

Revista Espinhaço interviews Lori M. Hunter (University of Colorado Boulder)

Introduction Dr. Lori M. Hunter, *Population and Environment's* editor-in-chief was interviewed by Revista Espinhaço during the “II Seminário Nacional sobre População, Espaço e Ambiente” (2nd National Workshop about Population, Space and the Environment), that took place in São José dos Campos (SP/Brazil) during October 29th and 30th, 2013. To this special issue of Revista Espinhaço, Dr. Hunter, professor at the *University of Colorado Boulder* and expert on migration and the environment, brings significant reflections about her research field and also about her work ahead one of the most important and renowned journals on the field of population studies.

Revista Espinhaço: Lori, how did you start your interest in Demography and why/how did you decide to work with the topics related to population and environment?

My interest in Demography actually started with my interest in Sociology and when I decided to go to graduate school it was to study Sociology. I had never heard the word “demography” before. So, my, the university where I went recognized Demography in my statement of interest because I talked about interest in urbanization and inequalities and things like that, so I didn't know I was interested in Demography as a word, but I was interested in those kind of processes. I decided to work with topics related to population and environment immediately upon going to graduate school, because, two reasons, one is that moved to Brown in Providence, Rhode Island from a timber harvesting community in the Pacific Northwest. The timber community was very poverty-stricken and the poverty was related to broadscale economic change that had huge environmental drivers and implications, so the environment was a big part of that question. Moreover, I was also interested in migration to the Pacific Northwest like Californians who were moving to Seattle because it was beautiful and more affordable, so there are economic and environmental drivers there too. So I saw the environment very much bundled into the kinds of questions I was interested in from the beginning.

Revista Espinhaço: For you there is a core question in terms of Demography and Migration issues...

That is always been my passion... migration... and I did not realize that was Demography, per se, until it was put in that framework for me.

Revista Espinhaço: How did you start to work as an editor? Tell us further about the main challenges and opportunities of this work.

What a good question. Well, I was approached to be editor-in-chief about seven years ago by Springer

Publishing that owns the journal. I had been approached because I had been an active member of the editorial board and a committed contributor for several years prior to that, and population and environment has been my passion from the minute I started graduate school. So, they saw me as someone committed to the area, I went to all the meetings, I was pretty networked, I was middle-career, I had just received tenure, so it was a good time to do it, although perhaps a little early.

One other piece regarding the editorship, there really was nobody senior to me, except, probably, Daniel or Billsborow, who had been doing population and environment only. You know, there is a lot of senior demographers who did some environmental demographic research like Entwisle, who also studied fertility and social networks. However, among researchers focused solely on population-environment, I was probably the most senior person in my generation.

OK, challenges and opportunities: challenges, they have changed across time. At first, it was getting really good science submitted to the journal, I had to twist a lot of arms to get people to send manuscripts, because the journal was not really well recognized. Now we get plenty of good submissions and the challenge is – one of my main challenges now – is feeling bad about rejecting as many as I do since I tend to be a nice, supportive person. But actually I have to reject a lot before they even go out for review, but I write letters to provide feedback.

Revista Espinhaço: Do you have a team? Or do you work alone?

No, because the journal has been pretty small up until now there is not really any administrative support. I have a board of directors, but we just hold on an annual virtual meeting. I do not rely on them for reviews like I should, but they are senior and they are really busy. What the journal needs is a board of directors that is more middle-career perhaps. There is a production group in India that I communicate with about some processing and production aspects, but it is just me with regard to submission communication.

Revista Espinhaço: A lot of work!

Yes! And then, opportunities such as putting forward work that is really innovative, suggestive, and maybe untested that would not be considered in a mainstream sort of journal. I have been able to publish a few pieces that I think pushed research forward and may not have had a home elsewhere. I'm also proud of the special issues which call attention to new areas.

An example is pulling together a special issue on AIDS and the environment during a time where there really was not much attention being paid to the environmental dimensions of the AIDS pandemic. The issue I believe called attention to this. We also put together issues on the demography of the hurricane Katrina, and also population and climate, to bring these issues to demographers. So I think it is an amazing opportunity to create these bundles of papers that bring to attention issues that might not be brought to attention with this publishing of papers here and there.

Revista Espinhaço: In Brazil, we have little private and governmental financial support to improve our scientific journals. Do you think that the main scientific journals like *Demography* and *Population & Environment* should be the model to our periodicals to follow?

So, Roberto and I talked a bit about this yesterday because I do not know how your journals work so I did not know how to answer that question. But I think that I would say no to the question of thinking of the main scientific journals should be your model. The reason being that those mainstream scientific journals are profit-driven, so *Population & Environment* is a Springer journal and it is profit-driven so they are concerned with subscriptions and downloads of articles -- in addition obviously to maintaining high quality science! There is also a big transition happening in the publishing world with this movement to open access and how does open access afford itself when you are not paying subscription fees or download fees, so I think there is a real transition here but I do not know that the corporate model is the one that would necessarily work for the Brazilians journals. I am not sure what model would work.

Now, *Demography*, that would be interesting to research because it's the Population Association of America's journal and so they are not necessary profit-driven, they are paid for by subscriptions that are memberships fees, so that would be a good model for you maybe. Perhaps a journal could be associated with the Brazilian Population Association.

Revista Espinhaço: Yes, we already have REBEP, I think that is the same model of *Demography*, because it is attached to ABEP. And if you could change something in the way that scientific knowledge disseminates what would it be?

Do I get to do anything? (Laughs) I would like every single scientist that publishes a research manuscript to be

forced to write a one page summary of it in not jargon-language that points out what they did, how they did it, what are the main findings and why are they important. I would also want a dissemination outlet that gets that science out there. How is that?

Revista Espinhaço: That is nice! (Laughs). How do you see the difference the high- ranked universities around the world and universities located in developed countries like Brazil in relation to access to scientific information disseminated by great scientific journals? Can this difference amplify the disparities in knowledge productions in the world? How can we solve these disparities?

These disparities are very important. Absolutely, there's unequal access. Can these differences amplify the disparity in knowledge production? Again, absolutely! I see it because when I get manuscripts from places in the world that have less access, they are not as well grounded in the scientific literature, they don't have a thorough literate review, they are not been well placed within the body of knowledge and I know that is in part because there is not access. And so what happens? More likely they get rejected, what means that their contribution isn't made and so it is just this circle of, you know, inequality that perpetuates itself.

We were talking yesterday, I am writing a meta-analysis on migration and environment. I am using only English language articles. You know, I have to, otherwise I would be hiring translators in languages all over the world and I can't do that, you know but that perpetuates the impact on knowledge because the great work of these guys, you know, on migration and environment isn't going to be in my chart. And that is not fair! How do we solve these disparities? Open access. But open access has to pay for itself and I am not sure how that works cause then there is disparities because open access costs I think that it is 2-3 thousand dollars if you get an article accepted in an open access journal, so the author pays for distribution, I mean that is not feasible across the globe, it's not feasible for me if I don't have grant money and I don't have grant money right now, so I don't know, I don't know...

Revista Espinhaço: This is a good question.

It is a difficult question. But absolutely there is unequal access, it amplifies the disparities and I think it will be solved through open access but I am not sure how that can be implemented across the board. OK, we have to think about that.

Revista Espinhaço: OK, your work has many considerations about the relation between migration and environmental risk. Tell us more about how these risks affect migration in both developed and developing countries considering regional contexts.

So, the challenge is that the relationship is context-dependent. In the developed contexts, for instance, where I did my research in the U.S., destination decisions may be influenced by risk factors -- but people already living in

risky places are not more likely to leave. That makes sense because people living in risky places may be exactly those that have less resources to leave.

So, people that find themselves in risky spots, they are the ones that are least likely to be able to move. So that's why the whole climate refugee thing doesn't always make sense because people who find themselves more vulnerable to climate aren't going to be making really expensive international moves, they will be mobbing within their borders and so in-country dialogue that also needs to happen.

Revista Espinhaço: Give us an overview of how environmental changes could affect worldwide migration patterns in the next decades and why do we have to keep studying them?

I think we have to keep studying it. OK, the first part of the question: I think that a lot of environmental changes will induce internal migration because international migration is expensive. I think we have to keep studying it because it's going to happen and we need to be prepared for it, I mean, we need to have a sense of where people will go and what they will need. And we can do that, I think.

Revista Espinhaço: OK. You have been working with migration in rural areas in Mexico to U.S. In Brazil we observed a large population displacement in the Northeast to more developed areas in the past 40 years. People usually see migration as a dysfunctional thing, I mean a kind of anomaly, this situation of staying in these conditions, the deprivation of water, economic and social resources, and aid, could be seen as a real anomaly. What do you think about it?

That is an interesting question, so there is some research on the Dust Bowl in North America back in the 1930's, and Robert McLeman who is Canadian has done some of this work. Graeme Hugo has been doing work -- not on the Dust Bowl -- but on the idea of migration as adaptation. As you say, migration is not necessarily dysfunctional, and in many cases it is a perfectly rational response to challenging conditions and that could be economic, social, or environmental. McLeman in particular has used historical examples of migration to talk about the rationality of migration as an adaptation. So I think you are right, I mean, migration isn't necessarily dysfunctional and you know when I do my work in South Africa it is not migration of whole households we are studying but it is a very rational decision on part of that household to send one person off to do some work and they send money bac> Same thing in Mexico, so it is not household migration but it is a strategy at the household level to send on person. It is very rational. And it has been going on forever (laughs).

Revista Espinhaço: Now you have free time to say everything you want about Population, Environment and your work as an editor and just to finish this conversation, what would you like to say?

Wow! I would just emphasize that the population and environment field is pretty new in the sense that research began really coming around Daniel's time -- Daniel's papers in 1992 and since 1992 -- and you know we've made tremendous strides in 20-30 year. We've made tremendous strides in the complexity and innovation of the work and the theoretical underpinning of the work. Daniel would have been really happy, years ago he called for localized case studies and I think that people really have been doing that. These are bodies of work now to draw on and to build on. I think what we need to do now is to figure out what we know, what we still need to know, and how to continue to move us forward. That would be my first thing.

The next thing would be to take a breath -- to sort out what we know and how we can communicate it better. I'd like to figure out how to get our science in the hands of people that can make use of it, and of course to get people to keep sending good manuscripts to Population and Environment (laughs).

The journal is doing really well, people are accessing and it is such an honor to me. I really do feel honored to be able to showcase some really innovative and exciting work. Still, researchers have to keep sending in good research for that to happen! In all, the Editorship has been great, it is a lot of work, but has been really rewarding.

Thank you.