

# Some Issues in Research Approaches to Global Migration in the United States

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## Introduction

I'm grateful to the KAS and MARS for their invitation to the Society's 28th Annual Meeting, and I'm delighted to be here. On the East Coast you hear rumors about the Statue of Liberty that now should be facing the Southwest, and that the money being collected for the restoration of the Statue and of Ellis Island facilities should be invested in a meaningful program for the thousands of new immigrants and refugees pouring into Los Angeles.

While I have no control over national monuments and federal programs, I am happy to serve as a personal connection between MARS and the Center for Migration Studies (CMS), which happens to be located in New York, but focuses on all aspects of international migration issues and national immigration policy. Since the West Coast is now—as far as migration is concerned—where the action is, I look forward to a long and fruitful cooperation in migration and resettlement studies, hoping that UC Berkeley will become a major point of reference.

The topic of my brief and informal presentation will deal with some issues in research approaches to migration in the U.S. Indirectly, these brief observations may throw some light on the reasons why no migration programs have been developed at major American institutions of learning, while at the same time pointing out some areas in need of research.

In its latest world survey of international migration policies and programs, the United Nations Population Division, which has greatly enhanced our knowledge of international migration matters in recent years, reminded us that there are today twenty million migrant workers legally or illegally crossing national frontiers—largely a “south-north” flow of workers in search of economic opportunity. In addition, there are today about ten million refugees, mostly concentrated in the poorest nations (United Nations 1982). We are familiar with the large numbers of immigrants and refugees who entered the U.S. in the last decade. Kevin McCarthy (1983), among others, argues that they changed the profile of California.

“Yet statistics are but a crude indication of people's real concerns about immigration,” wrote James Fallows in a recent article in the *Atlantic Monthly* (1983:48). “The unspoken question about immigrants,” the author continued, “is What are they doing to us? Will they divide and diminish the nation's riches? Will they accept the thousand informal rules that allow this nation of many races to cohere?” (ibid.). In his excellent article, James Fallows effectively debunked the most popular myths on how new immigrants are affecting us.

How are we doing on a less popular (i.e., more technical) level of analysis? The shifting international realities of the world seem to require new concepts, categories, and definitions appropriate to transnational movements of population (Kritz 1982). Distinctions between various types of international movements are becoming increasingly blurred. "Certainly the distinction between permanent and temporary migrations is less functional today than it was in the period of large transcontinental migration" (Kritz 1982:11).

An improved typology of international migration policies, movements, and results was recently outlined by W. R. Bohning (1983). But this is not the time for going into that question. Indeed, categorical distinctions are useful for purposes of analysis: "to enable analysis to proceed as close to reality and with as much rigor as possible" (Bohning 1983:643). But even when analysts "use neutral and objective terms in place of the value-laden or pejorative ones that have hitherto dominated the discussion" (Bohning 1983:642-643), categorical distinctions are more a reflection of administrative practices than of economic and social realities.

Lacking is a comprehensive framework that places immigration issues in their global and domestic contexts—and that considers the interrelations between immigration policy and other policy sectors—such as foreign policy, foreign aid, and international trade, on the international side; and labor, services, equal opportunity, on the domestic side. Immigration policy has tended to be treated as a discrete policy, its formulation ignoring other national interests and objectives. [Kritz 1982:3]

But our policies reflect our theories—our efforts to understand and our creative commitment.

Recently, Nathan Glazer, professor of education and sociology at Harvard University, confessed that "there was, and is, a narrowness" in the American intellectual movement, making too much capital of ideas that "are only one aspect of the issues we have to understand and deal with." Professor Glazer concluded:

These might well include those issues of personal relations at which English intellectuals worked so much harder. But they should include more than that: they should include large areas of the public realm unrelated to the history of Marxism, Socialism and Communism—the role of technology and science, the problem of nuclear arms, the growth of government in welfare states, ethnic conflict, relations between rich and poor countries, worldwide immigration and emigration, and many other issues, on which American intellectuals . . . have not had much to say. It is time for them to think more spaciously of American society and America's world role. [1984:1]

The history of research on migration in the U.S. shows that analytical interest, political concern, and theoretical bias come and go with as much regularity as the migrations themselves. Historical hindsight reveals how researchers fell victim to the immediacy of controversial issues of the day. We have learned that the shape of the migration that confronts us constrains the kinds of questions we ask and thus our ability to provide answers. This is true whether it is the "oriental hordes" invading before the turn of the century, the need to "Americanize" Southern Europeans before World War I and II, or the current "threat" of bilingualism today.

However, contemporary American researchers on migration are attempting to minimize these biases by adopting a perspective that takes into account the long-term character of regional and world migrations. This is reflected both in research commissioned by the Federal Government as well as in academic research on migration. According to Lawrence H. Fuchs, formerly the Executive Director of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy, "on almost every major policy question" the Commission was "confronted with contending philosophical positions and deeply felt clashing

interests" (1982:1). He lamented that "as important as new empirical research is, we are still without a strong new theory of cultural pluralism based on civic unity which acknowledges the possibilities for cultural diversity with respect to what are essentially private beliefs and behaviors while insisting upon conformity to certain core civil values" (1982:9). Thinking back over the 20 months of the Select Commission's activities, Fuchs concluded: "what is needed is a long and spacious regional or ethnic group interest" (1982:9).

Such an approach may help researchers obtain sufficient analytical leverage to move beyond what may be the most serious research problem: not seeing beyond the present adjustment of economic and political relationships that continue to produce the current high volume of migration and let U.S. immigration policies become out of control.

Several competing theories have been proposed to explain the origins of international migrations (Kritz, Keely, and Tomasi 1981; Ricketts 1983). But, as for the types of migration, so also for theories; it is not the place to go into this question either. To make just a preliminary observation, I think that it is safe to say that, besides a growing awareness of the global and complex nature of the phenomenon, there seems to be a general agreement with one of the conclusions of the London Institute of Commonwealth Studies on labor migration that "the 'universal migrant laborer' of the economists and demographers is as far away from the complex realities of the phenomenon as is the general run of historical studies" (Marks and Richardson 1984:3), i.e., a theoretically informed and historically specific approach is here advocated.

If we look very briefly at some major theoretical developments in American research on migration and the major areas in need of analysis as currently perceived, we see that during the past ten years, public and research perceptions of *international* migration have shifted from the view that the large-scale international migrations have ended to recognition that migration flows in many regions are already large and growing. While *intraregional* migrations are considered different from *transcontinental* migrations, there are relatively little data available on intraregional migration flows, and they have received contrasting interpretations (reflecting Malthusian dynamics versus demand-determined flows).

Among the topics covered by the broad heading of *international relations* and migration which are receiving increasing attention from researchers and policymakers are: a) the extent to which governments utilize international migrations to achieve political goals; b) the settlement of political and economic refugees; c) the rights of migrants; d) the linkage between migration and development; and e) the question of settlement, assimilation, and integration in the receiving country.

With regard to furthering political goals, the topic of unrestricted mobility of workers within regional agreements, including the factors influencing such agreements, the conditions underlying the patterns that emerge, and the impacts on countries that do the sending and receiving is a relatively unexplored area. The extent to which future membership in regional markets will be influenced by these free labor provisions is also an open question. There is little empirical evidence on the labor market effects of immigration. Data should be obtained on these topics as well as on the regional distribution of economy-wide impacts of immigration, and on the characteristics of migrants moving between member market countries. Too many analysts have not gone beyond highly descriptive studies of immigrant characteristics. Some researchers have already pointed out that it could be important to ascertain which groups are likely to remain permanently settled in the U.S., and among those most likely to return, what are the correlates of differential emigration rates. The resolution of these questions appears to be critical for developing a well-balanced immigration policy—one which is founded on scientific evidence about the social and economic impacts of old and new immigrants.

Regarding the settlement of political and economic refugees, the phenomenon has not been a topic of sustained social science research. The academic literature dealing with refugee movements is heavily descriptive (except for the growing body of work on resettlement and adjustment patterns). However, triggering events of refugee movement are by no means totally random and are amenable to theoretical analysis. Policy relevant research areas include courses and trends in refugee movements, the implications of reform with respect to mass asylum and refugee status, and the relationship between relief assistance (international institutional mechanisms) and development aid to the Third World.<sup>1</sup>

Concerning the rights of migrants, in recent years there has been a growing emphasis (which is analytically still at the advocacy level) on universal human rights that would accord to all persons, regardless of their citizenship, basic rights to due process, personal security and autonomy, political participation, equality, and economic and social rights (trade union participation, voting rights, residency, schools, health and unemployment insurance, social security, pensions, and the like). In the case of illegal migrants—a problem of major proportions for the United States—some would argue that they have forfeited their basic human rights when they leave their country of origin. There is more agreement, however, that “presence in a territory is sufficient to generate an obligation for the government of that territory to uphold a person’s human rights—whether or not that person is documented . . . but it does not preclude deportation in accordance with due process of law” (Kritz and Keely 1981:xxi). Thus, while media accounts vividly reveal the infractions on the human rights of undocumented migrants in the United States and other countries, to correct this situation, according to the prevalent opinions in the ongoing debate, ultimately requires the elimination of the status of undocumented migrants (granting legal residency status to all persons once they have successfully entered the country, even if illegally) or halting the flow of illegal migration (a process which may at best be able to be slowed but not effectively halted).

The linkage between migration (growing population) and development was clearly recognized since the early phase of the Industrial Revolution. Later in the 19th and early 20th centuries, American scholars, like their European counterparts in the late sixties and early seventies, started questioning immigration on social grounds with concepts like “overforeignization,” social costs, ethnic relations, and political implications. At the heart of the question of the impacts of the sending countries have been the twin issues of labor and remittances. To what extent is exported labor a safety valve for unemployment, and to what extent are the migrants, those with the very skills needed for development, creating labor bottlenecks and pressure for rising wages by departing? In the case of research on Mexican migration to the United States, emphasis has been placed on the incorporation of Mexican migrants into U.S. labor markets and the effects of the migration on the individuals and families involved in the migration streams. The effects of Mexican emigration on economic and social development in Mexico have not been seriously addressed in the literature. A parallel body of research on Caribbean migration to the United States, however, has emphasized the negative development consequences of emigration, observing in particular that the flows are highly selective of migrants who have the skills and resources needed to promote development at home. There is a growing awareness among American researchers that in addition to further empirical analyses of the economic consequences of emigration, considerably more attention should be directed to the social consequences of emigration for the sending countries. In the ongoing analysis of international labor migration and national development, researchers are finding push-pull theories as well as labor recruitment and social networks theories incomplete and are looking at different levels of incorporation into the world economy.

Large and sustained international movement and migration to the U.S. ultimately lead to questions of settlement, assimilation, and integration in the receiving country. In the analysis of these aspects there is agreement that settlement and integration processes should be conceptually distinguished. The process of migrant settlement refers to the individual, community, and societal factors associated with the intent and decision to settle in the receiving country. The process of integration involves the adaptation, acculturation, and assimilation of individuals and groups into the receiving society. But still very little is known about how important migrants' original intentions are. Also, relatively little is known about the conditions for stability in pluralistic democracies or the implications of immigration for maintaining stability or fostering change. Some researchers have been identifying various factors influencing migrant integration in the U.S. While it has been argued that temporary migrations frequently become permanent, or at least some subset of them does, it could also be argued that the perception on the part of the migrants as to the tenuousness of their legal status encourages maintenance of ties with relatives and community in the homeland rather than developing new ones in the receiving country. Efficient transportation and communication systems also facilitate maintenance of transnational networks.

If after these brief observations, we can draw a conclusion, it would seem that in the U.S. *international* migration is usually not a topic specifically addressed in the contexts of global politics, North-South relations, or the new international economic order. Considerable work remains to be done by migration scholars to develop appropriate theory to explain migration phenomena. Most analyses tend to be cross-sectional and based on study of one immigrant group or limited to the U.S. While providing rich and detailed data on characteristics and patterns, such studies frequently lack detail on historic and comparative processes, and knowledge does not accumulate as rapidly as it should. "International migration studies," suggested the editors of *Global Trends in Migration*,

should be placed in a broad and comparative context. Case studies of ethnic groups should include comparisons with other ethnic groups. Studies which develop an historical perspective, even if not always using longitudinal data, are required, along with comparative studies that test existing theories and identify the conditions leading to similarities and differences in migration patterns to various countries. For example, several migrant-sending countries have more than one country of destination yet almost nothing is known regarding the selectivity of these migrants at origin, or the parallels and differences between migrant work activities, settlement and integration experiences in various countries. The field of international migration research has reached the point where knowledge on specific groups and countries needs to be expanded into a broader historical and comparative perspective. Various theories have been elaborated which require testing on a broader range of data than has occurred to date. Until such work occurs, the field of international migration will remain a long way from prediction. [Kritz and Keely 1981:xxx]

Specifically, with reference to *intra-regional* migrations (U.S.-Mexico and -Central America, Northern and Southern Europe), there is a sense that

the long-term realignment of political difference among the involved states may be at the core of the future of this migration pattern. Perhaps the criteria for choosing research priorities should not be drawn from the relationships that have currently given the migration system its form and composition, but from those that are moving the regional political economy in a new direction. [Bach 1983:150]

Also, the definition of immigration will have to change, according to Jorge Bustamante of Colegio de Mexico (1984). The historical persistence in the U.S. to define immigration as a domestic problem, claims Professor Bustamante, is due to the politicization of immigration, according to which illegal aliens are generally associated with a domestic problem (unemployment, public health problems, education, etc., for the U.S.; population explosion for Mexico)—a politicization where immigration laws operate as labor laws. A situation where more than two thirds of Mexico's total exports go to the U.S., from which more than two thirds of Mexico's total imports come, is called dependency. "In that context," concluded Professor Bustamante (1984:241-242),

we are not talking about two separate realities that are divided by a border. . . . Therefore, the U.S. cannot think of the U.S. realities in terms of a domestic policy as it relates to something that permeates the border which is capital, technology, migrant people, myths and values. I think that this is the time to stop blaming each other about this phenomenon. I think this is the time that we should start learning how to live together in a more rational way.

#### Note

<sup>1</sup> For new directives in refugee research, see "Refugees Today," a special issue of the *International Migration Review* (Spring/Summer 1981) and another *IMR* special issue on refugees to be published in the fall of 1985.

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