

## Immigration and Migration: Cultural Concerns

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the study of human migration. During the last decades of the twentieth century, most major nation-states have seen the topic of immigration emerge as a significant issue with important public opinion, policy, and research implications. Indeed, with well over 100 million international migrants worldwide, plus an estimated 30 million refugees, immigration has become a topic of global concern (Suárez-Orozco 1996).

Migration, in Latin, *migrare*, meaning to 'change residence,' has been a defining feature in the making of humanity from our very emergence as a species in the African savanna. Social scientists have traditionally defined migration as the more or less permanent movement of people across space (Petersen 1968). In the language of the social sciences people 'emigrate' out of one location and become 'immigrants' in a new setting.

### *1. Immigration and Time*

The definition of migration as the more or less permanent movement of people across space suggests a number of important cultural concerns. First is the matter of the relative permanence of immigrants in a new setting. For many, perhaps most, immigration represents a permanent move, for others it is a temporary state before eventually returning 'home.' A central feature of the great transatlantic immigration that took place between Europe and North and South America from the 1890s until the 1910s was the high proportion of people who returned to Europe. By

some accounts, well over a third of all the Europeans who came to the Americas went back 'home' (Moya 1998).

'Sojourners' represent yet another pattern where temporality defines immigration. They are the large numbers of immigrants who move for well-defined periods of time, often following a seasonal cycle to eventually return home. Large numbers of Mexican agricultural workers in California have historically followed the sojourner pattern (Cornelius 1992).

A third type is the constant shuttling back-and-forth that seems to define the lives of many new immigrants. In recent years, some scholars of immigration have argued that new transnational and global forces structure the journeys of immigrants in more complex ways than was previously seen (Basch et al. 1995). This research suggests that many immigrants are players (economically, politically, and culturally) both in their newly adopted lands *and* in their communities of origin—moving 'back and forth' in ways seldom seen in previous eras of large-scale immigration (Suárez-Orozco 1998).

### *1.1 Immigration and Space*

The idea of immigration as movement across space also requires some elaboration. Immigration, at a minimum, involves a change in residency and a change in community. Over the years, scholars have concentrated on two major types of large-scale migration: 'internal migration' (within the confines of a nation-state) and 'international migration' (across international borders). While many scholars would argue that the large-scale movement of people *within* a nation-state is a phenomenon of a different order than the large-scale movement of people *across* international borders, the differences between these two broad types of migration are often quite blurred.

Internal migrants might share many characteristics with international migrants: many move from rural villages to urban centers, many experience linguistic and cultural discontinuities, and many face the same bureaucratic and legal restrictions international migrants do.

While much attention has been focused on international migration, most immigrants today are internal migrants staying within the confines of their nation-states—China, Egypt, and Brazil are countries that have experienced high levels of internal migration. Indeed, *contra* the impression that most international migrants head to the developed world (i.e., Europe and North America), most immigration today is an intracontinental (i.e., within Asia, within Africa, etc.) phenomenon.

### *2. The Causes of Immigration*

Why do people migrate? Scholars of immigration have generally theorized patterns of migration flows in

terms of economic forces, social factors, and cultural practices. Social scientists who study the economic causes of immigration have long ago examined 'push' factors including unemployment, underemployment, and wage differentials (Dussel 1998). Changing cultural models about social standards and economic expectations have also been implicated in why people migrate (Moya 1998). 'Pull' factors include demand for foreign workers in various sectors of a host country's economy. In many settings, transnational labor recruiting networks deliver low-skilled foreign workers into jobs that native workers have come to culturally construct as unappealing. In Japan, for example, immigrant workers are sometimes called '3k workers' for the Japanese words for 'dirty, demanding, and dangerous' jobs (Tsuda 1996).

In other cases, immigrants become a vital part of the well-remunerated knowledge intensive sector of the economy. Nearly 40 percent of all engineers in the Silicon Valley of Northern California are immigrants. Indeed, in recent years, countries of immigration have witnessed an unprecedented pattern of economic mobility among new arrivals (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001).

Immigrants today tend to be highly heterogeneous—in terms of sociocultural and religious background, race and ethnicity, and educational background and skill. They defy easy categorizations. In the United States, for example, immigrants are at once among the most educated and skilled *and* least educated and skilled workers. Immigrants tend to be over-represented in the category of people with doctorates or, indeed, winners of the Nobel Prize—just as they are over-represented in the category of people without a high school diploma. Worldwide immigrants now tend to be much more 'bimodal' in their socioeconomic profile than ever before.

### *2.1 Transnational Networks*

Scholars of immigration have long maintained that cultural and social practices can generate—and sustain—substantial migratory flows. People migrate because others—relatives, friends, and friends of friends—migrated before them. Indeed, the best predictor of who will migrate is who migrated before. Transnational family reunification continues to be a critical vector in immigration today. In the year 1996, 915,900 immigrants were formally admitted in the US. Among them, 594,604 were family-sponsored immigrants (Suárez-Orozco 1999). Since the early 1970s family reunification is one of the few formal ways to migrate into Europe (Suárez-Orozco 1994). A number of studies have examined how transnational migratory social chains can generate a powerful momentum of their own. Roger Waldinger (1997) has explored the sociocultural dynamics of transnational immigrant labor recruiting networks.

Immigrants find their kin and kith jobs. Waldinger's research in immigrant-rich Southern California suggests that immigrant social networks provide employers with a nearly unlimited supply of workers with little or no outlay. Transnational social networks provide connections to people able to fill jobs, at times even before the jobs are vacant. The social networks function optimally when they efficiently and economically generate quality information—about jobs, about applicants, about bosses.

### 2.2 *Immigration and War*

We have a reasonable understanding of how 'love' (family reunification) and 'work' drive immigration. On the other hand, the role of war and its relations to large-scale migratory flows has been generally neglected. Yet throughout history war and migration have been closely linked. The threat of labor shortages during World War II led to the creation of temporary labor recruiting efforts to attract much needed immigrant workers to the United States (Calavita 1992). The resultant 'bracero' program became a powerful force in building—alas, via family reunification—a Mexican migration momentum that eventually turned into the largest and most powerful immigration flow into the United States this century (Suárez-Orozco 1998).

In the aftermath of World War II, many of the major Northwestern European democracies such as Germany and Belgium developed 'guest worker programs' to recruit foreign workers—initially in southern Europe, and subsequently in the Maghreb region of North Africa and in Turkey (Suárez-Orozco 1994). These programs came to an end in the early 1970s. Yet family reunification and chain migration continued to bring immigrants from North Africa into Europe for years.

The Cold War both deterred immigration—because of strict Iron Curtain controls—and generated large population displacements. The robust Cuban diaspora in the United States can be traced more or less directly to the Cold War (Molyneux 1999). The low-intensity warfare in Central America during the 1980s generated a new wave of large-scale immigration. As a result, there are now well over a million Central American immigrants in the United States (Suárez-Orozco 1989). In the 1990s, the ongoing conflicts in Zimbabwe and Angola have generated large-scale migratory flows especially into South Africa.

Natural disasters have also displaced populations and started new migratory flows. The 1999 hurricanes, which devastated much of Central America, initiated significant flows of emigrants into North America.

### 3. *Immigration and the State*

Whether social scientists examine the case of internal or international migrants, there is a consensus that the

apparatus of the nation-state is decidedly implicated in migratory processes: by both what the state does and by what it cannot do. States are, *inter alia*, in the business of regulating the movement of people—both internally and internationally. The right to leave a country, that is the right to emigrate, is a relatively recent phenomenon (Moya 1998).

Nation-states regulate, and carefully police, the inflow of international immigrants across borders. Large-scale international immigration is in significant ways the product of nation building—Argentina, Australia, and Israel come to mind as archetypal examples. Likewise, the reconfigurations of national boundaries have historically and contemporaneously generated large-scale migratory flows. The partition of British India into Pakistan and India was accompanied by one of the 'largest migrations in human history' (Petersen 1968, p. 290). More recently, the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia led to massive, mostly involuntary migratory movements.

In the area of international migration, nation-states generate policies designed to establish who is a 'legal' or 'illegal' immigrant, who is an 'asylum seeker,' a 'refugee,' and a 'temporary guest worker.' States regulate how many immigrants are legally admitted every year. In the US, for example, since 1990, an average of about a million legal immigrants have been admitted annually. On the other hand, legal immigration into Northwestern Europe was greatly curbed following the oil crisis of the early 1970s (Cornelius et al. 1994).

#### 3.1 *Asylum Seekers*

States also regulate the flows of asylum seekers—those escaping a country due to a well-founded fear of persecution. Agents of the states decide who is formally admitted as a refugee. In the post-Cold War era, there has been an explosive growth in the numbers of asylum seekers worldwide. For example, some 369,000 foreigners requested asylum in Europe during the year 1998. Only a small portion of those seeking asylum are eventually granted formal refugee status.

In recent years, many postindustrial democracies—including the United States and throughout Northwestern Europe—have developed new strategies to deal with increasing numbers of asylum seekers (Suárez-Orozco 1994). For example, the 13,000 Kosovars that arrived in Germany in mid-1999 were given a three-month renewable 'Temporary Protective Status' on the condition that they not apply for refugee status—in effect, forfeiting all the rights and entitlements that come with formal refugee status. Similar arrangements were made for asylum seekers from Bosnia.

In the face of growing numbers of asylum seekers, and a widespread public concern that many of them

are 'economic refugees' in search of a better life in wealthier countries, new formal and informal strategies have been put into place in varied countries. Many of these new strategies seem to be designed to prevent asylum seekers from accessing 'safe countries'—where, under Geneva Convention agreements, they would have the right to a 'fair hearing.'

The high-seas interdiction program put into effect in the United States in the early 1990s is an example. The strategy was conceived to prevent large numbers of Caribbean (especially Haitian) asylum seekers from arriving in US territory—or even within its territorial waters—where they could establish certain legal protections. Apprehending them in international waters, and returning them to Haiti, leave asylum seekers with little practical recourse under international law. In Europe, a similar strategy has been to deem certain areas in international airports not part of the national territory—for example, parts of Zaventem airport are not technically Belgian territory but are considered to be international territory. Asylum seekers entering such airports have been turned back because they are said to remain in international territory, and hence not come under the jurisprudence of the Geneva Convention (Suárez-Orozco 1994).

While advanced postindustrial democracies are likely to continue to face significant numbers of asylum seekers, the greatest numbers of asylum seekers are in the developing world. For example, at the close of the millenium there are over three million asylum seekers in the African continent.

### 3.2 *Illegal Immigration*

While the state wields substantial power—both in regard to internal and international migration—there are nevertheless areas where it faces strict limitations in the management of human migratory flows. Nowhere are the limitations of state power more obvious than in its inability to control illegal immigration. In many parts of the world, undocumented or illegal immigration has become a more or less permanent problem, which periodically emerges as an unsettling political issue.

In the United States, for example, it is estimated that there are some 5–10 million illegal immigrants constituting roughly 20 percent of the total foreign-born (immigrant) population (National Research Council 1997). In Europe, the ratio of illegal immigrants to legal immigrants is a more carefully guarded secret because of its dangerous political connotations. Most hard-core right wing political parties in Europe, including France's *Front National*, Belgium's *Vlams Bloc*, and Austria's *Freedom Party* revolve around anti- (illegal) immigration platforms. In the 1990s, these once-marginal parties have made substantial gains with electorates quite concerned with the problem of undocumented immigration.

The enduring problem of illegal immigration in many parts of the world suggests that immigration is now structured by powerful economic factors, social forces, and cultural practices that seem impervious to state actions such as controls of international borders (Cornelius et al. 1994). Transnational labor recruiting networks, enduring wages differentials between nation states, and family reunification generate a powerful migratory momentum that is not easily contained by unilateral, or even multilateral, state interventions to curb it.

### 4. *Economics of Immigration*

Few topics are more controversial than the economic consequences of large-scale immigration. Do immigrants help or hurt the economies of host countries? Do immigrants carry their own weight or do they represent a burden to citizens and other established residents? Do complex postindustrial economies need low-skilled immigrant workers or have they become redundant? Much of the recent scholarship on immigration and the economy has tended to focus on such concerns as the fiscal implications of immigration, the issue of immigrant competition with native workers, and the related issue of immigration and wages. Another important theme has been the economic integration and progress of immigrants over time.

The research findings on the economic consequences of immigration are somewhat contradictory—some economists claiming that immigrants are a burden to tax payers and an overall negative influence especially on postindustrial economies (Huddle 1993) and others suggesting that they continue to be an important asset.

A recent study on the economic, demographic, and fiscal effects of immigration by the US National Research Council (NRC) concludes that in the American setting 'immigration produces net economic gains for domestic residents' (NRC 1997, p. 3). Not only do immigrants 'increase the supply of labor and help produce new goods and services' but their presence also 'allows domestic workers to be used more productively, specializing in producing goods at which they are relatively more efficient. Specialization in consumption also yields a gain' (NRC 1997, pp. 3–4). The NRC estimates that the immigration-related 'domestic gain may run on the order of \$1 billion to \$10 billion a year' (NRC 1997, p. 5). Given the size of the US economy (about 7 trillion dollars), it is clear that immigrants will neither 'make it' nor 'break it.'

In fiscal terms the NRC data suggest, 'Immigrants receive more in services than they pay in taxes' (NRC 1997, p. 7). The panel estimates that 'if the net fiscal impact of all U.S. immigrant-headed households were averaged across all native households the burden

would be ... on the order of \$166 to \$226 per native household.' The NRC study and other studies conclude that while immigration is a plus in overall economic terms, low-skilled new immigrants have contributed to a modest drop in the minimum wage of low skilled workers. They found that a 5 percent drop in wages since 1980 among high school dropouts could be attributed to the new immigrants. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that new immigration has 'hurt' the economic condition of native minority workers such as African-Americans (NRC 1997, p. 5).

#### *4.1 Immigrant Workers in the Global Economy*

Other recent research engages the theoretical debate over the role of immigrant workers in the global, postindustrial economy. In the context of the increasingly advanced knowledge-intensive economies of today, are low-skilled immigrant workers simply anachronistic? Are immigrant workers a left over from an earlier era of production? Wayne Cornelius' comparative research of the use of immigrant labor in two paradigmatic postindustrial economic settings, San Diego County, California, USA, and Hamamatsu, Japan, suggests a remarkable convergence in patterns of growing reliance on immigrant labor—in spite of rather marked differences in national context (Cornelius 1998). Cornelius' data reveal a pattern of enduring, indeed voracious, postindustrial demand for immigrant labor. Cornelius concludes 'As immigrants become a preferred labor force, employers do more to retain them, even in a recessionary economy' (Cornelius 1998, p. 128). Cornelius argues that immigrant workers are desirable to a wide variety of employers for three basic reasons. First, immigrants are willing to do low-pay work that is boring, dirty, or dangerous with little or no prospects for upward mobility and that even in firms involving highly advanced technologies such work is critical. Second, employers perceive them quite favorably—as reliable, flexible, punctual, and willing to work overtime. Indeed, employers often prefer them to native-born workers. Third, immigrant transnational labor recruiting networks are a powerful method for 'delivering eager new recruits to the employer's doorstep with little or no effort on his part' (Cornelius 1998).

Other studies examine the issue of the socio-economic progress made by immigrant workers. The research of Dowell Myers tracks, over time and across generations, various dimensions of the economic adaptations of immigrant-origin men in the state of California. His work explores three sequential outcomes: educational attainment, occupational mobility, and earnings. In some fundamental ways, the recent Mexican immigrant experience in Southern California seems to replicate earlier patterns of im-

migrant adaptation. Yet in other ways, Myers findings suggest new—and disturbing—patterns.

Myers' research reveals that upon arrival Mexican immigrant men tend to be poorly educated, work in low-skilled occupations, and earn low incomes. Myers finds that over time immigrant men make modest improvements in their economic condition. However, he also suggests that important changes occur across younger cohorts within the first generation. These changes, according to Myers, are strongly related to the much higher educational attainment of immigrant children. In other words, Myers finds an old story with a new set of characters: poorly educated immigrant men make modest gains over time but their children are able to attain more education in the new country. Still, Myers data reveal a disturbing new pattern: among the children of immigrants higher education 'does not appear to fully convert into higher occupational status or earnings; and higher occupational status translates even less well into higher earnings. These under-returns are most pronounced for the more recent arrivals from Mexico and for young cohorts, including native-born, both of whom newly entered the labor market in the 1970s and 1980s.' Myers concludes 'The social implications of these falling returns to education and occupation are regrettable, because the declining reward system may discourage other immigrant children from investing in schooling as the route for status mobility' (Myers 1998, p. 188).

#### *5. Immigration and Cultural Transformation*

In all countries of immigration there have been major debates surrounding the cultural consequences of large-scale population movements. In the US a palpable concern, not always fully articulated, relates to how the new immigrants, the majority of whom are non-English speaking, non-European, people of color migrating in large numbers from the developing world, will culturally adapt and, indeed, transform their new country. In Western Europe, there are similar concerns about the cultural adaptations of large numbers of immigrants coming into the Judeo-Christian continent from the Islamic world (Suárez-Orozco 1991). Likewise in Japan, a country where racial and cultural homogeneity is deeply implicated in the construction of cultural identity, there are questions about the long-term consequences of increasing migration from Thailand, Korea, China, the Philippines, and South America (Tsuda 1996). Large-scale immigration is both the cause and consequence of important cultural transformations. Immigration inevitably leads to cultural changes and accommodations among both new arrivals and native citizens (Ainslie 1998). Immigration can be said to be the consequence of cultural change in that new cultural tastes and changing

cultural conceptions of what is an acceptable standard of living have been implicated in large-scale migratory flows (Sassen 1988). Culturally immigrants not only significantly reshape the ethos of their new communities (Ainslie 1998, Gutierrez 1998) but they are also responsible for significant cultural transformations 'back home' (Durand 1998). As immigration researcher Peggy Levitt has argued, in many settings, immigrant 'social remittances' profoundly affect the values, cultural models, and social practices of those left behind (Levitt 1998). Because of a new ease of mass transportation and because of new communication technologies, it seems that immigration is no longer structured around the 'sharp break' with the country of origin that once characterized the trans-oceanic experience (Ainslie 1998). Immigrants today are more likely to be at once 'here' and 'there'—bridging increasingly unbounded national spaces (Basch et al. 1994) and in the process transform both home and host countries.

Studies of an earlier era of large-scale immigration in the US argued that those who abandoned their cultural practices in favor of quickly 'assimilating' to the uniform norms of the mainstream tended to display successful outcomes in terms of health, schooling of children, and socioeconomic mobility. More recent research suggests a somewhat more complex picture—where the long-term benefits of unambivalent assimilation may not be so obvious.

Various contemporary researchers stress that we can no longer assume that upon arrival immigrants face a uniform mainstream society. Rather, immigrants are most likely to interact in complex ways with many *other* immigrant and native minority groups. In the United States, increasing residential, labor, and school segregation means that many immigrants, especially poorer immigrants of color, are much more likely to interact with other ethnic minorities rather than with the white mainstream population (Orfield 1998).

For large numbers of immigrant children today, the social point of reference is not 'white,' mainstream, culture but rather the culture and social structure of ethnic minorities. In the words of the eminent scholar of immigration, Alejandro Portes:

This puzzle is whether today's children of immigrants will follow their European predecessors and move steadily into the middle-class mainstream or whether, on the contrary, their ascent will be blocked and they will join children of earlier black and Puerto Rican migrants as part of an expanded multiethnic underclass (Portes 1994, p. 634).

Increasingly immigration will need to be framed in the context of powerful—and as of yet little understood—transnational formations. New patterns of capital flows, new information technologies, new patterns of communication, changing cultural ex-

pectations, and the ease and affordability of mass transportation are generating dynamics that transverse the traditional boundaries of the nation state. Global capitalism is increasingly characterized by 'borderless' economies predicated on transnational capital flows, newly opened markets, and migrant-dependent economic niches. All of these factors would suggest that immigration is certain to remain a vital social phenomenon in the new millennium.

*See also:* Assimilation of Immigrants; Cultural Assimilation; Cultural Evolution; Overview; Cultural Geography; Immigration; Public Policy; Migration; Economics of; Migration History; Migration, Theory of

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## Immigration: Consequences for Fiscal Developments in the Receiving Population

Immigration, particularly when it is from poorer to richer countries, often gives rise to concerns about economic impacts on the receiving country. One leading concern is that immigrants will impose a net fiscal burden on the nonimmigrant taxpayers by disproportionately drawing on public assistance, and, through their children, the educational system. At the same time, other people believe that immigration will alleviate population aging of industrial nations and bring them fiscal relief from the costs of providing health care and pensions to their growing populations of elderly. Most immigrants pay taxes as well as receive benefits, so it is the net effect that matters. In modern industrial states, immigrants are seen as imposing net costs through public education, poverty programs, and some health programs; and potential net benefits through programs for providing health and pensions for the elderly, with ambiguous effects on net health costs in general. Do immigrants, on net, impose a burden on taxpayers, or provide relief? The answer may influence policy decisions on the numbers and characteristics of immigrants to be admitted.

### 1. Sources of Fiscal Impacts

The history of these concerns extends at least into the nineteenth century in the US, and perhaps farther in other countries. However, the potential fiscal impact of immigration grew larger in industrial nations over the course of the twentieth century, as government spending grew in relation to the sizes of their economies, and as new welfare programs were initiated and grew to take a larger share of these expanding government budgets.

Some of the fiscal effects of immigrants would arise in a similar way from adding any new member to the population, for example a newborn native (see *Childbearing, Externalities of*). Thus an immigrant increases the size of the population and increases the number of tax payers. The increase in the size of the population will increase the demand for social infrastructure and public capital of many kinds, such as roads, water supplies, sewer systems, police stations, fire departments, airports, and court systems. Either these must be expanded, requiring both capital outlays and increased current expenditures, or the quality of services delivered to the pre-existing population must decline. Given the nature of the tax system, these increased costs will be born by everybody, constituting a negative fiscal impact. We call these congestible services. For other services provided by the government, the quality of the service received per person is not degraded nor costs increased when the population

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