

Emerging Immigration Scholars Conference

University of California
Los Angeles, USA,
February 26th–27th 2016

On February 26th and 27th a conference took place at the University of California in Los Angeles, organized by the University of California Los Angeles Center for the Study of International Migration. While the conference mainly concerned migration, multiculturalism and immigration into the United States, there were also other interesting topics. Many participants were post-doctoral fellows, fresh holders of doctorate degrees, who had finished their fieldwork as well as their dissertation thesis and wanted to publish their thesis. Each session was led by “older local” professors from the University of California Los Angeles, San Diego, Irvine and Berkeley, while the presenters were from all over the United States. There were no presenters from any other countries.

The conference in fact took the form of a workshop. All contributions were sent to all participants some days before in the form of articles (some still works in progress), so that participants were prepared for discussion and almost all had questions for their colleagues. Presenters thus expected feedback after they finished their presentations, constructive criticism that made their paper stronger. Professors were not excluded from discussion – first, they also replied to participants with notes and advice, and, secondly, there were meetings called “authors meet critics sessions” for two recently published books by professors. There were critical sessions of this kind on “The Cross-Border Connection: Immigrants,

Emigrants, and their Homelands,” by Roger Waldinger (University of California Los Angeles) about immigrants’ cross-border ties, and “American Identity and the Politics of Multiculturalism,” by David Sears (University of California Los Angeles) and Jack Citrin (University of California Berkeley).

The conference was divided into two days, with eight sessions and twenty-four papers presented. Two sessions were simultaneously conducted in two different rooms, so that visitors could choose which one to attend. The presentations featured qualitative as well as quantitative methodology, and were made mostly by sociologists, but also by political scientists, anthropologists and academics from other fields. Immigration policy was a favourite topic, and participants mainly dealt with the immigration policy of the United States (less so that of other countries) and the behaviour of organizations in the country of immigration towards immigrants (some contributors were interested in agricultural labour). However, some researchers focused their attention on almost unknown areas such as the persisting apartheid in the Republic of South Africa after the breakdown of apartheid laws. Something that almost all the contributions had in common was the connection between state policy and human behaviour – both young and experienced academics strongly emphasised the belief that policy may directly affect human behavior and legalized state policy “equipment”, such as citizenship, as an adored status for migrants which they have to achieve. Research into the connection between the state and migrants’ behaviour was a very important point of view.

One of the most remarkable presentations was that by Konrad Kalicki, a post-doctoral researcher from Harvard University, on foreign labour admission in Japan and Taiwan. These countries have positive admission policies for ethnic fellows from poorer countries, and Kalicki shows how Japan and Taiwan deal with security and simultaneously with the need for foreign labour, i.e. how ethnic fellows are more acceptable because of imagined similarities, and how the legitimization of roots tourism (etc.) to Japan and Taiwan “overshadows” labour migration. Another interesting contribution came from Caitlin Fouratt, a post-doctoral researcher from California State University Long Beach, who talked about transnational parenting among Nicaraguan migrants. She argued that being absent (i.e. separated from children as the result of working in a foreign country) is complicated for Nicaraguan mothers, but their remittances as a “currency of care” are more consistent than remittances from men. However, fathers also provide transnational care with responsibility. In the “authors meet critics session” there were prominent differences in the inter-generational points of view on methodology and theory. The publication “American Identity and the Politics of Multiculturalism” by David Sears and Jack Citrin was criticised by Zoltan Hajnal

(University of California San Diego) and Andreas Wimmer (Columbia University) for using a descriptive and simplifying scheme and having limitations with regard to urgent questions. As a publication supporting multiculturalism, its conclusions are also more positive than realistic.

This small and well-organized conference with a fee of 75 dollars for presenters was a valuable meeting for young researchers. The preference for a small conference should be attributed to several professors from the University of California who themselves declared that big conferences in the United States like ASA (American Sociological Association) Annual Meetings were “less attractive” because of the high number of researchers. There was, however, one crucial shortcoming. Only two or three students from bachelor’s or master’s degree programs (plus me as a visiting graduate researcher) attended the conference. Indeed, this was the highest number of non-presenters possible, because the small rooms and shortage of chairs meant it was hard to accommodate more visitors. However, attendees included professors widely known as famous social scientists, such as Andreas Wimmer from Columbia University and Roger Waldinger, Marjorie Faulstich Orellana, Carola Suárez Orozco, Roger Brubaker and David Sears, all from the University of California Los Angeles.

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