

## **Prospects for International Migration: Globalization and Its Discontents**

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In a passage of his *Memoirs*, Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser, reminisces about the January 1979 visit to Washington of the then Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping:

In addition to...formal and rather sober exchanges there were a few light moments. At one stage, when Carter registered his concern for human rights, requesting Deng to be flexible on emigration from China, Deng leaned forward toward Carter and said, "Fine. We'll let them go. Are you prepared to accept ten million?" (Brzezinski 1983:407)

If the question was meant to be rhetorical, posed in a spirit of levity, it was only because Deng knew the answer. Indeed the answer did not have to be spelled out, a simple smile could suffice. Yet it probably occurred to Deng that the number he offered was remarkably modest. In the four decades of Communist rule, between 1949 and 1979, China's population grew by some 430 million; giving up less than one fortieth of that gain to the Chinese diaspora was perhaps not extravagantly ambitious. Using another metric, China's annual population increase at the time Deng spoke was 14 million; giving up 10 million would have set back China on its demographic growth path by less than nine months. Despite China's harsh birth control policy, routinely condemned by Western critics, in the 21 years that have elapsed since Deng's Washington visit, China added about another 300 million to its already impressive headcount.<sup>1</sup> The UN medium projections anticipate that by 2025 China's population will be 1.48 billion, 200 million greater than its population today.

China as a potential exporter of migrants is of course hardly alone. The developing world as a whole, which grew between 1950 and 2000 by 3.2 billion—from 1.7 billion to 4.9 billion—is currently adding some 73 million persons each year to its population. By 2025 the population of the developing countries is expected to reach 6.6 billion, that is, to increase further by some 1.7 billion.

Without checking estimates of the current level of international migration, the figures just cited clearly suggest that current migratory flows could make only a small dent in the developing world's population trajectory. Still, it is commonly assumed that international migration is at present very high; indeed, it is often claimed that the late twentieth century is an "age of migration" (see, for example Castles and Miller 1996). What do the statistics show?

The first point that must be made on this score is that the statistical picture is far from satisfactory. In most countries migratory *flows*—in and outmigration—are either not recorded at all, or statistics relating to them are highly defective. Given that deficiency, the best approach to estimating the volume of international migration is indirect: based on census counts that generally offer information

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<sup>1</sup> These estimates are based on United Nations 1998. The population of China in that publication includes Taiwan but excludes Hong Kong.

on the *stock* of migrants, most commonly defined as persons residing in the country but born elsewhere. Comparison of foreign-born stocks between successive censuses then suggests changes in the size of net international migration over time.

Some salient features of such estimates, compiled by the UN Population Division and summarized in United Nations (1997: Table 2.5) are as follows. In 1965 the world total of the foreign-born populations was 75 million; in 1990 this number rose to 120 million. As a share of the total population these figures amounted to 2.3 percent in both years: that is, the rate of increase of the stock of migrants between 1965 and 1990 matched the rate of increase of the global population.

Within the global total the dynamics found in the developed countries between 1965 and 1990 differed from those in the developing world. In the developed countries the stock of migrants grew from 30 million to 54 million, which brought their share within the total population from 3.1 to 4.5 percent. In the developing countries the number of foreign born grew from 45 million to 66 million; this represented a decrease within the total population from 1.9 to 1.6 percent.

In broad regional divisions three areas stand out as having large immigrant stock: in each the percent of foreign born within the total population increased substantially. (I omit discussion of Australia, extensively covered by experts at this conference.) These areas are (with indication of the total number of foreign born in 1990 and their percentage share in the total population in 1965 and 1990) North America (United States and Canada): 24 million (6.0 percent and 8.6 percent); Western Europe (Europe excluding the former Soviet bloc countries): 23 million (3.6 percent and 6.1 percent); and West Asia (in this context dominated by the oil-rich Arab countries): 14 million (7.4 percent and 10.9 percent). Much of the migration into the Arab oil producing countries is labor migration on term contracts, rather than accepted by the receiving countries as permanent settlement. A contrast between North America and Western Europe (each with roughly the same number of foreign born) is the pattern of change over time during the quarter century between 1965 and 1990. In North America the rate of increase of the foreign born was accelerating: from 1.7 percent per annum in 1965-75 to 3.1 percent per annum during 1985-1990. The corresponding figures for Western Europe indicate deceleration: from 3.7 percent to 2.1 percent.

Comparability of such estimates is made problematic by the definition of international migration as crossing national borders and the corresponding definition of foreign born. Thus someone born in Italy but living in Switzerland is an international migrant but someone born in New England and living in California is of course not. International migration to the United States and Canada, at least by the latter part of the period in question, was overwhelmingly migration from developing countries (primarily Latin America and Asia). International migration in the largest European immigration country, Germany, and to a lesser extent also in Western Europe at large, was primarily from the countries of the former Soviet bloc, the Balkans, and Turkey.

Why do people move across national borders? War, whether civil war or war between countries, and natural calamities can generate major flows of involuntary migration. The estimated total number of refugees in early 1990 was 15 million; some 31 percent of these were in Africa and 46 percent in Asia (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 1995). In principle, such migration is temporary, ending in voluntary return to the home country when conditions permit such movement,

or ending in forced repatriation. The reflux of Afghan refugees from Pakistan in recent years illustrates this pattern.

But the main motor force of international migration is economic: migration of persons seeking entry to the labor force in foreign countries offering the potential of higher earnings than is available in the home country. Numerically, such migration is amplified by the number of dependents accompanying the labor migrant and by family reunification that tends to follow settlement in the country of immigration after a more or less extended period. The large international income differentials, and the corresponding differential in wage levels in given categories of labor by skill, especially the differentials between developed and developing countries, suggest the potential power of the economic motive. Crude wage differentials of course are not adequate indicators of the potential economic gain a person might obtain by migrating: uncertainty that employment can be obtained or that successful self-employment is possible, as well as the costs of migration, both physical and psychological, are likely to be major factors in the implicit benefit-cost calculations potential migrants make. So are expectations about options in case of individual failure: the feasibility of temporary or longer term reliance on family and kin groups or on publicly financed safety nets.

Still, the magnitude of the potential economic gain for migrants from a low-income to a high-income country is so large that under conditions of unhindered freedom of movement international migratory flows from the less developed countries to the advanced industrial countries (especially to North America, Western Europe, Australia, and Japan) could be expected to be vastly larger than in fact they are, on an annual basis eclipsing, perhaps, even the figure cited by Deng, and not only from China but from the developing world at large. The explanation why such flows do not materialize is to be found in the institutional barriers countries erect against uncontrolled immigration. International treaties impose certain obligations on States to offer asylum to refugees, albeit permitting considerable discretion in conferring or denying that status to applicants. But with respect to all other types of entry, the principle of state sovereignty, as recognized in international law, allows full control over national borders, hence theoretically full control over the entry of foreign nationals to the national territory. The effectiveness of such control, assuming that States wish to exercise it, is of course affected by the cost of barring undesired entry, including the cost of imposing economic loss and psychic inconvenience on the country's own citizenry. Apart from the fact that countries differ considerably in the degree to which they are sought as a destination country by potential migrants, and differ in their population's willingness to accept international migrants, these factors account for the substantial variation in the policies States adopt concerning the admission of international migrants, and in the vigor and success with which national policies are pursued.<sup>2</sup>

A population's attitude toward immigration is of course the composite of individual feelings, opinions, and interests. These may differ considerably, as do the ability of particular population

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<sup>2</sup> Policies concerning outmigration tend to be a simpler matter. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right of persons to leave their own country unhindered—subject of course to the willingness of another country to accept them. Apart from Communist countries, this right is generally respected by individual States. Tacitly or explicitly, some countries that consider themselves overpopulated actively *encourage* outmigration. In some instances such encouragement is directed to particular elements of the population, such as distinguished by race or ethnicity. In extreme cases, as noted below, the policy reaches coercive levels, seeking the expulsion of persons the state considers undesirable.

segments to influence State policy. Such differences go a long way toward explaining the often acrimonious political conflicts generated by immigration. Immigration, in particular, is apt to reduce the relative remuneration of labor and enhance the returns to capital, giving rise to the commonly observed difference of views on immigration between the corresponding interest groups. Under ordinary conditions total product of the receiving country would increase as a result of immigration, but within-country per capita income, pulled down by migrants' lower incomes, is likely to decline. Furthermore, certain segments of the non-immigrant population, those whose skills are most comparable to those of immigrants (for instance unskilled laborers), may suffer an absolute loss of income.

It is virtually certain, however, that immigration will increase income per capita if the comparison is between the population enhanced by the number of immigrants and the same population prior to immigration, that is, including the migrants in their country of former residence. Furthermore, under ordinary circumstances, as a direct result of the migratory movement, income per capita would also grow in the country from which the migrants came, and the share accruing to labor there would tend to increase.

Assuming unhindered international labor migration, such income-enhancing effects measured for the sending and receiving countries *jointly*—and, by extension, measured globally—would be likely to be very large. The assumption of total freedom to migrate is contrary to realistic expectations, hence the potential quantitative implications of free international movement of labor for gains in global productivity are inadequately explored. A calculation by Hamilton and Whalley (1984), admittedly based on heroic assumptions (notably that the worldwide labor supply is fixed and full employment occurs in all regions), came to the conclusion that “the size of the annual worldwide gains...can easily exceed existing worldwide GNP generated in the presence of labour mobility restrictions.... The losses to labour already employed in high wage countries dramatize the incentives for labour unions in the developed world to oppose liberalization” (p. 61). The authors compare their results concerning gains for the developing world from full international labor mobility to potential gains that might be secured by the poor countries through commonly discussed policy initiatives in the North-South debate, such as commodity price stabilization, cancellation or rescheduling of LDC debt, relaxation of trade protection in the North on LDC exports, and increased aid flows. They contend that their calculations suggest “that the gains from liberalized labour mobility are likely to dominate developing country gains from non-migration initiatives.... Citizens of LDCs could thus be well served if demands for removal of immigration controls in the North were more forcefully presented, instead of allowing the other proposals which have so far preoccupied negotiations on a new international economic order to take center stage” (p. 75). They also point out that even partial liberalization would have important effects because the gains are largest at the margin.

As the antiquated reference to the North-South negotiations also suggests, under the present geopolitical configuration of the world system the goal of free international labor migration is a completely unrealistic reference point in pursuing progress toward global economic development. One fundamental reason for this was noted above: the sheer magnitude of the imbalance between population size (and population dynamics) in the industrialized and the developing worlds. Free international migration could virtually submerge the rich countries in the demographic deluge, creating social conditions that would be likely to negate the assumptions of smooth adjustment of factor proportions underlying the type of calculations about global economic gains cited above. The

level of labor migration from poor to rich countries may well increase in the future, but only as agreed to by the receiving countries and under their direct control. Such increases in most instances are likely to be relatively modest and gradual. The path to increasing LDC incomes and the narrowing of international income differentials is likely to be mainly through liberalizing trade and capital movements rather than through fostering greater international spatial mobility.

The goal of free labor migration becomes realistic, however, when international wage levels are relatively uniform, or at least when existing differences are sufficiently narrow to be made meaningless for most microlevel units by the expected costs of taking up residence in a linguistically and culturally different milieu. In other words, migration can be made free between countries once the incentive to actually migrate internationally is largely eliminated. An example is the European Union, which now guarantees freedom of labor migration for the citizens of the member countries. The inclination to move, for example from Lyons to Munich or Munich to Milan, or even from Valencia to Malmö is now sufficiently weak to generate only thin flows of labor migration. In contrast, a main stumbling bloc on the path toward enlargement of the EU is the fear of existing member countries that enlargement would result in massive East-West migration. Austria, for instance, points out that in the countries that are candidates for EU membership the size of the labor force that is within daily commuting distance from Vienna is approximately 5 million. The Austrian government advocates, therefore, that even if new members are admitted in the next four years or so, removal of migration controls vis à vis new members should be far more slowly phased-in, perhaps during a period extending to 20 years. By that time, presumably, wage level differentials would be much narrower, removing the inclination to migrate.

Examination of the type of concern just cited—Austria’s fear of massive labor inflows—reveals that economic considerations, narrowly defined, are only part of the picture. It is the broader effects of immigration on the human and physical environment that receiving countries consider problematic. These include a feared loss of social cohesion, and a host of undesired shifts in the texture and quality of life, and, most significantly, altering the receiving population’s composition by ethnicity, religion, and other cultural traits. Such shifts may eventually affect the receiving country’s political system and a variety of institutional structures and social arrangements. When expressed explicitly, such sentiments are often labeled xenophobic or even outright racist; others might retort that these very problems are caused by or feed on excessive migration and the multicultural, multiethnic society international migration generates. Such attitudes are especially common in Europe, which in its modern history was an area of outmigration rather than immigration and where ethnic and cultural homogeneity of the nation state have long been considered ideal.

Germany, Europe’s largest immigrant-receiving country during the early postwar decades, and also the West European country in which fertility decreased most precipitously, generating sharply negative rates of natural increase of the native population, exemplifies the syndrome most clearly. Fueled by the country’s long-sustained postwar economic boom, the influx of foreign labor into West Germany, primarily from Southern Europe and Turkey, gathered momentum in the 1960s. By 1970, the annual net inflow of migrants exceeded one half million. From 1973 onward, German immigration policy turned strongly restrictive. But the “guestworkers” refused to regard themselves as guests and elected not to return home. The combined effect of reunification of families, the rapid natural increase of the foreign born (a population with very young age composition), and the absolute decline of the native German stock has led to a continued increase in the share of persons of

foreign origin. In February 1982, a group of prominent German scholars from a variety of academic disciplines issued a passionate condemnation of these trends. Brief excerpts from the declaration, that came to be referred to as the Heidelberg Manifesto, provide the general flavor of the argument.<sup>3</sup>

It is with grave concern that we observe the infiltration of the German nation by millionfold waves of foreigners and their families, the infiltration of our language, our culture, and our national characteristics by foreign influences....Our birth rate is now barely one-half the rate needed to ensure the continued existence of our nation. Many Germans are already strangers in the places where they live and work.

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Biologically and cybernetically, nations are living systems of a higher order, with different system qualities that are transmitted genetically and by tradition. The integration of large masses of non-German foreigners and the preservation of our nation thus cannot be achieved simultaneously; it will lead to the well-known ethnic catastrophes of multicultural societies.

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The problem must be attacked at its roots, and this means concerted development assistance to improve the living conditions of the foreign workers in their native countries—not here in our country. For the Federal Republic of Germany, which is one of the most heavily populated countries of the world, the return of foreigners to their native lands will provide ecological as well as social relief.

In America, a country of immigrants, such sentiments are relatively rare, although by no means unknown. Back in 1751 Benjamin Franklin worried that “new comers...will eat the natives out.” Thomas Jefferson, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781/82) asked: is “importation of foreigners...founded on good policy?” No, he answered in a detailed argument, they will render our legislation “a heterogeneous, incoherent, distorted mass.” In more recent times, as was always the case, opinions on the matter are divided. The *Wall Street Journal*'s editorial page would like to see a constitutional amendment declaring “there shall be open borders;” the late Julian Simon accepted the possibility of setting an annual number of immigrants by policy fiat, but proposed that the agreed-upon entry permits be auctioned off to the highest bidders, thus ensuring immigrant quality. But conservative opinion can take positions not unlike those expressed in the Heidelberg Manifesto. The views articulated by the diplomat-historian George Kennan (1993: 151-156) on US immigration policy illustrate the concerns held by an eminent figure at the other end of the ideological-analytical spectrum:

We have prided ourselves, through much of our history, on the welcome we gave to the arriving immigrant, and even on the lack of discrimination we showed in the extension of this welcome.... We have gone on the further assumption that such was the universality of values incorporated into our political system that there could be no immigrant, of whatever culture or race or national tradition, who could not be readily absorbed into our social and political life, could not become infused with understanding for, and confidence in, our political institutions, and could not, consequently, become a useful bearer of the American political tradition. Particularly

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<sup>3</sup> The declaration was originally printed in the 5 February 1982 issue of the newspaper *Die Zeit*. An English translation appears in the September 1982 issue of *Population and Development Review*.

has the possibility never become apparent to us that in some instances, where the disparity between what these people were leaving behind and what they were coming into was too great, the new arrivals, even in the process of adjusting to our political tradition might actually change it. One need only look at our great-city ghettos of the cities of Miami and Los Angeles to satisfy oneself that what we are confronted with here are real and extensive cultural changes.

Kennan goes on to argue, that migration-induced cultural changes, in turn generate economic changes that are no less ominous: they make the receiving population resemble the received, rather than the other way round:

It is obviously easier, in the short run, to draw cheap labor from the pools of adjacent poverty, such as North Africa or Central America, than to find it among one's own people. And to the millions of such prospective immigrants, there is, rightly or wrongly, no place that looks more attractive than the United States. Given its head, and subject to no restrictions, this pressure will find its termination only when the levels of overpopulation and poverty in the United States are equal to those of the countries from which these people are now so anxious to escape.

The explanation why, despite such dangers, societies are unable to resist large-scale unregulated immigration is to be found, in Kennan's view, in flaws of the receiving countries' political system. There is an asymmetry between, on the one hand, the concentrated interests of the migrants in making a particular move, amplified by narrow domestic interest groups that support immigration motivated either by prospective economic gains or by humanitarian impulses and, on the other hand, the low-intensity disapproval of mass immigration by large segments of the receiving population which is diffuse enough to get effectively articulated at policymaking forums. Pessimism about the ability of large-scale political units to effectively cope with this problem once massive immigration has shifted the ethnic composition of the population prompted Kennan to go as far as to suggest that the remedy would require the break-up of the United States, the prime illustration of the flawed policy:

I might point out that these are problems that might more easily be coped with if the United States...were to be divided into a relatively small number of constituent republics, and if each of these were to be given control over immigration, at least in the sense of controlling the rights of residence. In that case it is not inconceivable that certain of the major southern regions where things have already gone too far would themselves become, in effect, linguistically and culturally, Latin-American countries, and would find in that way their own level with relation to the adjacent already Latin-American regions.

Other historians consider the process of ethnic mixing now exhibited by most of the economically advanced countries as the normal dynamics of civilization. Modern European history, in which nation states emerged as ethnically homogeneous, was the exception rather than the rule. With globalization, the "barbaric ideal" of a nation of blood brothers is no longer tenable. In the words of William McNeill (1984: 18):

Only since World War II have European nations begun to experience the ethnic mingling that was usual in civilized lands of the deeper past. Die-off at the center (or at least a rate of reproduction inadequate to fill available jobs) and recruitment from ethnically diverse peripheries again prevail in post-1950 Europe and America. Consequently, polyethnic lamination—clustering different groups in particular occupations and arranging them in a more or less formal hierarchy of dignity and wealth—is again asserting itself in the Soviet Union as much as in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States.

Yet the countries listed by McNeill, exhibiting the tendency toward globalization by permitting the influx of foreigners, comprise only a smallish fraction—less than a fifth—of the global population. This indicates the persistence of a multiplicity of patterns as things stand today. Closer examination also suggests the possibility of reversals of trends. Since the early 1970s, France, Germany, and Great Britain each strenuously sought to slow down, halt, or even reverse, migration to their territories from the developing periphery. Japan's absence from the list is also telling, even though most recently Japan's determination to keep its doors closed to international migrants has been to some extent frustrated by a growing stream of illegal immigrants.

The collapse of the Soviet Union has generated another set of developments: the recrudescence of nationalistic aspirations for independent statehood with ethnically homogeneous populations. In the short term, this tendency (chronicled, for example in Moynihan 1993) resulted in intensification of migration, some voluntary, some forced, as illustrated by the break-up of the Yugoslav Federation. But in the longer run, pursuing the objective of national separateness creates enclaves with tightly controlled borders, closed to migration from the outside.

It is possible to see this pattern, exhibited most strongly in the successor states of the former Soviet Union and in parts of the former Communist bloc, as the triumph of atavistic nationalist hatreds over economic logic. But closer examination tends to reveal the continued relevance of economic motives, even when they might point toward modern versions of mercantilism and autarky. Indeed the process of increasing fragmentation of political units, at least as an aspiration, hence perhaps a likely future, can be observed not only in Eastern Europe but geographically far more broadly, suggesting a global tendency. The underlying economic rationale of such a trend is the effort of economically successful subregions or even cities of formerly unitary countries to preserve and enhance their privileged position vis à vis their neighbors by erecting barriers to entry. A persuasive analysis of this trend is offered in Boniface (1998): he sees a rush toward secessionism in the pursuit of economic goals driven by the territorially clustered rich to shed obligations toward the adjacent territorially clustered poor. The lessons of the economics of German reunification are read as proving the merits of disunity in rich South Korea; the economic success of Hong Kong holds a lesson for Shanghai as well as for China's several Eastern provinces. The protective umbrella of unified Western Europe inspires a variety of efforts within the EU to draw economic strength through smallness and devolution even when the true motives are concealed in nationalistic rhetoric. North Italy would be more comfortable without ties to the Mezzogiorno, Catalonia and the Basque country without income transfers to Spain's poor. Global integration thus may go hand-in-hand with national disintegration: an era of strategic cocooning may be arriving. The process may become general when its advantages are learned in large countries with economically, and often ethnically

and culturally, diverse population, such as those of India, Indonesia, Brazil, Mexico, and as noted above, China. If Bosnia can be independent, why not Bombay? Kennan's seemingly bizarre notion of this trend engulfing America as well may not be out of place further along in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For the movement of people internationally, the consequence may turn out to be the very opposite of what the triumph of globalization would have predicted

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