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“Migration and Social Transformation”

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Introduction

The establishment of the Migration Studies Unit at LSE is an occasion for celebration, because it will help focus the great analytical capacities of LSE on a key aspect of contemporary society. However, it is also an occasion for caution because the study of international migration is full of pitfalls.

The establishment of the Migration Studies Unit can be understood as part of a process of rapid growth of migration studies – which is happening not just in Britain but also throughout Europe and indeed the rest of the world. Compared with the situation twenty or even ten years ago, migration studies has come of age. There are degree courses, specialised journals, conferences and a European network of excellence. Hundreds of doctoral candidates are working on international migration, and many of them see their future in one of the ever more numerous special research units, centres or institutes.

But we must ask: why this is happening? Is it because social scientists and university heads have recognised that mobility of people is one of the key dynamics of global change and that migration studies must have a central place in social analysis? Or is it because migration regulation, immigrant integration and the migration-development nexus have become highly politicised issues, leading to a demand for policy-relevant data, research and analysis? I would like to think the former, but I fear it is much more the latter.

Thus one of my main themes today is *the ambivalence* of the proliferation of migration research. The rapid growth is potentially beneficial, but it could also have negative consequences for migration researchers, and indeed for social science more widely. International migration research can and should be *socially-relevant* – that is it should address the concerns of migrants, communities affected by migration in both sending and receiving countries, civil society and government. That means that it is – in official parlance – also *policy-relevant*. But if it becomes *policy-driven* – that is when research questions, methods and even findings are shaped by needs of policy-makers – it is likely not only to be bad social science, but also a bad guide to policy.

To avoid this, it is vital to ensure that migration researchers should not spend all their time looking at short-term narrow research questions, and that migration research should not be carried out in isolation. On the contrary, migration studies needs to be embedded into fundamental research on the major processes of *social transformation* taking place in the context of increased global integration of economics, politics and social relations. Migration studies must reject the role of being an administrative tool for policy-makers and instead assert its place in the mainstream of contemporary social science. *The importance of embedding migration research into analysis of social transformation* is my second main theme.

In this paper I will:

- Give some examples of unsuccessful migration policies in the past and link these to the migration research of the time; Discuss the politicisation of migration and its consequences for research;

- Draw attention to some of the emerging ‘conventional wisdoms’ about migration today;
- Discuss some important trends in migration theory, that are bridging old divides and providing new ways of thinking about the relationship between structure and agency in migratory processes;
- Argue that social transformation could be a central analytical concept for migration studies, and could provide a link to mainstream social science discourses; Examine the consequences of a social transformation approach for the theory, methods and organisation of migration studies; Revisit some of the ‘conventional wisdoms’ outlined earlier.

Migration policy failure and migration studies

In the past, migration policies have often failed to reach their objectives (Castles 2004). US policies for preventing irregular migration from Mexico are a well-known case. The Immigration and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 was designed to legalise existing migrant workers and prevent future irregular entries. In fact, such entries grew rapidly after 1986, leading in 1994 to the Clinton Administration’s ‘Operation Gatekeeper’, designed to stop irregular immigration by building fences along the US-Mexico border. The consequences were that the death rate on the border soared, while migrant smugglers were able to increase their fees sharply, and temporary migrants decided to stay on permanently (Cornelius 2001). The irregular population continued to increase, reaching an estimated 12 million by 2006 (Passel 2006). President Bush then supported legislation for a legal guestworker system and ‘earned legalisation’ of existing workers. These measures were blocked by Congress, which decided instead to spend billions on extending the border fences and upgrading surveillance equipment.

Here are a few more examples:

- Australia’s postwar immigration programme, which was designed to keep the country white and British, and yet led to one of the world’s most diverse societies.
- Germany’s ‘guestworker’ recruitment from 1955-73, which aimed to provide temporary labour, but in the long run led to family reunion, permanent settlement and the emergence of new ethnic minorities.
- Recent European immigration restriction policies, which have created a profitable international business for people smugglers.
- Temporary labour migration policies in Asian countries like Japan, Korea and Malaysia. These policies were designed to keep labour cheap and flexible and to prevent settlement. But trends to longer stay and family reunion soon became evident. Governments are now being forced to look at issues of social integration, education and welfare – in the same way as European governments in the 1980s.

Why have so many official policies been based on a fundamental misunderstanding of migratory processes? It would be nice to claim that the politicians and officials have ignored the advice of migration scholars, but unfortunately this has often not been the case. Rather there have always been influential social scientists willing to carry out research that tended to reinforce the basic assumptions upon which official migration

objectives have been premised. Dissident voices have been isolated enough to be ignored.

The reason for this must be sought in the historical development of social sciences in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Castles 2007). In emerging industrial societies, sociology and other social sciences were concerned with the control and integration of potentially deviant groups (notably the working classes and colonised peoples) and with the maintenance of social order (Connell 1997). Economic, social and political relations were constituted within the borders of the national industrial society (Wieviorka 1994). The construction of national identity was a crucial part of the nationalist project, and this meant forgetting the history of conquest, incorporation and migration upon which European nation-states were based (Renan 1992). In this model of 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003) border crossing was seen as exceptional and destabilising.

Social scientists therefore generally understood migration as peripheral to their central analytical concerns, and were willing to accept conventional national assumptions on appropriate models for dealing with migrants. These varied from country to country. Central European nation-states based on ethnic models of belonging sought to exclude migrants permanently from the national community – hence the guestworker models in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, etc. Former colonial powers (like Britain, France and the Netherlands) aimed to assimilate immigrants through political membership and cultural adaptation. White settler colonies, which built their populations through immigration, also aimed to assimilate newcomers (as long as they were white). Some of these models were modified into pluralist or multicultural approaches from the 1970s, in response to the emergence of ethno-cultural diversity.

The point here is that mainstream social science was always behind the game. The migration theorists of the 1960s and 1970s largely failed to predict the settlement of former guestworkers, the emergence of multi-ethnic communities, and the continued role of minority languages, religions and customs in industrial societies. Max Weber's assumption of the decline of affective relationships and the rise of 'rationality' in modern industrial societies was shared by generations of social scientists, including Marxists, and seems to have blinded them to what was actually happening.

The failure of earlier migration models had little influence on official thinking – perhaps because of the ideology that each nation-state has a unique experience with regard to migration and diversity. US attempts at border control since the 1980s have been based on a new version of rationality: namely the methodological individualism of neo-classical theory, which interprets migrant motivations in terms of cost-benefit calculations and individual income maximisation. Alternative explanations that emphasise long-term collective interests are available in the form of the new economics of labour migration and segmented labour market theory, but have been largely ignored because they do not fit in with dominant ideologies. Hence the continuation of policy failure in attempts to regulate Mexican migration to the USA. The story is similar with regard to European border control and Asian attempts to import labour without permanent settlement.

The politicisation of migration research and its significance for migration studies

Crossing a national border may seem a simple enough act for an individual – a matter of course in a globalising world. But it is actually part of one of the great dramas of our time: the contradiction between the national principle upon which the sovereignty of states is founded, and the transnational principle of global mobility. In the form of flows of capital and commodities, transnationalism is crucial to the ‘new economy’, but it inevitably spills over into flows of people and cultures.

Globalisation is often portrayed primarily as an economic process, to describe activities that used to be centred on national economies but have now spilled beyond their boundaries:

‘In its most general sense ‘globalisation’ refers to the upsurge in direct investment and the liberalization and deregulation in cross-border flows of capital, technology and services, as well as the creation of a global production system – a new global economy’ (Petras and Veltmayer 2000, 2).

The key actors in this new economic world are the multinational corporations (MNCs) – large companies that operate in many countries – and the global financial and commodity markets. Globalisation is ‘driven by the logic of corporate profitability’ (Bello and Malig 2004, 85). Through electronic trading, the markets operate continuously across borders, and are seen as beyond the control of any state. Strong proponents of globalisation regard the nation-state as obsolete – to be replaced by the power of markets and consumer choice (Ohmae 1995). This view is linked to the neo-liberal principles of a ‘small state’, privatisation of utilities and services, economic deregulation and the opening of markets (especially those of developing countries) to global competition. Such celebratory ideas make it clear that globalisation is not just about economics: it is also a political process, conceived in normative or ideological terms.

This is particularly clear in looking at the diverging approach to globalisation when the flows are of people. States control of cross-border movements of people appears as a vestige of sovereignty at a time when liberalised markets erode the power of states to regulate corporations, manage labour markets and maintain welfare states. Employers, by contrast, want to draw freely on a global labour force. The ‘states versus markets’ dilemma is escapable. Where the policy-makers get it wrong, the result is irregular migration: 3-7 million in Europe, over a million in Malaysia and so on. Irregularity suits some employers well, but means exploitation of workers, undermining of labour standards for competing local workers, and erosion of the rule of law. States, however, are more concerned about supposed security threats through uncontrolled migration, economic inefficiency through survival of marginal firms, and the popular backlash against immigration.

The attempt to reassert state sovereignty is most obvious in the walls that have been built along frontiers, such as that between the USA and Mexico, or, in the European case, around the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta in Morocco. These walls are visible, physical barriers between the North and South, which are defended by military force. However, for Europe, the principle barrier is the sea between North Africa on the one hand and Spain, Italy and Malta on the other. Increased surveillance and control has led to a growth of people smuggling and an escalation of the death rate – just as it has on the US-Mexico border. However, physical barriers are not the

most important forms of mobility control for modern states – far more important are the invisible walls of visa regulations, carrier sanctions (which turn airline check-in clerks into surrogate immigration officers), biometrics, ‘safe-third country’ rules and a whole panoply of surveillance strategies designed to eliminate the ‘enemy within’ (Bigo and Guild 2005). Such measures are used to exclude unwanted migrants (particularly asylum seekers and lower-skilled workers), or to stigmatise them so that they are forced to accept the most exploitative forms of irregular employment.

Anyway, today’s walls are not designed to keep everybody out. For instance, although the USA systematically uses undocumented workers to meet low-skilled labour needs, there are small legal programmes for labour for some jobs. Similarly, most European countries have set up temporary or seasonal labour migration programmes to meet labour demand for low-skilled workers in agriculture, construction, and some sectors of manufacturing and the services (Castles 2006a; b). These ‘new guestworker’ schemes (like their predecessors in the 1960s) are based on limitation of workers’ right to change jobs, to stay permanently and to bring in families. The situation is very different for highly-skilled personnel, such as IT professional, medical staff or engineers. Developed countries compete with each other to attract the highly skilled by offering them privileged entry and residence rules, and rights to family and reunion and permanent stay. There is virtual free movement for those with the right attributes and human capital. Developed countries seek to compensate for deficits in their own education and training systems by stripping the human assets of poorer countries. Thus, there is no single set of migration rules: *differentiation* has become a key concept in migration policy.

International migration has become highly politicised – an issue of daily debate in the media and parliaments. With the growth of international migration and its increased political saliency has come an enormous expansion of migration policy-making capacity. Governments have set up special policy units and agencies, inter-ministerial taskforces and even special ministries. International cooperation in the EU and other regional bodies has grown exponentially. Migration is becoming a key theme in debates on global governance. Since 2003 there has been a Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) (GCIM 2005), a High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development (HLD) at the United Nations (September 2006) and a Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). The latter was hosted for the first time by the Belgian Government in July 2007, and the second Forum will be held in Manila in 2008.

The politicisation of migration has *ambivalent consequences* for migration research. The governmental and inter-governmental activities generate a great need for data-collection, analysis and research. Government inquiries – for instance in the UK into migration and development (IDC 2004), or into the causes of the 2001 riots (Cantle 2001), in Germany the Süßmuth Immigration Commission of 2001 (Süßmuth 2001) – provide a great deal of work for academics. The GCIM commissioned large amounts of research and so did the GFMD. Clearly this is a good thing for all of us who study migration: it gives a new significance and prominence to our work, it means that we are being listened to (even if our conclusions are often distorted or ignored). It raises our prestige in increasingly privatised and competitive higher education institutions. We are ‘policy-relevant’, ‘engaged with users’, and even ‘working in the national interest’.

However – and here is the ambivalence – this sudden political interest can also be a bad thing. There is a danger that ‘policy-relevant’ will turn into ‘policy-driven’ research. That is, we will become dependent on funding for research commissioned to address short-term policy concerns of governments and international agencies. Anyone who has run a university research unit knows the dilemma: you start off with a critical analytical agenda, and hope to fund salaries and activities with the spin-off from commissioned research. People’s jobs become dependent on the continued flow of funding, and that in turn is dependent on delivering the goods – the reports and briefings that government can use. Why is this problematic? Here are four reasons:

1. Policy-makers often have a very short time horizon based on the electoral cycle, while migration issues often need long-term study, and solutions may require a commitment to change over many years.
2. Typically governments lack institutional memory, and often seek to re-invent and apply old solutions, that have failed in the past. Academics who point this out can find themselves unpopular. (For instance around 2001, the UK Home Office had decided on a policy of dispersal of asylum seekers. Social scientists who drew attention to past failures of this approach went unheard).
3. Politicians and officials have often already decided on policies and are seeking confirmation of their goals and help in implementing them – they want administrative tools rather than critical analysis.
4. Dependence on policy-driven research can become an exhausting treadmill, which does not leave researchers the time to link their work with broader social trends and theory, and tends to isolate them from mainstream social scientific inquiry – leading in the long run to narrowness and dequalification.

This last factor is crucial – and has to be understood dialectically. Migration scholars have often found themselves marginalised within the social sciences because migration is not seen as important areas of investigation. This is exacerbated by the fact that migration is intrinsically a cross-disciplinary field of studies, which has at least until recently gained little acceptance in disciplinary departments. As a result migration research often takes place outside core social science research contexts, usually in dedicated research centres heavily dependent of on external funding. This in turn forces migration researchers to take on policy-driven consultancy work – which in turn confirms the prejudice against interdisciplinary study on the part of mainstream social scientists. If anything, this problem has got worse in the UK, because the Research Assessment Exercise has put such a premium on publication in disciplinary journals that young academics fear the consequences of publishing in migration journals.

Conventional wisdoms about contemporary migration

Have policy-makers learned from past policy failures? A survey of some of the current central assumptions in the migration field gives little room for optimism. Key beliefs enunciated by important politicians and officials include the following:

1. South-North migration is a problem to be fixed – something negative that can be prevented in the long run by addressing ‘root causes’.

2. Migration can drive the development of poorer countries, because money remittances provide a source of investment, social remittances involve transfer of the right attitudes and know-how, and diasporas can be encouraged to work actively for the development of their homelands.
3. Circular migration policies can be made to work, despite the failure of similar 'guestworker' policies in the past, and will provide a win-win-win situation for receiving countries, migrants and origin countries.
4. Multiculturalism is detrimental to integration. It is being replaced by 'integration contracts' and citizenship tests – ways of forcing migrants to abandon their cultures and religions and assimilating.

I believe that all these ideas are either mistaken or problematic, because they largely ignore the forces that are currently driving international migration. I will come back to these conventional wisdoms later.

Innovations in migration theory

Until recently migration studies was marked by 'dual divides':

1. An almost complete separation between those who examined *why and how migration took place*, and those who studied the place of migrants in receiving societies and *processes of incorporation* into societies. The former area was closely linked to development studies, and mainly involved economists, political economists and geographers. The latter involved sociologists, anthropologists, cultural studies, political scientists, educationalists and legal scholars.
2. Within each area, deep theoretical divides based on disciplines, paradigms and political positions.

These are complex issues that cannot be dealt with properly here (on migration theory see Brettell and Hollifield 2007; Castles 2007; Favell 1998; Massey et al. 1998; Portes and DeWind 2004). But, very briefly, here are some of the key positions. With regard to theories of how and why migration took place, the main controversy from the 1960s to the 1990s was between neo-classical economic theory and historical – institutional theory. Neo-classical theory emphasises the individual decision to migrate, based on rational comparison of the relative costs and benefits of remaining at home or moving. Neo-classical theory assumes that potential migrants have excellent knowledge of wage levels and employment opportunities in destination regions, and that their migration decisions are overwhelmingly based on these economic factors. Constraining factors, such as government restrictions, are mainly dealt with as distortions of the rational market. According to the neo-classical model, the mere existence of economic disparities between various areas should be sufficient to generate migrant flows. In the long run, such flows should help to equalize wages and conditions in underdeveloped and developed regions, leading towards economic equilibrium.

By contrast, the historical-institutional approach saw migration mainly as a way of mobilizing cheap labour for capital. It perpetuated the underdevelopment that was a legacy of European colonialism, exploiting the resources of poor countries to make the rich ones even richer. The intellectual roots of such analyses lay in Marxist

political economy - especially in dependency theory, which was influential in Latin America in the 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s a more comprehensive 'world systems theory' developed. It focused on the way less-developed 'peripheral' regions were incorporated into a world economy controlled by 'core' capitalist nations. The penetration of multi-national corporations into less-developed economies accelerated rural change, leading to poverty, displacement of workers, rapid urbanization and the growth of informal economies.

With regard to theories of incorporation into society, there were two main initial positions, with a third one emerging later on in response to changes. In the early stages of post-1945 migration to developed countries, one school of thought held that countries with relatively homogeneous national identities could not accommodate groups with differing cultures. This led to an *exclusionary model*, in which migrants should only be allowed in as temporary 'guestworkers' but not allowed to bring in families or settle permanently. This view was held especially in countries like Germany, Switzerland and Austria.

The opposing position was based on the notion of *assimilation*: countries of immigration could deal with difference by requiring immigrants to give up their distinctive languages, religions and customs and to assimilate as individuals into the national culture. In return, immigrant would be offered permanent stay and citizenship. This approach was based on the experience of settler societies like the USA, Australia or Canada, in which migration was a key element of nation-building. However, assimilation was also advocated in most European immigration countries up to the 1970s and in some cases beyond.

Both the exclusionary and the assimilationist model shared a belief in the *controllability of difference*: immigration was not expected to lead to long-term diversity or to have a substantial impact on the existing national culture. From the late 1960s onwards, this belief was eroded, as it became clear that immigrants were staying on, and were not becoming culturally assimilated – partly because discriminatory practices and racism were leading to residential segregation and labour market segmentation. Ethnic community formation and emerging cultures of resistance made it clear that immigration countries needed to face up to a new and enduring diversity. This led to the introduction of multicultural approaches first in Canada and Australia and then in several European countries. Clearly, methodological nationalism was still strong in such debates, and social scientists were often closely aligned with official policy positions and national myths – knowledge is rarely neutral in this area.

However, from the 1970s onwards, alternative theoretical models have emerged, which are making it possible to bridge the old divides, and to work towards a more comprehensive understanding of the migratory process.[†] For instance, *transitional theories* set out to overcome separation between migration theory and broader social science, by linking mobility to processes of development and economic integration. According to (Zelinsky 1971) at the beginning of a process of modernisation and industrialisation, there is frequently an increase in emigration, due to population

[†] Apart from the literature referred to earlier, the next few paragraphs are partly based on an as yet unpublished paper on migration theory by Hein De Haas, International Migration Institute, Oxford University. See also (Castles and Miller 2003, Chapter 2).

growth, a decline in rural employment and low wage levels. As industrialisation proceeds, labour supply declines and domestic wage levels rise; as a result emigration falls and labour immigration begins to take its place. This process parallels the 'fertility transition' through which populations grow fast as public health and hygiene improves, and then stabilise as fertility falls in industrial countries. A more recent concept used to describe this pattern is the 'migration hump': a chart of emigration shows a rising line as economic growth takes off, then a flattening curve, followed in the long run by a decline, as a mature industrial economy emerges (Martin and Taylor 2001). Another theory that links migration with broader social changes is to be found in the work of geographer Ronald Skeldon, who suggests a spatial typology of migratory situations (Skeldon 1997).

Transitional theories imply interdependence between sending and receiving regions with regard both to migration and to other economic and social factors. This should help to break down the dichotomy between theories of mobility and of incorporation. At the same time, theories of incorporation have changed, especially in the last ten years in response to political and media claims of supposed threats to national identity and security from migrants who refuse to get integrated and who carry on 'parallel lives'. Such claims have been targeted particularly at Muslim minorities. The result has been a revamping of assimilationist theories to fit contemporary northern societies. Neo-assimilationist approaches (Alba and Nee 1997; Entzinger 2003; Joppke and Morawaska 2003) have recently been joined by works on social cohesion and social capital, which claim that diversity endangers the solidarity on which democratic nation-states are founded (Vasta 2007). Such social scientific accounts have been linked to changes in national policies, such as the introduction of 'integration contracts' and citizenship tests in a range of states, including France, Germany, Britain, the Netherlands and Australia.

At the same time, this return to assimilation is contest by theories of globalisation and transnationalism, which argue that increased mobility and greater diversity are an enduring result of irreversible changes. All societies have to find ways of relating to these changes, and attempts to impose 'core national values' or to return to some mythical homogeneity are doomed to failure.

Without going further into these complex (and often heated) debates, it is important to see that advances in migration theory are making it possible to move towards more holistic understandings of the migratory process. The key ideas of some of new migration theories come from different disciplines, but they seem highly compatible with each other. Apart from the transitional theories already mentioned, the newer approaches include:

- The new economics of labour migration (NELM), which questions neo-classical theory's methodological individualism, by emphasising the role of families and communities in migration decisions. NELM uses methods such as qualitative interviews and household survey that are similar to those used by anthropologists and sociologists.
- Dual or segmented labour market theory, which analyses the differentiated labour demand of employers as a key factor in causing and structuring migration.

- Migration networks theory, which shows the collective agency of migrants and their communities in organising processes of migration and incorporation.
- Transnational theory: as a result of new transport and communications technologies it becomes increasingly easy for migrants to maintain long-term economic, social, cultural and political links across borders. Transnational communities (or diasporas) are becoming increasingly important as social actors.

Such approaches also correspond with tendencies in mainstream social theory to overcome the old structure/agency dichotomy, and to re-theorise the links between human action (individually and in groups) and broader processes of change in social structures. These innovations in migration theory could therefore help change the marginal position of migration studies within the social sciences – which, as I have argued, is both a result of the way it has been dominated by national assumptions and driven by policy considerations in the past, and a cause of this continued marginalisation.

The key to overcoming this marginalisation is to understand migration research as a central aspect of the study of global change. Since cross-border mobility is at the core of globalisation it should be an important part of the theorisation of contemporary societies.

Social transformation and migration

Contemporary trends to global economic and political integration lead to processes of social transformation in all types of society. The idea of *transformation* implies a fundamental change in the way society is organised that goes beyond the continual processes of social change that are always at work (compare Polanyi 1944). This arises when there are major shifts in dominant power relationships. The recent massive shifts in economic, political and military affairs represent such a fundamental change. Globalisation has uneven effects. Indeed it can be seen as a process of inclusion of particular regions and social groups in world capitalist market relations, and of exclusion of others (Castells 1996).

Penetration of southern economies by northern investments and multi-national corporations leads to economic restructuring, through which some groups of producers are included in the new economy, while other groups find their workplaces destroyed and their qualifications devalued. Thus economic globalisation means profound transformation of societies in all regions. Often social transformation starts in agriculture. The ‘green revolution’ of the 1980s involved the introduction of new strains of rice and other crops, which promised higher yields, but in return required big investments in fertilizers, insecticides and mechanisation. The result was higher productivity but also concentration of ownership in the hands of richer farmers. The poorer farmers lost their livelihoods and often had to leave the land. The process continues today with the introduction of genetically modified seed-stock. The pressure on farmers in poor regions is increased by farm subsidies in rich countries – especially US cotton subsidies and the EU Common Agricultural Policy (Oxfam 2002) – which depress world market prices.

The economic advances of emerging industrial powers such as China, India and Brazil are based on enormous growth in inequality between urban and rural incomes (Milanovic 2007, 35-9). Displaced farmers migrate into burgeoning cities like Sao Paulo, Shanghai, Calcutta or Jakarta. The cities of the South are growing at a rate of about 70 million a year. In 2005, around 1 billion people were estimated to be living in slum areas, like the shanty-towns of southern Africa or the *favelas* of Brazil; this number is expected to double by 2030 (New Internationalist 2006). Urban employment growth cannot keep pace, and there are few jobs for the millions of newcomers. Many scrape a living through irregular and insecure work in the informal sector. Standards of housing, health and education are very low, while crime, violence and human rights violations are rife. Such conditions are powerful motivations to seek better livelihoods elsewhere, either in growth areas within the region or in the North. However, international migration is selective: only those with the financial capital to cover the high costs of mobility and the social capital to link up with opportunities abroad can make the move.

The social transformations inherent in globalisation do not just affect economic well-being – they also lead to increased violence and lack of human security in less-developed countries. The great majority of those affected by violence are displaced within their own countries, or seek refuge in other – usually equally poor – countries in the region. But some try to obtain asylum in the richer states of the North, where they hope to find more security and freedom – as well as better livelihoods.

Social transformation drives emigration from poorer countries, but it is also a process that affects richer countries, shaping the conditions for immigration and incorporation. The increased export of capital to low-wage economies since the 1970s had a reciprocal effect in the global North: old ‘rustbelt industries’ declined, blue-collar workers lost their secure jobs, and often found their skills devalued. Factories were replaced by distribution depots, shopping malls and call centres, employing de-unionised and casualised labour. The neo-liberal turn in economic policy meant a decline in welfare states, trends towards privatisation and individualisation, and the erosion of community solidarity. At the same time, the decline in fertility, population ageing and changes in work locations and requirements created a strong demand for immigrants of all skill levels. Immigration and settlement thus took place in a situation of rapid change, uncertainty and insecurity for host populations. Immigrants became the visible symbol of globalisation – and were therefore often blamed for threatening and incomprehensible changes. This helps to explain the rise of extreme-right racist groups since the 1980s (Schierup et al. 2006).

Consequences of a social transformation approach for migration studies

The processes of social transformation that arise from globalisation are the crucial context for understanding 21st century migration. On the one hand, social transformation drives migration and changes its directions and forms. On the other hand, migration is an intrinsic part of social transformation and is itself a major force re-shaping communities and societies. This is the reality between the observation of the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) that international migration is driven by ‘development, demography and democracy’ (GCIM 2005, 12).

The flows and networks that constitute globalisation take on specific forms at different spatial levels: the regional, the national and the local. These should be understood as elements of complex and dynamic relationships, in which global forces have varying impacts according to differing structural and cultural factors and responses at the other levels (see Held et al. 1999, 14-16). Historical experiences, cultural values, religious beliefs, institutions and social structures all channel and shape the effects of external forces, leading to forms of change and resistance that bring about very different outcomes in specific communities or societies.

For most people, the pre-eminent level for experiencing migration and its effects is *the local*. This applies especially where social transformations make it necessary for people to leave their community and move elsewhere: for instance through changes in agricultural practices or land tenure, through reconfiguration of production by multinational corporations, or through a development project (such as a dam, airport or factory) which physically displaces people. The departure of young active people, gender imbalances, financial and social remittances all transform conditions in the local community. Similarly, the impact of immigration in host areas is felt in the way it affects economic restructuring and social relations in local communities.

Nor should the *national* dimension be neglected. Nation-states remain the location for policies on cross-border movements, citizenship, public order, social welfare, health services and education. Nation-states retain considerable political significance and have important symbolic and cultural functions. But it is no longer possible to abstract from cross-border factors in decision-making and planning. One result of this is the growing importance of *regional* cooperation through bodies like the EU, NAFTA or ECOWAS.

Understanding migration as an integral part of social transformation has important consequences for the theory, methodology and organisational forms of migration studies. These can only be listed briefly here – they require a lot more discussion than is possible in this paper.

Theory

- Migration theory must analyse movements of people in terms of their multi-layered links other forms of global connectivity. Macro-trends in economic, political and military affairs are crucial in reshaping the global space in which people movements take place. The closely related shifts in social and cultural patterns are also important in influencing the forms and volume of mobility.
- Migration studies should examine transnational or cross-border processes, and their social consequences. An important theme is trends to shifts in power mechanisms from hierarchical to network configurations, and the tensions between these.
- A key dimension of migration studies is understanding the way social transformation processes act at different spatial levels (local, regional, national and global). Analysing the mediation and transformation of global forces by local (or national) cultural and historical factors can overcome the division between top-down and bottom-up approaches.

- This implies that general theories of a highly abstract nature are unlikely to be helpful (Portes 1999). Rather migration theory needs to be historically and culturally sited, and to relate structure and action.

Methodology

- *Interdisciplinarity*. Migration researcher should work in interdisciplinary teams in larger projects, and make use of the research findings of other disciplines in smaller ones.
- *Quantitative research* (involving economists, political scientists, geographers and demographers) is important in providing comparative data to understand macro-social change.
- The *study of the history and cultures* of sending, transit and receiving societies (involving historians, anthropologists, sociologists and cultural studies scholars) is vital in understanding any specific migration situation.
- *Comparative studies* of experiences in different societies can increase awareness of general trends and alternative approaches.
- Migration researchers need to take a *holistic approach*, linking specific research to broader aspects of transformation and its embeddedness in social relations.
- It is essential to examine *transnational dimensions of social transformation* as a key factor in migration. However, social transformation is always an *interaction between global and local factors*. Thus multi-level analysis is essential.
- It is vital to investigate the *human agency* of the migrants and of sending and receiving communities, and the way this agency interacts with macro-social organisations and institutions. This requires:
 - participatory research to include the perspectives of the different actors, and
 - qualitative research to understand processes and their social meanings.

Organisation of research

- The network is becoming the key organising principle of global relationships. It should also be the basic principle for organising migration research. International networks of researchers could help overcome the nationalist and colonialist legacy of the social sciences.
- Researchers can apply their understanding of local social structures and cultural practices, while western values and methods cease to be the yardstick, instead becoming objects for study and critique.
- Research is not a neutral activity: researchers can make conscious choices about goals. Working with civil society organisations (such as community groups or migrant associations) could be a counterweight to the power of government and funding bodies.
- International cooperation has grown in recent years, but key concepts may have quite different meanings in different countries. Overcoming conceptual gaps is part of the research task.

Conventional wisdoms revisited

Earlier in this paper, I argued that some of the policy failures of the past could – in part at least – be linked to the absence of a strong social scientific critique of the assumptions behind official approaches. I went on to mention some of today's conventional wisdoms in migration studies. The innovations in migration studies described above should provide tools to allow contemporary migration scholars to provide an effective critique of misguided assumptions. Linking migration to social transformation can avoid narrow, short-term perspective. The following discussion of four current beliefs is designed to illustrate this point.

1. South-North migration is a problem to be fixed – something negative that can be prevented in the long run by addressing 'root causes'.

The view that migration from poor countries is intrinsically negative has its origins in colonial policies designed to keep people in their villages and prevent urbanisation. (Bakewell 2007). By contrast, people whose livelihoods and communities have been drastically changed by globalising forces often see mobility as a path to greater well-being and security. Theories of migration transitions indicate that development is likely to cause more migration – the opposite of what many policy makers seem to think. In the long run development may lead to a 'migration transition', but this is far from certain and depends on many factors (Nayar 1994). Indeed, the causality seems to be the other way round: rather than migration leading to development, it is political reform, institutional modernization, demographic shifts and social change that are needed to create the conditions for sustained economic growth. This may in turn make it less necessary for people to migrate in search of adequate livelihoods – but that does not mean that emigration will necessarily decline: where people have resources and choices they are likely to be quite mobile, as is shown by the high level of professional migration between developed countries.

2. Migration can drive the development of poorer countries, because money remittances provide a source of investment, social remittances involve transfer of the right attitudes and know-how, and diasporas can be encouraged to work actively for the development of their homelands.

After years of seeing South-North migrants as problematic for both sending and receiving countries, politicians and officials now emphasize the development potential of international migration. One reason for this change is the realisation that remittances are now the main source of external income for many countries, exceeding both foreign aid and foreign direct investment. This has led to what has been called 'the remittance mantra': the idea that remittances can be channelled into economic investments that will overcome underdevelopment (Kapur 2004). But, migrant remittances only lead to productive investment if other forms of social transformation are making such investments productive. At the same time, migration can hinder development by removing skilled personnel. Current ideas on replacing 'brain drain' with 'brain circulation' are based on the idea that skilled personnel from less-developed countries will enhance their skills through migration and then return home. But this rarely happens. Developed-country governments try to get low-skilled migrants to return home permanently, yet do everything to retain the highly skilled.

Thus the idea that migration can drive development may be re-interpreted as an ideology that developed in response to the failure of neo-liberal development recipes to reduce poverty. The 'remittance mantra' is rather similar to the 'trickle-down' theory of development propagated by the modernisation theories of the 1960s. It implies that migrant should pay for the development of their homelands, where international donors and national governments have failed.

3. Circular migration policies can be made to work, despite the failure of similar 'guestworker' policies in the past, and will provide a win-win-win situation for receiving countries, migrants and origin countries.

The ambivalence of migration and development policies is perhaps clearest with regard to the renewed enthusiasm for temporary migration – now under the more positive label of circular migration. The perceived 'win-win-win situation' has three components. The receiving countries gain by getting workers who are not allowed to settle, thus avoiding past experiences of unexpected diversity and community formation. However, this neglects the difficulties that democratic countries have in preventing settlement of migrant workers: rights to welfare, secure residence and family life have been enforced by courts in the past and are likely to be in the future. Secondly, the migrants themselves are said to gain through the opportunity to work in a developed economy. But this is not true if migrant workers are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, which seems to be inevitable if they are deprived of equal workplace rights. Thirdly, the countries of origin are said to benefit through return of skills and through technology transfer. But temporary migrant workers tend to be employed in jobs where they do not acquire skills.

4. Multiculturalism is detrimental to integration. It is being replaced by 'integration contracts' and citizenship tests – ways of forcing migrants to abandon their cultures and religions and assimilating.

Recent trends in many immigrant-receiving countries have been away from recognition of diversity, and towards a neo-assimilationism based on compulsory integration and insistence on 'core values'. An analysis of globalisation and social transformation shows the futility of such approaches. Increasing human mobility across borders is an integral aspect of global change. The forces that drive mobility have increased in salience over the last 20 years and seem likely to continue this trend. The fast-developing technologies and cultures of globalisation make solutions based on mono-culturalism and myths of homogeneity quite unrealistic for the future. Compulsory integration is likely to lead to social conflict and fragmentation. Forward-looking policies in this area should focus on ways of creating solidarity and sociality in increasingly diverse societies.

Conclusion

Migration studies finds itself at an important turning point today. The innovative theories that have emerged in recent years offer opportunities for overcoming some of the divisions that have hampered the development of migration studies and kept it isolated from mainstream social theory in the past. Yet there is little evidence that political decision-makers are paying much heed to such changes. They still cling to politically-useful but mistaken assumptions, and are able to choose the migration

research that fits in with their political and administrative needs. This will no doubt lead to future problems, but the time perspective of politics is often as short as the electoral cycle.

In this situation, it is up to migration researchers to make sure that our work is not driven by policy needs, and to ensure that our research approaches meet the highest scientific standards. Only in this way can migration studies secure recognition within the academic world, and achieve the independence necessary to provide critical knowledge to governments and civil society.

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