

# Global Latin(o) Americanos: Transoceanic Diasporas and Regional Migrations

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Human mobility is a defining characteristic of our world today. Migrants make up one billion of the globe's seven billion people—with approximately 214 million international migrants and 740 million internal migrants. Historic flows from the Global South to the North have been met in equal volume by South-to-South movement.<sup>1</sup> Migration directly impacts and shapes the lives of individuals, communities, businesses, and local and national economies, creating systems of socioeconomic interdependence. In particular, migrant remittances make a fundamental contribution to many developing countries' GDPs.<sup>2</sup>

Latin America and the Caribbean have long been important regions of global migration and have recently transformed themselves from their origins as locations of immigration to ones of emigration. After four and a half centuries of immigration to Latin America and the Caribbean, starting with the arrival of Europeans, Africans, and Asians to the Americas throughout the colonial period, the flow of migrants changed direction. In the decades following World War II, economic growth and liberalized immigration policies in Europe and Asia and demographic expansion and repressive regimes in Latin America and the Caribbean contributed to a period of intensified migration. Internal migration developed from rural to urban areas and especially to the capitals and metropolises of Latin America. In the 1970s migration flows started between countries in the region and from those countries to the United States and Canada. Further impacted by increasingly muscular U.S. state security and border militarization following September 11, 2001, emigration flows back to Europe and Asia began toward the end of the twentieth century.

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century the contribution of Latin America and the Caribbean to international migration amounted to over 32 million people, or 15 percent of the world's international migrants. Although most have headed north of the Rio Grande or Rio Bravo and Miami, in the past decade Latin American and Caribbean migrants have traveled to new destinations—both within the hemisphere and to countries in Europe and Asia—at greater rates than to the United States.<sup>3</sup>

The diversity of these origins and destinations has not received balanced treatment.<sup>4</sup> Studies of U.S.-bound migration have dominated the literature, reinforcing the sense of dependence, domination, and attraction exercised by the United States over the whole region. Although significant research has been conducted examining the flow of transoceanic market capital, the growing globalization of Latin American migration to non-U.S. destinations requires a comprehensive overview. Emerging from our forthcoming volume, *Global Latin(o) Americanos: Transoceanic Diasporas and Regional Migrations* (Oxford University Press), the articles in this edition of the *LASA Forum* help to shift the analytical lens away from U.S.-dominant interpretations and document and examine the growing flow between and within destinations in the Global South and across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. By demonstrating the ways in which people in the Global South participate in and negotiate globalization, these articles foster a decentered, hemispheric, and transoceanic approach that enriches and broadens our theoretical conversations and substantive knowledge about Latin American and Caribbean migration.

Our use of the term “Global Latin(o) Americanos” places people of Latin American and Caribbean origin in comparative, transnational, and global perspectives with particular emphasis on migrants moving to and living in non-U.S. destinations.<sup>5</sup> Like its stem words, *Global Latin(o) Americanos* is an ambiguous term with no specific national, ethnic, or racial signification. Yet by combining the terms *Latina/o* (traditionally, people of Latin American and Caribbean origin in the United States) and *Latin American* in a bilingual fusion we aim to disrupt national conventions and underscore the processual, dynamic, and transborder nature of migration. The hybrid term also signals the importance of bringing together different transnational case studies of Latin American migrants in a comparative analysis. In stark contrast with other host countries, Latinos in the United States are predominantly of Mexican origin and highly vulnerable to criminalization and deportation.<sup>6</sup> As the sociologist Douglas Massey points out in the forthcoming volume, “this contrast alone cautions against generalizing about Latino identity and Latino integration from the experience of the United States.” Placing this *Forum*'s case studies into conversation with one another allows for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Latin American migrations.

While most members of the Latin American diaspora in the region identify themselves by their national affiliation (e.g., Peruvian, Haitian, Guatemalan), Latin Americans living outside Latin America refer to additional identifiers depending on the particular local context. There are self-proclaimed “Latinas/os” in Canada, Israel, Spain, and elsewhere. The Japanese government calls Brazilian immigrants of Japanese descent living in Japan *nikkeijin*. The existence of Latinas/os in the non-U.S.-

based Latin American diaspora challenges the assertion by Marcelo Suárez-Orozco and Mariela Páez that “the very term *Latino* has meaning only in reference to the U.S. experience. Outside the United States, we don’t speak of Latinos; we speak of Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and so forth. Latinos are made in the USA” (Suárez-Orozco and Páez 2008, 4).

These original, interdisciplinary studies provide a critical examination of Latin American and Caribbean migrations to non-U.S. destinations. In their brief overviews, authors in this “Debates” section focus on two broad migratory circuits originating in Latin America and the Caribbean: intraregional and transoceanic. Intraregional migration examines migratory trajectories within Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition to the relocation of workers from one country to another within the region (Nicaraguan workers to Costa Rica and Bolivian agriculturalists to Argentina), this *Forum* explores the experiences of migrants finding their way as minorities in the bilingual and bicultural context of Canada. The studies of transoceanic migration analyze transatlantic flows to Israel and transpacific flows to Japan. Factors determining transoceanic migration include colonial ties and proactive immigration policies that privilege historical ethnic relations to Latin American descendants.

These studies draw on the work of scholars such as Walter Mignolo and José Saldívar, who call for a “remapping” of American studies through a discourse of “border thinking” that challenges us “to re-imagine the nation as a site within many ‘cognitive maps’ in which the nation-state is not congruent with cultural identity” (Saldívar 1997, ix; Mignolo 2000). Expanding on this critique, these articles help us to reorient Latina/o studies outside of a

(North) American locus and Latin America, and Caribbean studies beyond the hemisphere, integrating and decentering traditional ethnic and area studies approaches.

The selections in this issue of the *Forum* address and reframe a central problem of our time, seeing it not so much as the challenge of incorporating immigrants into Western societies and economies (which too often frames immigrants as “the problem”) but rather the challenge of redefining citizenship in an era of globalization, which positions immigrants as uniquely poised to teach us about what this means. How Latin(o) American immigrants respond and exercise agency under familiar and unfamiliar global conditions is of critical importance on a number of fronts, not least of which is the health of democratic societies and the diverse expressions of citizenship across the Latin American diaspora. “Global Latin(o) Americanos” and their new destinations provide important contexts for studying these issues.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For a review of current scholarship on global migrant flows see Però and Solomos (2011).
- <sup>2</sup> “International remittance flows through official channels to developing countries in 2012 reached approximately USD 401 billion, three times the amount of total aid flows from OECD donors in 2011” (IOM 2015). See also United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2013).
- <sup>3</sup> “Internal Migration,” website of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division: International Migration. New York: United Nations. <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/theme/international-migration/index.shtml>.
- <sup>4</sup> We are responding to the call by scholars such as Marcelo Suárez-Orozco (2006), who writes, “While there is a general consensus that migration from Latin America is changing the Americas and the world beyond, there is little systematic empirical, conceptual, and theoretical work examining the Exodo in an interdisciplinary, comparative, and regional framework.”
- <sup>5</sup> In addition to including people from the Caribbean, we use “Global Latin(o) Americanos” as a shorthand meant to encompass Latina/o/@/x people of all subject positions; racial, ethnic, and gender groups; and sexual orientations. Furthermore, we recognize that the term “Latin America” is itself a fiction, concocted in the nineteenth century either by European elites to impose colonial dominance on the New World (Mignolo 2009) or by Latin American elites to resist U.S. and European imperialism (Gobat 2013).
- <sup>6</sup> Although the majority of Latinas/os in the United States are of Mexican origin (64 percent in 2012), the U.S. Latina/o population in general is of diverse national and regional origins and is dispersed throughout the country. In 2012, other major groups included people of Puerto Rican (9.4 percent), Salvadoran (3.8 percent), Cuban (3.7 percent), Dominican (3.1 percent), and Guatemalan (2.3 percent) backgrounds (United States Census 2014). For additional details, see Overmyer-Velázquez (2008).

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