

The ILO in Latin America: Laboratory for an International and Orderly Regulation of Migration (1936-1966)

La OIT en Latinoamérica: laboratorio para una regulación internacional y ordenada de las migraciones (1936-1966)

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the treatment that International Labor Organization (ILO) gave to international migration in Latin America—between 1930 and 1960—at the American Labor Conferences. Based on a qualitative methodology, a documentary corpus consisting of memories, statements, and reports produced in the context of the conferences held by the organization was constructed and analyzed. This document aims to contribute to the scarce existing academic production about the treatment that migrations received during the period in question by international organizations. It also shows how the possibility of regulating migration at the regional level was established on the ILO agenda. The article concludes that this agenda, marked by utilitarian thinking schemes on migration, is a laboratory for the incipient promotion of measures aimed at the denationalization of migration policies.

Keywords: 1. International Labor Organization, 2. international regulation of immigration, 3. American Labor Conferences, 4. Latin America, 5. Europe.

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza el tratamiento que la Organización Internacional del Trabajo (OIT) le otorgó a las migraciones internacionales en América Latina —entre 1930 y 1960— en el ámbito de las Conferencias Americanas del Trabajo. A partir de una metodología cualitativa se construyó y analizó un corpus documental conformado por memorias, declaraciones e informes producidos en el contexto de las conferencias realizadas por la organización. El presente documento pretende abonar a la escasa producción académica existente en relación con el tratamiento que recibieron las migraciones en organismos internacionales para el período señalado. Además, permite observar cómo se estableció en la agenda de la OIT la posibilidad de regular las migraciones a escala regional. El artículo concluye que esta agenda, marcada por esquemas de pensamiento utilitaristas sobre las migraciones, se constituye en un laboratorio de promoción incipiente de medidas orientadas a la desnacionalización de las políticas migratorias.

Palabras clave: 1. Organización Internacional del Trabajo, 2. regulación internacional de las migraciones, 3. Conferencias Americanas del Trabajo, 4. América Latina, 5. Europa.

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INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH³

In the last three decades, studies on international migration policies have paid increasing attention to the development of international regulations on migration. Relations between States—through bilateral agreements—, the creation of new non-binding regional and global spaces, and the emergence, dissemination and consolidation of approaches such as that of governability and governance of migration occupy a growing space in the academic production on migration policies. It is within this context that a critical production recently emerged that examines, through a diachronic view, the origins of the first international organizations, conventions and agreements, as well as the development of approaches that preceded what today is termed *migration management* (Damilakou & Venturas, 2015; Domenech, 2018; Parsanoglou & Konstantinos, 2015; Venturas, 2015).

This article is part of and resumes the contributions of these lines of research, so as to delve into the recommendations of the International Labor Organization (ILO [OIT, acronym in Spanish for Organización Internacional del Trabajo]) in Latin America since the 1930s, through the creation and development of the American Labor Conferences (CAT, acronym in Spanish for Conferencias Americanas del Trabajo), wherein migration and its regulation were relevant from these conference's origins. Our own approach seeks to analyze the treatment that the ILO gave to migration in Latin America between the 1930s and 1960s, in a context where the recommendations of incipient international organizations sought to expand. Already since its constitution in 1919, the ILO showed interest in migration issues and sponsored its international approach/regulation through recommendations aimed at the protection of workers who were in a country other than that of their origin (Betts & Kainz, 2017; Parsanoglou & Konstantinos, 2015).

Over time, this organization, which brought together representatives of governments, workers and employers, established the International Emigration Commission (1921) and the Standing Committee on Migration (1926), two specific instances that evidenced the relevance that the matter was gaining. On the other hand, the ILO had an important collaborative role in the transfer and location of refugees and displaced persons in the interwar period (Betts & Kainz, 2017), while compiling, elaborating and circulating information and data on international migration during the 1920s (Mechi, 2008). Likewise, different recommendations and conventions⁴ aimed at the protection

³ We would like to thank Eduardo Domenech, who generously shared some ideas and discussions on migration policies from the analyzed period, and provided documents and bibliography retrieved in the development of this article.

⁴ Since the first International Labor Conference held in 1919, the ILO agreed on different recommendations or conventions for the regulation of migrant workers: (a) 1919 N° 2 Reciprocity of Treatment Recommendation, (b) 1922 N° 19 Migration Statistics Recommendation, (c) 1925 N° 19 Equality of Treatment (Accident Compensation) Convention, (d) 1926 N° 21 Inspection of Emigrants Convention, (e) 1926 N° 26 Migration (Protection of Females at Sea) Recommendation, (f) 1939 N° 66 Migration for Employment Convention, (g) 1939 N° 61 Migration for Employment Recommendation supplementing the 1939 Convention, (h) 1939 N° 62 Migration for Employment (Co-operation between States)

of migrants were agreed upon, so as to guarantee, among other matters, minimum conditions for travel, protection of women and girls, and the acknowledgment of labor rights on an equal footing with nationals of member countries (Parsanoglou & Konstantinos, 2015).

Towards the beginning of the 1930s, the ILO began to negotiate strategies with Latin American governments on a regional basis, mainly through official envoys, negotiating the management of labor issues with the Organization of American States (Unión Panamericana) (Singleton, 2013). By these means, the organization sought to “establish a labor and social agenda fully in force in the trade union, employer and state debate, as there were structural problems still lacking effective solution” (Herrera González, 2015, p. 127). As a result of this work, and after several missions in the region and in the United States, in 1936 the ILO launched the first American Labor Conference in Santiago de Chile (Chile). From this meeting on, the issue of migration figured as a relevant topic on which specific proposals were made (Poblete Troncoso, 1958; Seguí González, 1947).

The ILO's early and notorious interest in international migration contrasts with the lesser attention it has received from the field of migration studies. The incipient academic production—from a historical perspective—on the international regulation of migration, as well as the scarce interest generated by the role of organizations such as the ILO—despite its long international and regional trajectory in the field—provides a fertile scenario for academic research. Hence, by studying the work of the American Labor Conferences (henceforth ALCs), this article raises the following questions: What topics and issues were addressed by the ILO in relation to international migration in Latin America? What were the ways of thinking about international migration within the framework of the ALCs? What actions, measures and policies were suggested to States?

In order to answer these questions, we mainly resort to the theoretical developments of Abdelmalek Sayad, in particular, to the notions of “State thinking” and “accounting balance” (Sayad, 2010, p. 385). Likewise, inspiration was drawn from the uses of these theoretical tools for the analysis of migration policies in different regional and national contexts (Domenech, 2009, 2012; Gil Araujo, 2010). These allow understanding, on the one hand, the principles of vision and division or categories through which migrations are classified and, on the other, the “instrumental schemes” that legitimize the presence or absence of migrants according to cost/benefit criteria. Thus, in order to understand the discourses and policies set forth by the ILO and its member countries, the category of *utilitarian thinking schemes* is proposed, to refer to the selective discourses and policies that construct and classify migrants according to the contributions and costs they represent (both for the countries of origin and destination).⁵

Recommendation, i) 1949 N° 97 Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), j) 1975 N° 143 Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions).

⁵ The countries that can be called transit countries at the period analyzed were not taken into account as part of the discussion back then.

Sassen's (2012) contributions are also incorporated into this approach. In particular, her idea of "denationalization of State policies" is used to understand the initial movements that took place towards the beginning of the twentieth century with the increasingly internationalized attention given to different issues, international migration in this case. Also, a dialogue is established with recent works that put forward a historical and critical perspective on governability or migration governance in Latin America (Damilakou & Venturas, 2015; Domenech, 2017; Parsanoglou & Konstantinos, 2015; Venturas, 2015). The contributions made by these studies make possible to describe and problematize the relationships between the most recent definitions on the perspective of governability and governance of migrations, as well as their possible connections with the ways of seeing and thinking migrations constructed between the early and mid-twentieth century.

The method selected for this work brings together a qualitative approach and an explanatory scope, recording regularities and specificities among the ALCs from the 1930s to the 1960s. The central instrument is the collection of documents, including declarations, recommendations, minutes of meetings and the director's memoirs produced in the context of the ALCs. The empirical corpus was organized by type of document and in chronological orders, for reading and subsequent interpretation.

In the first instance, the content analysis under the light of the selected theoretical tools made it possible to find a utilitarian imprint in the construction of migrations and migrants that persists over the years. In a second categorization and interpretation operation, three analytical stages are differentiated, shaped by discourses and utilitarian policies that allow for us to identify variations and distinctions in what has been termed utilitarian thinking schemes. The first stage analyzes the ILO's focus on the export of European labor for agricultural colonization, corresponding to the ALCs of 1936 and 1939. The second stage focuses on the ILO's view of the European "surplus population" (OIT, 1946a, p. 9) and the possibility that this skilled labor force would supposedly represent—to underpin economic and social modernization in Latin America—issues that were raised in the ALCs of 1946 to 1956. The third stage deals with the change in the ways of thinking about migration after the conferences held in the 1960s. There we find concerns about emigration from Latin America to northern countries, both of *skilled* and *unskilled workers*, associated with issues such as the *brain drain* and *remittances*.

Thus, the article provides three concrete and relevant contributions to the study of international migration policies in the region. First, it provides a diachronic and detailed description of the ILO's approach to international migration in Latin America for the selected period. Second, it provides an analysis of the emergence of utilitarian thinking schemes and their reorganization through the different ways of understanding the migration-development nexus by the ILO. Thirdly, it provides reflections on the denationalization of migration policies and the emergence of international regulation of migration in terms of governance and governability. Consequently, this article contributes specifically to the study of this organization and its migration guidelines on a regional scale, and more generally to works that analyze the link between migration and development in Latin America, from a historical perspective.

*Pioneering and Desirable Migration: European Labor
for Latin America's Agricultural Colonization*

The first ALCs developed in the 1930s, convulsive and critical times that materialized and expanded with the crash of the New York Wall Street Crash in 1929. The political response to the economic crisis came in the way of the establishment of restrictive policies to protect employment, and Latin America was no exception (Acosta, 2018). Argentina and Brazil, the main receiving countries along with a number of others in the region, developed different measures aimed at selected immigration (Devoto, 2009). Although political elites sought to protect local employment, still saw European immigration as a channel for colonization and modernization.

Consequently, restrictions were especially aimed at preventing the entry of refugees, particularly Jews and Spanish Republicans, groups that were perceived as a danger to the social order (FitzGerlad & Cook-Martin, 2014). These cautions in place, Western governments and incipient international organizations sought to prioritize various social considerations such as, for example, the social security of immigrant workers in order to keep their capitalist political projects alive. According to Hobsbawm (1998), social measures pointed to the “danger of not doing so [because of the possibility, on the one hand, of] the radicalization of the left and, [on the other] as demonstrated in Germany and elsewhere, of the right” (p. 102).

It would particularly be in the 1930s that a sustained link between the International Labor Organization and the local governments of Latin America began, since before those years the presence of Latin American officials in the bureaucratic body of the ILO was minor, and senior managers seldomly visited the region. Some authors argue that the incursion of the ILO in America “was a somewhat spontaneous affair” (Herrera González, 2015, p. 128) and promoted by the concerns of some Latin American leaders and/or officials (Lombardo Toledano—Mexican—, Unsain—Argentinean—, Poblete Troncoso—Chilean—, among others).⁶ From this moment on, a more systematic relationship was established, as well as a deepening of the ILO's universalist mission, which implied a turning point in the relationship between this organization and Latin America (Herrera León & Herrera González, 2013).

The first ALC (Santiago de Chile, 1936) aimed not only at the universalist view of the ILO's own endeavor (as expressed by the Chilean government representative, García Oldini), but also at incorporating regional issues such as “the conditions of agricultural workers, the recreational activities of workers, and the implementation of social security” (Herrera González, 2015, pp. 111-112). However, international migration was not accounted for in the minutes of the agenda. It was during its eighth meeting at the behest of the government delegate of Argentina, Alejandro Unsain, that a draft resolution on international (European) migration was proposed and approved.

⁶ For an analysis of the ILO bureaucracy and the role of different delegates, see Yáñez Andrade (2013). As suggested by Wehrli (2013), the emergence of the ILO (along with other international organizations) implied the constitution of new figures beyond traditional diplomats, such as experts, bureaucrats and international civil servants.

Consequently, the ILO was asked to conduct studies related to European immigration to America with the purpose of addressing “various aspects of individual immigration and of collective recruitments, spontaneous or directed, [and of] colonization, private or official, addressing the conditions of preparation for receptivity” (OIT, 1936, p. 162). On the other hand, the need was stressed to present a draft convention or basic recommendation for bilateral or plurilateral agreements between European and American countries on “immigration, colonization and labor” (OIT, 1936, p. 162).

The second ALC, held in 1939 in Havana, Cuba, included in its agenda, at Unsain’s request, a report on the organization of official immigration and colonization institutions. Although this request was made by Argentina, several countries of the region also showed their concern and interest. For example, the government delegate of Ecuador, Mr. Lopez Arteta, expressed: “Ecuador is a Republic with a weak economy, which sorely needs the assistance of immigration and foreign capital for the better development of its immense agricultural, industrial and mining potential” (OIT, 1939a, p. 106). In addition, the report pointed out the urgency of developing an *international regulation* on the migration of salaried workers. To this end, several meetings were held between 1938 and 1939 to carry out various studies on the conditions under which intercontinental migrations of salaried workers took place in the Americas, and a draft agreement and two recommendations were prepared and adopted by the plenary conference without opposition.

From the outset, the discussions that took place at this second conference made it clear that the recommendations and proposals made were not intended to call into question the sovereign actions of States in the field of migration; it was made clear that the proposals set forth did not seek to influence “the volume of migration movements, [since] the right of States to admit, encourage or prohibit the recruitment or introduction of migrant workers into their territory [was left untouched]” (OIT, 1939b, p. 6). Hence, the organization would concentrate on the promotion of certain migrant rights. Thus, it aimed at creating tools to “protect workers who leave their country to seek work abroad from the particular risks they face” (OIT, 1939b, p. 6).

The Latin American States were in favor of a resumption of colonizing migrations, yet there were great obstacles linked to the “difficulties of financing [the] establishment of settlers [and] transportation costs” (OIT, 1939b, p. 7). After analyzing this situation, it was proposed that international cooperation tools (both technical and financial) be sought to cover the expenses of these transfers. To this end, the conference recommended for the ILO Governing Body to promote a Permanent Commission on Settler Migrations (and also agreed on the creation of a Correspondence Committee on Migration), with the following objectives:

(...) a) to facilitate coordinating the actions of the emigration and immigration countries involved; b) to study in depth, especially in connection with specific cases, the problems of international financing raised by colonizing migrations; c) to carry out all tasks entrusted to it in connection with international credit operations that the countries involved deem necessary to develop colonizing migrations under conditions satisfactory to those countries and to the settlers (OIT, 1939b, p. 9).

The international cooperation actions proposed by the ILO included not only financial issues for the transfer of travelers, but also the construction of comprehensive and common statistics in order to “establish a regular information service on colonizing migrations [and] continue technical studies on the organization of these movements” (OIT, 1939b, p. 10). It also raised the need for public agencies of the States to take charge of administrative tasks, so as to facilitate immigration by means of policies that encouraged and stimulated colonization (OIT, 1939b). These recommendations show how the ILO sought to position itself as an actor at the regional level able to find ways of guaranteeing the arrival of settlers. This organization and, to an extent, the member States understood that settlers were those European immigrants:

(...) *desirable* because of the special professional aptitudes that (...) they would bring to the development of certain agricultural productions or industries, or even plainly and simply due to their aptitudes as *pioneers*: their will to move ahead, their spirit of sacrifice there where nationals, who may have within their reach various or easier possibilities of existence, prefer not to advance themselves (OIT, 1939b, p. 22).

This quote underlies the ILO's perspective on international migration, which was similar to that held by the countries of immigration, such as Brazil and Argentina from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Hence, the articulating axis of utilitarian thinking schemes understood working-age immigration as a contribution to the destination society. The references found in the ILO documents omit to mention women -thus making them invisible in these processes-, something that different authors have pointed out in relation to the reports and documents on migration from that time (Frid de Silberstein, 1997).⁷

As an example, Arrieta (2018, pp. 219, 243) analyzes *family reunification* policies from the “wives’ boats” in Brazil and Argentina (1945-1950), showing that, in the best of cases, women were perceived as “subordinate companions to men” (p. 224), as followers, or as part of family reunification outside the labor market or a project of their own.⁸ In this way, the promotion of immigration included mainly men of *economically active* age as part not only of a population movement arriving to settle permanently, but also as a fundamental economic and cultural contribution to the countries of the region seeking modernization. Thus, a utilitarian thinking scheme was established in which a particular figure of accounting balance was constituted: migrations and the presence of migrants (young-male-Europeans) as a contribution to colonization.

⁷ Although reports on the role of women in relation to paid work have been made since the first ALC, they omit the migrant condition. For the ILO's treatment of “women workers” in the first ALCs, see Aguilar (2020).

⁸ According to Arrieta (2018), in the second post-war period, “wives’ boats” sought to guarantee the preservation of the traditional family nucleus by reuniting it and encouraging women to travel with their children from their countries of origin to the Latin American destinations, where men (their husbands) had emigrated to work. For a complementary development on this topic, see García López (2012), Cárdenas Ruiz-Velasco (2014) and González Ferrer (2008).

This period can be understood as an inaugural moment in the relations between the ILO and the countries of the region, in which the importance and need for collaboration between countries as well as international cooperation were brought into the discussions on migration policies; novel elements in a subject matter that until that time seemed to be the exclusive competence of States. In addition, the ILO strengthened its role in the region from a *rhetoric of the export of European labor*, of *desirable* immigrants for agricultural colonization, modernization and “the social progress of the countries of America” (OIT, 1939a, p. 253).

*Surplus Population: European Skilled Workers
for the Modernization of Latin America*

The end of World War II brought about important changes in the ILO, as it faced new conflicts and tensions arising from totalitarian and/or nationalist policies in Europe, as well as due to the *advance of communism* or socialism in different parts of the world (Mechi, 2008). As suggested by Hobsbawm (1998, p. 203), the uniqueness of this era was the prevalence of an “apocalyptic rhetoric” back and forth the USSR and the United States (communism/anti-communism), especially the latter.⁹ Thus, communism as a common enemy, promoted by certain political sectors of the United States, was of use to develop alliances and agreements not only in terms of local politics, but also transnationally.

These international conflicts characteristic of the period weighed on the fact that the ILO had representatives from countries associated with communism, as was the case of Poland, Czechoslovakia and the USSR, which had recently joined, not without friction, in 1954. The situation resulted in various tensions with the United States, which opposed to international control being in the hands of an organization in which countries from the communist orbit participated (Mechi, 2008).¹⁰ Beyond these tensions, the ILO was the only multilateral organization created in the first post-war period that prevailed over the second world war.

In the post-war period, marked by new political and social conflicts, the end to restrictions imposed on transit, as well as the great migratory potential of workers willing to leave Europe (Devoto, 2001), made possible new migratory movements to Latin America. Consequently, some

⁹ For a more detailed and in-depth analysis of Hobsbawm’s idea of apocalyptic rhetoric, see Chapter VIII: The Cold War (1998, pp. 229-259).

¹⁰ From the 1950s on, a new actor appeared that challenged the ways in which migration was understood (and regulated): the Provisional Intergovernmental Committee for Migration Movements from Europe (PICMME). This new body, provisional at the outset, was soon renamed the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM), now the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Its creation was the result of the International Conference on Migration in Brussels promoted by the United States and Belgium in 1951, as a political response to the displacements and migrations that followed World War II; above all, as a control mechanism, especially for the United States, since, unlike the ILO, this organization did not accept countries in the communist orbit and prohibited the emigration of its citizens (Georgi, 2010; Santi, 2020; Venturas, 2015).

countries in the region sought to attract industrial workers by entering into agreements with European countries that promoted the emigration of their population.

In this context, the ILO, through the ALCs, began to outline new ways of understanding international migration, since the preferred topics of previous decades, linked to colonizing migration, did not seem feasible. Thus, notions such as “economic development”, “surplus population” (ILO, 1946a, p. 9) and “organized” or “orderly migration” (ILO, 1946b, pp. 32-33) began to progressively color the categories and measures produced and suggested at the ILO. The organization’s new perspective matched the more general perspective on Latin America also adopted by other organizations, such as the then new Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM). Latin America was understood as a relatively underpopulated region that could receive immigrants from an overpopulated Europe (Santi, 2020; Venturas, 2015).

The year 1946 saw a new ALC in which the notion of surplus population began to be used (ILO, 1946a) to refer to a new demographic phenomenon: it was stated that the consequences of the war left Europe with an *excessive population* for the scarce resources available and the economic conditions generated by the war. According to the ILO’s vision, the European population surplus was counterpart to the need for highly qualified workers required by Latin America, either for industry or for rural areas. This scheme was presented as complementary: for Europe because it would reduce its *surplus* population and for Latin America because it would cover some of its labor needs in order to achieve the *longed-for development*. These issues were already clearly visible at the third Conference (ILO, 1946b) and, in more detail, at the 1949 Conference.

Thus, at the 1946 ALC, a “Resolution on Migration” was approved to solve the problem of the European surplus population and specialized labor force in America. It acknowledged that:

(...) the United Nations should encourage, by appropriate measures which will afford adequate protection to all concerned, the *orderly migration* of workers and settlers in accordance with the economic needs and social conditions prevailing in the various countries; (...) a commission appointed by the Governing Body of the International Labor Office should undertake studies on the means necessary to protect the interests of immigrant workers (ILO, 1946b, p. 32).

To a large extent, the resolution was undertaken against the backdrop of the notion of “surplus population” and “orderly migration”, while at the same time it raises the need to consider the interests of the parties involved. It is important to note that, unlike the various interventions made at the conference, this resolution emphasized the protection of workers against any obstacles or inconveniences that might arise. Likewise, in line with the idea of an international regulation, the resolution was aimed at overcoming national management by suggesting that “unilateral migration regulations be supplemented by bilateral and multilateral agreements” (ILO, 1946b, p. 32).

The concern for the surplus population expressed in the 1946 ALC was further made explicit in 1949, when the migration of Europeans to the Americas was deemed the *desired* solution for the States of the region:

(...) as recently acknowledged by the Manpower Commission of the Organization for European Economic Cooperation, even after their economic reconstruction, the countries of Europe alone will not be able to absorb all the manpower available to them. (...) The development of European emigration to America seems to be, therefore, the *natural solution* to this double problem: on the one hand, excess population in Europe; on the other, development and economic progress in the American countries (OIT, 1949, p. 120).

Consequently, surplus population and the need for skilled labor were perceived by the ILO as an opportunity that benefited both the countries of origin and destination.¹¹ Based on this reading, the ILO proposed not to leave migration movements *to chance*, for which it began to devise measures and programs that could *organize* this flow through (targeted and selective) regulations. As could be read in the 1949 ALC, migration should be *organized*, this implying the elaboration of selection parameters in relation to the training and skills of workers (skilled labor or agricultural settlers) and the places where they should reside according to the needs perceived by governments.

In the context of the various approaches to *development*¹² that deemed industrialization a priority issue, it was stated that “the most important problem [was] the shortage of labor, [and] the most urgent issue was the lack of skilled workers” (OIT, 1949, p. 107). Hence, the solution depended “partly on organized immigration and partly on the better utilization of national labor forces” (OIT, 1949, p. 109). In this sense, both international and internal migrations were to be regulated altogether in order to obtain the best possible results.

However, according to the ILO, one of the obstacles to achieving the objective of orderly migration was the lack of information systems on labor demand and supply that would enable “resource development planning” (OIT, 1949, p. 110). From this perspective, emphasis was placed on the need to survey—by means of workers’ registers and statistical systems—the demands of the labor market together with the supply that could come from Europe. Thus, in order to facilitate this task, the idea of organization was necessarily linked to that of cooperation between countries.

As a strategy to support its position, the organization highlighted in a positive way some experiences that were taking place between Europe and America, which it identified as organized migration. To give force to this idea, the 1949 Conference exemplified this type of measures based on the agreements made between Argentina and Italy in 1948,¹³ where information was exchanged

¹¹ This perspective on migration, dating from the mid-twentieth century, in which both countries of origin and destination, as well as migrants, benefit, is analogous to IOM’s current perspective on migration governance. For this organization, migration managed in a *safe and orderly* manner produces *win-win situations*, that is, in which countries of origin, destination and migrants all benefit. A critical look at IOM’s migration governance approach can be found in Domenech (2018) and Georgi (2010).

¹² For more information on the perspectives on migration and development within ECLAC, see Romano (2009).

¹³ It is important to clarify that this type of agreements—aimed at promoting immigration from Europe to Latin America—were not only limited to the Argentinian case. During the same period, Italy also signed

and the “control of the emigration volume was promoted in accordance with the conditions of the labor market in [the destination]” (OIT, 1949, p. 124). Under these agreements, the Argentinian State undertook to report on a regular basis the number of immigrants to be admitted, as well as the occupations and professional qualifications required.

The 1946 and 1949 Conferences produced a way of thinking migration as *orderly* (1946) or *organized* (1949), as opposed to the way it was perceived in the previous period, revolving around *colonization*. It was assumed that there was potential or available migration in a given context of surplus population and that it was necessary for countries—both of origin and destination—to agree on who could migrate (selection) and in which occupations and regions of the country they could settle (channeling). At this particular moment, migration was seen as a contribution to the development of Latin America, given that the lack of skilled workers was understood as a central problem; a lack that could eventually be supplied by (European) migration, provided it was *organized*. This idea in itself implied the construction of certain migrants as desirable or undesirable, depending on whether they could meet the labor needs of the destination countries.

For the fifth ALC held in April 1952 in the city of Rio de Janeiro, one of the cross-cutting themes that permeated the preparatory proposals and discussions was development in Latin America. As with the proposals made at the 1946 and, especially, at the 1949 Conference, the question of the “surplus population” in Europe, and the opportunities this represented for Latin America, continued to be one of the central ideas structuring the perspective and proposals in relation to international migration. At this time, the image of surplus population and development was structured on the basis of the metaphor of European *exhaustion* and American *youth*:

On the one hand, European nations, exhausted by two consecutive wars and fearful of a third, with ever-increasing demographic surpluses, are no longer able to find the resources necessary for proper subsistence. On the other hand, the nations of America, young and full of unexploited natural wealth, awaiting additional human effort to fertilize them. For some, the problem is the overabundance of population; for others, their lack of development (OIT, 1952, p. 3).

One novelty in this context was that the ILO began to consider for itself a role that was not merely consultative and rather emphasized the need for active intervention through technical assistance (OIT, 1952).¹⁴ In fact, by this conference, the ILO had already begun to deploy different technical assistance programs and measures linked to employment and migration services—aimed at

migration agreements, for example, with Brazil. Further information on the agreements entered into by Italy and Argentina or Brazil and Italy can be found in Devoto (2009), Biernat (2007), and Arrieta (2018).

¹⁴ The organization's technical assistance was also reflected in the emergence of a central theme: the issue of social security. At this Conference, an important space was devoted for the first time to the proposals and actions developed by the ILO in relation to this issue. In addition, an entire chapter entitled *Social Security for Migrant Workers in the States of the Americas* explained the need to enter into bilateral, multilateral and international agreements to improve coverage for migrants in the region. In subsequent meetings, social security played an increasingly prominent role.

ascertaining the supply and demand for workers—. Thus, sponsored by the organization, services for the “placement of immigrants” were already operating in Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela.

On the other hand, the creation of the Action Center for Manpower in Latin America in Sao Paulo (Brazil) in May 1950 stood out. According to the organization itself, by that year there was already some progress and joint work in relation to vocational training and employment services in Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Paraguay and Uruguay. Among the employment services, mention was made of “the adaptation of professional classifications” in Brazil, Chile, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela to an international format that would allow *easier placement of migrants* through their *compatibility* with other countries. These initiatives hinted at a more active role for the ILO, oriented towards the internationalization of policies produced by States or, in other words, towards incipient processes of denationalization of policies.

The issue of *development* and the possibility of obtaining *skilled labor* for industries—by means of European immigration—continued to be a central theme also at the sixth Conference in Havana in 1956 (OIT, 1956). Hence, the organization highlighted the deployment of different missions in Latin American countries linked to technical assistance for the development of migration and employment services. These included Brazil (1951), Uruguay and Peru (1952), Guatemala (1953) and, finally, Venezuela (1953 and 1954). However, it is important to note that, although the idea of European immigration as a possible source of skilled labor appears in the documents, the notion of surplus population is no longer present as it was in previous conferences.¹⁵

The discourses and policies developed by the ILO—at this second stage—show a reconfiguration of the “utilitarian thinking scheme” in relation to the first conferences. In the context of industrial growth and new discussions on development in Latin America, the utilitarian view on migrations and migrants continued to conceive European immigration as a contribution due to its capacity to fill vacancies for skilled workers in Latin American countries. As in previous decades, the discourses deployed in the ILO sphere conceptualized desirable migrants as men of working age. This same phenomenon has been pointed out by Arrieta (2018) in relation to the ICEM and the “wives’ boats”.

On the other hand, the emergence of the notion of “orderly migration” implied the advance of new measures and policies that made use of various mechanisms to select migrants *capable of contributing to development*. In this sense, the organization focused on *planning* international migration through different measures and actions: the signing of bilateral agreements, the opening of employment offices, and the production of information—by means of records and statistics—that

¹⁵ It is worth mentioning that, at the international level, the organization promoted different agreements and regulations pertaining migration. Thus, around 1946, the Standing Committee on Migration proposed to revise the instruments approved in 1939, deeming them inadequate for the prevailing times. Therefore, within the framework of various discussions and conflicts, the Convention of 97 and the Recommendation 86 were approved in 1949 under the title of *Migration for Employment*, which established general principles on information, selection, transportation, channeling, non-discrimination, social security and equal treatment between natives and foreigners (Mechi, 2008).

would allow not only to assess the availability of European male migrants willing to emigrate, but also the labor demand for immigrants on the part of Latin American countries.

From an own perspective, the description of what happened in this period is consistent with the statement that “Latin American countries served, in many ways, as laboratories for the process of establishing international migration management mechanisms” (Damilakou & Venturas, 2015, p. 293). Hence, the idea of organized migration referred to the need to control and regulate migration in order to achieve, on the one hand, development according to the places and occupations that the countries of the region considered priority or strategic, and, on the other hand, to relieve the thus-understood socio-demographic pressure in Europe.

*Emigration from Latin America: Social Security,
Brain Drain and Remittances*

The 1960s brought about a remarkable transformation in discussions on international migration in Latin America (Romano, 2009). Economic growth and the expansion of welfare in developed capitalist countries, known as the *golden age* (Hobsbawm, 1998, p. 15), ran parallel to a notable decrease in migration from Europe to Latin America. In this context, the way migrations were approached at the ALCs took a substantial turn, as it began to outline transformations in the ways of thinking about and classifying migration and migrants. In other words, there was a reorganization of the “utilitarian thinking schemes” that enabled a new way of interpreting the *depletion* of immigration from Europe, as well as the growing phenomenon of emigration from Latin America to other destinations (mainly the United States).

As a result of these changes, attention to immigration from Europe diminished and the language of surplus population faded completely from the organization's discourse. In contrast, concern about the brain drain, understood as a cost, and the vision of remittances as an alternative option for economic development, emerged with force. In addition, the evolution of the meetings evidenced greater concern for “intra-regional migration” and the consolidation of social security issues as a central theme for the organization.

It was particularly at the seventh Conference held in April 1961 in the city of Buenos Aires that discussions on international migration focused on the vocational training of migrant workers and social security.¹⁶ Regarding the latter, an important debate was raised by the representatives of Mexico and Uruguay, which exposed some of the characteristics of their social security systems aimed at responding to the ILO's actions for the inclusion of migrants in the different types of social

¹⁶ One of the outstanding features of this Conference is the participation of the two most important intergovernmental organizations at that time dealing with migration and refugee issues: the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

coverage and policies (OIT, 1961).¹⁷ Likewise, a resolution on social security was signed as a result of the meeting, proposing a set of general principles as a guideline or recommendations for the constitution of specific national policies for immigrants.

As a proof of the relevance that the issue had reached, during the conference a report prepared by the Commission on Social Security was presented and discussed with the aim of “studying the situation of migrant workers in this matter” (OIT, 1961, p. 166). The Commission set for itself the task of “studying, as a matter of priority, a new declaration with the aim of helping America to emerge from the legal regime of territoriality of rights” (OIT, 1961, p. 167). As a result, a draft resolution was prepared, accompanied by an annex with technical standards to facilitate the deployment of the main statements in the cooperating countries.¹⁸

The resolution approved by the Conference established a series of general principles aimed at regulating social security systems, among which the following stood out: the establishment of equal treatment of foreigners and nationals, and the preservation of acquired rights in the event of transfer to another country (OIT, 1961). On the other hand, the ILO insisted on the administration and resolution of these issues by means of bilateral or multilateral agreements (OIT, 1961). The two pillars of the agreement were the extension of social rights to include migrants, especially those related to the pension system, and its management through agreements between the countries of the region. These steps taken by the organization and the member countries, although not strictly binding, sought to advance towards a *regional* regulation.

Years later, at the eighth Conference held in April 1966 in Ottawa, perspectives on the relationship between migration and development began to change substantially. For the first time since the American Conferences were held, brain drain, meaning the exodus of skilled workers (OIT, 1966a, p. 127), was addressed as a problem that the ILO should account for through technical cooperation with the countries of the Americas. Already included in the agenda of the meeting, this ALC stated that:

(...) it may happen that the foreign expert comes to perform a function that could perhaps be performed with equal or greater aptitude by a national specialist whom the country has lost, at least temporarily, for lack of sufficient incentives. Or it may happen that a national civil servant who has completed his training by working in close contact with a foreign expert and who, finally, has perfected his trade by a study trip abroad, considers at the end of this experience that, having considerably raised his professional qualifications, he is in a position

¹⁷ In this same debate, the possibility of creating a Latin American Common Market and the potential consequences it would bring in relation to intra-regional migration and the need for protection of migrant workers was raised (OIT, 1961).

¹⁸ The name of the project, approved by the Conference, was *Resolution on Social Security for Migrant and Non-national Workers*, partly based on the Petrópolis Declaration, adopted by the Conference of American Member States of the ILO in 1952.

to aspire to another position or, in particular, to another remuneration much higher than the one he is currently receiving (OIT, 1966a, p. 127).

Thus, these meetings pointed out the responsibility of the “States of origin” for not producing sufficient “incentives” to retain or attract skilled national workers (emigrants to be), which produced losses in terms of the *accounting balance* for the industrial and productive development of Latin America. This analysis omits what Oteiza (1996) pointed out as a central element to the study of the “brain drain” (p. 101): the investment that developed countries were making at that time to attract skilled labor from other nations. The analysis proposed by the author broadened the assumptions of interpretation by accounting for the mobility of individuals from the point of view of incentives at origin as well as at destination.

It was within this context that the question of how to promote development in the region began to take on a new dimension, since the possibility of attracting European immigrants was perceived as exhausted (in fact, emigration to *the north* was on the rise) and the idea of a surplus European population with technical qualifications was considered unlikely. This concern was reflected in a report¹⁹ prepared for the Conference, which included a section entitled *Emigration of skilled workers*. It stated that “the country of emigration loses the corresponding investments made in professional training” (OIT, 1966b, p. 82). Thus, a negative view of the emigration of “trained workers” was established insofar as it was seen as a loss of the investments (a cost) made by the States in the training of these professionals.

On the other hand, the report established for the first time a differentiated view of “emigration” depending on whether it was “intra or extra regional migration”. In the case of the former, it was stated that it:

(...) can be very beneficial as it may counteract the great inequalities and contribute to greater collaboration between these countries in the solution of these problems. The second form, which can be seen mainly in Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru, and which is fundamentally oriented towards the United States, poses, however, a series of problems (OIT, 1966b, p. 82).

From these utilitarian thinking schemes, the intraregional migration of workers appeared as a potential benefit to the extent that it could compensate for the asymmetries between countries within the region. However, the emigration of this “skilled workers” was seen as a cost when it was directed towards other countries such as the United States (OIT, 1966a, p. 127). Thus, the *accounting balance* found no limit at the national margins, i.e., intraregional migration was seen as a benefit to the extent that it was aimed at Latin American countries. Thus, the report set a differentiated stamp that privileged the idea of *Latin America as a region*, while at the same time establishing different problems or challenges in relation to migration according to the characteristics of each country. This

¹⁹ The report prepared especially for the Conference was entitled *Workforce Planning and Employment Policy*.

discursive shift, which proposed a regional perspective, also reflected the continuity of the denationalization process of migration policies initiated in previous decades.

However, the brain drain issue was not the only relevant novelty during this Conference, as the emigration of *unskilled workers* also emerged as an issue to be treated as *a problem*. In fact, in a report on “manpower planning”, the emigration of these workers appears as a way to promote development, especially in countries with high population growth rates (OIT, 1966b). As an example, the experiences of Jamaica and Colombia were addressed, and on the latter it was stated that “trade union officials have recently proposed that unskilled Colombian workers be exported to Western European countries willing to welcome them in” (OIT, 1966b, p. 155). This perspective has a *family resemblance* to the ideas of surplus population, only this time it was the population of Latin American countries that was migrating elsewhere. By way of justification, the document referred to the possible benefits of emigration and expressed that:

(...) naturally “it is not logical to expect for this (migration) to help solving on a global scale the enormous problem of unemployment and underemployment in poor countries with great demographic pressure, if not to a very small extent.” However, the country that “exports” its unskilled labor can realize two categories of benefit: *migrant workers* repatriate significant amounts of money for their families, and *workers return* to their countries of origin after having acquired professional training; as regards the latter point, it is important that the labor agreements entered into by “exporting” countries and countries of destination include clauses relating to professional training (OIT, 1966b, p. 155).

Some central ideas can be extracted from the above excerpt that synthesize this way of thinking about migration on the part of the ILO. In the first place, although the limited scope of migration processes understood as a solution to the problems of unemployment and underemployment was acknowledged, the contributions that migrants could make when they returned to their country of origin were also pointed out. Secondly, migration was seen as a process of emigration and subsequent return to the place of origin, that is, *temporary* (as opposed to previous ALCs where it was understood as permanent). In this scheme, the benefits for the countries of origin came from the remittances sent back by the *emigrants* and from the knowledge and training acquired in the destination country—once they returned to their countries of origin—.

This new perspective on migration marks a departure from the view of the surplus population of Europeans in the second post-war period, whose mobility was sponsored by the organization and justified by the destination countries. On the other hand, when it came to emigrants from Latin America, the possibility of them staying at the *destinationis* not raised a priori, since the key in that case was the temporary nature of their stay. On the other hand, the ILO’s views seem to be rather aimed at seeking *a solution* to certain problems—such as unemployment or poverty—through migration, yet without questioning the structural conditions of the region.

The 1960s marked a turning point in relation to the ways of thinking about migration developed in the Conferences of previous decades. The transformations of migration movements at the global

and regional levels, particularly the depletion of immigration from European countries and the growing emigration from Latin America, also implied changes in the ILO's discourse and policies, which were now aimed at constructing new interpretations and actions for these phenomena. When in previous years the concerns were linked to how to attract or channel the migrant population coming from Europe, from this moment onwards the question became what to do with emigration.

Consequently, the language used by the ILO transformed significantly when compared to previous decades. Expressions such as *brain drain*, *remittances* and *return* began to color the language and policy interventions of the organization, becoming a new thinking scheme that valued migrations based on different visions of development in the context of *skilled* emigration. On the other hand, the transformations that took place during this period brought about important changes in the views on the temporality of migration. Thus, unlike European immigration, which was understood in particular relation to permanent stay the countries of destination, emigration from Latin America was seen as an outward movement that should make a closing round with the return to the countries of origin (that is, should be temporary).

CLOSING REMARKS

This article provides a description, interpretation and analysis of the ILO's way of thinking about and dealing with international migration within the framework of the American Labor Conferences. To this end, it reconstructed the meetings of the organization and identified in detail the topics, issues and concerns that were incorporated into its agenda on migration in Latin America, as well as the actions and recommendations for the States that comprise it.

From the work with the documentary corpus, two analyses are carried out: one that interprets the regularities within the ILO's general thinking scheme, and another that covers the specificities the ALCs of the period. The first analysis found a certain continuity of the utilitarian view of the organization, based on the cost/benefit brought about by immigration/emigration; likewise, a universalist bet of the ILO in favor of strategies of internationalization or denationalization of migration policies could be identified. In the second analysis, three utilitarian thinking schemes were identified: 1) colonizing immigration, 2) immigration of surplus population, and 3) emigration from Latin America.

The construction of these two analyses—of regularities and of specificities—in the utilitarian thinking schemes allows for us to identify two central themes. First, it makes it possible to visualize a set of nuances and changes occurring over time within the utilitarian and instrumentalist perspectives that permeate ILO strategies. In this sense, the analytical and diachronic development of the text evidences that the transformations of the organization's discourses and policies, from immigration for *colonization* and development, to emigration and the importance of remittances, became keys to reading and interpreting the changes that occurred in migration movements. Secondly, it can be noted that there is an important continuity in the way of understanding international migration in the ILO's discourses and policies.

From our own perspective, the permanence of a utilitarian vision—through the identified thinking schemes—is explained, mainly, as a way of legitimizing the presence/absence of migrants in a national order different from the one to which they belong. In other words, each of these schemes is understood as a form of rationalization, in terms of economic and cultural cost/benefit, of what is presented as an anomaly for the national order: namely, international migration.

Thus, although the utilitarian imprint remains identifiable in all the schemes, each of them implies certain specificities. In particular, in the scheme of surplus migration for modernization, a commitment to *orderly* or *organized* migration can be seen. In other words, ordering migration implies establishing regulatory mechanisms, such as the creation of employment offices, the generation of statistical data on labor supply and demand, as well as the entering into bilateral agreements to guide and *channel* migration so that it is beneficial for both the countries of origin and destination.

Views on *orderly* or *organized* migration can be understood as a substantial antecedent to the notions of governance or migration governance that emerged at the end of the 20th century. The definitions of organized migration found in the documents have a *family resemblance* to the more current definitions of orderly migration held by international organizations such as the IOM. In this sense, and following after Venturas (2015), it is argued that the various instruments and technical assistance measures developed by the ILO in Latin America are part of the laboratory for the early development of migration management mechanisms, based on instrumental perspectives of cooperation between States and supranational agencies.

On the other hand, the journey throughout the period under analysis allows us to visualize how a regional body—such as the ALCs—seeks common policy definitions for the member States. Hence, the period analyzed is also understood as the *prelude* to the processes of “denationalization of State policies” (Sassen, 2012, p. 46), especially in the field of migration policies. Thus, from the recommendations of the organizations to the signing of bilateral agreements and international conventions, the first instruments aimed at the regionalization of migration policies were generated, aiming at managing, accounting for and administering the *flow* of migrants, that is, regulating them. Within this regional framework, the ILO became one of the organizations with the greatest visibility and influence in defining migration policies, together with the ICEM.

Lastly, the need to expand academic research on the emergence of migration regulation (both at the international and regional levels) should be pointed out. As for Latin America, it is essential to further the in-depth study of the policies and views on international migration proposed by different regional spaces and organizations, such as the CIME, the Pan-American Conferences, and ECLAC. The relationship between these organizations, actors and spaces could be a fertile field for new findings.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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