as an ever present fact of modern day Guatemala. Similarly, Garcia is able

to firmly plant the material in this novel in its proper socio-historical context allowing us to understand Rey Rosa's assessment through story in all of its nuances and density.

A socioeconomic profile of the Bronx

The paper by González-Corzo and Gargalas presents a detailed analysis of the socioeconomic characteristics of the population of the Bronx in comparison with the those of the populations of the State of New York and the United States as a whole.

To provide a context, The Bronx area in New York, has been at the forefront of transnational (migrant-based) communities in the eastern United States since the mass arrival of migrants over multiple generations. The Bronx has been the primary entry point for people from diverse regions of Latin America and the Caribbean. This has provided the opportunity to enjoy the benefits associated with a "mosaic of cultures and ethnic groups that comprise its population." On the other hand, the Bronx does not fare as well as the state of New York and the United States overall by various standard measures of socioeconomic comparison. In addition, there are stereotypes associated with the area which include the impression of disproportionately high levels of urban violence, extreme poverty, lack of opportunities, crumbling infrastructure, inadequate educational opportunities and environmental degradation.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first, demographic characteristics focuses on population, race and ethnicity. Next, social characteristics, explore households, marital status, fertility, school enrolment, educational attainment, place of birth, citizenship status and the language spoken at home. Housing characteristics are also detailed by examining housing occupancy, age and size of housing stock, housing tenure, vehicles available, housing heating fuel, housing density, mortgage status and gross rent and gross rent as a

percentage of household income. Finally, employment status, method of commuting to work, occupation and class of worker, income and benefits, health insurance coverage and poverty are outlined in a section on economic characteristics.

In conclusion, the paper suggests how the negative image associated with the Bronx during the 1970s and 1980s has begun to recede. Nevertheless, major socioeconomic differences remain between the Bronx, New York State, and the rest of the nation.

Conclusions and implications

The articles in this special issue highlight, a variety of approaches to understanding Latino research and pedagogy. These articles examine the importance of contextual variables in examining and understanding the overall adaptive success of Latinos and Latino immigrants. These contributions point to the layers of complexity that surround issues of understanding Latino issues through undergraduate coursework, literature, transnational relationships and socioeconomic examinations. These articles also remind us that the struggles of Latinos to navigate the transition to receiving countries do not occur in isolation. Latino immigrants' ability to succeed and the fortunes of receiving countries, at all levels, are highly intertwined. Ultimately, we hope that the articles contained in this issue will inform discussions of social, governmental and business policies concerning labor and migration as well as stimulate further research in these and related areas. The importance of this special issue resides in the rich information it provides about Latinos, yet it should also be noted that research with Latinos has the ability to inform us about how these important transnational adaptations may play out among individuals of other races and ethnicities. In sum, the articles contained in this special issue add to our understanding our basic and applied knowledge of the various contexts of Latino individuals and communities,

but consistent with the spirit of the Cumbre conference we believe they also have the potential to transform research, practice, and policy at a number of levels.

References

- Jonas, S. (2000). *Of centaurs and doves. Guatemala's peace process*. Boulder: Westview.
- _____. (2010). *Hispanics of Mexican origin in the United States*, 2008. Washington, DC.
- Rey Rosa, R. (1996). *El cojo bueno*. El Salvador: Dirección de Publicaciones e Impresos.
- Rey Rosa, R. (2002). *Noche de piedras*. Guatemala: El Pensativo.
- Vela, M., Sequén-Mónchez, A., & Antonio Solares, H. (2001). *El lado oscuro de la eternal primavera. Violencia, criminalidad y delincuencia en la posguerra*. Guatemala: FLACSO.