

# INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION FROM SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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## GENERAL OVERVIEW: MIGRATION STUDIES IN SOCIOLOGY

International migration is a succinct word that opens the door to a wide range of interesting areas. In Sociology in particular, a student of international migration can have many choices at hand. It can be studied as the sociology of migration, the phenomenon of people moving across national borders. It relates closely to demography because of the resulting effects on populations in both receiving and sending countries. It links to the sociology of development, since people often move from poor to rich countries to find work, send money home, or go back and build up infrastructure for a new industry. It leads to economic sociology because foreign workers affect the composition and structure of the labor force in the host country. It also leads to the sociology of minority groups, including race and ethnicity, because it involves immigrants, their cultures, and the process of assimilation. Remittances and social activism, commonly found among international migrants, are also prime topics in other sociological subfields such as transnationalism.

International migration at a glance is summarized below:

	Description	Related issues	Related theories
Who	Migrants, refugees, asylees, pilgrims	Boat people, brain drain, illegal immigrants, guest workers, expatriates	Labor economics Push and pull Development theories Human capital Social capital
What	Long-term movement from one country to another	War, poverty, inequality, social upheavals, opportunities, welfare, population demography	
Where	From poorer to richer region; from unstable to stable areas; from the south to the north	Immigration policy, labor market, border control, domestic security	

When	Contemporary era	Internationalization, globalization, development, security	Network theory Assimilationism
Why	Economic driven Family reunion Social upheavals & special circumstances	Job market, economic opportunities Immigration policy Military conflict Natural disaster	Transnationalism
How	Voluntary & involuntary, legal & illegal, intentional & unintentional	- Diaspora, expatriate community - Ethnic enclaves, ethnic niche - Human trafficking, illegal immigrants	

Given the vast scope of international migration, the focus of this essay is selective. The causes of migration will be discussed at the macro, meso and micro levels, followed by the major effects of migration on sending and receiving countries, as well as other entities, while highlighting two selected issues: the brain drain and remittances. Migrants' adaptation will be mentioned using assimilation and transnationalism perspectives. Finally, the paper will discuss return migration.

### **CAUSES OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

The twentieth century witnessed many great changes as the result of globalization, and large scale migration is one of them. Economic globalization and the development process in general changes the structure of production and the demand for labor. As incomes rise people consume more services: they travel more, go more often to restaurants, the entertainment industry expands, the demand for domestic services and household maintenance increase. In developed countries,

some of these activities are very intensive but unskilled and these jobs are increasingly avoided by native workers. This provides an incentive for foreign workers to migrate to fill the gap.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, technological advances in transportation and communications have sharply reduced the cost of international migration. Travel to a foreign country, or even intercontinentally, has become increasingly more accessible to potential migrants. Information regarding the standard of living and economic opportunities available abroad has also become accessible to a larger number of people at home, not only via Internet, television, movies and news media, but also through personal communications networks. Low cost travel and telecommunications contribute, in addition, to a reduction in the mental costs of migration by enabling people to maintain close ties with family and friends across oceans and continents. In sum, globalization incorporated previously disconnected areas (China, former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Vietnam) and populations (indigenous people) into the capitalist world system.

### **Macro level: Migration on a global scale**

#### **\* Development theory**

Every society is located at certain stages of development and will transform from traditional to modern society, or from a lower level of development to a higher level of development. Based on different stages of development, migration goes from less developed societies to more advanced ones. The underlying cause of cross-country migration is the underdevelopment of sending countries. Therefore, this theory predicts that countries with lower levels of development would

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. She pointed out the compatibility of modernization and socioeconomic inequality; and explained why household technologies together with rising standards of hygiene and of middle-class child rearing in the twentieth century have often extended, rather than reduced, the number of hours of domestic work. Especially in Los Angeles, where globalization and the entertainment industry produce huge income disparities, Latina domestic workers provide services that are obviously shunned (and therefore dependent on someone else to get done) by upper middle class natives. Another good example is *The Farmworker's Journey* by Ann Aurelia López, which describes arduous low-paid agricultural work in US farms that no natives like to do, therefore Mexican temporary workers – who are often also illegal – are the main source of labor for these farms.

have higher levels of emigration. Since cross-national inequalities in the level of development are major factors stimulating migration, the vital solution to the problem of increasing immigration is to boost the level of development in sending countries, such as increasing foreign investment and promoting trade.

This theory has some limitations in explaining variation in migration between countries that have similar level of development. For instance, most African countries (with the exception of South Africa) have serious development problems, but they have lower levels of immigration than some other more developed countries.

**\* World-System theory**

World system theory emerged in the late 1970s as an alternative theorization of the international migration process, which attempts to overcome the problems of development theory. World system theorists deal with migration in a global context. They see cross national variation in immigration as the results of varying degrees of economic, political, and military involvement of developed countries in sending countries. There is usually a positive relationship between the involvement and the size of immigration. In contrast to the predictions of development theory, world system theory claims that increasing foreign investment and trade will lead to increased immigration. For instance, Kim (2004) explained how migration from Southeast Asia to South Korea can be analyzed through the framework of periphery to semi-periphery migration.

The fact that international migration has become a global phenomenon and that its effective management calls for a global framework is already recognized. Some scholars, arguing that global games need global rules, suggested the establishment of a General Agreement on Movements of

People (GAMP).<sup>2</sup> GAMP should be an entity legislatively similar to global governing bodies such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the United Nations.

However, international migration differs from other forms of exchanges or types of movements between countries, such as flows of goods, services, and capital, in one very important aspect: it involves people and not inanimate objects. This makes it a more sensitive issue concerning territorial sovereignty, and a higher stake in managing migration.<sup>3</sup>

### **Meso level: Migration as a result of government policies or labor markets**

An example of migration as a result of government policy is the case of Vietnamese immigrants to the United States. Before the Vietnam War started, there was hardly any Vietnamese immigrant in America.<sup>4</sup> The refugee exodus only occurred after the war ended in 1975, at first with special parole powers from US Presidents and short-term legislation, and later with the Refugee Act, a government policy to admit refugees.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the US received the biggest number of Vietnamese refugees and immigrants: over 814,000 by the 2000 Census, not including Chinese-Vietnamese.<sup>6</sup> No other country in the world has such a sizable community of the Vietnamese diaspora. If migration policies in host countries do not favor immigration, they can deter migration significantly.

### **Segmented labor market theory: supply and demand**

Piore (1979) is the most notable contributor for this theory. International migration is caused by a permanent demand for immigrant labor that is inherent to the economic structure of developed nations. Four main factors are believed to create the permanent demand for immigrant labor in modern economies. First, employers are generally unwilling to raise wages for jobs at the bottom of

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<sup>2</sup> Straubhaar 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Ghosh 2000: 245.

<sup>4</sup> Rumbaut 2007: 653.

<sup>5</sup> Freeman 1995: 44.

<sup>6</sup> Rumbaut 2007: 657.

the skill hierarchy because those at higher levels would expect increases as well. Second, jobs at the bottom of the hierarchy rarely provide upward mobility, thus making it difficult to motivate native workers to take those jobs. Third, a duality in the labor market creates stable, permanent, well-paid jobs in the primary economy and unstable, temporary, poorly paid jobs in the secondary sector. Native people tend to be attracted to the stable jobs, whereas immigrants are more willing to take the unstable ones. Fourth, demographic shifts have affected the participation of two segments of the native workforce, particularly women and teenagers, who traditionally had taken the secondary sector jobs. Women have shifted from being intermittent to permanent participants in the labor force, and declining birth rates have reduced the number of teenagers available for these jobs.<sup>7</sup>

It should be noted that although foreign workers and immigrants are willing to take low-wage jobs, they are not always desirable in the host countries. Government policies play an important role in determining the size and direction of migration flow. The OECD countries in the 1990s, for instance, favored trade agreements over common markets with Third World countries because the later arrangement would imply free immigration policies within a common market area. In the case of NAFTA, liberalization of trade and investment between the United States and Canada with Mexico did not include a relaxation of the barriers for migrants from Mexico. Immigration issues were expressly avoided in NAFTA negotiations because they were regarded as a “poison pill” due to the enormous gap in perceptions concerning temporary labor and illegal migration between the US and Mexico.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the European Union accepted relatively quickly applications for membership by Austria, Finland, and Sweden, while postponed negotiations for full membership with Turkey due to large emigration flows from this country towards Europe. The

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<sup>7</sup> Massey et al 1998: 28.

<sup>8</sup> Miller 2000: 40.

immigrant-receiving countries prefer free trade to free migration because of the lower degree of domestic distribution of income and social benefits for foreign workers.<sup>9</sup>

### **Micro level: Migration as an individual decision**

#### **\* Push and pull theory**

Brinley Thomas (1973) established the paradigmatic framework for this theory. Based on a combination of economic, political, and social assumptions, this theory analyzes two sets of different factors influencing migration: the push (factors of expulsion) and the pull (factors of attraction). The pull factors refer to those attractive aspects in the receiving country that induce individuals to migrate there, such as high salary, job opportunities, and better living conditions. The push factors refer to a series of unfavorable factors in the country of origin that produce emigration, such as unemployment, political stability, and inadequate facilities for research. International migration is an outcome of the interaction and reinforcement between push factors from home and pull factors from abroad.<sup>10</sup> By weighing the relative importance between the two different forces, potential migrants will make their decisions of whether to stay or to emigrate.

Push and pull theory had been somewhat useful to explain the phenomenon of international migration due to its inclusiveness of many diverse factors: nearly every aspect can be analyzed and grouped into push and pull factors. However, despite its openness and flexibility, the theory does not provide insights why some factors carry more weight to some particular individuals. Neither does it have predictive value for international migration. The analyzed factors only contribute but do not suffice to trigger migration flows. If differentials of advantage are the only things needed,

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<sup>9</sup> Wellisch and Walz 1998: 1609.

<sup>10</sup> This is the simplified explanation. Further development of this theory looks at the two different forces in both sending and receiving countries, because in fact both sending and receiving countries have push and pull factors. Migrants' decision regarding staying in the host country then depends on how they deal with the two sets of forces. For example, to some people, the pull factors in the host country are much stronger than that in the home country, so they decide to stay after they finish their studies; while to some other people the pull factors in their home country are stronger than that in the host country, so they decide to go back.

then migration would originate mainly in the most impoverished countries such as Myanmar or Cameroon, and within them, in the most impoverished regions. Instead, international migration often originates in countries at intermediate levels of development and within them, in urban and rural sectors with some economic resources. In addition, there are marked differences in propensities to migrate among countries and communities at comparable economic levels. The Philippines, a mid-income distant country, is a more likely source of migration to the US on a per capita basis than a comparable Asian country, such as Pakistan, or a more proximate one, such as Columbia. Studies in Mexico and the Dominican Republic have found significant migration differentials among towns and small cities of comparable socioeconomic development and even located in close proximity to one another. Individual migration is undeniably determined by calculations of advantage, but these are embedded in a context that push and pull model fail to adequately consider.<sup>11</sup>

**\* Human capital theory**

Developed by Gary Becker in the mid 1990s, this theory stresses the economic importance of human capital, especially of investment in education and the transfer of critical skills in economic development. It assumes a strong autonomy of economic agents. Every human being is a single unit of human capital, susceptible of moving according to market signals.

The concept of human capital involves the basic idea that education – especially formal schooling, including elementary, secondary, higher education, and “on-the-job” training – is acquired by spending resources for the instruction of the individuals who are willing to defer the output they could have produced if they had worked instead of going to school. (Maintenance and other costs of living are not counted as part of the investment because all people need it whether or not they go to school.)

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<sup>11</sup> Portes and Rumbaut 2006.

The theory looks at two major kinds of return on education investment: one is the rate of social return, i.e. the nation's economic growth; the other is the rate of private return, i.e. the income that individuals earn after they finish their education for a certain period of time, which is also called marginal productivity. A person will emigrate when he perceives that the expected marginal productivity in the host country would be greater than that in his home country; otherwise he would not migrate. In other words, a person will decide to emigrate only if the expected benefits exceed the expected losses. Emigration is the result of professional career planning by the potential migrants and that, if it is successful, on balance it brings them monetary and economic benefits.

The general critiques for this theory is that it does not adequately explain the complexity of the migration phenomenon, especially when non-economic factors are involved. It fails to take into account the decision-making processes and decision-making behaviors. For instance, some skilled people decide to remain in Canada even though they know they could earn more money in the US and that they have to pay higher taxes in Canada. Their choice demonstrates that people are complex social beings, not simple economic self-maximizers.

#### **\* Network theory**

Network theory began with the idea of social capital by Glenn Loury (1977) and developed further for wider application by Bourdieu (1986). Intangible resources in families and communities are convertible into other forms of capital – in the case of migration it's the financial capital of foreign wages and remittances. Membership in networks and social institutions help migrants locate important resources and also promote a migrant's position in society.

The choice of the country of immigration is often dictated by the existence of a network of family, friends and connections that have previously migrated to that specific country. Having access to a community of familiar persons upon arrival makes transition much easier for migrants.

Such a community may act as a source providing information, e.g. opportunities and conditions in the destination areas, prior to moving. Upon arrival, migrants can lower their initial housing costs by staying with friends or relatives. These contacts may be very helpful during the process of finding a job later on, such as identifying job vacancies, referring to potential employers, and tapping into the network. More generally, entering a community that is familiar to the migrant lowers their sense of alienation, easing social as well as economic assimilation.<sup>12</sup>

The nature of the network varies depending on the type of migrants. Higher occupational groups tend to rely less on kin-based networks for accessing positions abroad than lower skilled individuals. They have more extensive and diverse networks consisting of colleagues, fellow alumni and relatives whom they can mobilize for their recruitments. The majority of highly skilled professionals earn their degrees in the host country rather than in the country of origin. It is while they study abroad that they learn about job possibilities and the conditions under which they may access them. It is also during this time that they cognitively prepare themselves for these particular jobs, become acquainted with their future colleagues, and build up their networks, which serve the purpose of expanding job opportunities and upward mobility.

#### **\* Neoclassical microeconomics and the new economics of migration**

Neoclassical microeconomics focuses on differentials in wages and employment conditions between countries, and on migration costs. It generally conceives movement as an individual decision for income maximization. Unemployment, low wages, poor working conditions, and the absence of economic opportunities motivate people to migrate towards other places where employment, wage, and other economic opportunities are more abundant (Todaro 1976).

However, research on Asian migration has shown that migration decisions are usually made not by individuals but by families, sometimes communities. People in a family act collectively to

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<sup>12</sup> Lucas 2005: 48.

decide to send members to different labor markets. Family linkages often provide both the financial and the cultural capital which make migration possible. In this sense, family strategies are designed to obtain secure employment and capital as well as to manage risks over long period – thus named “the new economics of migration.”<sup>13</sup>

The new economics of migration considers conditions in a variety of markets, not just labor markets. It views migration as a household decision for maximizing income and survival chances. Families that have some income to lose are more likely to want to minimize their risks and thus consider relocating, while the poorest within the community often are the least likely to migrate.<sup>14</sup>

### **EFFECTS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

The most important development effect of migration is its direct impact on income and poverty levels in the source countries. By allowing workers to move to areas where they are more productive and valued, migration leads to a direct increase in global output and income.<sup>15</sup> But overall, the interaction between migration, economic growth, and social development is a complex issue.

#### **ON SENDING COUNTRIES:**

##### **Remittances**

The most noticeable economic outcome of international labor migration is the remittance payments sent to home countries. In the Philippines, for instance, remittances of migrant Filipino workers have surpassed electronics manufacturing as the largest source of foreign currency for the nation, and 30-54% of the population is sustained by remittances.<sup>16</sup> The Philippines only ranked third on the list of top remittance-receiving countries in 2004, according to the Global Commission

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<sup>13</sup> Stark and Bloom 1985.

<sup>14</sup> Massey et al 1998: 21.

<sup>15</sup> Özden and Schiff 2006: 6.

<sup>16</sup> Parreñas 2005: 243-244.

on International Migration (GCIM). Mexico was number one with \$16 billion per year, second was India with \$9.9 billion, the Philippines had \$8.5 billion. In total, formal transfers of remittances in 2004 was \$150 billion, with an additional estimated \$300 billion transferred informally.<sup>17</sup>

Remittances to low-income countries were larger as a share of GDP and imports than were those to middle-income countries.<sup>18</sup> To many developing countries, a major development problem is the lack of capital and investment. Migrants might be seen as generating capital for investment through remittances. The GCIM report showed that formal remittance transfers are almost triple the value of Official Development Assistance (ODA), and the second largest source of external funding after Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).<sup>19</sup>

Remittances are important at both the national and household levels. At the household level, most remittances are used for daily expenses such as food, clothing, health care, housing improvement, and purchasing major consumer items. In that sense, remittances are the “only” social welfare in the world that is effective, because it goes directly to the receivers. Meeting basic needs is the top preoccupation, with building and repairing houses a central component of private spending. A smaller proportion goes into savings and investments, such as purchasing land or starting businesses. At the national level, remittances help reduce poverty by increasing family’s total income.

Although the remittances by migrants to their countries of origin are important, many blame both migrants and their families for not using these resources for investment but rather for consumption, thus lessening their impact on the wider societal level. On the one hand, it is due to the lacking of publicly-provided infrastructure to channel resources effectively and induce

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<sup>17</sup> GCIM Report 2005: 798.

<sup>18</sup> Lucas 2005: 148.

<sup>19</sup> GCIM Report 2005: 798.

investments out of remittances.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, remittance behavior might be explained and justified by other theories that focus on the functioning of family livelihood strategy (Tiemoko 2004). Families are seen as collaborating to promote remittances, which subsequently result in positive economic outcomes, rather than as a restraint on development.

### **Brain drain**

Highly skilled workers usually account for only a minor part of the migration flow. However, their number is increasing significantly during recent decades, partly due to the changes in immigration policies. Limited opportunities, low wages, meager career prospects, and significant risks for investors in the home country are important reasons for skilled people to emigrate. This particular phenomenon, sometimes known as “brain drain,” has emerged as an important issue to the countries involved and their respective national agencies, from immigration to economic to education and research.

Brain drain is generally understood in common discourse as the flight of professionals from a poor developing country to a rich industrial country. Because these professionals are highly skilled and educated, they are seen as “brain” – the intellectual capital – which reflects their value as very important resources of a country. Brain drain has become a highly debated political issue, especially since the process of globalization spreads across nations. In order to compete with other countries in a globalized context, several governments have modified their policies or designed new ones to encourage and facilitate the entry of foreign skilled workers.

In the United States, the skill of new legal immigrants has risen relative to that of the domestic population, due in part to changes in immigration laws that favor the admittance of people with skills that are scarce in the US labor market. Data from the US Census of 2000 show significant evidence of brain drain from Caribbean, Central America, some Asian and African

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<sup>20</sup> Lucas 2005: 156.

countries. The proportion of foreign-born faculty with doctoral degrees at US universities has increased sharply during the past three decades, from 11.7 percent in 1973 to 20.4 percent in 1999. The presence of foreign graduate students has a strongly positive impact on patent applications and grants.<sup>21</sup>

Brain drain appears to be a symptom of an imbalance between the typical pattern of expansion of the sending countries' education system and their capacity to absorb the graduates produced by it. In other words, brain drain is the result of the disequilibrium between the expansion of higher education in developing countries and their limited capacity to provide enough jobs for their graduates. Countries with a reasonable balance between the number of professional graduates and job available, such as Brazil, Venezuela, and Saudi Arabia, have had little problem with brain drain.

Most of the developing countries have been led to believe that the principal institutional mechanism for developing human skills and knowledge is the formal educational system. That means the more education, the more rapid the development. The quick expansion of higher education in certain developing countries had a serious consequence: it produces a supply of certain kinds of highly trained professionals larger than the economic systems of those countries can absorb. The supply and demand imbalance in developing countries pushes the excess graduates to emigrate. In contrast, developed countries have a high demand for highly qualified personnel, a demand that continues to grow more quickly than their educational systems can satisfy; therefore, developed countries accept highly trained personnel from developing countries.

C. Simon Fan and Oded Stark (2007) have recently speculated that there may be a possible link between brain drain and unemployment in the sending country: educated unemployment is *caused* by the prospect of international migration. The average level of human capital in a

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<sup>21</sup> Özden 2006: 252.

developing country may well be higher under migration than in the absence of migration. In other words, a developing country may end up with more educated individuals despite the brain drain and educated unemployment. In that sense they suggested another “beneficial” part of brain drain.<sup>22</sup>

### **The migration chain**

When governments encourage emigration, as in the Philippines under Marcos, it can become a long-term structural feature of the economy. This, in turn, can lead to a culture of emigration, in which people may migrate “because everyone else does so,” rather than on the basis of very precise goals. This happened in Italy between 1861 and 1970 and occurs today in certain regions of Mexico, the Philippines, China and other countries.<sup>23</sup>

### ON RECEIVING COUNTRIES:

#### **Labor demand met**

International migration can ease labor market shortages in the receiving countries. For example, since the late 1990s, US companies in the information sector and communications equipment have employed intensively foreign computer engineers and information experts from India, China and other developing countries to keep up with the human resources requirements of a rapidly growing sector.<sup>24</sup> Even governments that once strove to keep people out are encouraging the skilled to come in. Germany’s recent immigration legislation includes a points system for skilled workers. Britain has rapidly expanded the availability of work permits for skilled migrants, and pushed down the level of skill. Many countries are softening the rules that normally force foreign students to go home as soon as they graduate. Australia decided just a few years ago to allow

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<sup>22</sup> Fan and Stark’s research only proposed a hypothetical explanation under the form of a mathematical model, empirical studies are needed to confirm whether the model holds true.

<sup>23</sup> Castles 2004: 860.

<sup>24</sup> Saxenian 2002.

foreign students of information and communication technology to apply for permanent residence on the basis of their education alone.

Labor recruitment is not restricted to the highly-skilled level, but has been expanded to the low-skill, low-paid level as well. It is because migrant workers are concentrated in jobs which natives are unable or unwilling to do. The US agricultural sector, for example, needs undocumented Mexican workers in order to keep production costs low. In Malaysia during the 1997-1999 financial crisis, plantation employers requested the government to admit thousands of new workers due to labor shortages.<sup>25</sup>

### **Changes in demographics and public attitude**

The protracted period of prosperity and rapid growth of the US economy in the 1990s attracted significant migration, and generated a much more liberal political attitude towards immigration even by the labor unions, which have traditionally been hostile to immigration. According to the GCIM report, from 1995 to 2000, immigration accounted for 75% of population growth in the US. From 1990 to 2000, international migration accounted for 56% of the population growth in the developed world, compared with only 3% in the developing world.<sup>26</sup> However, since 2001 and the subsequent Iraq war, the US economy suffered the cost, recession followed, and anti-immigrant sentiments are increasing.

### **Illegal immigration**

Given the effects of globalization as discussed earlier, more and more people from Third World countries want to find work in developed countries to earn higher pay and improve their life, even if the receiving countries do not encourage it. It is not surprising to see an increase in migratory pressure along international borders. The receiving countries have responded by trying to

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<sup>25</sup> Castles 2004: 861.

<sup>26</sup> GCIM Report 2005: 797.

restrain migration. Rules for issuing residence and work permits, tourist visas, and granting refugee status are becoming increasingly restrictive, targeting in particular the nationals of developing countries. In the mean time, people try different ways to get in. Boats of asylum seekers, trucks of foreign workers, and airplanes with visa over-stayers continue to arrive with increasing frequency. This creates a fear in the relatively prosperous countries of being “flooded” with unwanted immigrants.

According to the Global Commission on International Migration, an estimated 2.5 to 4 million migrants cross international borders without authorization each year. At least 5 million (10%) of Europe’s 56.1 million migrants in 2000 had irregular status. An estimated 10 million migrants live in the USA with irregular status, many from Mexico.<sup>27</sup>

But movements of people can trigger political passion and human emotions more easily, especially the manner in which they are handled. This human aspect makes the perils of mismanaging migration particularly alarming.<sup>28</sup> The problem of illegal immigrants from Mexico to the United States, for instance, is more of a moral dilemma than a legislative one. As Jagdish Bhagwati argued, borders could not be controlled unless you were willing to be rough. But you could not be, because illegal immigrants are human beings and could not be shot at as if they were contraband. Those caught were not incarcerated but simply sent across the border and came back again and again till they got through.<sup>29</sup> In this case, the real solution is to help Mexico’s economy thrive, once the population is well off, migration incentive will diminish.

For reasons that are self-evident, few people (other than short-term contract workers) seek to migrate from functional states with thriving economies and flourishing democracies to weak or despotic state where human rights are violated and that are unable to meet the basic needs of their

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<sup>27</sup> GCIM Report 2005: 798.

<sup>28</sup> Ghosh 2000: 245.

<sup>29</sup> Bhagwati 2007.

own citizens.<sup>30</sup> Much international migration, of course, arises from socio-economic disparities. If gaps for differentials in wages and annual income can be lowered to the range of one to four or five, most socio-politically problematic international migration will abate. As a general rule, as testified to by the history of European regional integration, economically driven international migration between countries of similar socio-economic development will be neither extensive nor problematic.<sup>31</sup>

### OTHER BENEFICIARIES

#### **Migration industry**

The migration industry develops out of migration networks. Once a migration gets underway, needs arise for a variety of special services. The migration industry includes travel agents, lawyers, bankers, labor recruiters, brokers, interpreters, and housing agents. The agents have an interest in the continuation of migration and may go on organizing it even when governments try to restrict movements. Facilitating migration is a major and largely legal international business.<sup>32</sup>

#### **Contract agencies**

Due to the general difficulties in obtaining information about job openings overseas, the attempts to limit entry from receiving countries, and the lack of inter-state arrangements for the recruitment of temporary workers, labor migration has become increasingly commercialized in the hands of private recruiters.

Private firms serving as recruitment intermediaries today account for 80 to 90 percent of labor migration flows from Asian countries. The market for recruitment services has grown especially in the more technologically advanced countries where the labor requirements of industries are more complex. In the United Kingdom, for example, the number of agencies engaged

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<sup>30</sup> Report of the Global Commission on International Migration 2005: 789.

<sup>31</sup> Miller 2000: 36.

<sup>32</sup> Castles 2004: 859.

in placement services rose from 5,000 at the beginning of the 1980s to 13,500 at the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>33</sup>

### **Smuggling rings**

The illegal side of the migration industry – human smuggling and trafficking – is also a lucrative business. Irregular migration has become highly commercialized with an emerging pattern of increasing professionalization. Because undocumented entry is extremely risky: the risks of arrest, injury, and imprisonment involved in border crossings are high, even fatality, the smuggling rings usually charge migrant a high fee for the service. GCIM estimated that 600-800,000 people are trafficked each year, and migrant smugglers and human traffickers make an estimated \$10 billion profit each year.<sup>34</sup>

## **MIGRANTS' ADAPTATION IN THE NEW COUNTRY**

### **Assimilation**

Classical assimilation theory originated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with Robert Park (1950) from the Chicago School of Sociology, and Milton Gordon (1964), as the most notable advocates. The theory argued that immigrants come to share a common culture and gain equal opportunities in the new society, abandoning gradually their original cultures in favor of new ones, thereby leading to assimilation. Acculturation, then, means becoming more like middle-class Protestant whites. When the inevitability and ethnocentrism of assimilation was criticized, the theory was revised, paying attention to institutional mechanisms, individual agency, and network mechanisms. Nowadays, race as an insurmountable obstacle to assimilation has been removed for most immigrants. Individuals have multiple options for assimilation built from both ethnic and mainstream elements (segmented assimilation), while choosing their own “networks” to join (ethnic

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<sup>33</sup> Lucas 2005: 276.

<sup>34</sup> GCIM Report 2005: 798.

enclaves).<sup>35</sup> With regard to integration, Levitt and Waters (2002) note that there are two broad bodies of scholarship. First, the segmented assimilation theory argues that immigrants and their offspring may adapt to a new society in three different ways. These include conventional upward assimilation into the white middle class, downward assimilation into the underclass, or “selective acculturation” where migrants retain aspects of their culture and values while striving for economic advancement, as Portes and Zhou (1993) described. The alternate view counteracts straight line assimilation theory which “views integration as linear, generationally driven, and a necessary prerequisite for successful incorporation into the United States”<sup>36</sup> and notes that the assimilation and upward mobility may not necessarily go together.

### **Transnationalism**

A new trend that appeared in the early 1990s on the scholarship of immigrants’ adaptation is transnationalism. Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc (1994) defined transnationalism as a process through which immigrants develop and maintain multiple social relations that link together their societies of origin and of resettlement. Individuals involved in this process construct social fields that go across geographical, cultural, and political boundaries. The daily life of these transnational migrants, or “transmigrants,” is based on multiple and constant interconnections that transcend international borders. Portes et al (1999), while acknowledging the importance of transnationalism as a promising emerging field at the time, stressed the distinction between transnationalism and similar activities done by any other immigrants. The term “transmigrant” should apply only to people who actually commute across national borders on a regular basis, chiefly for professional or political reasons.

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<sup>35</sup> Alba and Nee 2007: 132-135.

<sup>36</sup> Levitt and Waters 2002: 2.

Transnational migration is a pattern of migration in which persons, although they move across international borders and settle and establish social relations in a new state, maintain social connections within the polity from which they originated. Levitt's (2001) research about Dominican villager immigrants from Milaflores is one of the most widely cited case studies. In transnational migration, persons literally live their lives across international borders. Transmigrants are people who claim and are claimed by two or more nation-states, into which they are incorporated as social actors, one of which is widely acknowledged to be their state of origin. Transnational migration implies continuing participation in the economy, politics, and social organization of one's state of origin while at the same time being more or less fully involved in one's country of adoption.

Other studies illustrate how migrants establish transnational social fields. Eckstein's (2006) work depicted how Cuban transnational families transformed Cuba through their visits and remittances. Thai (2002) studied the transnational marriage patterns of Vietnamese men overseas. Gale (2006) analyzed child fostering among Sierra Leonean refugees that spans across nation state and citizenship.

### **Differences between refugees and immigrants**

Immigrants migrate by choice, refugees are forced to flee. Many refugees had to escape in a very traumatic way – the Vietnamese boat people is an example. Psychologically, this left a deep mental scar to Vietnamese immigrants, one that is not experienced by other Asian groups such as Chinese, Indian, or Korean. Scholars have noticed a “collective memory” among the Vietnamese community in the US: they all share the memory of a desperate escape and harrowing difficulties, which they either had personal experience with, or know someone who did.

Refugees, due to their circumstances, have no time to prepare for the end destination, such as learning the language, acquiring cultural knowledge, or acquiring job skills needed in the new

country. Without these essential preparations, their adaptation is surely much more difficult than that of ordinary immigrants. Thus government support is very important to help refugees settle, especially in the first stage. Supports in the form of public assistance, entitlements, and welfare program give refugees the chance to attend vocational schools, learn necessary skills, and become economically self-sufficient.

Yet this treatment might create unintentional problems for the refugees. In the US, for instance, in late 1970s, the Vietnamese often encountered hostility in areas where unemployment was high or housing was scarce. Loescher and Scanlan (1986) described how in Maine, unemployed young people occasionally roughed up and robbed the Vietnamese. In Denver, Mexican-Americans reacted violently when twenty-four Indochinese families were given apartments in a housing project that had a long waiting list of Hispanics. Vietnamese fishermen in Galveston, Texas were perceived as a threat to the livelihood of local fishermen and were terrorized by members of the Ku Klux Klan. The efforts to get the Vietnamese jobs and to become self-sufficient as quickly as possible often placed refugees in direct conflict with other minority groups.<sup>37</sup>

### **RETURN MIGRATION**

With regard to labor and capital, the return of old migrants to their homelands is beneficial to the host country. It is in the interests of countries such as the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom to have migrant laborers go home as they age and becomes less productive, and as their children begin to take spaces in schools and universities. When migrants return home, developing countries bears the cost of the returnee's retirement. As capitalist economies mature and their populations age, temporary labor migration becomes preferred to permanent immigration. Most industrial countries in the post World War II era favored guest worker programs over permanent immigration.

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<sup>37</sup> Loescher and Scanlan 1986: 117.

Throughout the world, immigrants and refugees are choosing to go home again. Brazilian Japanese returned to their ancestral land to seek better employment and business opportunities.<sup>38</sup> The transition from conflict to peace has led to the repatriation of many exiles to their country of origin. Germans from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union also returned to Germany after the collapse of communism. Cambodians in Southeast Asia and Ethiopians in Africa returned to their homeland when the war was over.<sup>39</sup> Vietnamese overseas returning to Vietnam for visits only numbered 8000 in 1988, had risen to 87,000 in 1992, and over 1 million in 2003.<sup>40</sup>

In the United States, examples are abundant. Irish immigrants from Boston returned home to raise families in Northern Ireland. Korean from Los Angeles returned to South Korea after civil riots targeted their business. Puerto Ricans from the US mainland retire to the island after years of work away. Many European pensioners – for instance, Greek retirees – have gone back to spend their retirement on the ancestral land.

### **Developmental impact of return migration**

Returnees have a clear impact on their family back home. After years of hard work, most emigrants arrive home with a sizable amount of capital from savings and from the sale of overseas assets such as house, car, and furniture. Most use their savings to purchase housing or to improve the home or property they already own. Returnee housing is invariably of high quality. In some countries such as Barbados, successful migrants are expected to buy a car or bring one home when return, because car ownership is an important status symbol.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See “*Strangers in the ethnic homeland: Japanese Brazilian Return Migration in Transnational Perspective*” by Takeyuki Tsuda, 2003.

<sup>39</sup> See “*The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*” by Richard Black and Khalid Koser, 1999, and “*Coming Home?: Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed Behind*” by Lynellyn Long and Ellen Oxfeld, 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Thai 2003: 140.

<sup>41</sup> Gmelch 2004: 222.

Some scholars argue that returnees have little or no impact on their homelands. Although they do bring money with them when they return, they do not invest their savings in business enterprises that create new jobs and capital. Often returning migrants engage in building new houses and conspicuous consumption. Although these activities may stimulate growth in the construction trade, such returns do not necessarily lead to new economic growth, investment, or innovation as is often argued by government authorities.

There exist some contrasting viewpoints about what is development. From the capitalist point of view, it is pure economic growth. But from a social point of view, some people are not making a genuine contribution to the development of the country. A young businessman gets his education in a Western country, returns to his native country and starts up a business of his own. The business is thriving and he makes huge profits. But his business is exploitative and he offers no benefit or protection to workers. Whether he is contributing to his nation's "development" or not is arguable.

However, the return of certain professional groups appropriately timed may have positive economic effects, in historically recent cases such as Taiwan and Korea. Many governments and local communities encourage returns – especially with accompanying remittances, investment, and certain categories of skilled labor – to stimulate economic growth as a means to counter dependency on foreign capital and humanitarian assistance.

### **Brain drain, brain gain, and brain circulation**

The emigration of highly skilled workers is often denounced as "brain drain," harmful to the economic development of the sending countries. Sometimes it is depicted as "brain gain," beneficial to the receiving countries when the migrants go back and contribute intellectually or technologically. AnnaLee Saxenian (2002) introduced a new term, "brain circulation," in her

research about the high tech industry in Silicon Valley. Foreign born IT engineers are starting new businesses and generating jobs and wealth in the United States in tandem with doing similar activities in their country of origin. Even when they choose not to return home, they are serving as middlemen linking businesses in the US with those in distant regions.

### **Reintegration and sustainable return**

Sometimes return migration brings unexpected cultural ambiguities resulting from interactions between the returnees and those who stay. Coming to terms with the receiving community compels returnees to reconsider who they were and what they have become. Ethnic identities, political viewpoints, personal lifestyles and boundaries are not immutable, and returnees might simultaneously identify with and be estranged from their former homelands. Home may eventually come to mean the new place, or returnees may feel like outsiders in both places. Reverse culture shock can happen with damaging results.

People who have lived as refugees for several years typically find upon return that they have lost their property and land rights in the country of origin. This is the issue faced by refugees from many different parts of the world. Whether they return to their birth place or to a different area within the country of origin that is new to them, they often face intense competition with local residents for resources, social services, employment and educational opportunities. In such cases, returnees may strain existing resources and relationships within local communities.

Other factors may make it difficult or impossible for a country or region to absorb the returnee population. Domestic population pressure in Eritrea and Congo, for instance, creates a situation that is already tense and both societies can hardly cope with a new flow of residents. In Cambodia and Vietnam, certain areas have become uninhabitable due to continuing conflict, or the

danger of land-mines. Repatriation in these cases might be the cause of another migration flow and recurring disaster.

Return migration of refugees is quite a novel idea and had only been recommended and studied since the last four decades. From 1947 until the 1970s, repatriation was unlikely to be perceived as the long-term plan for refuge-seeking groups. After World War II there was an avoidance to recommend repatriation as the conclusion to exile, because it was feared that legitimate repatriation would quickly facilitate *refoulement*, or repression and retaliation.<sup>42</sup> Nowadays, repatriation is much more welcomed. It is the valid outcome of exile preferred in many circumstances by refugees and asylum seekers, as well as the governments involved and the international organizations. Moreover, it does not necessarily presuppose the cessation of conflict or changed political structures in the country of destination.<sup>43</sup>

It is worth noting that physical repatriation is not the end of the displacement cycle. In fact the end of the process may still be years away for some returnee populations. Therefore researchers, especially those in refugee studies, urge policy makers and involved agencies to adopt the notion of “sustainable return”<sup>44</sup> and help returnees to find sustainable livelihood.

## **IMMIGRATION TO THE US AFTER 9/11**

On September 11, 2001 suicide terrorists crashed four hijacked American airliners into the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and rural Pennsylvania. In total, approximately 3,000 persons died in the attacks.

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<sup>42</sup> See “*Repatriation under Conflict in Central America*” by Larkin et al, 1992.

<sup>43</sup> See “*The End of the Refugee Cycle?*” by Richard Black, 1999, p.20.

<sup>44</sup> The UNHCR (United Nations High Commission of Refugees) defines return migration as sustainable if the socio-economic conditions and the levels of violence and persecution are not significantly worsened by return as measured one year after the return process is complete. The sustainability of return depends on two main factors: the voluntariness of return (as opposed to forced return), and the return environment of the country of origin (such as opportunities for socio-economic advancement and political freedom).

The tragedy of September 11 raised the concern about immigration and security to new heights. This increased attention stems from the profiles of the nineteen attackers: all were foreign-born, most from Saudi Arabia and Egypt, but residing in the United States on temporary visas, three of which has expired.<sup>45</sup> John Tirman explains: “After the September 11 attacks, the culprit of American vulnerability were widely identified as porous borders, generous entry policies, violations of the terms of entry, and the entry of immigrants from the Middle East more generally.”<sup>46</sup>

On October 2001, President George W. Bush issued Homeland Security Presidential Directive 2, “Combating Terrorism Through Immigration Policies.” This directive provided an early linkage between migration, terrorism, and security. Days later Congress enacted, and the president signed, the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001. Among its provisions, this act authorizes the US government to use surveillance and wiretapping without first showing probable cause, permits secret searches and access to private records by government agents without oversight, authorizes the detention of immigrants on alleged suspicions, denies admission to the United States based on a person’s spoken words, and expands the concept of guilt by association.

The racist component of US policy regarding immigration following September 11, 2001 has been widely critiqued. Concern especially has been raised regarding the specific targeting – racial profiling – of Arabs and Muslims. According to Louise Cainkar, “of thirty-seven known US government security initiatives implemented since the 9/11 attacks, twenty-five either explicitly or implicitly target Arabs and Muslims in the United States.”<sup>47</sup> Yet Muslims are not the only victim. Because terrorists had been immigrants, the United States was now determined to reduce the flow of immigration and subject existing immigrants to closer scrutiny. It mattered not at all that no

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<sup>45</sup> Tyner 2006: 92.

<sup>46</sup> Tirman 2004:

<sup>47</sup> Tyner 2006: 92.

Mexican or Latino immigrant had been implicated in the terrorism; they were immigrants and therefore suspicious.<sup>48</sup>

Migration scholars have noted that migration policies often fail to achieve their declared objectives or have unintended consequences.<sup>49</sup> The current migration policy pursued by the US government already resulted in increasing anti-immigrant sentiment and bigotry, and some sectors of the economy have already been suffering. Whether this policy will be further discussed, analyzed, and possibly modified, remains open for debate, especially when the presidential election is fast approaching.

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<sup>48</sup> Isbister 2004: 198.

<sup>49</sup> Castles 2004: 852.

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