

EXPLAINING MIGRATION IN MEXICO AND ELSEWHERE

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Migration, the movement of peoples through space and time, influences almost every social process including the expansion of urban areas, mixing of cultural traditions, changes in social identities, and supply and demand for labor. Despite its recognized importance, migration proves to be a dismally confusing topic for scholarly discussion. After decades of collecting, counting, censusing, surveying, sampling, and modelling migrations in every corner of the earth, scholars have created a migration literature still characterized by unarticulated perspectives, data, models, and explanations. The absence of anything approaching "migration theory" has troubled most reviewers of the field (Mangalam and Schwarzweiler 1968:3; Sayers and Weaver 1976:11-12, and Jackson 1969). Jackson (*ibid.*:6) has summarized the dismay:

The amount of empirical evidence available in the field of migration is enormous and the range and coverage of the statistical data is constantly improving. In spite of this. . . there has been only a relatively slight attempt to order the confusion with the development of theoretical propositions and models which would lend both elegance and understanding to this large and important subject.

Who or what is to blame for this failure? Are methodologies lacking? Are typologies needed? Will more interdisciplinary discussions, case studies or survey data clarify the muddled models? Are migration theorists awaiting a theoretical messiah who will lead them out of the wilderness of computer printouts and the mountains of unread reprints to new insights? Funding agencies are avalanched with a variety of proposals to free the study of migration from its quandary. In the proposals may be found strong arguments for quantitative modelling; qualitative studies; micro, macro and regional studies; decision models; ethnographic studies; economic studies; ad infinitum. The more recent flood of proposals has been advocating King Solomon's solution, suggesting multidisciplinary projects which include a little of all the above.

After compiling a bibliography with over 2,000 bibliographic references on Mexican migration, Weaver, Camara, Clark and I are certain that every type of study suggested in the current migration literature has been attempted, at least once. As might be expected, little attention has been given to synthesizing the massive data, minitheories, macrotheories, hypotheses and hunches hidden in this literature. And I confess that efforts to synthesize this motley collection of discussions about Mexican migration fell far short of expectations (Weaver and Downing 1976). Given this background, I approached this symposium¹ on Mexican migration with considerable scepticism. Could anyone contribute anything other

Zacatecas and Hidalgo (Cauthorn and Hubbard 1976:69). Here, the labor force is nurtured, trained, and retired at minimal costs to the private and public sectors.

This labor strategy has continually encountered difficulties in peasant areas because some of the labor force is so marginal that it has remained divorced from the process. Relatively self-sufficient peasants occupy land which is not brought into the service of the nation's production strategy. These peasants minimally participate either as consumers or producers in the national economy. Many of Mexico's 11 million Indians participate in this labor pool of marginal peasants. Subsequently, an objective of dependent industrial capitalism is to convert the difficult-to-capture, landed, rural labor pool into a more mobile, landless proletariat. The strategy has been explicitly stated in the desire to: "de-peasantize" the rural areas of Mexico which is being considered as a way to increase national agricultural production.

The paper by Muñoz, Oliveira, and Stern provides direct support for this model. The authors distinguish two types of migrants entering the Mexico City labor force: those previously employed (transferred labor) and those who have never been employed (non-transferred labor). As the migrant streams into Mexico City have matured over the past thirty years, employment opportunities for skilled and previously employed migrants have decreased. Migrants with no previous work experience underwent occupational upgrading when entering the Mexico City labor force, while migrants who have been previously employed suffered occupational downgrading. Most significantly, the authors debunk a long-standing misconception concerning the transfer of farm workers to the city. Farm workers were believed to have been absorbed into the service sector, contributing to the "overtertiarization" of the metropolitan economy. This study suggests the opposite. Farm workers appear to be increasingly absorbed into manufacturing, suggesting that the metropolitan industries have been creating more unskilled jobs and taking advantage of the dominant characteristic of the labor force.

The cost of dependent industrial capitalism's pattern of labor migration has been theoretically conceptualized by the Santa Cruz Collective on Labor Migration (1978). The accumulation of capital creates qualitatively "deskilled" jobs, a process which they call "massification":

"The importance of this process for labor migration lies in the separation of two productive forces which were at one time combined in laborpower by the direct producers — namely *production knowledge* and the *physical capacity* to manipulate objects and symbols."

Massification leads to a dual structure in capitalist societies. Production *knowledge* is concentrated in an elite working class and production *capacity* is carried out by an unskilled proletariat which minimally comprehends its function as a cog in the industrial or agroindustrial process. Massification of production permits capitalism to exploit huge, previously untapped labor reserves. The masses of unemployed, floating labor reserves moving between Mexico's urban areas or in seasonal labor migrations in the countryside need minimal instruction to participate in the productive efforts of massified production. Vast latent reserves of labor in the countryside may be tapped, as necessary. Development strategies favoring labor massification aim to increase workers' abilities to manipulate symbols rather than understand the productive processes. Naturally, lowest priority is given to increasing the productive knowledge of the labor remaining in marginal rural areas. This strategy is apparent in Mexico's current technical and capital investment plans favoring irrigated agroindustry in the North, which relies on the physical

to meet the harvest needs, then leaves the state for its homeland in South Texas or Mexico. Taxes withheld from migrant's paychecks are windfall profits to the state. In years when labor is needed, the recruitment value may be tightened down, allowing only a trickle. Moreover, Michigan is not obligated to pay the social costs of the labor it receives. The migrants are raised, educated (minimally), and retire elsewhere. If they should become state dependents, Texas or Mexico pays the bill. To continue the analogy between labor and capital, Michigan receives discounted labor (cheaper than it can obtain at home) while Texas and Mexico pay the inventory, storage, or maintenance costs. Finally, Haney's study helps explain the external factors creating the dismal situation described by Linda Whiteford: Seco County, Texas, is to Michigan as Oaxaca is to Mexico City.

It should be stressed that the organized recruitment of labor is not limited to U.S. agriculture. Botey-Estape *et al* (1977) estimate that over a half million Mexicans form a seasonal migrant force picking coffee, tobacco, cotton, tomatoes and sugar. For example, for almost eighty years seasonal labor has moved back and forth from the Highlands to the Pacific coast of Chiapas and from the Sierra Juarez of Oaxaca to Veracruz to pick coffee. We need more historical studies on the seasonal labor migrant streams, such as that provided by Haney, to discover if the same evolution scheme of labor recruiting mechanisms exist within Mexico's borders.

The development of dependent industrial capitalism described here has not been without costs. Other papers in this symposium permit a closer inspection of the negative consequences of this particular development and migration pattern.

Wiest and Shadow both offer glimpses of the community effects of labor migration based on the development strategy of dependent industrial capitalism. They note that labor migration provides superficial benefits to Acuitzio del Canje in Michoacan and Villa Guerrero in Jalisco, respectively. As opposed to non-migrants, migrants use wages earned outside the village to build houses, purchase lands, increase consumption of nationally marketed commodities, and support their families living in the villages. Few would question their observations that the standard of living of migrants exceeds that of non-migrants.

But Wiest wisely realizes that these are superficial indicators of the effects of wage migration. Turning his attention to the problems exacerbated by this seasonal and permanent exodus of villagers, he cautions that the benefits from migration actually accrue to only a small group in the village, encouraging the emergence of a rural bourgeoisie. The rural bourgeoisie purchase lands which are cultivated by share-croppers, many of whom are non-migrant villagers. Land values increase, alienating more peasants from their primary means of production. Labor becomes scarce, not because of the lack of population, but because of the lack of people willing to work at low village wages compared to what they can earn as migrants.

The result is a series of contradictions. Labor is scarce, yet available. Land values increase, but production and productivity decline, with land use patterns suggesting an increase in extensive, less labor intensive cultivation. Those who own the means of production are not the peasants living in the villages, but rather absentee landlords, born in the village but working elsewhere. The landless poor lose their subsistence base and access to means of production. And the landed, migrant rural bourgeoisie are able to subsist only if they continue to migrate, i.e., the dependency of both the landed rural bourgeoisie and the landless proletariat increases.

Unfortunately, Wiest's dedication to class analysis fails to override his anthropological commitment to the countryside. He concludes that the benefits of the migration pattern are received by the "industrial centers at the expense of outlying

return migration, another demographic topic receiving increased attention from current migration theorists. Noting that few Tehuacan migrants remained in the United States, the authors suggest that if migrants perceive that they have an economic future (opportunity?) in the home area, they are much more likely to return. This hypothesis turns the idea of intervening opportunities on its head. The hypothesis has urgent implications for those studying the migration of undocumented Mexicans to the United States. President Carter's proposed amnesty program for "solving the illegal alien problems", discussed in Bustamante's paper, assumes that many of the migrants currently in the United States do not wish to return. It seems more probable that whether undocumented workers will or will not return depends on their opportunities to reinvest their earnings back in their areas of origin or wherever, for that matter, they would really like to be. The answer to the ultimate disposition of undocumented workers in the United States, therefore, depends on a clear understanding of the class conflicts and history of the areas of origin, not just their areas of destination. Such research is urgent, relevant, and lacking. It is precisely at this point that Bustamante's comments on the policy implications of migration to the United States are so important.

Nonetheless, the economy-specific theoretical approach to migration also has its shortcomings. Its validity depends, in part, on comparative research. Wiest, Whiteford and Henao, Muñoz, Oliveira, and Stern, and Haney, have presented hypotheses which demand further testing: in other villages, in the case of Wiest; in other regions, in the case of Whiteford and Henao; in other cities, as is the case of Muñoz, Oliveira, and Stern; and in other nations, as is the case of Haney. The methodological principles underlying this type of research need to be clarified. As long as the differences between cases can be attributed to historical and locational idiosyncrasies, the perspective has a potential flaw. Perhaps the more rigorous methods being developed by economic historians, under the name of cliometrics, might be useful in resolving this potential problem (Fogel and Engerman 1974). Finally, considerably more attention must be paid to the definition of types of economies which might be expected to have similar migration effects. This review must specifically consider linkages between labor and capital under different development strategies and would form the basis for subsequent comparative studies.

To summarize, those espousing the economy-specific theoretical approach to migration study its patterns within the context of political economic conflicts and contradictions. Migration is a symptom, not a cause in this formulation. Other symptoms are urban growth, wealth and income distributions, unemployment, and so forth. Migration is epiphenomenal, ~~as a result of the more complex magma of socio-economic change~~, a surface feature of the more complex magma of socio-economic change. It is the magma itself, not the surface convulsions indicating its movement, which they desire to understand. Technicians and more demographically oriented migration theorists will undoubtedly consider this perspective disappointing, if not dangerous, for it seems to deny the existence of an abstract migration theory, divorced from economic and political history. But before the counter-attack begins, the interesting migration hypotheses generated by this group should be considered, as I have tried to point out in this summary. Rather than being the death of migration studies, it could be that a new focus on economy-specific migration studies means that the field is finally coming of age.

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RESUMEN

En este artículo el autor ofrece unos comentarios respecto a las demás contribuciones al simposio sobre migración. Hace hincapié en la importancia del enfoque económico para estudios de la migración. Se dice que la migración debe entenderse no como el fenómeno central sino como un epifenómeno lo cual es resultado — no causante — de situaciones específicas dentro del continuo de espacio y tiempo. Desde este punto de vista, Downing argumenta que se necesita más investigaciones semejantes a las de Whiteford y Henao, Wiest, Haney, y Muñoz, Oliveira y Stern, las cuales dan énfasis al contexto histórico-estructural de la migración a todos niveles — local, regional, nacional y internacional.

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