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Recent issues in Latino labor and migration around the globe: Interdisciplinary approaches

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This special issue contains articles that examine Latino labor and migration 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 worker perceptions of organizational justice to contexts of reception to pedagogical representation of migration. Finally, each contribution delineates the policy implications resulting from the processes and literatures that are examined.

Keywords: Latino Labor, Latino Migration, Human Mobility

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 first 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.

Latino labor and migration around the globe

If international media coverage and political discourse at both local and national levels are any indicators, issues relating to Latino labor and migration would appear to be one of the central topics of recent decades. In receiving countries, public discussion about immigration has often dominated recent political debates in the United States and France (to name just a few countries). Immigrants, especially undocumented ones, have been blamed for draining public coffers, lowering wages, crime and failing to integrate into mainstream society among other things (Huntington, 2004). In the United States this has translated into a hostile context of reception in many states (e.g., Arizona, Alabama, Oklahoma) and has dramatically impacted many labor sectors, especially those in the agricultural and service industries. However, illustrative of the somewhat schizophrenic relationship between immigrants and receiving communities, skilled immigrants have been praised for spurring innovation and growing technology sectors (Freeman, 2006). Sending countries are no less conflicted about labor mobility. Emigration has brought about much needed financial support to local economies in the form of remittances (Acosta et al, 2008), but it has also meant profound brain drain and meant that many of the most talented and productive workers have been lost from the sending country's national economy (Docquier & Rapoport, 2008). Further, wide-scale emigration has also meant significant familial disruptions and population drops in many rural areas (Silver, 2006; Sanchez & Pacheco, 2012). 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 macro and micro level examinations. The articles that follow begin to address some of the most current issues on Latino labor and migration around the globe with the additional strength of providing multidisciplinary lenses to the subjects at hand.

Skilled worker mobility and development in Latin America

Recent years have brought along migration patterns that raise the question of whether certain Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries are experiencing a 'brain drain'. Lozano-Ascencio and Gandini examine the current emigration trends among skilled workers from LAC countries to determine which countries are being hardest hit by departures of skilled workers. Moreover their analyses provide some evidence that in addition to departures by skilled workers there is also 'brain waste' (under-utilization of skilled and/or highly educated laborers) taking place in both countries of origin and reception. This 'brain waste' is particularly pronounced for LAC skilled workers living in the United States.

The documentation of these gains and losses is an important addition to the literature on transnational migration however this analyses also reveals some other interesting results that have been much less intensively discussed. For example, analyses suggest that female skilled worker emigration outpaces male skilled worker emigration in all but one of the LAC countries. Finally, Lozano-Ascencio and Gandini note that migration outflows among skilled laborers is

higher in smaller, less populated countries (especially in the Caribbean) then in larger, more populated countries. As the authors note, these patterns should be a matter of reflection for both sending and receiving countries.

Contexts of reception

Restrictive immigration policies have been enacted in states around the country (e.g., Arizona, Alabama, Georgia). Among the underlying assumptions in these cases is that these policies would lead to undocumented immigrants choosing to leave unwelcoming states for those that had similar economic opportunities but a more welcoming living environment. The article by Pedroza examines exactly this question of whether inhospitable social policies at the state level (hostile context of reception), aimed largely at unauthorized Latino immigrants, leads to mass immigrant exodus. Pedroza finds that in the case of the state of Oklahoma while there are widely-cited accounts of immigrant exodus in these harsh circumstances, government data suggests that a majority of Latinos seem to stay put, opting to weather the storm.

What explains this seemingly contradictory evidence? Pedroza suggests that what has transpired is an illusion of large scale migration as a result largely of undocumented Latinos 'moving underground' by changing their behaviors (e.g., avoiding leaving the house as much as possible, walking rather than driving) to evade detection and possible deportation. He suggests that those that remain live in a 'state of capture' and daily have to risk everything in order to make a living. While the resilient nature of Latinos and other immigrants is not surprising to many, the natural question that follows is whether some of these forced choices made for themselves and/or for their families comes at a high cost. Findings discussed in Pedroza's article suggest this may be the case for some Latino families.

Labor movement perspectives on migration, globalization and development

Ronaldo Munck proposes a new perspective where migration and global employment paradigms are taken together in the context of development. He discusses the Great Recession of 2008-2009 and its impact, followed by an examination of various development theories—from modernization to dependency and postdevelopment thus leading to the increasing informalization, flexibilization, and "precarization" of work. The paper finishes with a discussion of social movement unionism to address the situation of the migrant precariat (precarious proletariat) in productive and creative ways.

Specifically, the effects of the recent financial crisis on migration patterns in general and in South America in particular are explored within the context of the history of capitalism. Issues of migration are then discussed within the framework of globalization in a new global development. The focus is on the relationship between globalization, development, and migration from a labor perspective. The Irish labor movement in 2005 was used as an example of the challenges in meeting social, economic and practical needs. The article illustrates that migrant workers are not easy to organize as they may speak different languages, they may be suspicious of the unions, and they may be embedded in community/ethnic networks. Case in point, in 1999 and 2000 a major campaign by labor and community activists in Omaha, Nebraska, began to organize the predominantly Latino(a) workforce in the meatpacking industry. Finally, Munck calls for the take a nuanced view of the complex character of emerging social relations in the migration movement.

Worker perceptions and organizational justice in the workplace

Although a great deal of research has addressed the general working conditions of Latino migrants (Green & Barham, 2002), very few studies have gathered information from the laborers themselves. The paper by Gaston and Harrison begins to fill this void by providing some initial information from workers about their perceptions of workplace conditions and how it relates to organizational justice. Organizational justice broadly refers to issues of fairness in the workplace. It encompasses fairness of outcomes in terms of resources and rewards (distributive justice), fairness in decision-making (procedural justice), fairness in interpersonal treatment (interpersonal justice) and truthfulness, transparency and access to information (informational justice).

In addition to exploring Latino meatpacking line workers' perceptions of organizational justice in their workplaces, the authors also examine these workers' beliefs about the obligations of their employers in meatpacking, what is referred to as their psychological contracts. Finally, the study adds additional information to recent investigations (e.g., Gouveia, 1997) of the quality and variability of working conditions in meatpacking plants.

Pedagogical representations of migration

Cooley and Mitchell's paper paints a harsh picture of the ICE raid which took place in Postville Iowa in May 2008. They provide details regarding the range of governmental agencies which took part in the detainment of almost 400 undocumented workers and the various labor violations that followed. This sobering description serves as the backdrop for the main purpose of the article which is to highlight the "educated dialogue" which such events can offer to explore the human impact of transnational migration.

Using simulations such that the line between actor and audience becomes fuzzy, the authors describe their various strategies to encouraging a pedagogical approach towards understanding of the visceral reactions to these migration issues. These are followed by discussions among students of realistic solutions. One particular concern that is addressed in the article is the subtle difficulty of weighing relevant experiences for the purpose of fostering learning while remaining mindful of the victimizing and re-victimizing potential such simulations might pose. That notwithstanding, the authors provide concrete examples of how various simulations may be used to encourage dialogue between students and thoughtful consideration of these difficult issues.

Conclusions and implications

The articles in this special issue highlight, among other things, 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 Latino labor and migration; they 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. Consider, for example, the work in this issue that addresses the perceptions of fairness and justice among workers in meat processing plants. While we should always be careful about generalizing to populations outside of those in our studies, the findings from that study likely speaks, at least in part to employee-employer relationships for other workers and in other industries. Improving relations among and between all segments of society also seems likely to promote both Latinos' and non-Latinos' success as future actors in a global economy and citizenry. In short, the articles contained in this special issue not only contribute to our basic and applied knowledge of Latino labor and migration around the globe, but consistent with the spirit of the Cumbre conference we believe they also have the potential to transform research, practice, and policy at all levels.

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