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Chapter Six

The Effects of Migration: is migration a problem or solution?

I have looked so far at causes, types and patterns of migration. In this chapter I will focus on the effects of migration primarily, but not only, on host countries. In public and political discourses in rich countries migration is often more about immigration than emigration and is frequently seen as a problem. This chapter will look at the extent to which discourses about immigration as a problem are right or not. When you look at it with an open mind and evidence there are powerful moral and practical arguments for migration. Given countervailing evidence, hostility to migration must be as much to do with racism and intolerance as with rational argument.

Citizenship Systems

See final book for this section.

Effects of Migration

One implication of migration is to raise questions about citizenship. Citizenship models have to be constructed to fit with migration. There are other ways in which migration has effects on source or destination countries. I am including references to the UK context below to concretise things and because Britain, as well being a country I am familiar with, is an interesting example of a nation of migration, for instance because of its post-colonial links and membership of the EU.

Debates over the effects of migration are affected by prior pro- or anti-immigration stances. Racism and xenophobia cloud judgements on the effects of migration. They lead to exaggerated perceptions of the scale of migration. People born abroad made up just under 12% of the total population in OECD countries in 2006. Significant as migration is, even in a globalised era the vast majority of people stay put. The ties of family, friends, community, work and obstacles to migration such as cost and political barriers inhibit it. 97.5% of the world's population live in the country of their birth (UNHCR 2000: 280). This leaves 2.5% who don't - a significant figure, but not consistent with 'floods' or other tidal metaphors used to describe migration. Opinion surveys consistently show that people overestimate the scale of migration into their country. For example, over 50% of Americans perceive the foreign-born population of the US to be at least twice as large as it really is (Pew Research Center 2006: 30).

Many included in figures for migrants entering countries are not in those countries at any given moment. For instance many migrants within the EU move temporarily for work and return home. Amongst asylum seekers in the UK there is a return rate of about 80%. So immigration numbers are not the same as the number of immigrants in the country. Furthermore, where immigration is measured by numbers born abroad, some of those are at birth citizens of the country they then emigrate to. They are counted as immigrants but are also those the media and politicians see as the home workers whose jobs are being taken (see Legrain 2006, 2007).

Data on the countries of origin of immigrants clashes with the media picture. In the media image in the UK and that propagated by politicians and amongst the public, immigrants appear to be mostly from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, often Muslim, or from the Caribbean and most recently from Poland. Yet the biggest immigrant group in the UK are the Irish, rarely mentioned as taking British jobs or placing a burden on the welfare state, although they have suffered discrimination. Amongst other main immigrant groups in the UK are Germans, Americans, Italians, Australians and French. These rarely appear in media, politicians and public talk of the dangers of migration, perhaps because they are predominantly white and Christian.

Table X: UK immigrants by country of birth 2001

<i>Origin</i>	<i>Numbers</i>	<i>% of population</i>
Ireland	494,850	0.87
India	466,216	0.82
Pakistan	320,767	0.56
Germany	262,276	0.46
Caribbean	254,740	0.45
USA	155,030	0.27
Bangladesh	154,201	0.27
South Africa	140,201	0.25
Kenya	129,356	0.23
Italy	107,002	0.19
Australia	106,400	0.19
Hong Kong	94,611	0.17
France	94,128	0.16

Total 7.5% of people in Britain born abroad

(Source: ONS 2001)

When political obstacles to migration are eased, as with the relaxation of barriers within the EU, the movement of masses which is predicted does not occur. Many in rich states overestimate their attractiveness to those in poorer countries. Extrapolating from situations where obstacles to migration are relaxed such as the pre-1914 period and more recent EU cross-border migration Moses (2006: 172) estimates that open and free migration globally would lead to population movements of between 5 million and 205 million annually out of a world population of over 6 billion. The mid-point between these two figures is about the level of current migration. These are rough estimates but they suggest that the actual or potential scale of migration flows are not overwhelming.

The free movement of capital across national boundaries is sometimes exploitative and creates economic interdependency. This can cause instability and economic depression, as with the post-2007 financial crisis, and in the best of times constrains the freedom of democratically elected governments to set policy. This freedom of movement is generally accepted or celebrated. But the movement of human beings, frequently in search of better life chances, attracts hostility often on the basis, as we shall see, of dubious evidence. Phillippe Legrain (2007) is an exception as a neoliberal who favours the free movement of both capital and people, the latter seen as bringing benefits for the former and the economy at large.

There is also a paradox, or hypocrisy, in that states that express confidence in their liberal institutions and freedom of their citizens do not extend such liberalism to other world citizens as far as policies on migration go. Liberal governments are rightly vociferous critics of states, such as socialist states in the past and present, from the GDR to Cuba, who have limited the movement of citizens out of their countries. At the same time liberal states' expectations on others to allow free outward movement is contradicted and undermined by their limits on allowing free movement in.

This book emphasises power, inequality and conflict in globalization. Some of the reasons for migrants pursuing better life chances are based in global inequality and poverty. Most of the resistance comes from rich developed states against immigration from poorer developing countries. As we shall see, it is difficult to see that this can be to do with anything other than factors such as political expediency or prejudice, pursued despite their harmful consequences for migrants, because empirical evidence does not show migration to be the threat it is said to be. There has been a long tradition, from the earlier days of the twentieth century, of states being reluctant to take in migrants fleeing hardship and danger even when they have known what their fate will otherwise be.

Political divides over migration are complex. Advocates of open migration range from supporters of free market capitalism like Legrain to many in the anti-globalization movement who are critical of the way the free movement of capital works but call for the free movement of people and ideas. Opponents can be found in less liberal strands of both the right and left.

Arguments for free migration are often based on liberal concerns for freedom. These are important but my reasons for favouring freer migration are more to do with inequality and the poverty of those who wish to migrate. Such reasons tend to come from those with an egalitarian or socialist perspective. Socialism has had internationalist strands, which stress the commonality and unity of humans, regardless of national background. This stress on all people as equally important, and against putting national interest and the interests of humans of your country or race over others, is behind arguments for open migration. People should not be treated differently because of the accidental fact of where they were born and because this happened not to be within the borders of your own country. However you don't need to be a socialist to argue for equal status for all humans regardless of whether they are part of your nation or not. If you take need rather than place of residence or birth as a reason for obligations to others then citizens in rich countries have greater obligations to foreigners than to their 'own'.

I think the strongest arguments for migration are to do with the needs of migrants – the economic hardship, exploitation or persecution they are escaping and the opportunities migration gives them for a better life. Such concerns are rarely mentioned in debates on immigration which focus on the effects for receiving societies. We will see below that the evidence for such effects being negative is problematic. As well as there being a moral case for migration, there are reasons to suggest it is beneficial for receiving societies, contrary to the public image. Nevertheless arguments for migration on the basis of the needs of migrants, which often involve basic economic or physical security, are so compelling that it should often be argued for whether it has benefits for receiving societies or not. More

detailed empirical evidence for arguments of the sort discussed in this section is laid out by authors such as Harris (2001), Moses (2006) and Legrain (2006).

Perhaps the most radical effect that migration has is to constitute nations. Many nations have been made over time by centuries of immigration (or emigration). In the modern era countries like Australia and the US have been constituted by mass immigration. Such states had pre-existing native populations, killed in large numbers and the survivors marginalised following migration from Europe and other parts of the world. Big shifts in migration have made or radically reformed these nations.

Arguments against immigration are insensitive to these sorts of histories. Migrations that made such nations were often based on fleeing persecution or economic hardship and the desire to make a better life. This better life was pursued with the subjection of indigenous populations in receiving societies. But it has also given people opportunities and created dynamic, modern, affluent and diverse societies. A historical perspective on the way that migration can give migrants such opportunities is often marginalised in contemporary debates on the effects for receiving societies.

The economic consequences of migration are not clear-cut or predictable. These vary according to factors such as the source or destination countries, the volume of migration and what type it is. Researchers in richer states tend to be more interested in its effects on their countries as destinations than on sending countries. Migrants to rich countries are members of sending countries so one consequence for the latter is that some of their members may find better chances in life. The consequences for sending countries should not be separated from those for its members who are the migrants.

Many migrants who go to rich countries do so to flee conflict and persecution (for instance, in war zones in Africa or Asia) or to escape poverty or seek wages hugely superior to those in their home country. The search for a better life, against a background of violence, poverty or poor standard of living, is rarely a theme in public discussions of migration in rich countries. The responsibility of humans to humans (regardless of the arbitrary accident of their country of origin) also infrequently crops up in this context.

One consequence of migration can be a reduction in unemployment in source countries, and of its economic consequences, such as the costs of support for the unemployed and of conflict. Migration increases remittances back to the host country. These can make very substantial contributions to sending countries' economies, more than overseas aid in some cases. Biggest recipients of remittances are India, Mexico and the Philippines. Annual remittances to Latin America and the Caribbean are greater than Foreign Direct Investment and development aid combined. In some countries they are greater than or comparable to a sizeable chunk of export earnings or Gross Domestic Product (Dicken 2007: 508). Migrant remittances to the least developed countries were \$13 billion in 2006 compared to net aid of \$28 billion and FDI of \$9 billion (UNCTAD 2008a: 7-8). This offsets the loss of tax income from migrants' who have left. Remittances bypass governments going straight to individuals and families. Rejecting immigration involves also rejecting this channel of aid by individuals and families themselves. Self-help alternatives to government

paternalism are something that critics of immigration favour in other contexts but not when it comes to migration.

If labour becomes in shorter supply in some areas because of emigration that strengthens the power of labour in the sending country to secure gains such as higher wages. Emigrant workers can also gain skills and access to contacts, capital and markets of benefit to their home country. A serious problem for source countries can be the loss of skilled workers, for instance in the case of doctors and medical staff leaving African countries for better wages and conditions elsewhere. This should not be downplayed. But brain drain can also have benefits. As well as remittances people gain skills from migration and will bring them home if they return. And, if they can afford it, better opportunities might be offered by governments or employers to keep skilled workers at home or attract replacements.

More studies focus on the consequences of migration for receiving countries. An anti-immigration argument is that migrants take the jobs of domestic workers. However migrant workers tend to go where there are vacancies rather than competition for jobs. In receiving countries they are often focused at the higher and lower end of the skills hierarchy, where it is either difficult to recruit skilled workers, or they are willing to accept low paid, low status work with poor conditions in, for instance, food services, health, or care for the elderly. Often it is difficult to find local workers to do these jobs. Migrant workers who take them can be highly skilled professionals and hugely over-qualified. In some rich countries immigration from poorer parts of the world solves labour shortages, from the postwar period onwards.

Sometimes this work is temporary as is the migrants stay, for instance in the case of some migrant workers within the EU. It can be informal and less regulated, so more open to exploitation and danger. The idea of wages being forced down or jobs taken gets more attention than the poor conditions of work for many migrant workers. The British government are keen to restrict immigration to more skilled workers. But this is strange as the unskilled often fill gaps the British do not wish to. Or they provide cheap services to the richer and more skilled, for instance, domestic labour which allows local skilled workers to do their jobs, as is also the case in the USA.

The alternative to bringing in migrant workers may not be more jobs for 'home' workers but exporting those jobs to low wage workers in other parts of the world. Critics of immigration give a false choice between home workers or migrants taking their jobs. But there are other possibilities. Those jobs could not be created in the first place if the migrant workers were not there to take them, or the jobs that migrants take could be exported if immigration was restricted (Srisankarajah 2006).

There is evidence that migration can lead to decreases in wages in receiving societies. More workers are chasing the same number of jobs so employers can cut wages knowing they will still find labour who will accept the lower wage. However this is by no means general. This often affects unskilled sectors of the workforce rather than others. UK Bank of England evidence in 2006 showed that while wages in some sectors were falling (as will always be the case in a large complex economy) average wages across the economy were on the rise (Blanchflower et al 2007. Also see TUC 2007, Reed and Latorre 2009).

Furthermore employers make the decision to cut wages. It is not a product of migration itself, although this is how the issue is constructed by the media and politicians. And there may be an overall benefit because migrants' wages rise. Often this phenomenon is covered only with attention to host country labour's wages, and not that of migrant workers, as if it is only the former that matters. All are not equal human beings the way this story is told.

In fact immigration can contribute to higher wages in receiving countries. It provides labour which enables sections of the economy to expand, for instance the construction industry in some places, leading to economic growth. The wages of migrant workers are spent on goods and services, boosting other industries' fortunes, and providing tax revenue for services such as health and pensions. A government report in 2007 suggested that immigration boosted growth in the UK by up to £6 billion a year (Home Office 2007, TUC 2007). This has a positive effect on employment, wages and tax revenue.

Many rich countries have the demographic problem of an increasing proportion of elderly people in the population which puts a burden on health care and pensions, alongside a smaller proportion of younger workers to pay the taxes that fund these and meet the needs of the labour market and economic growth. Migration can fill such gaps. Migrant workers provide income which can be taxed to support public services for the elderly and others. When they spend their income they increase consumer demand and stimulate the economy, so feeding into factors that create more jobs and so further taxable income.

For Julian Simon (1989: 299):

‘If we consider both the sending and the receiving countries as part of the same world, then – and on this every economist agrees – the overall effect of migration on the average standard of living of the world's people is positive’.

This is because migrants in general go from situations where they are unproductive to ones where they are more productive. The match between supply of labour and demand for it improves because there is more leeway for the former to move to meet the latter, leading to greater efficiency and productivity. This doesn't mean that in some contexts and for some groups migration, like any other social phenomena, does not sometimes bring economic losses. Nothing else could be expected of a complex phenomenon. But overall with all groups and contexts taken into account the effect is positive. Remittances can increase the home country's income, the migrant and his or her family may gain in income, and the receiving country and the economy more internationally may find economic growth boosted by the migrant's economic productivity and public services gaining from additional taxable income.

If rich countries won't perceive see such benefits, more because of prejudice than rational analysis, and choose to see on balance negative effects then there is still a reason why open migration might be of benefit. Open migration can create an incentive for rich country governments to help solve economic imbalances between richer more attractive countries and poorer ones that migrants try to escape. Open migration can be an incentive for the richer states in the world, if they will only see negative effects, to help solve the problems of poorer countries that people are trying

to flee. Because of past colonial involvements and economic exploitation they often bear direct responsibility for this anyway, not to mention because of the responsibility of humans to other humans.

The anti-immigration lobby argue that immigration puts pressure on public services, such as welfare and education and, because immigrants are bent on committing crime, on the police. However this is a one-sided argument. As we have seen demographic change has led to increased pressure on public services. Many migrants into European countries or North America, are labour migrants so they support themselves financially rather than calling on welfare, and pay tax which finances these public services. Migrant workers are often relieving the pressure on public services that comes with demographic change and the elderly population. The picture is a two-sided one and the pressure on public services of migrants, such as it is, has to be seen against the extra tax revenue that migrant workers supply to support such services.

Furthermore, anyone who has visited a British hospital will know that migrant workers provide a large proportion of the lowest paid and most skilled workers in the UK health service. They are providing the labour as well as the tax base for public services. The conflict and social problems that immigration is said to have led to are also cast into doubt by empirical evidence. Research by the UK Police Force in 2008 concluded that immigration has not led to an increase in crime, putting a burden on the police force, contrary to public misinformation which is encouraged by the media and politicians for whom such stories provide, respectively, readers and electoral support (Dodd 2008).

Another consequence that arises in situations of migration is racism and the unequal treatment of immigrants. This is often portrayed as a consequence of immigration but is a product not of the process of migration but of the reception of migration by host countries. In many countries some immigrant communities are the poorest sections of society, with lower employment and educational opportunities and are subjected to racism and discrimination, sometimes to the extent of violence. However this is not predetermined and is complex. Many immigrant groups are successful in such areas and racism and discrimination are not inevitable. They are the products of agency and can be countered.

Similarly conflict and a decline of community and trust is sometimes associated with immigrant or diverse societies (eg Putnam 2007). But, again, this portrays immigration rather than the reaction of the host community as the problem. Constructing the problem as a consequence of migration implies policies of restricting migration. Seeing the reaction of the host community as the issue suggests that policies should be geared towards dealing with hostility and intolerance.

Problems like this are not inevitable. They can be solved. And there are political consequences of migration. Some of these involve defining the terms of citizenship in receiving societies as discussed above as well as promoting, restricting or determining the shape of immigration and the relation of public services to migration. Political actors such as states and governments react to migration but they are also constructors of it. They institutionalise migration and are mechanisms for organising, facilitating, encouraging or restricting it. Governments and political parties make migration a political issue both as governments or states acting on it and as political parties

constructing it as an issue to mobilise electoral support. This can be through mainstream parties bringing up migration as an issue, or explicitly anti-immigration parties or parties of immigrants.

These points are relevant mostly to receiving societies. Migration may also have positive effects politically for sending states. Migration to escape dictatorship and authoritarianism can encourage nations to opt for more democratic systems. Migration can pressurise a regime to change its ways and regain loyalty amongst its citizens. Open migration can also encourage receiving countries who perceive immigration to be a problem to help rectify drastic imbalances of power and wealth between them and sending societies, these being a major factor behind migration from poor to rich countries.

Even attempts to question immigration have managed to show its lack of significant negative effects. In 2008 a report from the UK House of Lords argued that the economic case for migration into Britain was mistaken (House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs 2008, Wakeham 2008). Yet the report concluded that evidence on the effects of migration into the UK is neutral or mixed rather than negative. It said that while GDP has increased with immigration GDP per head has stayed the same. This is not exactly a damning conclusion on the economic effects of immigration. The report bemoans that immigration leads to job vacancies. Migrants spend their wages, which creates demand for goods and services and therefore more jobs to provide them. But it's difficult to see how new vacancies in this way can be a problem except within a framework of prejudice against immigration. The Lords report concludes that the effect of immigration on low wages is slight and the effect on the wages of the more skilled is positive. It argues that the tax contribution of immigrants is positive but small. The report states that it does not find any big economic losses from immigration into the UK. With enemies like this who in the pro-migration lobby needs friends.

Stories about immigration tell that it takes workers' jobs, brings wages down, is a drain on public services and a source of crime and conflict. But as we have seen evidence on the impact of migration on host societies contradicts the public myths that the media and politicians set out. The evidence is available so it can only be assumed that politicians and the media choose not to look for it or to disregard it because it goes against their motives.

As has been mentioned some of these problems are as much due to factors in the host country as caused by migration, for instance in the case that those who set the low wages are employers. Yet it is immigration to which low wages are attributed rather than employers who try to keep wages down and use migrants to do this. It suits the purposes or prejudices of the media, politicians and the public to direct the blame this way.

Many of the stories are promoted by parts of the media that use them because they sell papers, by appealing to popular prejudice. Politicians raise fears about immigration because it appeals to popular concerns and can win votes. This is ironic because through colonialism, labour recruitment and EU integration, politicians have also encouraged migration. Media and politicians encourage negative interpretations of immigration despite the unreliability of the information about this and the

consequences it can have for stirring up racial hatred, intolerance and violence against immigrants. At the same time these are not just problems of elites. Politicians and the media appeal to anti-immigrant sentiments because these exist amongst the population at large – it is a public phenomenon and not just an elite one.

I have focused so far on primarily economic and political aspects of migration. None of this touches on the cultural impact of migration. Alongside culture that the media brings from around the world, migration is also a contributor to dynamic and diverse cultures. Culture in rich receiving countries has become more interesting and exciting as a result of migration, through food, music, religion, values, film and media or a range of other day to day areas. Witness the dynamism and entrepreneurialism in a country of immigration like the USA and the economic, cultural, social and political contributions of immigrants from the oldest to the most recent in such countries and in global cities like New York and London. As we saw in chapter 4 globalization through the media and migration has contributed to new hybrid identities, and changing diverse and mixed forms of consumption, style and culture whether in dress, food, music or a range of other areas.

This undermines arguments that migration reduces diversity. Such arguments equate diversity with national diversity and say that national differences are being eroded by the globalization of culture via the media and migration. In fact national diversity tends to be maintained by migration because it often has a varying content in each country related to that nation's specificity. In Britain migration is linked to its colonial past and membership of the EU, which take forms in the UK, at least in the former case, different from other nations who have non-colonial pasts or colonial pasts linked to different countries worldwide. Furthermore, those who criticise migration for eroding national diversity are equating diversity too much with diversity of national differences. Within nations diversity is increased by migration.

Societies are plural entities that are always in a state of process. Attempts to argue that their meaning or identity will be undermined by immigration take a fixed moment and do not see that societies continually change over time, and that migration in and out is one of the elements in this process. Often the society into which migrants are entering is made up of centuries of migration itself. In the UK you could be led to believe that postwar post-colonial immigration or EU immigration at the turn of the 21st century were the first the country had experienced. Yet the citizens of this country at those times were the descendants of centuries of migration from Roman, Germanic, Viking and Norman invasions, to mention just some overseas inputs from the past, and more recent migrations from Ireland and Jewish refugees amongst others.

Holding on to the fixed moment of national identity at any given moment sometimes involves a form of racism. It takes that moment as real and true, in an arbitrary way as there will have been many such moments through history, all different, this one chosen because it is the latest. It makes anything different from that other and alien, on the basis only that it is different and not because of any inherent qualities. Definitions of identity are not only too fixed on a specific historical moment but that moment is also often a construction or caricature rather than a reality. The fixed identity that is sometimes appealed to in the UK, implicitly or sometimes more explicitly, is of a white, protestant society. Not only does this choose British identity

at an arbitrary point and not justify this over earlier different identities. It also creates a false and imagined rather than real picture of what Britain was at this point.

Further Reading

The further reading listed at the end of the last chapter, for instance Castles and Miller's (2003) *Age of Migration* are relevant to further reading on the themes of this chapter too.

Messina and Lahav's (2006) *The Migration Reader* is also relevant to this chapter as well as the last.

Nigel Harris (2003) *Thinking the Unthinkable*, Jonathon Moses (2006) *International Migration* and Philippe Legrain (2007) *Immigrants: your country needs you* outline the benefits of migration.

Reed and Latorre's report (2009) looks at the economic effects of migration for the UK.