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“A re-appraisal of thinking on and the empirical evaluation of migration theories.”

Harokopio University, Department of Geography (May 29, 2018).
Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal

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Over the past 30 years, immigration has emerged as a major force throughout the world. In traditional immigrant-receiving societies such as Australia, Canada, and the United States, the volume of immigration has grown and its composition has shifted decisively away from Europe, the historically dominant source, toward Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In Europe, meanwhile, countries that for centuries had been sending out migrants were suddenly transformed into immigrant-receiving societies. After 1945, virtually all countries in Western Europe began to attract significant numbers of workers from abroad. Although the migrants were initially drawn mainly from southern Europe, by the late 1960s they mostly came from developing countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Middle East.

By the 1980s even countries in southern Europe—Italy, Spain, and Portugal—which only a decade before had been sending migrants to wealthier countries in the north, began to import workers from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. At the same time, Japan—with its low and still declining birth rate, its aging population, and its high standard of living—found itself turning increasingly to migrants from poorer countries in Asia and even South America to satisfy its labor needs.

Most of the world’s developed countries have become diverse, multiethnic societies, and those that have not reached this state are moving decisively in that direction. The emergence of international migration as a basic structural feature of nearly all industrialized countries testifies to the strength and coherence of the
Outline of broader project
(boldface denotes points discussed in this talk)

1. Problems with thinking & empirical testing of migration theories in population & quantitative migration studies
   1. General scope of theories
   2. Improving understandings of historicity & spatiality of initiation of flows
   3. Theoretical (& empirical) guidance on how (initiation) theories overlap
   4. Methodological problems related to ex post attribution of motivations
   5. Theoretical mechanisms & empirical tests of cumulative causation of decline

2. Links between these theories & other phenomena, frameworks
   1. Internal (labor) migration: different phenomena, same theories?
   2. Forced migration: different phenomena, different theories?
   3. Links between (continuation) theories & “transnationalism” framework
1.1. Scope of theories.
Realm of theories examined

- Drivers/root causes of why people migrate
  - Not too concerned with immigrant adaptation, or ~even transnationalism

- Midrange theories/frameworks
  - As opp. to deeper engagement w/social theory (Morawska 2009; O’Reilly 2012)

- “International, not internal migration.”
  - But some theories are (too?) similar

- “Labor” flows
  - ~All movement but “forced” migration (& some “human capital” flows?)

- Tests/applications I will refer to have been largely quantitative
Theories explaining the initiation of flows:

- Location

World-systems

- Historical-structural

Neoclassical
  (macro)

Segmented labor market

New economics of labor migration

- Neoclassical
  (micro)

Factors in sending areas

Factors in destinations
Theories explaining cumulative causation of flows (all migration-fueled): location & social complexity scale

*Cumulative causation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors in sending areas</th>
<th>Factors in destinations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*CC: Land use changes</td>
<td>*CC: Δ origin-destination wage gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ inequality,</td>
<td>*CC: Social labeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“displacement”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*CC: culture of migration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Institutional theory

Social capital theory

("CC: Network expansion")
Mechanisms of cumulative causation and their relations to other theories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Migration-fueled cumulative causation mechanism:</th>
<th>Theory that mechanism can also pertain to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spatial redistribution of workers → lowering wage gaps</td>
<td>Neoclassical Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Brain drain” (e.g., entrepreneurs) → increasing income gap</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income redistribution in sending area → rel. deprivation</td>
<td>New Economics of Labor Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of migration in sending areas (e.g., rite of passage)</td>
<td>~Institutional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land (re-)distribution, organization of farm production</td>
<td>Historical-structural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social labeling of jobs in destinations as “immigrant jobs”</td>
<td>Segmentated labor market theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network expansion due to migration</td>
<td>Social capital theory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.2. Improving understandings of historicity & spatiality of initiation of flows
A broader theoretical & empirical vision could contribute to a better systematic understanding of the migration “life cycle.” This requires analysis of flows at particular times (stages), as opposed to the coterminous drivers of migration.

Takeoff sometimes does not occur, or otherwise takes place asynchronously across places. As such, studying the coterminous drivers of migration are not necessarily those explaining the initiation of flows.

More broadly, need to improve knowledge of factors leading to “takeoff” of migration at local, micro-regional, national, and regional scales.

Coterminous drivers of migration help evaluate theories relative to each other on a more limited basis, as theories pertain to different stages. (However, they are useful in of course understanding contemporary flows, what drives them, & even if specific theories may explain flows currently).

**Figure 1.** Effect of linewatch hours, migratory prevalence, and deportations on the likelihood of taking a first trip from Mexico to the United States.

Coterminous drivers of migration help understand mechanisms relevant ~today.

Source: Abel et al. (2019).
Examining historicity of impacts (for set of specific flows, paired with selection of time periods for take-off/initiation, maturation, decline) further helps test for relevance of different theories.

Source: Abel et al. (2019).
Figure 1. Estimated five-year international migrant transition flows (in millions) for Asia from Abel (2018). Note: points plotted at mid five-year interval on the horizontal axis. Source: Abel et al. (2019).
Examination of (standardized) impact across variables, important to compare theories (but need to fully describe theoretical paths to test some theories).

**Figure 4.** Standardised parameter estimates from the full models. Source: Abel et al. (2019).
1.3. Need for theoretical & empirical guidance on how initiation theories overlap: (e.g., what drives wage gaps (that drive migration)?)
Theories explaining the initiation of flows:

- location.

  World-systems
  
  Historical-structural

  Neoclassical
  
  New economics of labor migration
  
  Segmented labor market

  New economics of labor migration (decision sphere)
  
  Neoclassical (decision sphere)

  Factors in sending areas
  Factors in destinations
Theories explaining the initiation of flows: ~location and ~scale.

- Broader social structures
- Markets
- Institutions
- Networks
- Families
- Individuals

Factors in sending areas  Factors in destinations

- World-systems
- Historical-structural
- Neoclassical
- New economics of labor migration
- Segmented labor market
- New economics of labor migration (decision sphere)
- Neoclassical (decision sphere)
Models controlling for all factors concurrently measure more direct “effects” of theory-specific mechanisms (as opposed to more indirect pathways via other variables in model).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDEPENDENT VARIABLE</th>
<th>FIRST MIGRATION</th>
<th>REPEAT MIGRATION</th>
<th>YEAR OF MIGRATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community infrastructure:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparatory school</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paved road</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community economic context:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% earning twice minimum wage</td>
<td>.028*</td>
<td>.058*</td>
<td>.408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% self-employed</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% females in manufacturing</td>
<td>.036*</td>
<td>.060*</td>
<td>.438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community agrarian context:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrarian population density</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of land that is arable</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ejido established</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.430</td>
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<tr>
<td>Macroeconomic context:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected wage ratio</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peso devaluation</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican inflation rate</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. employment growth</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth in foreign investment</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican real interest rate</td>
<td>.028*</td>
<td>.056*</td>
<td>.368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. policy context:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of visas</td>
<td>.048*</td>
<td>.022*</td>
<td>.472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probability of apprehension</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer sanctions enacted</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amnesty recipients in household</td>
<td>.040*</td>
<td>.350*</td>
<td>.416*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected value of U.S. services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>.055*</td>
<td>.020*</td>
<td>.753*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical care</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>.271*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other forms of interaction: latent factors vs. catalysts of timing & spatiality of initiation/takeoff of (Asia-US) flows.

- **Latent factors (in Philippines – US migration).**
  - Wage gaps (NE), inexistent markets (NELM).

- **Catalysts → timing (Philippines, [Korea, Vietnam]).**
  - Labor demand shifts in US as a result of Asian Exclusion (SLMT).
  - Labor recruitment schemes (IT?), US-fueled postcolonial conflict.

- **Other material, neo-colonial, economic, social, & cultural links consistent with HST-WST can be latent factors sometimes, catalysts others.**
  - Latent: communications & transportation infrastructure.
  - Catalysts: liberation of emigration controls (DR, Cuba).
In sum, two specific points that I hope are helpful to continue testing for the effectiveness of theories and what drives migration (in and beyond Asia).

- (Some) theoretical tests require data to be arranged by migration stage, not period, examine initiation separately from other stages.

- Theories overlap in part due to their different scales of action. As such, theory-driven modeling should recognize this possibility.
Thank you.

Harokopio University, Department of Geography (May 29, 2018).