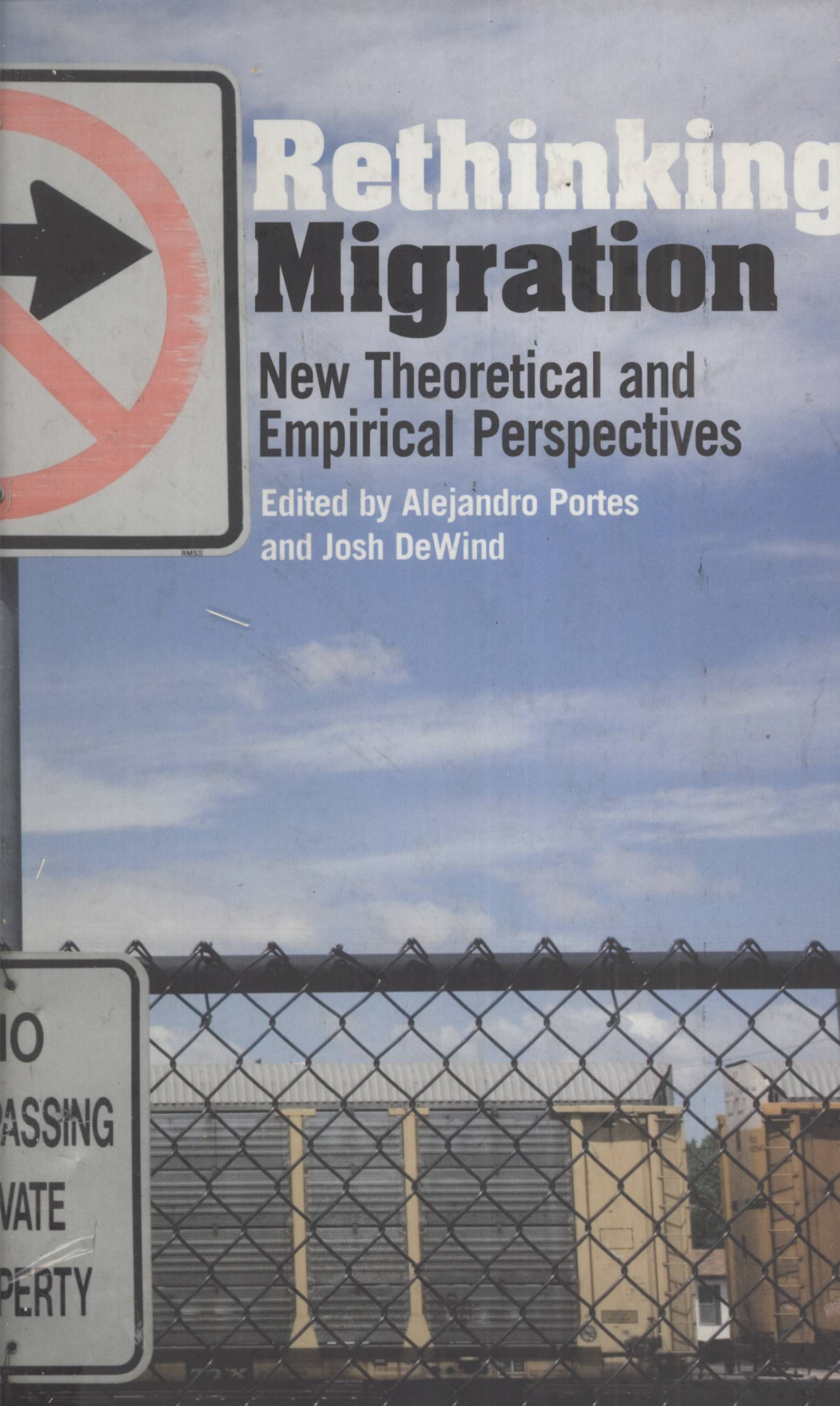
Rethinking Migration

New Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives

Edited by Alejandro Portes and Josh DeWind



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RETHINKING MIGRATION

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Conceptual and Methodological Developments in the Study of International Migration

Chapter 1

A Cross-Atlantic Dialogue

The Progress of Research and Theory in the Study of International Migration

Alejandro Portes and Josh DeWind

The Princeton conference sought to review and update the principal concepts, lines of research, and methodological problems discussed in the *Handbook* and, in this manner, gauge what progress the field has been making and in what directions. In contrast to the earlier and more encompassing event, the Princeton conference was thematically selective, targeting only a few strategic topics. It was the first major event of its kind that deliberately sought equal representation of immigration scholars from both sides of the Atlantic. The organizers tried to extend, in this fashion, the scope of the earlier SSRC conference and subsequent publications that had focused primarily on U.S.-bound immigration and patterns of adaptation.

Consequently, this issue presents, and deliberately contrasts, the approaches taken to the same specific topics in the field of immigration studies by European and North American scholars and the lessons to be learned

from one another. By and large, this dialogue occurred among anthropologists, political scientists, and sociologists. Economists were not included in the event for several reasons, such as the significant gap in theorizing and research styles between economics and other social sciences; the major challenge in organizing a meaningful dialogue between economists and other scholars of migration; and the relative abundance of volumes written by economists on the origins and "cost/benefit" ratios of immigration. While convening a future meeting on the economics of migration would be a worthwhile task, the Princeton conference sought instead to bring together specialists from other disciplines in Europe and North America, increasing their mutual knowledge and learning from their different orientations.

For various reasons, the paired symmetry featured in the conference between European and North American contributions could not be preserved in all instances in this final collection. Nevertheless, it presents a wealth of novel ideas and contrasting ways of understanding migration so as to give readers a clearer sense of where the field is moving on both sides of the Atlantic.

THEMATIC LINES

The editors of the *Handbook* grouped the articles from the 1996 Sanibel conference around three basic questions:

1. What motivates people to migrate across international boundaries, often at great financial and psychological costs?
2. How are immigrants changed after arrival? (Responses to this question address such issues as adaptation, assimilation, pluralism, and return migration.)
3. What impacts do immigrants have on American life and its economic, sociocultural, and political institutions? (Hirschman *et al.*, 1999:6).

These three questions aptly synthesize the main goals of the field and the bulk of the existing literature. They are, as it were, the basic pillars supporting the study of immigration. Going beyond them, the first chapter of the *Handbook* outlined a series of thematic priorities for future research grounded on the author's perception of the state of the field back then (Portes, 1999). The chapter argued that there is no such thing as a grand theory of migration encompassing all its aspects and that seeking such a synthesis would be misguided. To encompass the very heterogeneous questions addressed in this field, a comprehensive theory would have to be pitched at such a high level of abstraction as to be useless for the explanation

and prediction of concrete processes. Instead, the chapter advocated the development of mid-range concepts and theories and presented a research agenda where this task could be fruitfully attempted. Areas included were:

- Transnationalism and Transnational Communities
- The New Second Generation
- Households and Gender
- States and State Systems
- Cross-national Comparisons

The latter area represents less a substantive field than a call to develop and test concepts and theories comparatively. A first step in this direction is to see how specific topics are approached by scholars in different social and historical contexts, which is one of the goals of the present collection. The remaining four areas above were included and extended in the topical agenda for the Princeton conference which thus offers the opportunity to examine how their analysis evolved in recent years. These topics are:

- States and supra-state entities in the governance of migration and refugee movements
- Modes of immigrant political incorporation in the United States and Europe
- New developments in the study of immigrant transnationalism
- The role of religion in the origins and adaptations of immigrant groups
- The continuing debate on immigrant entrepreneurship and ethnic enclaves
- Methodological problems in the study of the immigrant second generation
- Methodological problems in the study of undocumented migration

This substantive agenda, developed in collaboration by the SSRC Committee, the CMD at Princeton, and the *IMR* editors, attempted to identify areas at the frontier of immigration research that have garnered the attention of theorists and researchers on both sides of the Atlantic in recent years. The different approaches to each of these topics are presented in the following articles and summarized in their respective abstracts. They need not be repeated here. Instead we call attention in this introduction to what we envision as significant developments in one or more of these subfields referring, when appropriate, to articles in this collection.

STATES AND MODES OF POLITICAL INCORPORATION

The first four articles in this issue have to do, in one form or another, with

the problematic relationship between national states and international migration. By definition, states seek to regulate what takes place within their borders and what comes from the outside. International migrants are one of the most potent and most problematic of these flows because, unlike commodities or other inanimate exchanges, they are composed of people who can, by their sustained presence, alter the very character of the receiving society. For this reason, as Hollifield (2004) and Castles (2004) contend, all modern states have sought to carefully monitor and regulate such entries in order to balance demands for greater openness and restriction, although their record of performance at this task has been mixed.

As Zolberg (1999) and Castles (2004) have pointed out, the economic distance between the global North and South has become so vast as to create a virtually inexhaustible supply of potential migrants. The gap is aggravated by the forces of capitalist globalization that expose and entice Third World populations to the benefits of modern consumption, while denying them the means to acquire them. In the developed world, meanwhile, a growing thirst for labor willing to perform the harsh and low-paid menial work that citizen workers increasingly avoid creates a powerful magnet for migrants from less developed lands. The fit between such labor needs and the motivations of citizens of the global South to improve their life chances is so powerful as to defy state efforts at controlling it (Hollifield, 2004).

Once international labor flows start, networks emerge between migrants and their places of origin that make the movement self-sustaining over time. Networks tend to develop such strength and momentum as to support continuing migration even after the original economic motives have declined or disappeared (Massey *et al.*, 2002; Massey, 2004; Portes and Bach 1985). The rapid exchange of information and flexibility of these networks can easily bypass official efforts to channel or suppress migrant flows. Governments of sending nations cannot be counted on to cooperate in such efforts either. Almost without exception, Third World countries have come to understand the significant advantages of out-migration, both as a safety valve to alleviate the pressure of domestic scarcities and as a future source of important financial contributions (Guarnizo *et al.*, 2003). There is no logical incentive for these governments to try to repress emigration and every incentive to maintain ties with large expatriate communities functioning as an increasingly important economic resource.

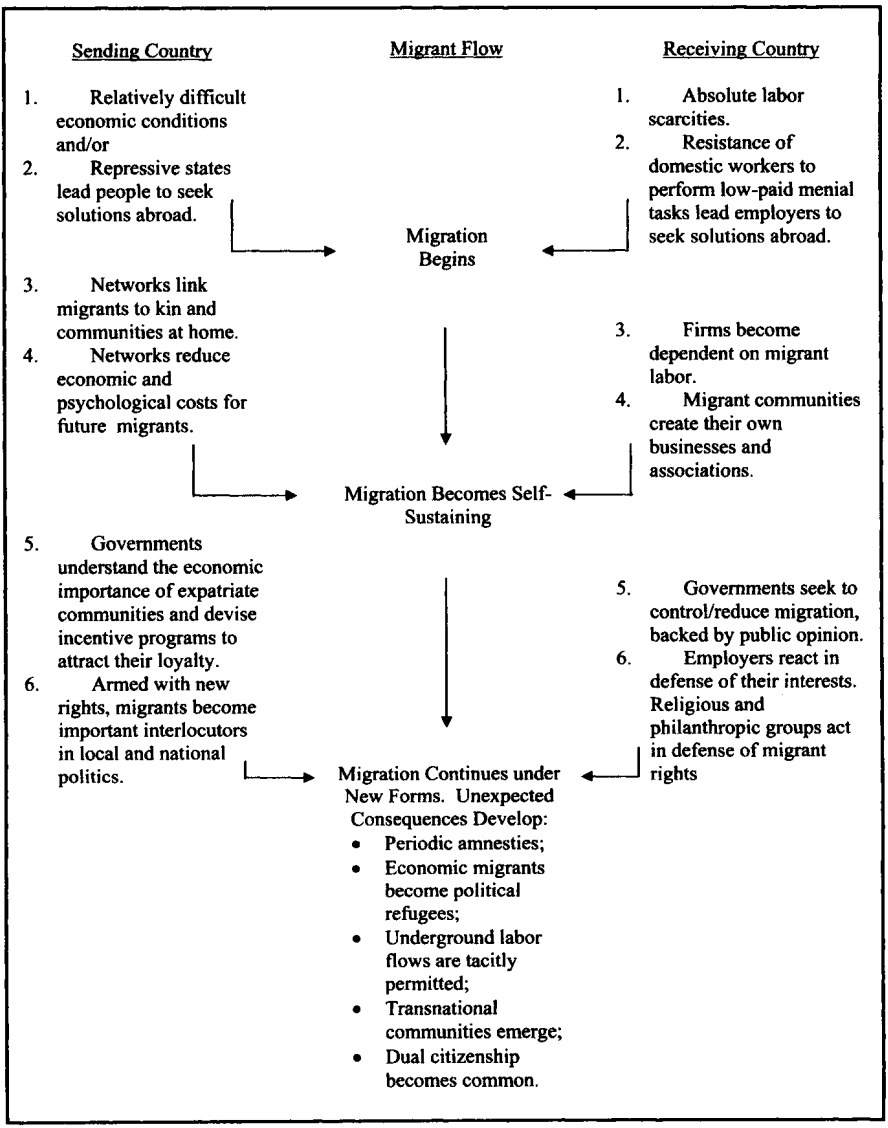
Ambivalently arraigned against these powerful forces are the governments and policies of receiving nations. While the native population of receiving countries tends to be hostile toward large-scale immigration, this

sentiment is generally diffuse, it is far from universal, and it seldom coalesces in organized or militant opposition. In contrast, as several authors have noted, the interests of those favoring the continuation of immigrant flows, including the migrants themselves and their employers, are often highly focused and determined (Freeman, 1995, 2004; Cornelius, 1998; Massey *et al.*, 2002). Governments of countries in the developed world are not impotent in the face of those pressures. Indeed, these states represent the key institutional actor enforcing the North/South divide and keeping the vast majority of would-be migrants in their respective countries (Zolberg, 1999). However, the social forces at play inevitably create a gap between regulatory intent and results, frequently leading to paradoxical outcomes. For instance, redoubling border enforcement compels migrant laborers to abandon their previous pattern of circular migration, encouraging them instead to settle in the host country and bring their families. Instead of stopping migration, these "get tough" policies end up consolidating migrants' presence and further entrenching their support networks (Castles, 2004; Portes and Rumbaut, 1996:Ch. 8).

Students of the politics of migration have been preoccupied by a second set of forces hampering official control efforts. By and large, the wealthy receiving nations are also democracies where human rights legislation applies to all those within their borders, not just citizens, preventing state attempts to deal summarily with unwelcome newcomers. Religious groups, philanthropic organizations, and associations of settled migrants stand ready to mobilize the judiciary against the executive branch in the name of migrants' human rights. This gives rise to the "liberal paradox" in which the most powerful nations in the world are prevented by their own laws from effectively controlling or suppressing unwanted immigration (Hollifield, 2004; Freeman, 2004). Figure I summarizes the interplay of forces giving rise to these unexpected consequences.

The complex interplay of political forces supporting international migration is no better reflected than in the rise and growing recognition of dual nationality and dual citizenship. Promoted originally by the governments of sending nations as a means to sustain the loyalty of their expatriates and keep their investments and remittances flowing, dual citizenship has become accepted as well by host countries in the developed world, either explicitly or tacitly. Contradicting the previously enshrined principle in international law that every person must have one and only one nationality, dual citizenship laws are currently accepted and defended as a novel form of political incorporation that reconciles immigrants' competing loyalties and actually facili-

Figure I. States and Immigration



tates their long-term integration to host societies. Though opponents point to the patent injustice of migrants being able to play off one set of national laws against another, something that native citizens cannot do, supporters point to the equally patent justice of giving common people the same

transnational reach and rights as those granted to multinational corporations and the wealthy. These dynamics (analyzed in detail by Faist, 2004) show, above all, how the interplay of competing forces outlined in Figure I can lead to unanticipated effects, startlingly at variance with the original expectations of actors involved in the process. The effect of regulatory regimes in state, market, welfare, and cultural domains of Western democracies in promoting the incorporation of immigrants, as described by Freeman (2004), can be offset not only by dual citizenship, but also by other ties that migrants sustain with their homeland societies.

TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES AND IMMIGRANT ENTERPRISE

A second area of increasing theoretical and research interest has been the rise and consolidation of transnational ties between immigrant diasporas and their respective sending countries. Dual citizenship represents the most visible political aspect of this process, but its social, economic, and cultural manifestations are equally important. Transnationalism represents, in this sense, the obverse of the canonical notion of assimilation, sustained as the image of a gradual but irreversible process of acculturation and integration of migrants to the host society. Instead, transnationalism evokes the alternative image of a ceaseless back-and-forth movement, enabling migrants to sustain a presence in two societies and cultures and to exploit the economic and political opportunities created by such dual lives.

The early literature on the topic conveyed the sense that transnationalism was becoming the normative pattern of adaptation among contemporary migrants. "Everyone was doing it," and, hence, old-style assimilation was a thing of the past. Indeed, the call for attention to this field in the first chapter of the *Handbook* argued that:

> Communication facilities, added to the economic, social, and psychological benefits that transnational enterprise can bring, may turn these activities into the normative adaptation path for certain immigrant groups. . . .That path is, of course, at variance with those envisioned by the assimilation perspective. (Portes, 1999:29).

Another question at that time was whether transnational practices existed only among immigrants to the United States or were present elsewhere. The subsequent literature has answered this question affirmatively, while correcting some of the earlier excessive expectations. Indeed, though transnational practices may be as common among immigrants in Europe as among those in the United States, in neither case are they necessarily nor-

mative. An empirical, statistically representative survey of Latin American immigrants in the United States discovered that involvement in transnational activities was exceptional, with less than 15 percent of immigrant family heads taking part in them on a regular basis. Even occasional participation was not generalized and involved only a minority of the relevant populations (Portes *et al.*, 2002; Guarnizo *et al.*, 2003; Itzigsohn and Saucedo, 2002).

Despite this numerical limitation, the same study discovered that participants were not generally the most recent or least integrated immigrants, but those who had managed to establish a more solid foothold in the receiving country. Transnational practices were found to increase with time since immigration, a result that leads to the expectation that they would continue to expand in the future. Other studies in the countries of origin demonstrated the enormous impact that remittances, regular visits, and the philanthropic activities organized by expatriates can have on the communities of origin (Smith, 1998; Landolt, 2001; Levitt, 2001). As a Salvadoran sociologist put it trenchantly: "Migration and remittances are the true economic adjustment program of the poor in our country" (Ramos, 2002).

Two of the articles in this issue review the recent literature in this subfield and highlight the potential significance of transnational activities for the identities and social lives of participants, for the political order of sending and receiving states, and for economic development (Vertovec, 2004; Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). In their contribution to this issue, Levitt and Glick Schiller trace the development of knowledge in this field and distinguish between "modes of being" and "modes of belonging" as an analytic lens to clarify the organization, meaning, and implications of immigrant transnationalism.

A controversy that began prior to the publication of the *Handbook* was whether there was "anything new" in this concept since practices labeled today as "transnational" could also be found in abundance among earlier immigrant groups, such as those coming to the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That controversy was resolved by a growing consensus that transnationalism represents a new analytic perspective, not a novel phenomenon (Glick Schiller, 1999). Through this analytic lens, it becomes possible to reconceptualize a set of disparate experiences described in the early historical literature, to highlight their common features, and to compare them fruitfully to contemporary events (Smith, 2003).

In addition, there is growing recognition that developments in transportation and communication technologies have qualitatively transformed

the character of immigrant transnationalism, turning it into a far more dense and dynamic cross-border exchange than anything that would have been possible in earlier times. No matter how committed and mindful of their native villages Italian or Polish immigrants of an earlier era were, they could not possibly send remittances, make investments, visit, or communicate with kin and friends with the ease and speed made possible by air travel and the internet. Figure II portrays, in synthetic form, the cumulative character of this phenomenon.

A parallel literature on immigrant self-employment and entrepreneurship developed in the past with an almost exclusive domestic focus. Publications on the topic, including those in the *Handbook,* concentrated, almost exclusively, on determinants of entrepreneurship and their economic consequences for those involved (Raijman and Tienda, 1999; Light, 1984; Light and Rosenstein, 1995; Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990). In her contribution to this issue, Zhou makes the important point that immigrant entrepreneurship is frequently tied to the countries of origin and it is thus transnational. This assertion is backed by empirical evidence from the survey of Latin American migrants cited earlier which shows that the majority of self-employed family heads in these communities are actually transnational entrepreneurs (Portes *et al.*, 2002). By linking together previously separate literatures, Zhou's article opens a new perspective on the topic of immigrant entrepreneurship, pointing toward possibilities for its expansion and development beyond what an exclusively domestic perspective would allow.

The same article makes a second theoretical contribution by highlighting the noneconomic consequences of immigrant enclaves (one of the three forms of entrepreneurship distinguished in the literature), especially with regard to the adaptation process of the second generation. Zhou points out that these tightly-knit communities, with a high diversity of institutional resources, promote selective acculturation and, hence, high self-esteem and a strong achievement orientation among second-generation youths. They also furnish them with the resources and information necessary to succeed, which are absent or less abundant among less entrepreneurial migrant groups. The various ways in which these resources are made available to children of immigrants are described in detail in the article.

UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRATION AND THE SECOND GENERATION

From a methodological standpoint, one of the most persistently difficult problems in this field is the measurement and analysis of determinants of