Introduction

Guest Editor: Camelia Tigau

Why skilled diaspora, elites and North America? A number of studies (Counihan and Miller, 2006; Lim, 2017) have shown that foreign-based skilled professionals are at the same time educational and financial elites. An earlier study by Derber, Schwartz and Malgrass (1990) compares today’s professionals with the mandarins of ancient China, where the educated governed over the ignorant. In many ways, skilled diasporas and elites are groups of powerful individuals, in terms of their knowledge, networks, political or economical influence beyond borders. The new trends in human capital research also prove that these skilled individuals are valued not only as individuals, but also as collective capital that acts through complex work teams (Ployhart et al., 2014).

North America is the main continent of destination of the skilled migrants. What is more, this is the first region where most of the migrants would like to live, because of individual preferences, but also looking for motivating work environments. Despite restrictions on migration and the current anti-migrant rhetoric, 20.9% of the total world’s migrant would like to go to the US, and 5.7% would like to live in Canada (Gallup Survey on Migration Intentions, 2017).

As a matter of fact, the US is the country that receives most international students in the world, 842 thousand in 2014, of which 77% came from G20 countries (World Migration Report; OIM, 2017). It was surpassed only by the European Union as a whole, which received 1459 foreign students in 2014. By comparison, Canada received 135 thousand students that same
year, and Mexico, 8 thousand. When we remember that international education is one of the main channels for skilled migration, than we also explain why the US has more skilled migrants than any other country, that is 8 million skilled foreign-born workers.

In essence, North America is “the region” of destination for skilled migration in the world, with the lowest rates of skilled emigration in the world (0.8%), compared to and European average of 5.3% and 7.4 for Latin America. For Africa, the regional average of skilled emigration was 10.8% in 2015.

This special issue addresses the related topics of skilled diasporas and elite migration in North America, seen from the perspective of a group of relevant scholars based in Argentine, Chile, and Mexico. This is but a humble attempt to introduce the discussion on skilled migration in Latin America, that does not in any way exhaust the scholars in the region who have done research on the topic. In fact, this issue is a follow-up written testimony of the Colloquium “Skilled Diasporas and Elite in North America”, organized by the Center for Research on North America at UNAM in March 2018. Most of the articles thereby included have benefitted from a previous presentation at this event.

One of our common purposes is to establish a dialogue and in certain ways, differences with the state of the art on skilled migration in other indexed journals, especially Anglo-Saxon. All the articles that follow prove the importance of the topic in the knowledge economy under construction in Latin America, and the need for making good use of the professionals in our countries, based on analyzing their experiences in the destination. In a more general way, this
issue is also an invitation to enrich the existing theoretical and political models on skilled diasporas in North America.

Like any process of systematic research, we build on previous findings. An extensive research in international journals published from January 2017 to June 2018 found approximately 200 peer-reviewed papers on skilled migration and diasporas, of which 17% involved core research in North America, with most of the authors based at universities from the same region. The bibliographic research also found relevant contributions from Latin America, but relatively few special issues that addressed skilled migration. One of them is “Mobilities and skilled migration in the XXI century” (“Movilidades y migración calificada en el siglo XXI”) of the journal “Sociedad y Economía”, published by the Universidad del Valle, Colombia in January 2018.

Among previous recent studies published in the last two years, relatively few are dedicated to Latin American skilled migrants residing in North America, making this gap in literature a sufficient reason for the publication of our special issue. Previous works generally consider migrants populations from India, China, Singapore, Spain, Israel, residents in main destination countries such as the US, Canada, Australia, the UK, the European Union or South Africa. In general, there is a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research that enrich the state of art on skilled migration. Certain classical theoretical views, such as Bourdieu’s theory of capital, are still applied by an important number of studies.

However, a wide variety of new trends of study and cutting edge research on skilled migration have emerged in the last two years. We must first mention those articles that derive
from the previous brain gain perspective, therefore explaining the contributions of skilled migrants to the global economy. One of them is the contribution of Naghavi and Strozzi (2017), providing a general model that proves skilled emigration could be beneficial for innovation and growth in sending countries, depending on the extent of international protection rights back home. In this vein, they sustain that what matters is the composition of emigrants, not the scale (ibid., p. 1009).

Another paper by Li, McHale and Zhou (2017) also analyzes the effect of skilled labour emigration on the home country’s institutional development. According to the authors, “bad institutions are likely to drive good people out”, (ibid., p. 1456). Most importantly, Li, McHale and Zhou split the effects of skilled emigration: it is good for political institutions and bad for economic institutions back home. They measure these consequences through four channels: absence, prospect, diaspora and return. More work on the positive outcomes of skilled emigration prove the role of foreign-born professionals in reducing information frictions that potentially hamper cross-country financial flows (Kugler et al., 2018).

A second mainstream tendency regards skills mismatch and overqualification of early career migrants and international students. Landolt and Thieme (2018) introduce the concept of “middling status position” referring mainly to young BAs who are not elite or corporate expats and whose conditions of precarity have been under-researched to this point. Other complementary studies for revision verse on the relevance of place choice in the migrants’ decisions (Moskal, 2017; Imeraj et al., 2018).
A third fresh view on skilled migration is based on a domestic level of analysis. Kazakis and Faggian (2017) distinguish between repeat migration and late migration of US-based professionals. Repeat migrants are those who change location for study or work purposes, and are generally motivated by higher salaries. Late migrants are those university stayers who later decide to migrate, generally due to a salary penalty. As the authors note, these categories are relevant for the study of regional economic performance in North America.

Contents of this special issue

After the revision of such valuable previous breakthrough in literature, we think that our issue is special in a number of ways, not just because it is a thematic one, involving original work. In what follows, we provide a collection of ten articles written by relevant academics dedicated to the study of skilled migration in the Americas.

The article that initiates this special issue verses on the “International Mobility of the Wealthy in an Age of Growing Inequality” and is written by Andres Solimano, a renowned expert on skilled migration, President of the International Center for Globalization and Development, Chile. His paper studies the geography of big wealth, that is, the global mobility of High-Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs), those people with net assets above one million dollars. This small but economically powerful group, that represents less than one percent of the total world population, controls nearly half of the total household wealth in the world. The US is the country that holds most millionaires, with 43 of the world total, followed by Japan and other European countries.
Solimano shows that having substantial wealth provides a critical advantage for obtaining residence permits and citizenship, by comparison to poor migrants who cannot afford hefty payments to get visas. In this way, his paper also contributes to the study on global inequality and huge differences between the richest and the poorest migrants. In most of the cases, wealthy migrants do not directly compete on jobs with the nationals but tend to bring fresh funds and market contacts. The reasons of outmigration of the wealthy are somewhat different in the poor, as they many times seek to escape from political or ethnic persecution and nationalization policies, as well as to shield their assets from taxation and financial uncertainty.

The second contribution belongs to Ana María Aragonés and Uberto Salgado, from the Institute for Economic Research at UNAM. The authors compare the situation of Mexican skilled migrants with the Chinese and Indians in the US, after the world economic crisis in 2008. This paper discusses the conditions of disadvantage of Mexican workers with respect to the Chinese and Indians in the US, in terms of their skills levels, but also when comparing the return and repatriation programs to their countries of origin. While the Chinese government has implemented strong return programs, India has emphasized remittances and networking with the diaspora. In Mexico, the strategy is limited to the functions of CONACYT, which restricts the population candidate to repatriation and return to those who benefited from scholarships abroad.

Aragonés and Salgado foresee a world competition for talent with serious consequences for talent mobility and provide two possible scenarios: that the countries of origin transform their societies and economies for the upcoming fourth industrial revolution or that they keep...
providing developed countries with skilled migration in a form of subsidy or "donation-contribution", thereby perpetuating historical imbalances.

In what follows, we have two articles on the US system and the way it favors skilled and entrepreneurial migration. The first one is written by Paz Trigueros Legarreta from the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM Azcapozalco), Mexico City. She studies the temporary recruitment of highly skilled workers in the US under the H1B visa, starting from a historical background and coming to a statistical and political analysis of their present use. The history of the migration to the US shows how certain European groups were privileged, while others, such as Mexican agricultural workers or African slaves were disregarded. The present discussion on the H1B visas and their restrictions under the Trump administration is based on a larger series of complaints from labor unions and professional associations, which pretend training more US specialists, rather than hiring foreigners.

However, Trigueros offers a myth-breaking analysis of the wages of IT foreign workers, finding that they are not, in any way, the best paid of H1B visa holders. Other professionals such as lawyers, life and social scientists, architects and medical doctors earn more than computing engineers. Finally, she addresses President Trump's offensive against the visas of skilled workers and their consequent reduction in 2017.

The second contribution on visas belongs to Elizabeth Salamanca-Pacheco, from the University of the Americas of Puebla, in a joint research with the Baker Institute for Public Policy, Rice University, Texas. Salamanca offers expert analysis of investor visas and TN visas, from which Mexican entrepreneurs and professionals benefit in the US. By comparison to the
critiques regarding the H1B visas, the E2 and E5 investor visas have benefitted from a quite favorable opinion of President Trump and the public opinion. Due to their potential for job creation and their contributions to GDP growth, their possible reform would consist in a virtual increase of the initial investment amount.

In particular, Mexicans have been among the top beneficiaries of the E-2 investor visas, more than the entrepreneurs from Argentina, Colombia, and Venezuela. In exchange for an environment of fiscal uncertainty, crime, and corruption in Mexico, the US environment offers a “more secure and stable alternative for their investment projects”, according to field research by Salamanca.

Her research is actually complemented by a fifth article of this issue, that deals with the migration of Mexican professionals (MP) who are part of an educated middle class, elites in their home country. Lilia Domínguez Villalobos and Mónica Laura Vázquez-Maggio, both researchers at UNAM, have designed a qualitative survey with 813 Mexicans in the US to study the reasoning behind their immigration. Indeed, 85.1% of the individuals who reported to this study identified themselves as middle class.

As part of a middle class, MP abroad, look for “greater resources, intellectual abilities, values and have a greater capacity to give course to their life” than migrants who are more poor, according to Domínguez Villalobos and Vázquez-Maggio. Interestingly enough, 64% of the surveyed had a job in Mexico before leaving and they were not dissatisfied with their work. Their decision to migrate is therefore related to a better international experience in the United States, the slow progress of the knowledge economy in Mexico, including institutional support
for research. As a matter of fact, having a PhD degree is negatively associated with the search for a better quality of life, but it is more related to the search for a better job.

The sixth paper our special issue allows a comparison of different Latin American professionals in the US. This time, a team of three researchers from Buenos Aires analyze the patterns of scientific mobility and job opportunities in the academic market, based on the Argentinian researchers who studied at US graduate schools. Based on semi-structured interviews and a data base of 31,000 curricula of Argentinian researchers, Lucas Luchilo, María Verónica Moreno and María Guillermína D’Onofrio show why graduate studies abroad are a necessary condition for the development of research careers in Latin America.

By comparison to Mexico and other Latin American countries such as Brasil or Chile, Argentina has few, if any, scholarship for doctoral studies abroad. Argentinians who take a PhD abroad are self financed or receive funding from foreign institutions, therefore their return decisions are not conditioned by any legal obligation back home. The authors describe the scientific system in their country as one characterized by a “strong endogamy of the places of formative socialization of those who are working as academics: only 3 out of 10 (29.7%) Argentinian researchers made one or several postgraduate studies abroad”.

Similar to the case of Mexican scientists, the US is the main country of destination for their graduate training. For those who decide to stay there, the main reasons are joining institutions or groups with worldwide and better support for research than back home. Even when the interviewed did not emphasize the search for better remuneration, they did not ignore its economic dimension either.
Postdoctoral studies is yet another topic covered by Luchilo, Moreno and D’Onofrio, as a false friend that makes academic jump from one postdoc to another, postponing formal commitment with an academic institution. This is one more problem common to the scientific systems in Argentina and Mexico, that could be a possible topic for future research.

The three last articles of this issue offer different perspectives on skilled migration, since one focuses on South–North skilled migration, one is a gendered based interpretation of skilled migration and the last one is based on the situation of forced skilled migration.

Telésforo Ramírez-García and Fernando Lozano Ascencio from the Regional Center for Multidisciplinary Research (UNAM) study the trends and patterns skilled immigration to Mexico, from 2000-2015. They show a gradual increase in skilled migration to Mexico, from the US, Spain, Colombia, Argentina and Venezuela. In the 20th century, Mexico used to be a preferred place of destination for intellectual exile from Spain, South America and East European countries. In the 21st century, however, skilled migration to Mexico follows different patterns, mainly intracompany transferees and labor migration.

The authors show that Mexico follows a model of growing selectivity model for its migrants, like other countries in North America, Australia and Europe. The percentage of migrants with postgraduate studies has increased in Mexico from 20.4% in 2000 to 28.3% in 2015. At present, skilled migrants from the United States represent almost 30% of the total stock, a population that Ramírez-García and Lozano explain by three hypotheses: geographic proximity, the large group of American investors in Mexico and the skilled retirees who choose Mexico as a second place of residence.
A second important group are migrants from Spain, mainly driven by the economic crisis and unemployment back home. In many cases, these are entrepreneurs who invest in Mexico. The article concludes with a proposal for a more active policy of labor integration of the skilled foreigners who come to Mexico, in order to avoid an underutilization of their abilities (brain waste).

The eight article by Luciana Gandini proposes a gendered explanation of skilled migration, starting from regional evidence in North America. The author finds that skilled migration has been explained using categories different from the overall migration. She therefore propose gender, a more general category, to analyze the process of feminization of skilled migration.

In particular, Gandini reconfirms the growth in the flow of skilled Mexican women in the US, but she finds that in terms of personal achievement, Mexican women professionals are not more independent or autonomous, when compared to their male counterparts. In this way, her position is that gender differences are perpetuated in the migration process, independent from the skill level.

A related topic addressed by this article is the recognition of educational credentials and work experience of skilled migrants, depending on gender and immigration status. On this respect, Gandini makes two relevant distinctions: a) between being skilled and recognized as such (labour integration) and b) between being skilled and being allowed in a foreign country as skilled (legal permission).
Lastly, my own article in this issue develops on the conflict-induced displacement of the skilled (CIDS) a concept I propose to study the experience of professional Syrian refugees in seven OECD countries. Based on a cross-case analysis, I sustain that the Syrian skilled migration CIDS is a crisis but also an economic and political opportunity for traditional countries of destination of skilled migration in North America and in Europe. Indeed, OECD countries take advantage of the skilled refugees in order to maintain growth in their aging economies, solve brain drain caused by internal conflict, as well as to strengthen their status as moral powers. By comparison to the other articles that honor this special issue, I propose a change of framework from economically induced skilled migration to conflict driven migration, that requires different theoretical interpretations, characteristic to previous literature on exile.

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