

**“You are not going there to amuse yourself,” Barriers to achieving wellbeing through international migration: The case of Peruvian migrants in London and Madrid.<sup>1</sup>**

## **1. Introduction**

International migration from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) to the EU is important but has received relatively little attention and needs to be better understood. Data sources on LAC migration to Europe remain relatively underdeveloped (Pellegrino, 2004) because LAC migration to Europe is a relatively recent phenomenon. Yet, by way of illustration, between 1995 and 2003 the LAC population in Spain increased from 92,642 to 514,485 (Pellegrino, 2004). In Madrid they constitute more than 10% of the population<sup>2</sup>, accounting for half of all the immigrants from outside the EU. In contrast with Spain, where most of the LAC migrants in Europe can be found, in the United Kingdom, the Latin American presence is much smaller (73,785), though there is a considerable immigrant population from the Caribbean (253,176), particularly Jamaica. As in Spain, this is mostly labour migration, comprised by economically active segments of the population.<sup>3</sup> Through Latin Americans now constitute the second largest immigrant

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<sup>2</sup> See ‘Spain is the New World’ Guardian Weekly, 2007, February 23-March 1<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> See ‘Spain is the New World’ Guardian Weekly, 2007, February 23-March 1<sup>st</sup>.

group in Spain (Altamirano, 1996, Escrivá, 1997, the literature on them is extremely limited (Jariego, 1999, Hernando, 2000).<sup>4</sup>

The international migration literature has assessed migration from many different perspectives including economic, social, cultural and psychosocial aspects (e.g. Castles, 2006, Vertovec 2001, Nyberg Sorensen, 2002). However, the concept of wellbeing that focuses on the perspectives of migrants themselves, examining how their own subjective assessments of their situation correlate with more objective factors, has been largely absent from the more dominant integrationist international migration literature (Sen, 2007). To overcome this gap, this paper seeks to understand this migration by adopting a wellbeing approach and applying it to the case of Peruvian migrants based in two different societal contexts – London and Madrid. Taking a wellbeing perspective explores not only what migrants have and do, but what they think and feel about the process.

Wellbeing is still a relatively new category in social science and no uniform definition yet exists. The concept is being applied to this research which runs parallel with the Wellbeing and Developing Countries Research (at Bath University)<sup>5</sup>:

*We argue for a conception of wellbeing that takes account of the objective circumstances of the person and their subjective evaluation of these. But both the*

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<sup>4</sup> There is also relatively little literature on Latin Americans in other countries in Europe with exceptions being Tamagno's work (2002) on Peruvians in Italy, McIlwaine on Latin Americans in the UK (2007). On Ecuadorians in Europe see: Moser (2007), Veiga (unpublished, n.d.) Pedone (2005) and Pujadas et al (2002).

<sup>5</sup> Social scientists working on the umbrella concept of wellbeing have examined it from a range of different angles including research into the economics of happiness (Frey and Stutzer, 2002; Di Tella et al, 1997; Layard 2005); health-related quality of life (e.g. Skevington et al, 2004) and in the discipline of cross-cultural psychology (Berry and Sam, 1996). This literature postulates that people transform resources available to them into satisfiers and that a combination of satisfiers can result in the meeting of universal needs.

*objective circumstances and perceptions of them are located in society and also in the frames of meaning with which we live. Thus, wellbeing is also and necessarily a relational and dynamic concept. States of wellbeing/illbeing are continually produced in the interplay within the social, political, economic and cultural processes of human social being. It cannot be conceived just as an outcome, but must be understood also as a process (Gough and McGregor, 2007:5).*

The wellbeing approach is premised on the belief that people cannot be wholly defined by their wealth or their poverty and that even the very poorest are active in constructing their wellbeing.<sup>6</sup> The most recent work in this field demonstrating part of the growing interest in wellbeing has been the Wellbeing in Development Programme (WeD) at Bath University, which is conceptually based upon three main frameworks – (i) the resource profiles approach (Kebede and McGregor, 2003); (ii) a theory of human need developed by Doyal and Gough (1991) and (iii) Quality of Life Research. This literature postulates that people transform resources available to them into satisfiers and that a combination of satisfiers can result in the meeting of universal needs. Social scientists working on the umbrella concept of wellbeing have examined it from a range of different angles including research into the economics of happiness (Frey and Stutzer, 2002; Di Tella et al, 1997; Layard 2005); health-related quality of life (e.g. Skevington et al, 2004) and in the discipline of cross-cultural psychology (Berry and Sam, 1996).

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<sup>6</sup> Critics have argued that an over-focus on wellbeing obscures the more common experience of ‘illbeing’ which relates to structural causes including income poverty, and more broadly, social exclusion. It is argued here that using the concept of ‘wellbeing’ does not mean abandoning concepts of income poverty or masking the structural roots of poverty. Rather, it simply means acknowledging that poor people themselves are not passive but rather actively seek out elements of what they conceive as wellbeing and that their own visions of the good life and how this is constructed need to be understood in a wider discourse and that such insights have usefulness both for analytical and policy purposes (Gough, McGregor and Camfield, 2006).

Berry and Sam (1996), applying the wellbeing concept to the issue of international migration have demonstrated the changes that occur as individuals who have developed in one cultural context manage to adapt to new contexts, (that themselves are changing). The blocks to achieving wellbeing can be explained as a reflection of such processes as individuals struggle to learn “a new behavioural repertoire that is appropriate for the new cultural context” (Berry et al, 1996: 298), with the pressures of acculturation often generating conflict or “acculturative stress”. A useful distinction is made between the concept of acculturation which refers to the cultural changes resulting from these encounters and the concepts of psychological acculturation and adaptation which he employs to refer to the psychological changes and eventual outcomes that take place as individuals adopt acculturation strategies to achieve wellbeing outcomes.

Berry’s framework is thus closely linked to the ‘identity, meaning and culture’ pillar of new theory of wellbeing developed by Gough and McGregor (2007). Berry argues that when moving from one social context to another, individuals adopt different strategies, namely those of integration (whereby some degree of cultural integrity is maintained), assimilation (when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily contact with others), separation (when the non-dominant culture places a value on holding on to their original culture and wants to avoid interaction with others) and marginalisation (with little interest in having relations with others and where there is much cultural loss). The strategies adopted may be a combination of an individual’s pursuit of wellbeing but may also be enhanced or constrained by the broader national context in the host country.

Adaptation in accordance with the migrant's position and perspective in this context both refers to the achievement of wellbeing in terms of psychological outcomes (such as good mental health) and also in terms of socio-cultural adaptation. Moderating factors in the acculturation process relate to factors existing in the individual's experience prior to acculturation (age, class, language, religion, values etc) and moderating factors arising during acculturation relating to features of the dominant society (e.g. immigration policy and attitudes to immigrants).

Whilst using a wellbeing perspective has considerable advantages for understanding the phenomenon of international migration, at the same time international migration is a useful lens for interrogating the concept of wellbeing, given the complexity of the worlds and systems of meaning that migrants necessarily have to negotiate between. This paper draws on Berry's framework to assess the blocks to achieving wellbeing in the settings of London and Madrid. In particular it explores how people construct their wellbeing in different cultural settings and adapt as they move between different systems of meaning. The main purpose of this article is to sketch the tradeoffs that exist in their search for wellbeing in new contexts and the barriers to achieving wellbeing in new societal contexts which are analysed at individual, societal and wider structural levels. By examining both the objective factors (such as age, migratory status, length of time in country of settlement, employment in country of origin) and some of the subjective factors influencing wellbeing, it is hoped that analysis of this empirical evidence will eventually lead to a set of universal factors affecting wellbeing outcomes which operate everywhere, but whose "specific influence will vary in relation to the particular cultures in contact" (Berry, 1996: 318).

## **2. The research**

### Methodology

This research was conducted over a period of 18 months (2006-7). Peruvian migrants were contacted via three gatekeepers - a leader of the Latin American community based in London, one male migrant from Lima engaged in construction activities and one female migrant from Lima engaged in geriatric care based in Madrid. Surveys were conducted with 49 migrants in London and 50 in Madrid with entry points through informal sporting events and snowballing techniques identifying a poorer sample than if entry points had been through for example, students who study. In addition, other entry points were used to contact female migrants including those working in domestic service or in nursing. The survey comprised closed questions on objective states of wellbeing<sup>7</sup> and more open questions about subjective states and life satisfaction. A further 10 case studies were conducted in Lima with relatives and close friends that remain in Peru.<sup>8</sup> The survey data was pooled into an access database and the qualitative data was transcribed, coded and categorised to allow for analysis, interpretation and translation. This was followed by a post-hoc classification of a “set of blockages” or barriers to achieving wellbeing identified by the respondents.

### The sample

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<sup>7</sup> The focus of this article is on the subjective states and objective states are not analysed here.

<sup>8</sup> The case studies are not analysed here but form the subject of a separate paper (Wright-Revollo, forthcoming).

The sample included 64 men and 35 women. Ages ranged from 11 years to 80 years, but most migrants were aged between 21 and 40. They represented a highly economically active segment of the population. 79 of the 99 were from Lima but many of these had originally been born in other provinces in Peru.<sup>9</sup> 39 of the sample were single, 29 were married and 20 were divorced. 24 had partners that lived with them and 21 had partners living in Peru. A similar split could be seen with those with children. In 22 cases the children lived with the migrant and in 26 cases their children were still in Peru. In terms of education, the most common were the following: 26 had secondary education, 28 had been to a technical college and 27 had attended university. 15 in the sample had been out of their country of origin for 2-3 years and 23 for 4-6 years. Most had been living in the UK or Spain for a maximum of 1-2 years. In terms of occupations in the country of origin most were working in the service sector or in the informal economy. As regards employment status, in London, 27 were working legally and 13 illegally. In Madrid, 35 were working legally and 10 illegally. In terms of income, the majority were earning between £4,000 and £12,000 per year.

The desire for better economic and social opportunities and the desire to “progress” were the main factors motivating migration: *“It was a step forward for me – to improve”*. Many had left due to unemployment or job cuts. Typical responses included: *“The company closed after years of service”*. Many sought advantages such as a state pension and social security benefits. Others were motivated by the desire for a better future for their children, were escaping unhappy marriages or other problems. Two in the sample were political refugees. In the UK sample of 49, 24 spoke no

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<sup>9</sup> The others came from: Chosica (4), Chiclayo(1), Trujillo (3), Huancayo (3), Junin (1), Canete(1) and Cusco (1).

English and 13 spoke only a little. The quantitative data suggests that 12 out of 49 still did not speak it at all or only ‘more or less’, whilst 5 feel they speak it satisfactorily. 30 feel that since living in the UK they have spoken it well or excellently.<sup>10</sup>

46 of those surveyed mentioned that they chose these countries due to relatives living there. Another prime motivator was speaking the language previously (mentioned by seven informants) and, in the case of Spain, historical and cultural links. Others were offered work contracts, particularly in construction: “*The opportunity arose; with documentation and a flight*”. Ease of legal or illegal documentation was also a factor: “*I got my documentation sorted more quickly in Spain than in the USA*”; “*It was easy to get in*”. There were other cases that were more circumstantial or opportunistic: “*They denied me entry to Italy – a distant aunt wanted to help me- the plane stopped on route in the UK and I stayed*”. Others had been invited through personal contacts. Other cases seemed to be products of long trajectories with decisions made on route according to changes in circumstance,<sup>11</sup> whilst some had never ‘chosen’ to leave at all: “*I never wanted to leave*”; “*It wasn’t my idea but the father of my children was here*”. In many cases it appeared that the informants never truly had a destination country but rather seemed to ‘land up’ in either of these countries by coincidence or for circumstantial reasons.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the qualitative data suggests that even those that speak it well (including children of migrants), are not confident about speaking English and see it is a major hindrance in achieving good treatment, being able to relate to others or achieving satisfying employment.

<sup>11</sup> “*I wanted to go to the US and my family was going there. But my cousin was in Germany. I managed to get a tourist visa to Germany, where I studied English and German. Germany was more expensive than Spain so I went from there to Spain*”.

<sup>12</sup> “*It was pure coincidence – my mother died and my comadre went to her burial and she invited me over*”. Other diverse reasons included: “*I went as a tourist to Canada but I was deported. They thought I had drugs. I met my fiancée who was from England, Brixton*”.



Having outlined some of the variance in the demographic, social and economic profile of the sample, the next section evaluates obstacles to constructing wellbeing in the countries of settlement identified by the respondents.

### **3. Obstacles to constructing wellbeing**

*“Immigration removes individuals from many of their relationships and predictable contexts – extended families and friends, community ties, jobs, living situations, customs and (often) language. Immigrants are stripped of many of their sustaining social relationships, as well as of their roles which provide them with culturally scripted notions of how they fit into the world. Without a sense of competence, control and belonging, they may feel marginalised...these changes are highly disorienting and nearly inevitably lead to a keen sense of loss”* (Suárez-Orozco, 2000: 195).

This section applies Berry’s wellbeing framework to the case of Peruvian migrants living in UK and Madrid. The main blocks to achieving wellbeing outcomes explored are losses experienced at the individual level due to differences in cultural repertoires between society of origin and society of settlement and behavioural shifts such as cultural shedding or cultural learning adopted to overcome these. Lack of social support experienced in societies of settlement (compounded by changes experienced in the acculturating group) lead to social isolation, acculturative stress and depression that undermines the achievement of wellbeing. The themes have been clustered under the following broad headings: (i) loss of autonomy; (ii) loss of enjoyment; (iii) loss of relatedness; (iv) loss of status.

### **(i) Loss of autonomy**

- *Loss of freedom of self-expression*

Personal autonomy, or “choosing one’s behaviours freely” (Kasser, 1995) is a psychological need and thus a fundamental component of wellbeing (Ryan, 1995). One theme to emerge strongly from this study was the perception of loss of personal freedom.<sup>13</sup> One element of this was loss of self-expression. Though this was noted in the London sample<sup>14</sup>, it played out most strongly in the Madrid sample. Typical responses included: “*They [Spaniards] don’t like you expressing yourself*”; “*When I took the flat I had problems with the neighbours. When I had one party they came down and told me that they didn’t like the noise. I told them that they were racist. They told me, no, that foreigners were welcome, but that I had to behave myself well... They were right*”. The latter citation ‘*They were right*’ acknowledges the need to adopt a new cultural repertoire and reflects an important behavioural shift, cultural shedding and the acquisition of essential social skills that go with conformity to a new social norm. According to Berry’s analysis adoption of such an attitude leads to the construction of greater wellbeing outcomes.

Loss of freedom also played out in other ways. In the London sample informants spoke of the dominance of a ‘punishing’ state that controls and regulates the individual’s behaviour in a way that denies personal freedom and wellbeing. This was most strongly felt in the London sample: “*The laws that you have to comply with, you*

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<sup>13</sup> Respondents used the word ‘freedom’ but it is recognised that the term needs deconstruction in relation to the concept of autonomy defined by Wellbeing theorists who suggest that autonomy is about the relationship between the person and wider social collectivities and that the correct or socially acceptable level of autonomy is a social construct (McGregor, personal communication). Ryan and Brown also define autonomy as “the experience of volition, ownership and initiative in one’s own behaviour, facilitated when people are not coercively or seductively controlled and when choices are afforded where possible” (2004:73).

<sup>14</sup> Typical responses included: “*Our perceptions are different, the English person does not appreciate those that speak a lot. They are more responsible. Being too open scares them. Their voice is very soft – in Latin America they shout at you. They also don’t open up easily which means making friends is very hard*”.

*have enforcement officers for everything, traffic laws, trading standards for everything. You can't break their hand [give a bribe], they are intransigent – sometimes in Peru explaining it to them, or with a bribe..and they also understand you, in the human aspect. The punishment is extremely severe here – its ferocious – a naughty adolescent who throws a pear in the street? FINE! Truency? FINE! You take your child on holiday and he's not in school? FINE! It doesn't matter what the reason was. They are very systematic – its difficult to assimilate... you, find your space and learn to know how to live well, without becoming resentful". Another suggested: "Its all about rules here – legally be in a good situation, respect the laws, have a good job, studies profession in an area you like". Yet another commented: "There [in Peru] they dictate to you how things should be; you do what you want and no-one says anything, here 'the law is the law". Children also voiced how forced adherence to laws in the host country meant they were denied access to things that were important for their wellbeing: "I miss being able to have a dog even though you don't have money. Here you have to vaccinate it and everything".*

- ***Loss of freedom of movement***

When informants were asked what they missed most about Peru, loss of freedom of movement was regularly voiced: *"There... you can go to places that do not belong to anyone, nor do they belong to you. Here its all fences, everything is protected and private space. The beach specifically..."* . Another suggested: *"The way of life...the children are in the street, its hot, the dogs are outside. Here the dogs have to wear a collar...There's more freedom there, here everyone is taking care. There the children play, there's not so much 'safety', there are no traffic lights. In the schools here they teach children that they shouldnt go alone, they inculcate this in them from a very*

early age. *There, the children are on the street, they will go to the shops, when I was only eight they sent me to the shop, here they don't like you going out*".

- ***Loss of control over one's time***

A sense of control over one's life is integral to self-esteem with wellbeing studies deriving from health research suggesting that personal control and 'self-actualisation' is often associated with the ability to be happy or contented (Taylor et al, 1988) and greater mental health (Taylor et al, 1989). Loss of control, in particular over one's time, was voiced repeatedly across both samples. This may relate in part to the fact that the migrants surveyed often worked in the informal sector in Peru and are used to being their own boss. Similarly, not all were as tied into the credit culture in Peru as much as in Spain. In Madrid typical responses included: *"Here they walk with the watch"; "When I arrived here they told me: 'You need to buy a watch'. Everything here is organised by hours. Here you can't not work for a week. You have to pay for the flat, its all intermeshed, linked. If you don't turn up, you can't afford it. In my country I can stop working for a week and nothing happens. There you set your own timetable, here everything is set according to a timetable"*. The sense of routine and monotony as a hindrance to wellbeing was also pervasive such as in the following cases: *"It's like a law here, it's a rule, routine, at such and such a time go to work, study"; "I miss my life as a taxi driver, my independence, to work as and when I wanted to, not having a boss"*. Lack of time and the stressful nature of life in the host country was also mentioned: *"Its more relaxed in Peru, you have time for everything. It's always busy in the UK and time passes too quickly"*.

Loss of control over time was related to the need to abide with rules in other areas of one's life such as being "orderly" and "methodical". For example, when asked what migrants in Madrid need to live well, many informants mentioned that this was

down to acquiring learnt behaviours such as: “leading an orderly life”, “being methodical” and “obeying laws” and social norms of the host country. In London, informants spoke of the need to acquire a “progressive mindset”. Informants across both locations spoke of the need to acquire the learnt behaviour of becoming organised, orderly, of the need for time and money management and for self-sufficiency.

### **(ii) Loss of enjoyment**

Another area where migrants signalled loss was in enjoyment. This was particularly apparent in the London sample. Application of Berry’s framework reveals that loss of enjoyment relates strongly to mediating factors in the particular communities that they inhabit. Migrants in the London sample mainly live in council housing in relatively deprived areas of South London (e.g. London Bridge, Elephant and Castle and Brixton). Informants complained that the forms of enjoyment in these areas are highly restrictive. Enjoyment in London was thus reduced to engaging in (i) A strong pub culture and (ii) Consumerism. With regard to the former, typical responses included: “*Here [London] the routine is terrible, you work and go home, on Saturday you have a drink. I imagine that in Peru its rather different. You do sport, you can go for a walk, they took me to eat out, on a Saturday maybe I would go and have a dance – more variety in the things that you can do*”. “*The drinking culture – there is nowhere else than the pub! There’s more demand for it. The man who is bored goes there and stays there the whole day long. You also have to go to the Chinese, fast food. Where are you going to go if not to the pub?*”. Informants in the London sample also complained of lack of enjoyment of consumerist culture. The wider wellbeing literature suggests that living in disadvantaged socio-economic

conditions (such as deprived areas of London) that do not provide supportive environments for personal growth and expression may lead individuals to look to wealth as a means to feel good about themselves, escape their insecure situation and provide themselves with goods to aid their survival (Kasser, 1995: 134). Interestingly migrants complained of the dominance of materialistic values and the severe limitations of consumerist culture in constructing wellbeing. Typical responses included: *“There’s just shopping here – in my country we have places for entertainment, to share with the family”*; *“Its very systematic. You work from Monday to Friday; The weekend: DVDs, go shopping”*. Enjoyment of consumerist culture is also restricted to those that are able to participate in it: *“There being poor you can laugh...you don’t need much, life is simpler. You mend it. Your rice, your warm potato. Here the fried food is expensive, clothes expensive, property expensive”*. Consumerism was also linked to loss of spiritual values: *“Here its all commerce, they want to sell you the lot. Its very unspiritual”*.

Part of this reaction may be linked not only to the fact that migrants in the UK are living in some of the poorest inner city areas of South London such as Brixton, Elephant and Castle where the possibilities to engage in other recreational activities (such as accessing the countryside) are very few. This reaction may also be linked to the profiles of the migrants themselves. Though the majority are from Lima, given internal rural-urban migration associated with Peru, many would have access to the provinces and the scenery and lifestyle associated with this: *“In Peru you have other things, your food, the scenery, the mountains, the dancing”*. Lack of enjoyment may also be linked to loss of diversions that are associated with family relationships such as going for walks with relatives and participating in fiestas and family reunions which were stated as key areas of enjoyment that informants miss.

### **(iii) Loss of relatedness**

- ***Loss of family relationships***

Separation from family members and the negative impact on wellbeing outcomes played out in direct and indirect ways. A very large number in this sample had left children, spouses, immediate family and extended family members in Peru: *“My family can’t come and visit [London] and that is tough. While I’m there [Peru] I miss my children, whilst here I miss my mother, my brothers, the family”*. One direct effect suffered was acute feelings of loneliness and depression: *“I feel like a bottle that they have cast out to sea”*.

For those migrants who do not have residency the pain of separation from relatives can be permanent, such as in the following case: *“I was not able to bless my mother before she died. I cannot leave the country. Neither can my children come here. And if I escape I lose everything. I don’t want to risk that. I have this country as a prison. I am grateful but its a limited kind of happiness”*. Prolonged periods of separation also have negative indirect effects on those that remain in Peru: *“To separate is to break up the family, you can’t share your problems; you don’t have the family reunions with everyone there..and neither do they have you.”*

Stability of marriage is good for happiness and trust (Layard, 2003: 28). Yet, separation from family members for prolonged periods due to migration often threatens this stability. Similarly, the misery of being separated from loved ones, compounded with the acculturative stress experienced by having to live in the host country can lead migrants to find new partners as part of the process of “self-fashioning” in the host country. Acquisition of Spanish partners was seen as a direct

way of acquiring a new and more acceptable social status and gaining cultural capital that would be admired both in Spain and in Peru. Typical responses included: *“I want my boys to get Spanish girlfriends”*. However, there is much social criticism amongst Peruvian migrants of obtaining Spanish partners which is mostly levelled at women: *“Each one out for himself; they are very liberal, they are with other men, they distance themselves a bit from their families, they go from one relationship to the next, how are you going to look after your children that way and what example are you giving?”*.

As migrants are challenged to provide for themselves without the social protection and support usually offered by the economic unit of the family, so they enter into greater competition with one another. Wellbeing theory suggests that in order to manage stress and anxiety or to increase self-esteem individuals often compare themselves with the performance of their own reference group (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). People use social comparisons in a strategic way to cope with situations and enhance their subjective wellbeing (Diener et al, 1997: 352). Social comparison is seen as one of the strongest predictors of satisfaction and the “comparison gap” or the distance between oneself and others has also been found to be a strong correlate of life satisfaction and happiness (Deiner et al, 1997: 332). One striking feature of this study was that a key factor repeatedly stated as inhibiting Peruvian migrants from achieving wellbeing was the high incidence of selfishness, envy and distrust amongst them.

This can take the form of malicious gossip, the withholding of information and backbiting in the workplace. One respondent explained: *“I don’t like having much contact with Peruvians because it always brings problems – there’s a lot of envy, they want to know about your things, not to help you but just to know”*. Spreading rumour



and malicious gossip is widespread: *“They [Peruvians] are people who become very limited, they live for their down gain, they are selfish, they like gossiping...people when they arrive here change their personality – they become more selfish; there is no communication”*. Often respondents referred to malevolence and spite: *“They put stones in your path; “There is malice amongst us –there is envy for having a better position and they speak badly about you behind your back”*. Such results fit with the wider wellbeing literature that argues that individuals compare themselves with others and that in certain circumstances, their happiness increases when others do poorly (Eggers et al, n.d.: 18). Lack of trust and unity also been noted by other authors examining the case of Latin American migrants in the UK (McIlwaine, 2007).<sup>15</sup>

Meanness in terms of the withholding of information or advice was also noted: *“I see envy, hypocrisy. You try to get ahead and other people don’t want to give you a piece of advice. We have had problems with friends, intrigue, they interpose themselves into your life with malice.”*; *“There is no very explicit information available [from the State] and Peruvians are very envious about telling things – they Hispanicize..They think they have the world in their hand and they don’t try to help you. They say “I was like that, in the same position as you”*. Others complained of backbiting in the work place: *“They are hypocritical – instead of giving you a hand they try to get you out of your post”*; *“There is lots of envy, gossip...one person gets a little further ahead and they say things that aren’t true out of envy”*. All these destructive practices stemming from the threat of being outperformed by members of their own reference group (Tesser, 2001) were seen as a major hindrance to achieving wellbeing across both locations.

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<sup>15</sup> See McIlwaine’s research on coping mechanisms of Colombian and other Latin American migrants living in London presented at the Society for Latin American Studies Conference, Newcastle University, 13th -15<sup>th</sup> April 07).

- ***Loss of neighbourhood links and community support***

Loss of family relationships and conflict amongst Peruvians themselves was compounded by loss of a neighbourly culture or sense of community. The kinds of districts that migrants inhabit may be extremely deprived and lacking in social cohesion. Typical responses from informants in London included: *“Here you keep to yourself and don’t speak to the neighbours. In Peru you speak to everyone in the street. Here it’s your house and work, house and work”*; *“There the whole neighbourhood gets together, here the neighbourhood is not that friendly, there they all talk to you, here they are all in their houses”*.

- ***Loss of social networks, language and affinity***

Beyond lack of social support in the immediate neighbourhood, informants complained of social structures and norms that undermine inter-personal relationships typified by closeness and trust: *“There you can go and visit people, you don’t have to call them by phone...you can visit them spontaneously. Here people are very busy and that’s a barrier”*; *“English people don’t appreciate people who talk too much...and being too open scares them off. Their voice is very soft – in Latin America they shout. Its difficult to make friends – people don’t open up quickly”*; Thus, culture shedding such as *“toning oneself down”* were seen as necessary behavioural shifts or learnt behaviours for achieving wellbeing in the host country.

In Madrid, though speaking the same language should in theory facilitate interpersonal contact, speaking with a Peruvian accent is a clear marker of social difference: *“Because you are an immigrant you are not the same as them, they don’t understand you. But if we speak the same language as them! Only that they have a different pronunciation. It does affect me a bit in my daily life; it comes to your mind*

*that they don't understand what you are saying, that they don't understand you; you think that they are not valuing your effort in trying to say important things". In London respondents suggested that there was little acceptance of those that do not speak English: "I try to make friends but if you don't speak the language they separate from you a bit". One informant explained: "It's difficult to adapt here in the social aspect- over there a neighbour looks out for you and runs to help you. Here they greet you only if they want to. Sometimes even if you speak it well they say: 'I don't understand you, what did she say? They greet me very formally but they never stop to talk to me. In Peru its taken as quite charming if you don't speak the language well, but here they take it as a misfortune. I avoid social meetings with English people. You feel as if they see you like a martian. By contrast, in Latin America we want people to integrate". Thus, the social isolation experienced in London went beyond the language barrier and was signalled by the perception of a total lack of interest on the part of English people in mixing, learning about or engaging with other cultures together with a marked lack of cultural affinity: "The English are charitable but they don't want to understand you or get to know you. They can see at school that my children have a different ethnic origin. I don't have much contact with them. I don't share any affinity".*

- ***Loss of familiarity/ connection with Peru on return***

When migrants return to Peru many suffer lack of connectedness, familiarity and a sense of isolation on their return: *"You belong to your family but they don't belong to you. You came and when you come back you are not the same piece of the puzzle and you don't fit. You are an exile in your own family. And if you don't accept that its in vain. They are not going to understand you". Another stated: "After nine years I*

*returned to Peru and everything had changed...People don't recognise me any longer, they are new faces, another generation; its more dangerous, there are more kidnappings, you don't feel safe. The economy...to start once again as a member of the proletariat to maintain oneself*".

Though migrants gain cultural capital by living in Europe and can be admired by those that remain in Peru, they may also be rivaled and rejected on their return. First, informants complained that if they slip into English or speak with a mainland Spanish accent this can be misinterpreted: *"The accent that you get here makes it very difficult to readapt there and the people are very prejudiced and say: who does he think he is?"* *"They say, oh! She's come back very full of herself. She thinks she's a Spaniard now!"*. Finally, many informants experience rivalry on return from Europe: *"People idealise what's in the UK and think you have it all "life is rose coloured" and this generates resentment"*.

#### **(iv) Loss of status**

Wellbeing theory contends that the actualisation of intrinsic potentials or 'competency' is an essential component of human wellbeing (Ryan & Deci 2001). Many informants in this study complained that though they are well educated many have to take demeaning jobs or work that is unrelated to their professional background. Responses included *"You have to start from scratch and you don't find anything that you know about"*; *"I'm only a little bit better off than before. I actually had better prospects in Peru. Here you have to work in things that are unrelated to what you know"*. Friends and family members who remain in Peru saw this as

demeaning: *“They see it as a way of getting ahead doing jobs there that I would be embarrassed to do here. They work there doing bits and pieces, not real jobs. I have known teachers who also left. In the end we found out that they are working as nannies, but here they could have worked in their profession. They go to Spain, Chile, Argentina, the USA and Italy. There are quite a lot of policemen sticking on labels in factories just in order to work over there!”*. Though many of those that migrate are skilled, the labour demands are likely to be in areas such as in domestic service or care of the elderly which would be seen as “demeaning” for groups in the social sectors to which they belong in Peru. A major hindrance in achieving skilled and better paid employment relates to difficulty of getting qualifications obtained in Peru recognised in the UK and Spain. This is compounded by lack of time for study due to other demands and obligations. Typical responses included: *“It would be good to have options to improve one’s situation, to get more training to get a better job, but you work all weekend, we don’t have time to study even though we are intelligent and capable”*.

Another barrier to achieving wellbeing described by informants in London is lack of a sense of belonging, also leading to a loss of status: *“You don’t feel on your own terrain that gives you an air of dignity, of property. Here you are always tiptoeing around, hoping that no-one will reproach you”*. This feeling of not rightfully belonging is compounded in the UK by the invisibility of Latin American reference groups.<sup>16</sup> Informants in London described how Peruvians are “invisible” and “not understood”. Some complained that Peruvians and Latin Americans in general are often confused with other nationalities: *“The Latin American community contribute a lot to the government; we are Christian, Catholic. We are different but*

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<sup>16</sup> Layard has argued that mental illness is more common if you live in an area where your group is in the minority than where your group is in the majority (Layard, 2003:28).

*we are confused with Arabs - that's what happened to that Brazilian [Jean Charles de Menezes, shot by police in error at Elephant and Castle tube station]*". They also complained that their contributions are not recognised and that they receive much less recognition than other minority groups in the UK: *"They don't pay us much attention; we pay our taxes and are within the law. Refugees get much more attention. They should help us so that we can work"*.

In Madrid, Latin Americans are more visible due to greater numbers of Peruvians and Latin American migrants in general, but precisely because they are easier to "place" they are more easily stigmatized. Negative social categorization and stereotyping/ is a barrier to the construction of psychological wellbeing as described by Orozco in studies of migrant children who stated that "Most American children believe that that Latin Americans are "bad", and "members of gangs". Children may respond by internalizing, denying or resisting their awareness of the hostility of the dominant culture (Suárez-Orozco, 2000:212). Similarly, this study revealed that, Latin Americans in Spain in general are stigmatized and are often associated with a gang operating in Madrid known as 'the Latin Kings' that have emerged on the margins of the dominant society as an oppositional counter-culture. Typical responses included: *"We are seen as bad people- as thieves and liars". "I don't like the Latin Kings - they give us a bad reputation and then they all stereotype us in the same way". "Since the emergence of the Latin Kings they treat you more coldly. Before it wasn't like that"*.

Social isolation is compounded by negative attitudes towards migrants in both London and Madrid leading to high levels of prejudice and discrimination. In London this plays out in apparently more subtle and insidious ways such as through suspicion of foreigners and little mixing: *"Their tolerance is only in inverted commas, they are only tolerant with what they know. They are only tolerant with Muslims but not with*

*others that they don't know*"; *"The English are a little racist with Latin people – when you complain about something they take no notice of you, they act like they haven't heard you. They don't do that with English people"*. More overt forms of racism and discrimination were also noted: *"They insult you when you go out for a drink...its always a bad experience"*; *"There's marginalisation of foreigners in employment – they give it to the English but not to me"*.

In Madrid migrants complained of being made to feel like second class citizens, often through displays of verbal and physical aggression. In Madrid typical responses included: *" They are very focused on your outward physical appearance, from what country you come from, they insult you"*; *"I suffered getting onto the train, the way people behave, they look at you as if you were a strange animal"*. Discrimination was acutely felt in places such as bars, buses, at doctors surgeries and in schools. *"You go out to eat and they look at you differently, they serve you slowly"*; *"Spaniards are distant and they look at the Latino strangely and it shouldn't be that way because when they come to Peru they have a great time. They tell you to go to the other side of the bar"*; *"There are a lot of immigrants and it's badly seen, they avoid you on buses; and don't answer you. With your documents they act superior, they make you feel stupid and clumsy. You also see it in your children's school"*; *"You don't see it but in the doctor's surgery the receptionist always says "It's a Latin American". They give you a different kind of treatment. That's why I don't go there"*.

Prejudice and discrimination was especially visible in the workplace: *"The treatment of the bosses was terrible; we were putting up electricity pylons in the mountains and they threatened us with sending us home. I felt pity for my colleagues"*; *"I worked as a live-in domestic servant, I became very depressed. In the end they say*

*'I couldn't care less' what you feel or think" ; "I came with the idea of doing something outstanding, I had an accident and they made me leave the firm. They play with the worker. They made me leave so as not to give me my Christmas basket. The government doesn't control that. They offer you 850 Euros 'if you want to work, no more'. They pay the immigrant very little. They get 800 Euros and the Spanish get 1500 or 1800".*

In London one strategy voiced to manage racism and marginalisation was to enhance and reaffirm one's own self-esteem: *"You need to develop self-esteem to live in England, to be courageous, never to lower your head and to know how to get over your solitude"*. One strategy adopted in Madrid was that of fighting back using shared cultural histories and discourses of colonisation such as in the following case: *"We are in a job queue- [Spaniards say] 'That Peruvians should go back to their country!'- [We retaliate with] 'Return to me all the gold that you stole!'"*.

Treatment received by foreigners in Spain is contrasted heavily with that which (white) foreigners receive in Peru: *"If they go to Peru they get red carpet treatment! Here they see you as if you have come to take their jobs and that's why you are here"*. Such contrasts can be seen as part of broader structural and power inequalities that shape North/South relationships (INTRAC, 2004).

## **Conclusion**

Though there are clearly advantages of international migration in terms of resource acquisition, ability to send remittances and enhanced status on return that may be obtained from living in Europe, this research suggests that such gains are



counter-balanced by deeper losses and multiple obstacles in other domains of wellbeing. The wellbeing literature maintains that fundamental to psychological wellbeing are three components: autonomy or personal control over one's actions; social status and relatedness to others. One possible weakness of relying on what people say and feel (rather than more exhaustive participant observation of behaviour and of multiple and changing attitudes or cultural performances) is that of presenting informants views more starkly. However, through their own assessment, the price paid by migrants across the London and Madrid samples (in terms of loss of these principal components of wellbeing) appears to be extremely high.

Interestingly, though there were differences in terms of the ways these “losses” played out in London and Madrid, due to variations in context and socio-cultural systems and immigration policy many of the same blocks or obstacles could be observed across both locations. For example, the issue of language proved to be a hindrance not only in London but also in Madrid. Thus, as argued by Berry (1996) it appears that there are a set of universal factors affecting wellbeing outcomes which operate across contexts. This study also demonstrates that there are tradeoffs between material and other psycho-social aspects of wellbeing with the latter remaining largely unfulfilled through the strategy of international migration.

Beyond how the individual engages in their own strategies to achieve enhanced wellbeing, through for example acquisition of learnt behaviours (such as developing a “progressive mentality”), culture shedding (such as “toning oneself down”) as well as methods for coping with aggressors, structural issues undermining

wellbeing outcomes need to be addressed through incorporating the wellbeing concept into policy on international migration.

Whereas debates have tended to put the burden on migrants to adapt and acculturate (e.g. with policies of language training prior to settlement being pushed), if European governments are truly to accept international labour and migration of peoples as a reality, the conditions necessary for achieving wellbeing also need to be created in the host country. This study has provided insight how migrants feel treated by the dominant majorities in host countries and the extent of the social isolation that is experienced. Structural constraints can only be addressed through educating the dominant majority and changing social attitudes to immigrants to improve their social treatment as they begin to form part of a significant minority. As debates are gradually shifting to recognition of the potential value-added of migrants, this paper reveals the potential benefits in providing the conditions for migrants to achieve wellbeing by investing in migrants (through measures such as aiding the validation of the qualifications that they have obtained in Peru). Other measures include the need to create and strengthen existing institutions of mutual support to overcome the mutual distrust, fragmentation, division and isolation that exists within Latin American and other minority immigrant communities that has tended to be neglected.

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