

‘Latin American and Caribbean experiences of migration, work and employment’

2nd November 2015, University of Birmingham

Event report

The fifth [Latin American and Caribbean Migration](#) network (MIGRALAC) workshop was held for the first time at the University of Birmingham on the 2nd November 2015. The event was co-organised and generously funded by the [Institute of Advanced Studies](#) and the [Enterprise and Diversity Research Cluster](#). In recent years there has been a proliferation of research on Latin American migration flows towards Europe and, more recently, the reversal of such flows in the wake of the economic crisis.



With regard to research into Caribbean migration, research has tended to focus predominantly on postcolonial migration from former Caribbean colonies to European metropolis, and research has frequently been focused on the French, British, Spanish or Dutch Caribbean. However, despite the

growing number of examples of particular case studies, there seems to lack a comparative or interdisciplinary approach, so research to date remains patchy.

In order to bring some of the interconnections, contrasts and points of comparison within our research and explore possibilities for future research collaborations, the [Latin American and Caribbean Migration \(MIGRALAC\)](#) was set up in 2014 as a cross collaboration between UK universities. This network aims at providing a space for researchers to access and share contacts and research outputs (working papers, seminars, conferences etc.). MIGRALAC was first established at the University of Oxford in 2014. In 2015, it moved to be hosted at Queen Mary, University of London but with joint involvement from the University of Oxford and the University of Birmingham. Members of the network meet each terms to discuss work in progress as well organize events throughout the academic year. These events have proved to be an excellent forum for dialogue among scholars to identify interconnections, contrasts and points of comparison within their research.

The MIGRALAC seminar this autumn brought together researchers and practitioners interested in Latin American and Caribbean experiences of migration, work and employment. The event counted with the opening presentation by Cathy McIlwaine and Diego Bunge from Queen Mary University of London, who presented a paper exploring the labour market experiences of Latin American onward migrants in London. They presented a unique survey carried out in London of onward migrants (400 people contacted) who have mainly arrived from Spain with acquired EU passports due to the limited employment opportunities since the crisis of 2008. Their paper highlighted how the experiences of onward Latin American migrants show the complexities of the migrant division of labour in London, where Latin American migrants are mainly finding employment in precarious conditions. This paper showcased the complexity of the impact of citizenship in the positions obtained in the labour market, given the EU nationality that most hold.

Raquel Martínez Buján from Equipo de Sociología de las Migraciones Internacionales (ESOMI) (Spain), presented a paper looking at the gendered return strategies for Bolivian migrants and their impact in the productive and reproductive realms. Her presentation showed that the patriarchal structure that positions men and women differently in both the labour market and family structures explains the different migratory trajectories of returnees. One of the particularly revealing findings is that Bolivian women fund the micro-enterprise initiatives run by their husbands as a means to compensate them for their absence during their migration and negotiation of their mobility.

Nicolas Lemay-Hebert, University of Birmingham-based colleague, presented some preliminary results of his pilot study looking at

the role of state intervention in internal drain brain in Haiti. Lemay-Hebert's presentation explored the experiences of workers in international organisations in relation to their drivers for internal mobility due to factors such as wage differentials between working in international organisations and local organisations.



Tanja Bastia (University of Manchester) presented her work on migrant elderly care workers in Spain, reflecting on the transnational ethics of care. Her presentation highlighted how Latin American women are incorporated into the Spanish labour market as caregivers in a context where the support from the state for care is very limited but has a strong presence in regulating migration. Following social networks starting in the country of origin as methodology, Bastia investigated the transnational ethics of care in the context of market care into family relations.

Ana Paula Silva (University of Manchester) presented the findings of a multi-method research on Brazilian migrants in the UK in the cleaning sector. Her work uses qualitative methods together with film-making. Silva presented how many female Brazilian workers in the cleaning industry in London do not

perceive their work as 'dirty work', and how the incorporation into this sector facilitates sociability among different social classes from Brazil.



Patria Roman (Latin Elephant and Castle) discussed the role of small business run by Latin American migrants in Elephant and Castle in London in the debates about urban regeneration and what is the future of these businesses. Their research found that they found 80 shops in Elephant and Castle run by Latin American owners (mostly from Colombia), providing direct employment to 240 workers approximately. Patria highlighted the lack of acknowledgment of the contribution these businesses make to the urban economies. The workshop was closed by the showing of a short documentary by Ana Paula Silva (University of Manchester) 'Hair Expectations', filmed in a hair salon run by Brazilians in London.

Olivia Sheringham (Queen Mary University of London) provided a summary of the day's presentations and highlighted three overarching themes:

- **New geographies of migration and mobility:** including onward migration, return migration, people left behind).
- **Intersectionality:** labour market experience influenced not just by nationality but intersection of many

factors including age, gender, migration status, migratory path.

- **Power Relations:** papers highlighted exploitation and impact of gentrification on migrants' experiences of work and employment. But also **agency** – migrant creativity and resistance, to some extent challenging 'migrant division of labour'.

Next steps

- **Expansion of the network to include events organised by the University of Manchester in the coming years**
- **Exploring sources of funding for continuing the activities of the network at a national or international levels**
- **Facilitation of collaborative projects among the members of the network**

For further details about the **Institute of Advanced Studies**, please contact Sue Gilligan:

Email: s.gilligan@bham.ac.uk

Website: www.birmingham.ac.uk/ias

For further details about the **Centre for Research on Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME)** please contact Sophie Sinclair, Centre Manager:

Email: s.c.sinclair@bham.ac.uk

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/business/creme/index.aspx>

For further details about **MIGRALAC**, please contact Maria Villares:

Email: m.villares@bham.ac.uk

Website:

<http://www.geog.qmul.ac.uk/research/migralac/index.html>