

# Migration, Incorporation, and Change in an Interconnected World

Written in engaging and approachable prose, *Migration, Incorporation, and Change in an Interconnected World* covers the bulk of material a student needs to get a good sense of the empirical and theoretical trends in the field of migration studies, while being short enough that professors can easily build their courses around it without hesitating to assign additional readings. Taking a unique approach, Ali and Hartmann focus on what they consider the important topics and the potential route the field is going to take, and incorporate a conceptual lens that makes this much more than a simple relaying of facts.

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*Migration, Incorporation, and Change in an Interconnected World* by Syed Ali and Douglas Hartmann



# **Migration, Incorporation, and Change in an Interconnected World**

**Syed Ali and Douglas Hartmann**

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For Eli, Sami, and Noura  
(Syed)

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For Teresa, Ben, and Emma  
(Doug)





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## PREFACE

This book is and is not a textbook. It has the look of a textbook, in that it covers the bulk of material a student should need to understand to get a good sense of the empirical and theoretical trends in the field of migration studies. But it is not really a textbook in that it is not comprehensive. We planned it that way. We wanted the book to be short and cheap and conceptual so that the professor could use it to build a course around, and not feel too guilty assigning students additional materials to read. Wasn't that nice of us?

Because the book is purposefully short, we had to make stark choices as to what to put in and what to leave out. If you compare our book to other migration textbooks, you will find that much of what they discuss is missing from here. Conversely, much of what is in here you won't find anywhere else. Again, that is on purpose. A lot of what's in the book is our take on what is important in the field, where we think the field is going, and to a degree is a matter of taste. The chapters on Muslim immigrants in the West, low-end migrant workers (including lengthy sections on marriage migration, sex work, and human trafficking), and high-end expatriate workers are indicative of this. While you may not find the breadth of topics you could get elsewhere, we try to make up for it in depth and readability, especially with topics that others do not deal with, or only touch upon. (And for the professors out there, this lends itself easily to assigning short and long essay questions. If any students are reading this preface, please stop groaning.)

Much of the material in the book is based upon our own research on migration, multiculturalism, and race and ethnicity. Though we have both written on these topics, we are outsiders to the migration field, in the sense that we don't have the personal network connections to the "big players," and our approach in our published work is quite different from that of the bulk of researchers in the field. Ali's studies of assimilation in multiple contexts (United States, Europe, India, Dubai) have led him to a theoretical stance at odds with mainstream conceptions of assimilation, theories that draw largely on the American experience. His studies of migrants in India and Dubai also shape his notions of why migrants leave and the different ways in which they adapt and are incorporated (or not). Hartmann approaches the topic of migration a bit differently, more from the perspective of his interests in race and ethnicity on the one hand, and social solidarity, diversity, and belonging, on the other. In current research, both of us have closely linked the concept of race and ethnicity to incorporation, and in ways different from how others have.

Being outsiders has disadvantages of course. But it also has advantages. The biggest is that we can "see the forest for the trees." That is, we make the claim that *because* we are outsiders, we can evaluate the field (what's interesting, what's not, what's dead, what's hot) better than others who are players in the field, who may have vested interests in certain theories or studies, or who will insist on incorporating as much research as possible. We chose to go another route—to make the book reader-friendly. You will immediately get a sense of that from some of the material we choose to foreground, the storytelling approach we use, and our writing style.

The writing style that we use is unique for a textbook. We have both written and worked for *Contexts* (Ali is currently an editor and Hartmann is a former editor), a sociology magazine dedicated to bringing insightful research that is written for the lay reader. So we wrote this book in a very simple, easy-to-read style, intended for undergraduates of all levels (and for non-Western students who often get lost in dense writing styles), graduate students (because they don't want to read dense academic-y material any more than undergraduates do), and any journalists and other nonacademics who might be interested in the topic.

The question we ask ourselves when writing is, “Will my mother-in-law read this?” Your mother has to read it, but your mother-in-law is under no such obligation. But don’t be put off or fooled by our writing style—simple is not simplistic! The theories and ideas in the book are often complex. We have done our best to explain in clear English what they mean. Some professorial types might not like our writing style (they’ll call it “journalistic,” as if that is some kind of insult). But from our experiences teaching undergraduates (and as life-long students and readers ourselves), we believe that students will greatly appreciate it, will pay more attention, and will actually read it! And in the end, they will likely learn more. Isn’t that what it should be about?

# INTRODUCTION

Why do people leave their homes for a new land? Where do they go, and how do they get there? What do they do once they get there? And what about their children, what happens to them? These four linked questions about movement and incorporation are the building blocks for the field of migration studies. They are also the backbone of this book and constitute the core preoccupations of the chapters that follow.

The book will provide a broad, sociological introduction to migration, migrants, and incorporation in a rapidly changing and increasingly interconnected world. Each chapter and case will be based upon (and thus highlight) classic works, key concepts, and the newest, most innovative research and thinking in the field. We will show how these various concepts are intimately connected and place them in a global context. We will do this by presenting a series of stories of the experiences of different groups of migrants in the contemporary world to give a general overview and synthesis of the most important ideas and recent findings about both international movement and immigrant incorporation in the field. We hope this book will serve as a starting point for clear thinking, further research, and informed discussion on all these matters.

It is important to see the underlying points and patterns that each case represents and that organize a sociological approach to the topic and material. As sociologists, we go a bit further in framing migration and incorporation than many scholars in the area. What this means, generally, is that we place these core concerns in the broader social

contexts that drive and determine the movement of people and that shape their experiences in new circumstances.

Context is an important word and a big concept for sociologists. In the sociological imagination, why migration happens and how migrants fare is not just about their culture and resources and hard work (or lack thereof). It is not just what they bring or do. The experience of migration and incorporation is more importantly driven and determined by the conditions that migrants encounter, the very social and cultural situations that motivated their movement in the first place. This is core sociological territory.

There are at least four contexts of the migration experience that we focus on. One is economic—the need that nations have for workers on the one hand, and that migrants have for work. Another is cultural. It is under the general heading of culture that we would call attention to the social dynamics of gender, class, and race, both in terms of movement and incorporation. Across all of the chapters of our book, we will highlight the powerful ways in which gender, class, and race shape, distinguish, and stratify the immigration experience all over the world.

A third contextual factor crucial to understanding migration and migrants is legal and political. This includes the laws and public policies that govern immigration, citizenship, and naturalization, as well as those that dictate the conditions of work. Laws and policies also determine access to social services like education and health care that shape the experience of migration in a new place and that affect movement in the first place. There is a big difference, for example, between the experience of migrants who are undocumented workers (that is, lacking a valid visa for work or residence, or having no visa at all) as compared with those who are refugees from war-torn states who have been granted the benefits and protections of political asylum, or as contrasted with those who work in an industry that has been targeted by a government for economic growth (thus bringing with it favorable tax policies and worker visa programs).

A fourth context is globalization itself. Our emphasis on globalization speaks to the truly international dynamics of movement and migration, and how these dynamics play out differently in different parts of the world. We are also interested in how globalization

is driving the incorporation of migrants' into their new societies, the impacts that migration is having on race and ethnic relations, citizenship and multiculturalism, and national politics in societies all over the world. Ultimately, we are interested in what the evolving dynamics of migration and incorporation can teach us about globalization and the contemporary global world itself.

In addition to our emphasis on context, another distinctive aspect of this book and the sociological orientation to migration and incorporation more generally is a focus on the broader social impacts and cultural significance of migration. Our premise is that migration not only changes things for the lives of migrants and their children, but it changes things for the societies they move into, the natives and other foreigners they come into contact with, and those they leave behind. Indeed, the final chapter of the book will discuss explicitly the transformations that immigration leads to in countries and societies all across the world.

We don't intend this to be a particularly long book, or a completely exhaustive one. Rather, our goal is to produce a volume that will—in an engaging, accessible way—introduce readers to the classic works, key concepts, and original new research and topics that together constitute the unique, broad vision of and orientation to migration that is cultivated in sociology. It is an invitation—or perhaps challenge—to think sociologically about migration and be able to apply that orientation and basic set of facts and concepts to the unfolding world around us.

### **American Migration as Starting Point**

Although migration is fundamentally a global phenomenon, it operates very differently for different people in different societies over the world. But you have to start from somewhere in order to begin to grasp all of this complexity and variation. Since we are from the United States, and many of our students and readers will be American, that's where we will start.

The United States offers a very important, if somewhat particular starting point for thinking about migration and migrants. The United States is one of those rare societies that think of itself as a nation of immigrants. The country's history has been thoroughly shaped and

determined by migrants (though also by the colonization, imperial conquest, and the displacement of Native Americans). Moreover, the country has been, and still is, the most popular destination for immigrants globally. According to the US Census, there are approximately 40 million foreign-born people in the United States.<sup>1</sup> That is to say, about 12–13 percent of the total population was born in and comes from a country outside of the United States.

These are quite remarkable numbers. To put them in some perspective, consider that this is the highest *raw* number ever in American history, though not the highest proportion of immigrants, which was in the 1890s–1910s when about 15 percent of the population was foreign born. And it has all happened very quickly. In the 1970s, after a long hiatus brought about by various restrictions following the world wars, the percentage of persons born outside of the nation's borders was only 4.7 percent. So from the 1970s to 2013, the percentage of foreign-born residents had more than doubled to about 13 percent.

There are not only a lot of immigrants in the United States, but they are also an extremely diverse group. About one-third of the foreign born—13 million—who live in the United States are legal permanent residents, with close to half being citizens. Around another 11 or 12 million are undocumented, the most controversial group. And no matter what their legal status, migrants come from many different countries. By far, the largest number of foreign born is from Mexico (about 12 million), more than five times the next two largest groups of Chinese (2.2 million) and Indians (1.8 million) respectively. About half of all legal residents live in four states: About 25 percent live in California (3.5 million), while another quarter of all legal residents live in New York, Texas, and Florida.<sup>2</sup>

Immigrants and residents are diverse in terms of economic status and education. Though public discussion often focuses on poor and undocumented immigrants, the fact is that American immigrants taken as a whole are far from the poor, huddled masses they are sometimes imagined to be. For example, a large number of immigrants in recent years have been political refugees—people who come to the United States because the political situation in their home countries has deteriorated so much that their rights and freedoms have been taken away or their

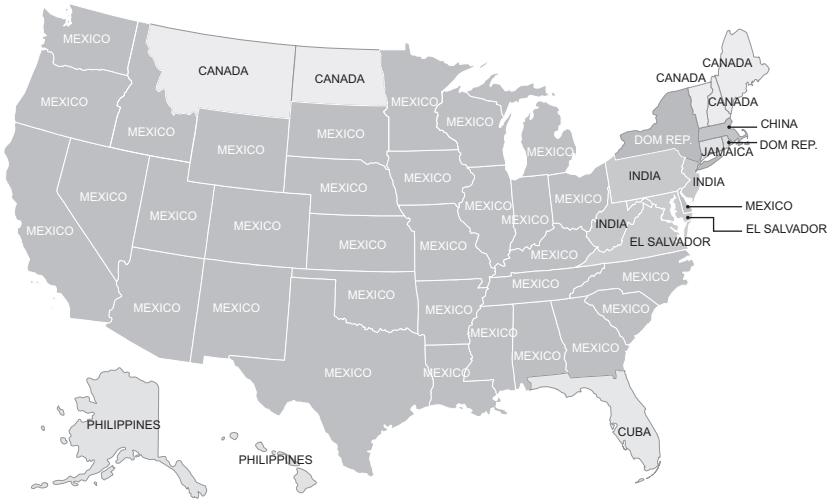


lives put in jeopardy. They come with varying amounts of economic resources and education, but also typically receive special recognition and assistance from the governments and communities that they settle into. Other American migrants are actually sought out for the scientific or technological skills that they have, or the wealth they possess. Many migrants in the United States are highly educated and fairly well off, and migrants and their children also incorporate themselves into American society at rates and levels, from second to third generations, far more quickly and smoothly than is often imagined. The acquisition of English happens particularly quickly, even for first-generation migrants.<sup>3</sup> The exceptions to these general patterns tend to be immigrants who are darker skinned and seen as culturally different. In fact, a recent book on anti-immigration sentiment in the United States suggests that those who have been here the longest and have the most experiences with racism and discrimination are the least likely to think of themselves as Americans.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to place American migration patterns and settlement experiences in some historical and global context. A century ago, the bulk of global migrant flows was to the United States. Migrants came from Southern and Eastern Europe, including the Irish, Italian and Polish. In the early mid-1800s, large numbers of German, British, and Canadian migrants also made their way to the United States. In fact, if you look at Map 0.1 comparing where immigrants to the United States were born in 1910 and 2010, you see that in 1910, the biggest immigrant population in individual states was of Germans, British, and Canadians, whereas by 2010, the largest immigrant population in most states was of Mexicans.<sup>5</sup>

These patterns have been shaped by both economics and governmental policies—or, more accurately, how these two dynamics affect each other. The Mexican case is illustrative. From 1942–1964, the United States had a temporary labor program, the Bracero program, which brought 450,000 temporary Mexican laborers to the United States yearly. An additional 50,000 Mexicans arrived with permanent residence. These numbers changed with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (also known as the Hart-Celler Act) that limited permanent resident arrivals to 20,000 overall annually. Also in 1965 the United States shut

2010



1910



Map 0.1 Top nation of origin by US state

Source: Pew Research Center, "From Germany to Mexico."

down the Bracero program. So the number of legal, permanent residents declined significantly. But temporary workers, who used to come legally, in the 1970s started to come without proper documentation. (In the United States today, there are around 12 million undocumented migrants—more than half of which are Mexican. Of these, around three million or more entered as minors and grew up in the United States.<sup>6</sup>) In fact, Mexico-United States migration is the greatest flow in the world. Almost 10 percent of Mexican citizens live in the United States, and this flow constitutes 6 percent of all global migrants.<sup>7</sup>

In recent years, increased border controls (walls, patrols, drones, etc.) between the United States and Mexico have made migration more difficult and more costly. This has changed the nature of undocumented migration. Before the 1990s, when the United States became stricter about undocumented migration, migrants often went back and forth. But by the 1990s, it became more difficult to enter, which made migrants more likely to stay, and have children and raise them in the United States.<sup>8</sup> In fact, there are a great number of families where the parents and some children are undocumented, while other children are born in the United States and are citizens.<sup>9</sup> But while the undocumented population of Mexicans has increased dramatically, so has the documented population. In recent years, large numbers of Mexicans have naturalized—between 1990 and 2010, 2.1 million naturalized. US citizens are allowed to sponsor direct relatives (spouses, minor children, and parents and adult siblings subject to certain numerical conditions). Because so many Mexicans have naturalized, they are sponsoring relatives—in 2010, two-thirds of all Mexican immigrants, about 170,000 a year, arrived as permanent residents. The number of legal, temporary Mexican workers has quietly risen also—in 2008 there were 361,000, the most since 1959.<sup>10</sup>

But what about the rest of the world? The high percentage of foreign-born residents in the United States as well as the extreme range and variation in terms of their experiences can give us a skewed sense of the scope and significance of migration worldwide. Only 3 percent of people around the world live outside of the country that they were born in, and half of those live in just 28 countries (see Map 0.2).<sup>11</sup>



## Global Stocks and Flows

Western European countries have also seen a jump in immigration over the past half century. Immigration there was driven by the need to rebuild after World War II, and because of the long economic boom in the 1960s. Most of the immigrants that came as temporary guest workers were from Muslim countries—Turkey, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco sent the most. In the mid-1970s most Western European nations shut down avenues for labor migration, but many of these workers, who it was assumed would just go home, didn't. They settled and started families. Migration since then has been mostly through family reunification and to a lesser degree of refugees. (We will have more to say about Muslim migrants in Western Europe in Chapter 5.)

While the United States and other Western countries are the most popular destinations for migrants, they only account for about 45 percent of the total stock of global migrants. So less than half of all migrants have gone from developing to developed countries. Migrants going between developing countries account for another 35 percent of the total, those migrating between developed countries are 17 percent, and three percent have gone from developed to developing countries (see Table 0.1).<sup>13</sup> Migrants moving West will often travel long distances (like Filipinos to Canada to work as maids), but those moving between developing countries tend to go to neighboring countries, like Zimbabweans to South Africa, or Bangladesh to India. For some developing countries, refugees make up more than 10 percent of the total number of migrants.<sup>14</sup>

In much of the world, working-class migrants come on temporary visas, such as individuals from former USSR countries to Russia; Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis going to the resource-rich Persian Gulf countries; Chinese, Indonesians, and Vietnamese to Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea; and so on. There are also some countries that migrants recently have started going to that few people would even guess would be attractive destinations. For example, Kazakhstan became an important destination for low-skilled migrants from central Asia and to a lesser extent from Russia and China after the Russian financial crisis in 1998, and since 2000 as Kazakhstan's economy has grown considerably due to its recently acquired oil and natural gas wealth.<sup>15</sup> All of these differences matter—and our task in

Table 0.1 Top five migrant corridors on each of the four migrant pathways

| <i>S-N</i> | <i>Origin</i>      | <i>Destination</i> | <i>Number of migrants</i> | <i>% of total S-N migrants</i> |
|------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1          | Mexico             | United States      | 12,189,158                | 12.8                           |
| 2          | Turkey             | Germany            | 2,819,326                 | 3.0                            |
| 3          | China              | United States      | 1,956,523                 | 2.1                            |
| 4          | Philippines        | United States      | 1,850,067                 | 1.9                            |
| 5          | India              | United States      | 1,556,641                 | 0.7                            |
| <i>N-N</i> | <i>Origin</i>      | <i>Destination</i> | <i>Number of migrants</i> | <i>% of total N-N migrants</i> |
| 1          | Germany            | United States      | 1,283,108                 | 4.0                            |
| 2          | United Kingdom     | Australia          | 1,097,893                 | 3.5                            |
| 3          | Canada             | United States      | 1,037,187                 | 3.0                            |
| 4          | Korea, Republic of | United States      | 1,030,561                 | 2.8                            |
| 5          | United Kingdom     | United States      | 901,916                   | 2.5                            |
| <i>S-S</i> | <i>Origin</i>      | <i>Destination</i> | <i>Number of migrants</i> | <i>% of total S-S migrants</i> |
| 1          | Ukraine            | Russian Federation | 3,662,722                 | 4.9                            |
| 2          | Russian Federation | Ukraine            | 3,524,669                 | 4.7                            |
| 3          | Bangladesh         | Bhutan             | 3,190,769                 | 4.2                            |
| 4          | Kazakhstan         | Russian Federation | 2,648,316                 | 3.5                            |
| 5          | Afghanistan        | Pakistan           | 2,413,395                 | 3.2                            |
| <i>N-S</i> | <i>Origin</i>      | <i>Destination</i> | <i>Number of migrants</i> | <i>% of total N-S migrants</i> |
| 1          | United States      | Mexico             | 563,315                   | 7.8                            |
| 2          | Germany            | Turkey             | 306,459                   | 4.3                            |
| 3          | United States      | South Africa       | 252,311                   | 3.5                            |
| 4          | Portugal           | Brazil             | 222,148                   | 3.1                            |
| 5          | Italy              | Argentina          | 198,319                   | 2.8                            |

Source: International Organization for Migration. *World Migration Report 13*.

the chapters that follow will be to try to understand and explain how and why this is the case.<sup>16</sup>

The figures we gave above regarding migration numbers are for the *stock* of migrants. The total stock of global migrants is about 3 percent, or 214 million people. This includes people who have just migrated, and people who migrated when they were infants who have lived in those

countries all their lives. A quick glance at these numbers may give a reader the sense that these numbers are similar over time, that is, the percentages of where people go to and from are the same over time. They are not. These stock numbers don't give us a dynamic sense of what is happening recently.

A better way to examine recent migration is by looking at *flows*. Getting a comprehensive picture of migration flows around the world has been difficult, because the sizes of flows between countries cannot be directly compared using existing datasets. The problem is that countries vary widely in the amount and quality of data they collect on migration. Most countries collect information on the size of their immigrant population (the migrant stock), but less than 50 countries provide data on incoming and outgoing migrants over a specific time interval (the migrant flow).

A new study presents for the first time ever data on the flow of people over five-year periods, from 1990–1995 to 2005–2010.<sup>17</sup> It captures people who changed their country of residence over a five-year period and allows for comparisons between 196 countries. But the data aren't perfect. The coverage of refugees is uneven, and undocumented migrants and seasonal workers can't be captured. So for instance, it will underestimate migration flows to the United States, which has a sizeable population of undocumented workers.

Data on human movements have traditionally been visualized with lines or arrows overlaid on a world map (like the previous map). Circular migration plots created by the migration scholar Nikola Sander and her colleagues make the complex and dynamic patterns of flow data more easily accessible and understandable. The shading tells the direction of each flow: The flow has the same shade as the origin and a different shade as the destination. The width of a flow shows its size, and every tick mark on the plots represents 100,000 migrants.

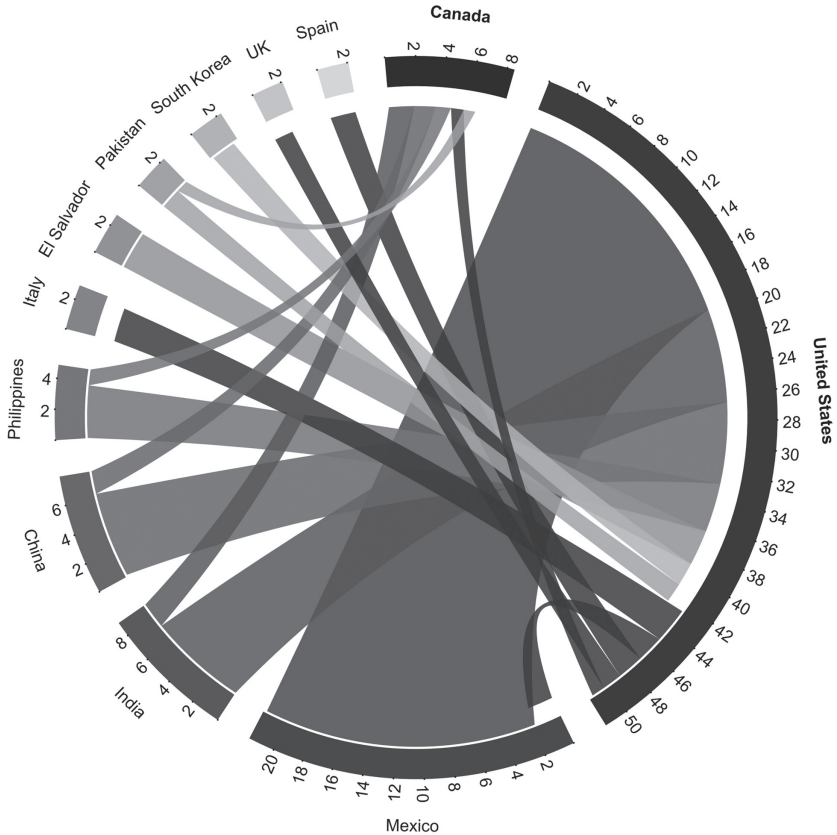
The next four circular plots show migration between seven world regions, to and from the United States and Canada, Western Europe, and the Persian Gulf for the period from 2005 to 2010. Overall, 41.5 million people, or about 0.6 percent of the world's population, migrated during this time, and this five-year flow amount hasn't changed much from 1995 to 2000.<sup>18</sup>



Plot 0.1 Migration between seven world regions, 2005–2010

One thing that stands out in all of these plots is that migration is overwhelmingly from “transitional” countries—not the poorest developing countries, but those with some level of economic development and education. The plots do show some migration within the West, and some from the West to the Persian Gulf, but mostly it is within and from the developing world. This contrasts with the data in Table 0.1, for instance, where we see a great deal of migration within the West. But that is misleading, as the number of German, Canadian, and British migrants in the United States, and British migrants in Australia are mostly settled, that is, they are not recent migrants. Similarly, Russians



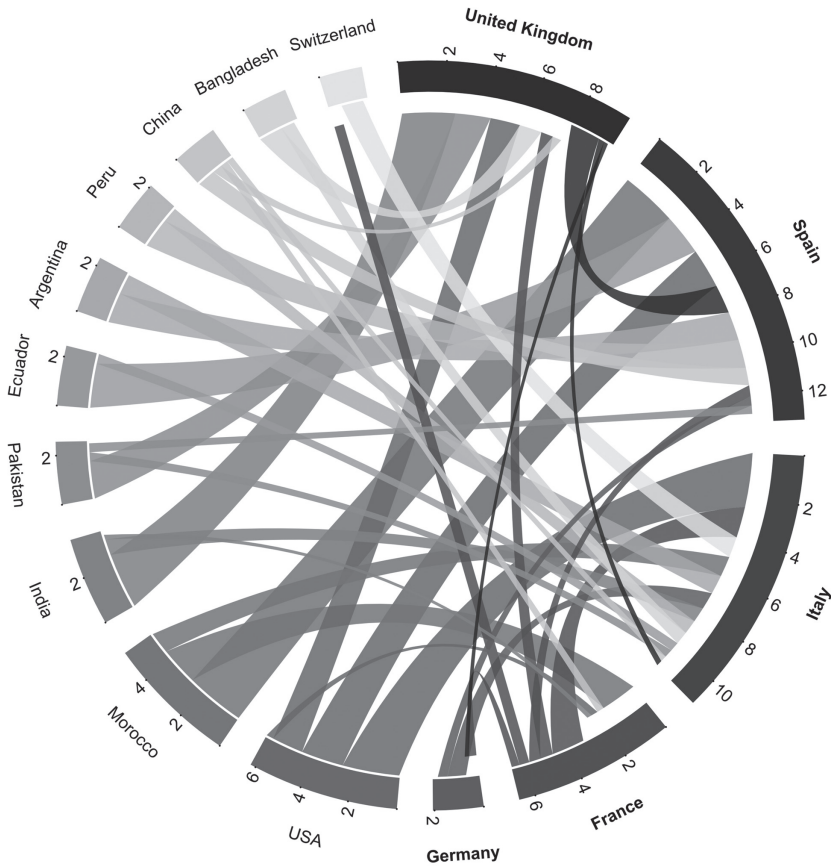


Plot 0.2 Migration to and from the United States and Canada, 2005–2010

in Ukraine (and Ukrainians in Russia) date largely to the early 1990s when the Soviet Union collapsed.

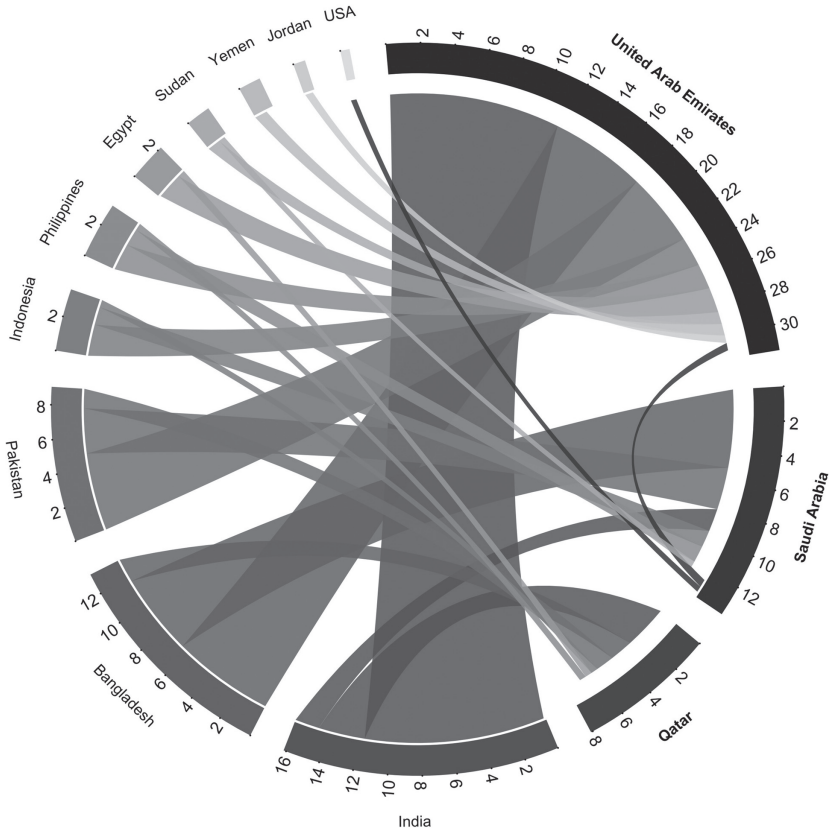
### Chapter Summaries

The first chapter, “Leaving Home,” will look at the why’s, how’s, and where’s of people leaving their homes. It may seem obvious why people leave their homes to seek out a new society, but there are actually many reasons, and how they get from point A to point B (and for many on to point C) is a rather complex process. Here, we explore the main sociological explanations and contexts of emigration: economic factors,



Plot 0.3 Migration to and from Western Europe, 2005–2010

networks, political and legal systems, cultures of migration, and the importance of remittances migrants send home. We also examine how migrants travel back and forth and sometimes split their time and mental energies between countries, a process dubbed “transnationalism.” Many of the most important theories of emigration answer why people go, but do not adequately show how people go. We try to answer the question “how do migrants get to where they are going?” by looking at under-examined mechanisms in migration such as the role of middlemen—agents and smugglers. This consideration of why and how people move not only sets the stage for the rest of the book, but it



Plot 0.4 Migration to and from the Persian Gulf, 2005–2010

provides a lens onto the organization and complexity of the contemporary, global world.

Economic forces are obviously one of the chief drivers of international migration, but economics works in different ways for different groups of migrants. The second chapter of the book will examine the international migration of workers at the lower ends of the labor market—maids, service workers, construction workers, hawkers, sex workers, and so on. Specifically, we will explore the migration of these types of workers in the context of a globalized world where goods and services flow freely across national borders. But these people, whose labor is needed in these destination countries, face greater barriers. We examine labor migrants

who go to their new countries with the understanding that they are merely workers, not immigrants, that is, they go knowing they are temporary (and sometimes undocumented) and in many places have no rights of permanent residence, let alone citizenship. Unlike yesteryear's migrants who were mostly European (and went mostly to the United States) and arrived with legal rights of permanence, today's migrants are darker skinned and often arrive with temporary visas, if they have proper documentation at all.

This chapter also examines the controversy over human trafficking and introduces gender as a key variable shaping the migration and incorporation experience. In recent years, it has become an accepted truth put forward by some scholars, politicians, nongovernmental organizations and activists, that millions of workers have been trafficked and enslaved, mainly women forced into sex slavery, and to a lesser degree men and children forced into various kinds of labor. This may be exaggerated. We look at arguments by some scholars that the focus on trafficking and slavery is one that is morally driven by an aversion to prostitution generally, and greatly inflates the degree to which slavery exists, thus moving the focus away from more pertinent issues of discriminatory visa practices and labor exploitation.

Chapter 3 will look at workers at the other end of the global labor market—professional migrant workers, or “expatriates,” who typically have a greater degree of freedom of movement and choice of what to do and where to go. This chapter concentrates on the working and lifestyle experiences of three types of expatriate workers: Westerners going East; non-Westerners working and living in the East; and non-Western expatriates in the West. In many ways the freedoms and economic benefits enjoyed by these groups of migrants stand in contrast to the experience of the much poorer migrants that are the focus of Chapter 2. However because of government policies restricting their political rights and ability to naturalize, expatriates are also usually short-term migrants and know they will return home at some point. We will show how this status greatly affects their work and lifestyles in their temporary abodes and helps bring into focus the political and legal conditions that structure the migrant experience,

whether by setting the laws for citizenship or by structuring the economic policies that shape economic and corporate markets.

Some of the most familiar, and perhaps most important questions that arise in the study of immigration today involve the adult children of immigrants, the so-called second generation. How does this second generation adapt to their family's new societies, and how and why does this adaptation vary and change across contexts and communities? To what degree do they achieve upward or downward economic mobility? What various governmental policies, cultural conditions, and historical forces affect these outcomes? The most contentious theoretical debates over assimilation rage here, especially through the dominant paradigms of segmented and new assimilation theories. This is the focus of the fourth chapter of the book. We examine a range of second-generation immigrants in the United States and Europe, and contrast these diverse experiences with the case of second-generation immigrants in non-Western settings.

The debates between the different theoretical camps, and the criticism of American theories from Europe, have centered on the degree to which immigrants assimilate or do not assimilate, and the degree of downward assimilation. A contribution that we make will be to point out that while these theories do explain assimilation at the group level, they do not do so at the level of the individual. Therefore they do not explain assimilation, but rather why some *groups* have greater or lesser degrees of assimilation. We will propose and justify an approach centering on peers that looks at how and why individuals assimilate.

The fifth chapter of the book will explore the varied experiences of arguably the most despised and maligned immigrants in the West today: Muslims. We compare the experiences of American with European immigrants. European Muslim immigrants are largely working-class North Africans and Turks in continental Europe and South Asians in the United Kingdom. They came to Western Europe largely as "guest workers," but became permanent simply by not leaving. Their children have improved upon the parents' educational and occupational status somewhat, but by and large trail their native European peers. The experiences of American Muslim immigrants are quite different. For one, there is a very large native-born (that is, whose parents are also native

born), mostly African American contingent. Another major difference is the Muslims who migrated between the 1960s and 1980s were largely professionals, as these people had visa preferences, though by the 1990s the educational, occupational, and country backgrounds began to vary greatly.

What is the meaning and significance of migration for non-migrants? How does all of this affect those who do not migrate, or natives in the countries that migrants are moving into? This is the focus of the sixth and final substantive chapter of the book. We again examine the economic impacts of migration and remittances for migrants and their kinfolk and others back home.

This chapter will also address a range of demographic issues, focusing on overall patterns of population growth as it is driven by migration as well as how race and ethnicity are affected by these demographic shifts. We end by discussing multiculturalism and nativist backlash to the rise of multiculturalism.

In the final, concluding chapter, we will revisit some of the main trajectories and future questions revolving around migration and immigration globally, and try to show the utility of the key concepts and insights of the works discussed in the book. We will also try to suggest some of the historical forces and social factors that are most likely to be decisive in determining the future patterns of migration, incorporation, and change in an increasingly interconnected world.

## Notes

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- 11 Waldinger, Roger. "Crossing Borders International Migration in the New Century." *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 42.3 (2013): 349–363.
- 12 International Organization for Migration. *World Migration Report 2013*. Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2013, p. 61.
- 13 International Organization for Migration, 2013, p. 55. These numbers are from the World Bank, and estimates from other organizations differ, sometimes greatly. So take them as indicative, but not definitive.
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- 15 Anderson, Bridget, and Blanka Hancilová. "Migrant Labour in Kazakhstan: A Cause for Concern?" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37.3 (2011): 467–483.
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- 18 All four plots were made for us by Nikola Sander. We're greatly thankful and indebted to her for making these plots, and writing the description for them. You should go to her website, [www.global-migration.info/](http://www.global-migration.info/), to see more detail about global migration flows for different periods and for specific countries. They show how flows change over time, and how some countries get more while others get less. For instance, between 1995 and 2010, the flow of migrants to the United Arab Emirates increased dramatically, whereas immigration to Saudi Arabia was higher in 2000–2005 than in 2005–2010. Her plots are interactive and fantastic. What we present here is just a glimpse of the data.





# 1

## LEAVING HOME

As we saw in the introductory chapter, there are clearly identifiable patterns and paths of international migration. There are specific places that send off greater numbers of migrants, and specific places that are more likely to receive them. And the places they go to have shifted over time. Some countries that were net exporters of people have become net importers, and vice versa.

Here, we explore the main sociological explanations of why people emigrate, or leave their home countries: economic reasons, networks, and cultures of migration. We will also look at how migration affects migrants' kinfolk and others back home through remittances, money, and ideas that migrants send home. Remittances shape future migration patterns, and thus are theoretically very important. We further examine how migrants travel back and forth and sometimes split their time and mental energies between countries, a process called "transnationalism."

Many of the most important theories of emigration answer *why* people go, but do not adequately show *how* people go. We try to answer the question "how do migrants get to where they are going?" by looking at under-examined mechanisms in migration such as the role of middlemen—agents and smugglers. This consideration of why and how people move not only sets the stage for the rest of the book, but it provides a lens onto the organization and complexity of the contemporary, global world.

### Economic Arguments

The basic economic argument for why people migrate is twofold: Migrants make a rational decision to leave home because job prospects and pay are poor, and they choose to go to a place because job prospects and pay there are better. This is known as the “push-pull” model and is the basis for “neoclassical” economic arguments for why people migrate. In this view, the broad migratory trend will be from developing world countries to developed countries. The migration trend will be in this direction because there is a great demand for labor in the richer, developed countries, and the wages are greater there.<sup>1</sup> Essentially, the individual does a cost-benefit analysis. If the financial costs of migration are outweighed by the benefits of a higher salary, the person goes. The motives for migration then are economically rational and individualistic.<sup>2</sup>

This economic framework is sensible but, in itself, has not proven to be a good explanation for why people migrate. If it were true, we would expect a lot more people to migrate than actually do, especially from poorer countries, and we would expect the poorest to go. In reality, the bigger sending countries, like India, Mexico, and China, are not the poorest countries. And within the sending countries, it is not the poorest generally who migrate. Further, this line of argument ignores social aspects of migration. It assumes that decisions are made by the individual and are made for purely monetary reasons.

A revised version of the neoclassical approach is the “new economics of labor migration.” Here the emphasis is not on the individual making a rational economic decision to migrate, but rather it is the household that makes the decision.<sup>3</sup> Migration of a family member is an opportunity for the family to enhance its income base through the remittances sent home by the migrant family member and is also a hedge against economic risks at home. Families can protect against risk by the migrant sending home economic remittances. This theoretical approach in fact puts forward the idea that remittances are a central motive for migration.

While this is a marked improvement over the more simplistic “push-pull” model, there are multiple problematic assumptions. One is that everyone within the household shares the same interests and there is

little conflict or inequality within the family. Another assumption is the possibility that no matter how long the migrant is abroad, he or she will keep sending remittances, and send the same or more. It also assumes the would-be migrant goes where the family wants him or her to go, and stays if they want him or her to stay.

But people are funny sometimes and do what they want, even going against their family's wishes, not going along with the family game plan. For instance, Salman, a civil engineer, was being pressured by his parents and siblings in the late 1990s to leave Hyderabad, India, to get a job in Saudi Arabia, where he could make much more money. His sister's husband lived in Saudi Arabia and remitted substantial amounts and built a three-story addition to the joint family compound for his nuclear family. His brother lived in Iran for ten years and also sent substantial remittances, and when he came back, built himself a large, fancy house. Salman, his wife, and three children lived in one room off the kitchen. His parents and siblings insisted, pretty much demanded, that he *must* go, that it was his moral duty to migrate to support his family. But he didn't want to go. His nonmigration was a source of family tension for many years.<sup>4</sup>

So while this added emphasis on the family and remittances is an improvement over the neoclassical model, it still leaves much unanswered about the process and dynamics of international migration, and still suffers from the assumption that the sole reason to leave is monetary.

### Networks

In the early 2000s, Germany tried to recruit high-tech workers, specifically from India. They expected a flood of migrants. What they got instead was a trickle.<sup>5</sup>

Germany's assumption was that if you gave the opportunity to professionals in a developing country like India to come to a developed country with much higher wages, they would jump on it because it is the economically rational thing to do. Basically, they were operating under the "push-pull" model. It is true that a great number of migrants move initially for economic reasons—whether due to trouble at home or better opportunities abroad. But this is only a partial explanation of why people move, since migrants often dismiss opportunities abroad, as

was the case with Germany. Basically, there are non-economic factors also at play.

Another way to look at this case is to put yourself in the potential Indian migrant's shoes and ask, "Why would I go to Germany?" Your answer would likely be, "It's cold and I don't speak German. In fact, I don't know anything about Germany or anyone there." Indeed, that is a good question and those are good points. For the most part, migrants are going to places that already have links with their country. These could be colonial (India was a British colony, so it shouldn't be surprising that there are large numbers of Indians in the United Kingdom) or military (the United States has had a military presence in countries like Philippines and Vietnam, and this helped spur migration). There are of course economic links. Firms need workers, and one way to get them is to go to the source and recruit them directly. (We'll have more to say on recruitment and agents later.) Another type of economic link is indirect and unintended. Many firms instead of bringing workers back take their workplaces to them, for instance with US firms setting up in China, Haiti, Mexico, etc. Many people thought this foreign investment would deter migration, but paradoxically, it may actually increase it.<sup>6</sup>

The dominant theoretical explanation today looking at why people migrate examines personal networks. The basic idea here is that once these links between places are made, as more people from certain groups—family, village, ethnic group—start migrating, the financial and psychological costs for each succeeding migrant within the network decrease. And as more migrants go, it becomes easier and easier, and the migration flow will become self-perpetuating. This is known as "chain migration" or "cumulative causation."<sup>7</sup>

One of the more important aspects of this approach is the insistence that interpersonal ties drive international migration, and that these networks provide various kinds of aid—information, money, housing, and so on.

Maritsa Poros expands on network theory, while also criticizing it, by introducing more network possibilities beyond the standard "strong" personal network ties, which result in chain migration where family and friends encourage other family and friends to migrate.<sup>8</sup> Her criticism of network theory is that it only looks at one kind of network—the

interpersonal network. To that she adds “weak” ties through organizations and institutions, that is, relations with co-workers, employers, bureaucrats, or community leaders.<sup>9</sup> They provide other sources of information and opportunities to migrate through intracompany transfers, study abroad programs, and direct potential migrants to particular destinations that are often different than those where people who migrate through interpersonal ties settle. Then there are composite ties made up of interpersonal and organizational ties. These ties differ from those above because the interpersonal and organizational aspects of these ties are inseparable, for instance with certain Indian family firms involved in the global diamond trade.

Poros’s approach to networks is quite interesting. She says we should see networks as variable—she uses the term “relational”—in strength, and we need to understand that individuals have multiple networks. Given that, we should try to understand why and how they vary, and when one rather than another network will be important for a migrant.

Studies of migrants generally look at them through geographical origins—Mexicans, Gujaratis, Dominicans, and so on—and assume that the strong interpersonal connections based on these places are the network, and are important for migration patterns. In fact, if you look at the titles of important empirical scholarly work on migrants, nearly all look at migrants from specific places, and they assume (to greater or lesser degrees) that ethnicity or nationality is a basis of solidarity, that, say for instance, Turks in the Netherlands will aid each other because they share nationality. Poros acknowledges that is often the case, but she then wonders about those who are not helped by “their people.” Why and on what basis are they excluded? Why do some get resources from co-ethnics while others do not? Not everyone is equally loved by their co-ethnics, and some people don’t want to be around their co-ethnics or to get help from them, as taking help can put you into financial or social debt, which can lead to more problems than it’s worth.

Poros suggests that we look at the number and quality of the network connections of migrants, and what actually happens between people in these networks. Some networks provide help and resources; others do not. We also have to get away from the assumption that just

because people share the same nationality/religion/ethnicity that they will provide assistance to others who share those characteristics. Sometimes they do; sometimes they don't. It is important to see when and where they do or don't. By looking at migrant networks as variable, and by looking at the broad types of networks (interpersonal, organizational, composite), we can see more clearly and with greater focus more exactly how migration happens.

Another major criticism of migrant network theory is that it concentrates too much on the supply side. That is, it puts too much emphasis on the actions of migrants themselves and the activities within their networks. It ignores the role that employers, the demand side, have in driving migration.<sup>10</sup> If there were no employer demand, then a lot of migrants, perhaps the vast majority of migrants, would never bother going to those places, and the networks might shift location, or wither away.

This has immediate policy implications concerning migration generally, but undocumented migration specifically. Today in most countries concerned with undocumented migration, policing efforts center on finding, punishing, and deporting the migrants themselves. But if migration is largely demand-driven, then it might be more practical and more effective to focus on employers (who are fewer in number than undocumented migrants and often concentrated in certain types of jobs and industries). In the United States, for example, migrant employers are in very high numbers in restaurants, sweatshops, agriculture, meat-processing plants, and construction. If governments gave harsher financial penalties and jail time for employers, it's possible they would not take the risk and would refuse employment to undocumented workers, and there would be less reason for these migrants to come. Currently under US federal law, an employer only faces relatively small fines for hiring undocumented workers, even if the employer is a repeat offender.<sup>11</sup>

### **Culture of Migration and Remittances**

In spite of the above criticisms, networks are a useful way to understand migration chains that have already occurred. But people don't migrate just because they are connected to others who have migrated, which

is essentially the story of migrant network theory, or because there are better jobs available, the basis of economic theories of migration. They have to learn that migration, which is often scary and lonely, is a good thing to do, and they have to have the desire to do it. Or at the least they have to overcome their fears or desires not to do it. Some scholars call this the “culture of migration.”<sup>12</sup> This culture of migration, once developed, has the effect of reinforcing and even expanding the migrant networks. We should point out that this is usually a local, not a national phenomenon. When we talk of emigration from Mexico or India, it is from specific areas like Oaxaca or Hyderabad where migrants disproportionately leave from, and it is in those areas that a culture of migration is most developed.

We can define the culture of migration as ideas, practices and “cultural stuff” that reinforce the celebration of migrants and the process of migration. These include beliefs, desires, symbols, myths, education, and stories about migrants. Simply put, migration is a learned behavior. People have to learn to migrate, and learn to desire to migrate. Ali saw this in simple things in daily life, like young men in Hyderabad putting American/Canadian/Australian flag stickers on their motorcycles. He also found young men of working age sitting in cafés sharing a cup of tea, studying, gossiping, and waiting for agents to process their visas—anything but building a life in Hyderabad itself. Though they physically lived in Hyderabad, in their minds, they had already left.

Wanting to leave in a culture of migration becomes the norm; wanting to stay is deviant, even though only a small minority actually leaves. Salman, the engineer in Hyderabad we met earlier, was perfectly happy to stay. He had his own business and didn’t want to be away from his wife and kids for 11 months out of the year. He had siblings who had gone off and made a lot of money, come back and built large houses. His siblings and parents insisted to him and his wife that he *must* go to Saudi Arabia or Canada (or anywhere in the West or Persian Gulf). The not-so-subtle implication was that by staying with his family, he was being a bad husband; the good husband goes away to send money back.

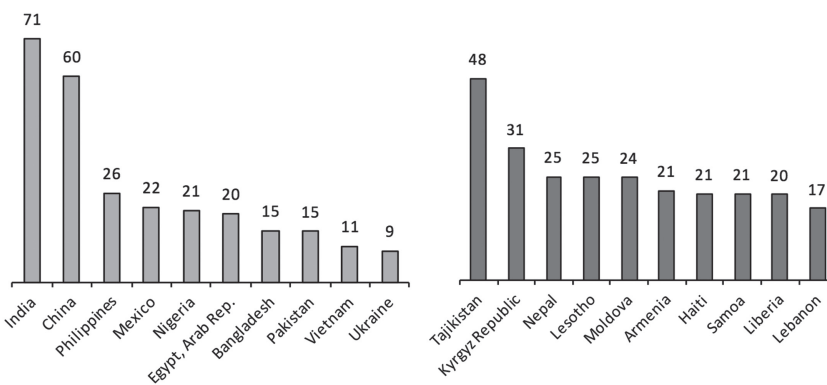
The culture of migration likely emerges after migration has already begun. Once a chain of migratory behavior has started, once networks

have started to flourish, this culture emerges to reinforce the desire among those directly affected by migrants—family, friends, neighbors—and extends out beyond those networks to intensify the desire among even nonmigrants to migrate.

How does this happen? A big part of the story is remittances. Remittances are things that migrants—usually first-generation migrants—send home to family and sometimes to others in their communities. Usually this is economic or material—cash, electronics, clothes, etc. The amount of remittances sent by individuals varies due to many factors: where the migrant has gone to and how long they’ve been there, what their visa status is in their new country, how strong their family ties are back at home, and whether they think they’ll return home or not.

Some countries receive more in remittances from their migrants than others. (See Table 1.1 and Map 1.1.) India and China receive far and away more in remittances (USD 71 and 60 billion in 2013, respectively) than for any other country, not surprising given that both have populations well over one billion people. The next largest recipient nations are Philippines, Mexico, Nigeria, Egypt, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. But in terms of shares of gross domestic product (GDP), nations that are critically dependent upon remittances often have small populations and high unemployment, and many are suffering from effects of wars and natural disasters, and they usually have little other high-income-generating

Table 1.1 Top ten recipients of remittances



Source: Dilip Ratha et al., “Migration and Remittance Flows,” p. 5.





economic activities. These include countries such as Tajikistan (which gets half of its GDP from remittances), Kyrgyz Republic, Nepal, Lesotho, Moldova, Haiti, and Lebanon.<sup>13</sup> For places like these, anything that slows down the pace of remittances can have disastrous ripple effects on the broader economy, as remittances pay for construction, school fees, marriages, and support local businesses. Not surprisingly, many governments, like the Philippines, Mexico, and Sri Lanka actively encourage and facilitate the sending of remittances.

In addition to financial resources, some migrants send “social” remittances that benefit their localities beyond just family and friends. Migrants who go back and forth between Dominican villages and towns in Massachusetts in the United States learn political strategies and “send” them back to the Dominican Republic where people then take those lessons learned and apply them locally.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Mexican villagers in New York City set up organizations to send money back and administer funds for public works projects.<sup>15,16</sup>

These remittances are important because they transform how the families of migrants live their lives at home. Obviously the money and material stuff makes life easier. Economic remittances for families in places like India, Lebanon, Mexico, and so on are essential for maintaining and improving their standards of living, making the poor less poor, and making the rich much richer.

These financial and material remittances have no meaning in and of themselves—they’re just useful things. But people give meaning to these things, and that is important here in understanding the culture of migration. This also takes us beyond the simple financial family calculations we see in the new economics of labor migration theory. Remittances greatly affect how people think about *status*, or honor or social prestige. Families of migrants who were poor and low status can quite quickly become wealthy, even wealthier than the local economic elite is. This can change the ways they interact with others.<sup>17</sup>

This status transformation is most obvious when looking at the one place where status matters the most—marriage. Who is good marriage material in many places has become the person who has migrated or is willing to migrate. Those who can’t—or won’t—go abroad are seen as lacking. A 19-year-old woman in Beirut said, “The guys that remain in

Lebanon are the stupid ones! You start to feel that the men who stay in Lebanon are the ones with no ambition in their work, and so you wonder, why are they still here?"<sup>18</sup>

For many people who find their marriage ambitions stunted at home, migration provides the possibility of remaking themselves because the opportunity to make more money can increase their social status dramatically. In fact, being a migrant *in and of itself* has become a status marker in many places. Ali found that in Hyderabad, for men, and often women, going to the West or to the Persian Gulf to work changes the ways they are perceived in Hyderabad itself. The identities they are born with, such as caste or nobility (Hyderabad was a kingdom until 1948) or the class background of their parents, become secondary or irrelevant. Even educational achievements, so important as status markers throughout the world, can lessen in importance. These migrants become highly prized commodities because they have that valued social marker—a foreign visa or citizenship. And these people can demand better—better-educated spouses, better quality families, and better (that is, bigger) dowries. Those who get abroad are victorious, and to the victor go the spoils.<sup>19</sup>

Because migrants and migration are socially valued, people in the sending societies take keen interest in the lands to which they may migrate. They become familiar with how people live their lives there through doing things like watching satellite TV and hearing the stories (and seeing the results) of migrants who come back to visit or settle permanently. Essentially there is a cultural presocialization that goes on, sometimes well before a migrant even decides to migrate.

To facilitate migration, many learn the languages of the places where they intend to migrate, often even before it becomes clear they have a chance to migrate. At higher educational levels, students often choose their courses of studies based on perceptions of what is in demand in the countries they would like to emigrate to. So for instance, in the late 1990s, there was a great demand in Hyderabad for software training in programs like Oracle, Java, and C++. Many did not do this to work in Hyderabad, which was certainly possible, as international firms such as Microsoft, Texas Instruments, and many others had set up operations there. Rather, they were trying to get to the United States, United

Kingdom, Canada, and Australia—places that had visa preferences for IT workers.

The possibility that they may migrate affected how these young people thought about working at home. For many, they didn't bother, as they were receiving remittances from family abroad, which was more money than they could make working. So why work? Many educated young men sat around and chose not to work, instead putting their efforts into securing a visa to go abroad, to do anything. Many highly educated young men in Hyderabad would sit idly and not work at low-paid, low-status jobs. But they were more than happy to do menial jobs once abroad, like working at a gas station in Chicago or Melbourne. Why? Because they saw work abroad as inherently higher status than work at home.

The above examples all focus on status mobility—or changes in the relative social ranking within their communities—of individuals and, by association, their families. But remittances have social effects that go beyond the individual and family. Take for example a study of the effects of migrant remittances on caste (hereditary status groups that tend to marry amongst themselves) in three villages in the coastal Indian state of Kerala.<sup>20</sup> In a Hindu village, migration by lower-caste members led to an inversion of rank of the two major castes; in a Christian village, the high castes took advantage of migration, leading to greater caste polarization; but in a Muslim village, the economic success of the low castes served to erode the caste differences, and broke down traditional patterns where marriages were arranged within castes. What's interesting here is that patterns of social inequality that took hundreds of years to build up were so strongly affected by remittances sent home over merely a few decades.

### **Transnationalism**

Arguably the most prominent paradigm that scholars use today to study the flows of migrants between countries is transnationalism. Transnationalism does not try to directly answer the question of why or how people migrate as the above theories do; rather it shows how people maintain connections across multiple countries. Most scholars of transnationalism, though, just look at how migrants maintain such connections between their home and host countries.

Scholars generally see transnationalism as a process where individuals and families and/or ethnic, nationality, or religious communities maintain varying degrees and types of social, economic, and political ties across two or more nations. Additionally, some scholars put forward the idea that actual mobility across borders is not even required, that living within a “transnational social field” where others participate in transnational activities encompasses both those who move and those who stay behind.<sup>21</sup> The ability to be transnational is made easy through fast and cheap transportation, email, texting and video chatting, ease and speed of sending remittances, and so on.

While some scholars argue that transnationalism is a recent product of globalization, it’s not actually new. We can see examples of transnational behavior among 19th and early 20th century Italian and Russian Jewish immigrants in the United States. They sent letters home, and perhaps more importantly, money orders. Russian immigrants set up hometown associations in New York to send aid back to war-ravaged home communities. And many returned back to Russia and Italy, often to build houses. Many Italians were “birds of passage” flitting back and forth between the United States and Italy. Even among Russian Jews who faced political oppression and an incredible degree of anti-Semitism in Russia, as many as 20 percent of those who came between 1880 and 1900 returned. More broadly, for every 100 migrants that came to the United States in the first two decades of the 20th century 36 returned. That’s actually a higher rate than later in the 20th century, when between 1971 and 1990, 21 of every 100 migrants returned.<sup>22</sup>

The earliest theoretical writings on transnationalism in the 1990s cast a very wide net.<sup>23</sup> They defined transnationals as migrants who maintained any kind of personal, political, or cultural link to the homeland. This would conceivably include, say, a second-generation Irish American who likes to drink Guinness beer.

While earlier scholars made it seem that nearly all immigrants were transnational, more recently other writers have begun to emphasize that not all international migrants are transnationals.<sup>24</sup> Many if not most migrants—especially those in Western countries—have little, if any, qualitative or quantitative connection with their home countries outside of close family. Even where one finds the greatest numbers of first-generation

immigrants who are engaging in transnational behavior, the absolute numbers are still few relative to the total population of migrants.<sup>25</sup>

One understudied element in the field is of adult, second-generation migrants, who, not surprisingly, tend to have fewer and less intense transnational connections than their parents with their parents' country of origin.<sup>26</sup> However, many scholars assert that the children of migrants do engage in transnational activities, even if not to the same degree as first-generation immigrants.<sup>27</sup> Some of these young adults choose, for economic and/or cultural reasons, to return to their parents' homeland, laying claim to it as theirs.<sup>28</sup> But again, transnationalism is not common among the first generation; it is far less common among the second generation.<sup>29</sup>

Most studies of transnationalism look at migrants in countries where there is a chance of permanent settlement, which partially explains why rates of transnationalism are so low. Instead, let's look at a place where there is no chance of permanent settlement. In his research on Dubai, Ali found a situation where *all* second-generation migrants, like first-generation migrants, regardless of country of origin, must at some point consider leaving Dubai.<sup>30</sup> This is very different from second-generation migrants in the West. The key factor that makes these migrants in Dubai different from immigrants in other countries is the structured impermanence they live under as a direct result of the state defining them as temporary migrant contract workers, rather than as immigrants. All non-citizens in Dubai are on temporary visas. Even if they're born in Dubai, hardly any will ever get citizenship, and there is no such category as permanent residency. Their passports and citizenship are those of their fathers, even if they have never been to those countries.

For most global migrants, conscious decisions have to be made to leave one's home and engage in transnational behavior. For second-generation migrants in Dubai, however, their transnationalism is compelled by the state and is their default strategy. Alejandro Portes makes the point that "the ways immigrants are incorporated in the host society [affects] their propensity to engage in transnational initiatives."<sup>31</sup> In Dubai and throughout the Persian Gulf, migrants are barely incorporated into the host society beyond their economic activities; indeed they are not even considered immigrants.

One of Ali's more interesting findings was not simply how common transnational behavior was for these people, but rather, how these migrants accepted their reality of going between multiple countries to live and work with such mental ease. They live with the possibility that their visas could be cancelled, and they may find themselves deported. But at the same time, in a way they are untethered from Dubai, as they do not legally belong. For these people in Dubai, transnational behavior is something they all engage in, or will necessarily engage in, as they have no choice. Since Dubai is not really their "home," their attachment to it is much less than, say, for second-generation migrants in London or New York City who do have legal permanence and are socially recognized as belonging, even if they do experience forms of exclusion such as garden-variety racism. It should be no surprise, then, that second-generation immigrants in the West so rarely engage in transnational behavior.

### **Government Regulations and Migration**

At this point we should make clear, if it's not already obvious, that we feel laws and governmental actions are possibly the most important, and least theorized, factors affecting international migration. Governmental action shapes who migrates, where, and how. Sometimes migration happens the way the government intends; at other times it does not. Migrants react to the actions of governments, by abiding by their rules or figuring out ways to get around them. On occasion migrants are able to mobilize to get governments to change the rules; sometimes they're successful, though usually they're not. While it is true that economic compulsions, network connections and a culture of migration are important, it is governments that set the rules of the game—migrants either follow the rules or they cheat (which can be another way to get governments to change the rules if the cheating is widespread and successful). However, ultimately migrants cannot ignore these rules, nor can they make their own.

Nation-states issue passports and visas, and go to great lengths to regulate who comes in and out and who is able to stay and for how long—from short-term tourist and work visas to permanent residency visas to granting citizenship. Those without visas—or undocumented

persons—are subject to prosecution and deportation. Most states have very stringent controls and detailed bureaucratic processes. Migrants have to do the things that need to be done to get them admitted legally, or figure out ways around border controls to get there illegally. For instance, as the United States has stepped up border controls and built a border wall with Mexico, migrants have to work harder to get to the United States, often crossing through the Arizona desert, where deaths have skyrocketed in recent years. Again, governments set the rules here, and migrants react by either following them or figuring out how to get around them.

This should be an obvious point, but somehow it is one that does not get as much attention as it deserves in theories of why people migrate. Migration theorists, while they often acknowledge that the state is important, usually don't put it theoretically front and center. That is to say, the state seems to be for many writers the *context* in which migration happens, rather than a *cause* of migration. They instead emphasize that the important causes of migration are economic reasons, networks and cultures of migration. But the state is an active player in migratory flows, and, again, can be an active cause that affects people's decisions to leave, and affect the destinations they go to.

### **How People Actually Migrate: Middlemen**

Given that a passport is almost universally required for international travel, and that nearly all countries have visa requirements for visitors, students, businesspeople, workers, and noncitizen residents, the would-be migrant has to be able to navigate a massive bureaucratic maze if he or she wants to come legally. And if they want to migrate without documents, they have to figure out how to get there without getting caught—either by illegally crossing a border, or by arriving on a short-term visa then overstaying, an increasingly popular option. These are not easy for an individual to do, no matter how good their network connections are.

There is a movement among some scholars outside of these theories we discussed above to pay more attention to *how* people actually get to where they're going. They focus on middlemen—legal and “kind of” legal brokers, smugglers, and traffickers—who are central



to migration.<sup>32</sup> Middlemen are important for many people as countries make the process of getting a visa more difficult, and as countries increasingly police their borders. The state is important to whether or not brokers are important. Lax borders and easy admissions and visa policies mean individuals can navigate the holes in border enforcement or bureaucratic processes by themselves. But in the past forty years or so, migration controls have been proliferating throughout the world. At the behest of the US government and its obsession with the possibility, no matter how remote, that terrorists might try to enter their land, in nearly every country these controls—visa requirements, border checks, body and luggage scanning—have become far more stringent and intrusive since 2001.

The importance of brokers is not new. In the 17th century, people were “spirited” from English ports to the Americas to become indentured labor through a combination of persuasion, alcohol, money, and kidnapping. British and “native” brokers sent Indian and Chinese migrants to various parts of the British Empire in the 19th century as indentured labor. The conditions of indentured Chinese migrants and the bad reputation that Chinese brokers developed as exploitative were crucial to the rise of anti-Asian immigration laws throughout the West in the late 1800s. Chinese exclusion laws in North America and Australia in the 1880s gave rise to a form of migration control focused on borders, and where migrants came from.<sup>33</sup> Brokers were also important for transporting women to be married. The novelist Anna Solomon, in her lovely book *The Little Bride*, describes how young Jewish girls from Odessa used marriage brokers to fulfill a dream in the 19th century to go to America.<sup>34</sup>

Today, in the popular imagination, brokers are usually thought of as smugglers and traffickers who bring undocumented workers to the West. Mexican coyotes, Chinese snakeheads, and various organized crime syndicates who smuggle men, women, and children in cargo containers, the holds of ships and in the back of trucks are the stories we get from journalists. And these highly organized smugglers are important. For instance, undocumented Mexican migrants to the United States increasingly use smugglers—73 percent used them in 1975, and by 2005, this number went up to an astonishing 96 percent as the United

States increased the stringency of border controls and the number of border guards.<sup>35</sup>

Like other forms of international trade, smuggling requires cooperation with numerous intermediaries, often through multiple countries. One of the most famous cases of human smuggling that came to light was in 1993 when the *Golden Venture*, a 150-foot tramp steamer ran aground on Rockaway Beach in New York City with a cargo of nearly three hundred smuggled Chinese workers.<sup>36</sup> Cheng Chui Ping, a middle-aged New York City Chinatown businesswoman also known as Ping Jia, or Sister Ping, masterminded the smuggling operation. Sister Ping was a snakehead, described by authorities as the “mother of all snakeheads.” She worked with middlemen in China (small-scale snakeheads in Fujian province recruited migrants to bring to larger-scale snakeheads there), Hong Kong, Thailand, Belize, Kenya, South Africa, Guatemala, Mexico, and Canada from the early 1980s to bring thousands of undocumented Chinese migrants to New York City’s Chinatown. In the early years, it was a family-run business. One of her sisters would meet the migrants in Hong Kong, a brother would meet them in Guatemala, and Sister Ping would meet them in California and fly with them to New York City.

As demand for her services grew in the early 1990s, she expanded her network of associates, including the very violent Fuk Ching gang, whose leader Ah Kay was also a snakehead, and was one of her partners for the *Golden Venture*. (At that point in time, snakeheads started to prefer ships to air travel, as they could move more people that way, thus increasing profits, and it diminished the necessity of using forged travel documents.) The *Golden Venture’s* itinerary started in Bangkok, Thailand, picking up ninety Chinese passengers. The *Golden Venture* sailed with a Panamanian flag, and then changed in international waters to a Honduran flag. (Its original name was *Tong Sern*, changed at the same time as the flags.) The ship stopped in Pattaya, Thailand, and then made its way to Mombasa, Kenya. It then spent months at sea. Before the ship made its way to the Atlantic coast, there was an internal fight within the Fuk Ching gang that left several of the gang members dead, including the leader’s brother, sending Ah Kay into hiding. More importantly, no one was going to be able to meet the ship to offload the passengers into

smaller boats at sea. A Taiwanese snakehead, who was another partner in this smuggling operation, told the boat's crew that no one was coming to meet them, at which point the crew decided to run the ship aground. Many of the passengers were deported; of these, some came back to the United States later with the help of other snakeheads. Others were arrested and spent nearly four years in jail in the United States. Upon their release, several were approached by snakeheads demanding their payments.

Sister Ping fled the United States, continuing her smuggling operations from China, and was caught in Hong Kong and brought back to the United States in 2003 to face trial. Her former snakehead associates testified against her, and she was found guilty in 2005 "of conspiracy to smuggle aliens and take hostages, money laundering, and trafficking in ransom proceeds." But still, she performed a valuable service for the migrants she smuggled. One of the *Golden Venture* migrants upon his release from prison said of Sister Ping, "She's a very nice lady. Even if some of her customers died by accident, it's not her fault."

The point of this lengthy description of Sister Ping's networks and enterprise is to show how global and intricate smuggling can be. As it has to be, given the degree of international policing, and given the amounts of money involved. And while the methods they use may be violent and exploitative, the would-be migrants are desperate to go abroad. The tens of thousands of dollars spent, the possibility of being caught or even dying is well worth the risk.

While smugglers like Sister Ping are quite important to moving around the estimated 50 million undocumented migrants globally, most smuggling is likely done on an ad hoc basis, on a smaller scale, and through more loosely organized networks. Still, whether large or small scale, they are not the most important middlemen moving migrants. The vast majority of global migrants move legally, and likely most brokers operate legally. A recent special issue of the journal *Pacific Affairs* was dedicated to examining the poorly understood role of brokers who make possible the mobility of migrants throughout Asia.<sup>37</sup> The editors of this issue argue that focusing on migrant brokers, rather than migrants themselves, shows us very concretely how migration happens. Looking at brokers illuminates the infrastructure that makes migration

possible and is an improvement on other theories of migration that largely assume that if migrants want to go somewhere, they will just go.

Legal brokers are indispensable for marriage migration, student migration, unskilled labor migration and sex work. It may seem that it is only the poor, or those whose bonafides are questionable, who would need the assistance of brokers to spruce up their applications and perhaps provide bribes (where applicable). This is not the case. Even highly educated workers often need the help of brokers, such as Indian IT workers trying to make their way to the West.<sup>38</sup>

Who are these legal brokers who are so critical to the flow of migrants? They are sometimes state officials, some are legally licensed, and others are themselves migrants. Some work alone, while others are engaged in complicated networks. Most are men, though the numbers of women are increasing. Some are professionals, other are amateurs who become recruiters by accident. Some work the brokering angle in multiple ways, such as Indian computer programming schools that also provide visa assistance and job placement promises abroad for their students. More generally, the brokers *make migration possible* by organizing the recruitment process. In the past few decades, there has been an increase in formally licensed private recruitment across Asia, but the line between formal and informal brokering is not hard and fast.

Brokering arises from complex institutional arrangements that depend on the relations between countries, on the demands of receiving countries and the policies of sending countries. For instance, the Chinese state is central in the rise of broker networks in China. Since the 1980s it created complicated structures and licensing policies for international migration brokers. But these large brokers also rely on a large network of unlicensed agents to recruit migrants at the local level, in spite of the government trying to stamp them out.<sup>39</sup>

In Indonesia, it is informal brokers who actually recruit people. Because migration here relies on informal, unregulated brokers, this requires a great deal of trust on the part of would-be migrants. These brokers are often themselves migrants, and their brokering careers are often short term.<sup>40</sup>

Another wrinkle to this point on informal brokers comes from a study of anti-trafficking (particularly sex trafficking) programs along

the Laos-Thailand border. Many international organizations want to stem the “problem” of undocumented migration and trafficking by creating “safe migration,” that is, legally documented and registered brokers, or informal, intimate networks that are thought to be safe because they are personal. The assumption is this will put an end to the need for undocumented migration and dry up trafficking because the middlemen are “safe.” But trafficking may continue because of high costs of getting legal documents, which increases the likelihood of debt bondage. And further, it is often these “safe” intimate brokers, sometimes sex workers themselves operating within their social networks, who are recruiting others to be sex workers. So creating and enhancing “safe migration” may in the end be counterproductive and not so safe.<sup>41</sup>

A careful reader—you!—would have noticed by now that there’s probably risks involved with going through a broker. And you’re right. Sometimes brokers try, but fail to get their clients visas. But you don’t get your money back. And sometimes the broker is a scam artist. Ali has a cousin in Hyderabad, a middle-class kid who had recently graduated from university in the mid-1990s and wanted to go abroad as the pay in the United States was far greater than in Hyderabad at the time. He gave a broker USD 10,000 in 1998 to get him a visa to go to the United States. The broker disappeared with his passport and money. But the cousin didn’t give up; the influence of the culture of migration on him was too strong. A couple of years later, he went to Saudi Arabia where he got a job as a computer programmer. His uncle who was working in Saudi Arabia helped him to get a visa. He stayed there for a few years and then went back to Hyderabad and found work with a large transnational corporation making a very comfortable salary. After a few years, he got antsy and applied for a visa to the United Kingdom, which had just changed its visa allotment system in 2008. As he now had many years of experience as a high-level professional, he was easily granted a Tier 1 visa as a “high-value migrant.” He stayed there for a few months looking for work, but didn’t find the weather or the United Kingdom quite agreeable, so he returned to Hyderabad. He recently joined an American firm with an office in Hyderabad that has a practice of sending workers from India to the United States for projects. He came to

the United States in 2013 on an H1-B temporary (three years) visa for professionals. But he has no intention of staying. In fact, he had planned to return to Hyderabad after a few months in San Francisco, but the company sent him to work on a project in Boston.

### Conclusion

How and why people cross international borders to live and work are fascinating questions and the answers are complex. We have outlined some of the most important and prominent theories that try to answer these questions and have promoted a newer approach that emphasizes the central role that middlemen play in the process of international migration. While economic motivations, migrant networks, and cultures of migration are certainly important as reasons why some rather than others migrate, to us, it seems these are necessary, but on their own not sufficient to account for migration. Similarly, the idea that people can be transnational, living their lives across multiple countries begs the question of how they got to where they were going in the first place. Over the last few decades, as border controls and visa regulations have become more stringent, it becomes more difficult for individuals to navigate the process on their own. While some people are able to get visas directly themselves, for many others middlemen have become more important.

In the next chapter, we look at the global working class, or as we indelicately, but accurately describe them, meat for the global market. We continue the theoretical discussions from this chapter by looking at the forces that allow and, in some cases, compel individuals to go to such magnets for disposable, low-end labor, such as the United States, Dubai, Hong Kong, Western Europe, and so on.

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- 6 Sassen, Saskia. *A Sociology of Globalization*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2007.
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- 9 It's rather strange that migrant network theory largely ignores or downplays weak ties, as weak ties are such a central, important idea in sociology. The article "The Strength of Weak Ties" by Mark Granovetter (written in 1973) is one of the most cited sociological articles ever. See, Granovetter, Mark. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78.6 [1973]: 1360.
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- 31 Portes 2003: 879, op cit.
- 32 This is not to say that migration theorists have completely ignored middlemen. But they find the importance of middlemen to be secondary, at most, to other causes. For instance, Douglas Massey writes: "Over time individuals, firms, and organizations become well known to immigrants and institutionally stable, constituting another form of social capital that migrants can draw on to gain access to foreign labor markets. Recruiting agents can at times be active in creating new flows of migration from areas of labor surplus to areas of labor scarcity." (Massey, Douglas. "Why Does Immigration Occur? A Theoretical Synthesis." In Charles Hirschman, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh DeWind, *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience* [New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999], p. 45.) While this is on the face of it true enough, more recently scholars are proposing that middlemen *drive* migration. In this formulation, personal networks can be important, but are not completely necessary, and definitely not sufficient.
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## 2

# CHEAP MEAT FOR THE GLOBAL MARKET

In 1980, Emmet Comodas, a Filipino pool maintenance man got on a plane to Saudi Arabia. He grew up an orphan, selling cigarettes on the streets in Manila as a child, then had a job at a government sports complex for many years. But his monthly salary of USD 50 did not do much more than keep his family barely fed and housed in a one-room shanty.

But fortune smiled. His boss offered him a job cleaning pools in Saudi Arabia thousands of miles away in a theocracy where foreign workers have little rights and are regularly abused. He immediately accepted. His wife Tita went with him to the airport, waved at the plane from the departure lounge, went home, and cried.

Two years later, Emmet came home with chocolates for the kids and earrings for Tita. His two-year-old son looked at him like he was a stranger and cried when he touched him. Emmet threw himself a party, fixed the walls and roof of his house, and three months later, left again. This was a cycle he would repeat for two decades. His monthly salary in Saudi Arabia was USD 500—he made more in those two years than he would have in two decades in Manila. He sent two-thirds of his salary home. All five of his children, young when he started but grown by the time he finished migrating, followed his lead and became overseas workers. His initial desperation became his, and his children's, way of life. In order to live at home, they had to leave it. Even if it means your son cries when you come home and thinks you're a stranger.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter looks at the experiences of global, migrant laborers like Emmet. We examine the global market in cheap, disposable, temporary

labor crossing international borders. These laborers are maids and nannies, houseboys and gardeners, construction workers, agricultural workers, factory workers, staff in restaurants, bars and hotels, taxi drivers, security guards, store clerks, and sex workers, among others. And, as these categories suggest, gender really matters here, as we will illustrate by paying particular attention to the experiences of working-class female migrants.

The title of this chapter might seem somewhat flippant, but it was chosen with the utmost care. From the perspective of many of the firms and individuals who employ these global working-class migrants and the countries where they reside, these people are not people—they are merely labor, cheap meat to be used, chewed up and eventually spit out. Emmet's story is a relative success and highlights the typical working-class migrant's hopes and dreams and desires. He overcame poverty through migration, and his remittances helped his family have a better life. For every story like Emmet's though, there are darker stories of deportation, getting fired, heavy debts due to the initial expense of migration, cheated wages, physical and mental abuse, and even death. In the Philippines, workers going abroad don't say they're going to make their fortune. Rather, they say they're going to try their luck.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately for unlucky workers, enforcement of labor laws is regularly lax, even in the West. For undocumented migrants, and even for documented migrants in countries where residence permits are tied to their jobs, migrants live with the constant threat of deportation. The slow, or no, response of governments to violations of workers' legal rights contrasts with how quickly many governments move to punish workers who violate terms of their visas or who are undocumented.

In spite of such real and potential problems, people still go. And while work and living conditions may be horrible, it must not be all that bad. Otherwise a very large number wouldn't go, right?

### **Why They Go**

So why do labor migrants go? For the same reason that Emmet went—the pay abroad is far greater than the pay at home. In richer countries, firms and individual employers generally need these labor migrants because there is not enough local, cheap, low-skilled or unskilled labor

to meet demand (for example, construction work in the Persian Gulf). Another reason is because local labor is relatively expensive and, perhaps more importantly, many employers see no reason to pay more for local citizen or permanent legal resident workers when temporary or undocumented migrant labor is cheaper (such as agricultural workers in the United States and Western Europe). Related to that, many citizens can't or won't do the backbreaking work for low pay that migrants do (like, again, agricultural work in the West).<sup>3</sup>

This is the economic “pull.” But workers can't be enticed to go somewhere if they're happy enough where they are. There are economic factors at home that “push” workers out—such as poor agricultural conditions for rural residents, poor and poorly paid work opportunities in the cities, and high unemployment and underemployment generally. The economic push and pull, as we pointed out in Chapter 1, are in and of themselves insufficient to account for why people migrate. We must also look at how many migrants are tied into broader networks of people who have migrated and to those who can facilitate migration (like Emmett's boss) and come from places where there is a culture of migration. Most important for the working class is the possibility of remittances, which improves their lives *back home*.

But it is not enough that potential migrants want to go to those places and that employers want to hire cheap labor. Employers are able to hire migrants in part because the state devises policies to let such workers in, like with temporary guest worker visas, sometimes favoring particular nationalities over others. Another reason is because the state does not or cannot strenuously enforce border controls, which allows workers to come to these countries without documents, or often on temporary visas, like tourist visas, which many workers then overstay. Other workers are able to buy or rent various documents, such as passports, residence cards, social security cards, and so on.<sup>4</sup>

States where migrants often go tend to prefer temporary workers—and actively encourage or even recruit them—because they are not a financial or social burden on them. These workers are generally prohibited from staying permanently in many states, and some, like Singapore, forbid marriage of maids to citizens. They come, work, and then leave. There is no cost of raising them, or taking care of them when they are

old or if they get injured or so ill they cannot work anymore. In many countries, if you lose your job, you lose your visa (which is tied to one employer) and get deported.

Sending states also often prefer temporary guest worker programs. As the workers know they will return, their mental focus remains back home, so they essentially earn to remit—though it's important to point out that not all workers send remittances.<sup>5</sup> Sending states like the Philippines invest a lot of ideological work to secure the loyalty of their overseas citizens so that they send remittances. Many states have special tax breaks for remittances, and make sending remittances easy.<sup>6</sup> Why? In part because remittances supplement and often substitute for government welfare and development programs, which many states either don't want to or can't afford to fund adequately, or at all.

Then there is also the role that brokers play, reacting to the actions of governmental regulations, in making migration happen for these workers. As we emphasized in the last chapter, brokers are essential for a great number of people to move between countries.

### How Do They Get There?

Some individuals in the global working class are able to move somewhat freely between particular countries where visa regulations are fairly easy to deal with. But entry requirements and immigration laws for most countries are generally more stringent for the working class. As we saw in the last chapter, brokers are becoming indispensable for moving a great number of migrants from one country to another. Brokers make it possible for workers to move into those countries, legally or not. But they of course don't work for free, and the price is usually borne by the workers themselves.

For instance, in 2009, Human Rights Watch did a study of workers at Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Island, future home of the Louvre, Guggenheim, and New York University. Almost all the 94 workers HRW interviewed paid recruiting fees to brokers of up to USD 4,100 to obtain their jobs—a king's ransom for poor workers from South Asia. They should not have had to pay these fees, as it is illegal under United Arab Emirates (UAE) law for companies or recruiters to charge workers recruiting fees.<sup>7</sup> But they do it anyway. The result is these workers

are stuck working for companies who regularly switch contracts they signed in the country of origin for contracts that stipulate much lower pay when they arrive in the UAE. They can of course quit, but then they still owe the moneylenders back home for the loans to cover those fees. And if they quit, their visas are immediately cancelled, as they are tied to specific employers, and they will be deported. So they stay, and their income for the first year or so goes largely toward paying off those fees.

Brokers play a similar critical role for migrants coming to Taiwan. Wages offered there are higher than most anywhere else in Asia. Placement agencies in Taiwan as well as recruitment agencies in sending countries are major gatekeepers—few migrants are able to negotiate getting a job in Taiwan on their own. The fees are generally very high, and the first year of employment mostly goes to paying down their debts.<sup>8</sup>

### What Do They Do Once They Get There?

While higher wages is obviously a driving force, migrant networks and a culture of migration are also critical aspects for observing and understanding migrant flows. For instance, working-class Mexicans go the United States and Indians go to the Persian Gulf in large numbers, and from specific places. A disproportionate number of Mexicans come from a handful of states (such as Guanajuato, Veracruz, and Oaxaca), and about half of all Indian migrants in the UAE come from the tiny coastal state of Kerala, with large numbers also coming from Hyderabad and Punjab.<sup>9</sup> In both, migrants have established strong network connections, where family and friends help each other to get to their destinations and get jobs. And in both, a strong culture of migration has developed to reinforce migration flows.<sup>10</sup>

A critical driving force behind the network ties and culture of migration of working-class migrants is the desire to remit to their families. Though many also remit to villages and communities for things like public works projects, baseball fields, etc.<sup>11</sup> According to the World Bank, migrants in developed countries sent USD 414 billion in 2013 to their homes in poorer countries (out of total global remittances of USD 550 billion), and this is projected to rise to USD 540 billion by 2016.<sup>12</sup> These numbers are likely gross underestimates, as it only

includes money sent through official channels. The actual amount is likely much higher.

A typical remittance story comes from an interesting study of the Chungking Mansions in Hong Kong, a densely packed, lower-end business area. Indian workers who come on tourist visas are the bulk of the labor force of Chungking Mansions. They are touts, waiters, dishwashers, cleaners, and goods transporters. They arrive at Hong Kong airport on 14-day visa free entry, which is renewable twice, and can stay in Hong Kong for a maximum of 180 days in a year. Because it is illegal to work without Hong Kong residence and identity card, they earn considerably less than people with legal residency—around 3,500 HK dollars (about USD 450) per month. And the pay, meager though it is, is far and away more than they could earn at home, and enables these workers to remit large sums. One man paid for his and his two sisters' weddings, bought a motorcycle, and was financing the reconstruction of his extended family's house.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, workers regularly endure pay that is much lower when compared to natives, and put up with harsh working conditions and brutal living conditions, just so they can remit money. Many die trying. For instance, the migrant labor population in Qatar (in the Persian Gulf) has come under increasing pressure at work as construction activity has gone into fever pitch preparing for the 2022 football (soccer) World Cup. Around 900 Indian and Nepalese workers—among the largest contingents of foreign workers in Qatar—died while working between 2012 and early 2014, as safety at worksites is not of paramount concern for Qatari officials.<sup>14</sup> Again, they are treated as meat, fully disposable. If some die, there are many more willing to migrate to take their places.

Not surprisingly, the working and living conditions for the bulk of the global working class are rather poor, though this varies from place to place, and job to job. A common story is that of construction workers in the UAE. Their passports are regularly confiscated by their employers (an illegal action that even government departments engage in), their wages are usually lower than what was promised when recruited in their countries of origin, and they live in labor camps where they are packed into rooms and share bathrooms that are often filthy beyond description, and sometimes have raw sewage running in the alleys.<sup>15</sup>



And they are the lucky ones. Unlucky workers who cannot get housing in the camps live in rundown villas lacking basic amenities, illegally sharing rooms with the ever-present threat that housing authorities will evict and even deport them. Deportation of course means you lose your job, your ability to remit, and if you weren't there long enough, your ability to pay off your debts to the moneylender back home.<sup>16</sup>

These conditions are not unique to the UAE. In a survey of migrant workers throughout Kazakhstan, 20 percent had their passports kept by employers and 20 percent had to borrow money to get to Kazakhstan. Sometimes their wages were less than their expenses in Kazakhstan, leading to a situation of debt bondage with their employers. For some workers "not being beaten too much, having enough to eat, and a roof over their head were 'enough.'" Though Kazakhstan has an 8-hour-day/40-hour-week labor law, most of the workers worked far longer days and had hardly any days off in the month.<sup>17</sup>

While the typical story of migrant workers is that of working-age men going abroad to earn money to send back home, the landscape of migrants is changing. An interesting development over the past few decades has been the migration of women independent of their husbands and families. As women in the developed world have entered the labor force in large numbers, there has been an increasing global transfer of traditional wifely duties of childcare, care for the elderly, household maintenance, and sex work from developing to developed countries.<sup>18</sup>

### Female Migration

Working-class female migrants are often more vulnerable than men at work. Migrants in "visible" jobs, that is, those in the public eye, have it good relative to "invisible" maids, especially those who are live-in workers in private households. Maids are often subject to a great deal of physical and mental abuse, rape, wage theft, and sometimes nonpayment of wages. Part of this vulnerability is because they are women, and part of it is due to their work being behind closed doors (in the UAE, maids and nannies are not even covered under their labor law).

Take for example the vulnerability, and paradoxical freedoms, of overseas contract worker (OCW) maids in Taiwan.<sup>19</sup> For one, their time off is extremely limited. One Filipina worker's employer only gave her two

days off each month and didn't want her to mingle with other Filipinos; the employer preferred she work and pay her overtime. Actually many workers themselves also prefer to work on their days off to earn extra income and minimize expenses. (She's lucky to get overtime though; in many countries while maids may legally be eligible for overtime, they rarely get it.) But her pay was so low that this woman ran away from her employer, which immediately nullified her legal status. The upside though was that as she was no longer a live-in maid she could work as a freelancer, earning twice what she did before.<sup>20</sup>

One of the crucial principles of the OCW program is the strict prohibition of permanent settlement. OCWs can only work in Taiwan for up to six years, and can only work for one particular employer during their stay. Basically, they have no freedom in the market. If they do not like their employer, their only legal option is to leave. This contrasts with professionals who are subject to different rules. For professionals, there is no limitation on their length of stay in the country, and they are eligible for permanent residence after working legally for five years.<sup>21</sup>

The structure of the OCW program in some ways encourages workers to go underground, like the woman above, in part because they cannot leave bad employers for other opportunities. Some workers become undocumented to avoid abuse. Others don't want to go home and have to go through another round of debt associated with return migration and fees toward a new work contract. This explains why many workers become undocumented toward the end of contracts, or when an employer breaks or refuses to renew a contract.<sup>22</sup>

Undocumented workers in Taiwan become quite free in the labor market and, ironically, have greater bargaining power. Besides being able to choose their employers, they are able to dictate their terms of work (in a way that undocumented workers in other countries cannot) because it also illegal for employers to hire them. As a result, pay and working conditions are better, and social relations are also more equitable. It may seem like a small thing, but the form of address changes. Live-in migrants call their employer "madam," indicating a hierarchical relationship. But undocumented workers who clean and then leave usually use last names. One woman said that many of her employers have

the same last name, “So I asked them, ‘What is your English names?’ They said, ‘I don’t have any.’ I said, ‘OK, I will give you a name. You look sexy, so I call you ‘Sexy!’ When she calls me, I said, ‘Who is this?’ She said, ‘Sexy!’”<sup>23</sup>

This distinction between live-in maid and freelance housecleaner is important. In the UAE, migrant freelance housecleaners also have similar relationships with employers, though perhaps not so egalitarian. But live-in maids are often subject to an incredible amount of wage theft, forced labor, and physical abuse. Maids who run away from abusive employers—in the UAE, they are called “absconders”—often find their visas cancelled by their employers, which immediately means they are undocumented and in violation of the law. To help address the problem of absconding maids, a local newspaper in Dubai gave step-by-step instructions to employers on what to do “just in case your maid runs away.”<sup>24</sup>

The governments of many developing countries, such as Sri Lanka, Philippines, and Indonesia actively encourage female outmigration, in spite of abuses they suffer, in large part because of remittances, the value of which far and away exceeds foreign aid.<sup>25</sup> Many countries provide training for women who are preparing to go abroad as household help. As we have seen, many countries are highly dependent on these remittances.<sup>26</sup>

Increasingly over the past few decades, remittances from women are critical to their families back home. A study of Bangladeshi migrant workers in the UAE found that women remit more than men as a percentage of their earnings. Both men and women send money to their spouses, and often women send money directly to their fathers. While women increasingly support their families, female migrants who try to put conditions on how their money is spent are often ignored. This happened to half of all the women interviewed, as opposed to 20 percent of the male migrants. There were also interesting differences in how their monies were spent. Female migrants’ remittances were more often spent on savings, education, medical treatment, and loan repayments, while male migrants’ remittances were spent more often on businesses and homes. Also, more females were the main economic providers for their families back in Bangladesh than males.<sup>27</sup>

The drive for remittances is also an important motivation for women who migrate to be sex workers. For example, a study of Latin American sex workers in Spain found that while not many women have *macarras*, or pimps, these women often say they have “little macarras”—demanding children or family members generally, with consumerist needs for designer clothes, skateboards, and so on. One woman said, “Today I have to get a client so I can buy Christmas presents.”<sup>28</sup> In fact, satisfying the needs of the household back home with remittances is one reason many women who have paid off their debts associated with the cost of migration stay in the higher-paying brothels in Spain.

For the “smarter” women sex work was a higher-paid means to an end. They worked to remit. Some women who were at it for a while were able to bring over their children, and even other family members. At that point, they stopped doing sex work. Others who paid off their debts and did not have to send remittances also opted out of sex work to reduce conflicts between their work and their partners.<sup>29</sup>

Others though are not so far-sighted, and spend their money in Spain on their apartments, boyfriends, and other expenses. One smarter sex worker said, “I know a girl who never sends any money back to Colombia . . . I told her she was stupid; what does she have to show for it all back in Colombia? [I]t really gets them thinking when I tell them I’ve already paid for my house.”<sup>30</sup>

### Migration and Marriage

In richer countries, there is a “care crisis.” Upper- and middle-class households hire migrants for domestic labor, while working-class households “hire” migrant wives for unpaid domestic as well as reproductive labor (i.e., having children) as local workers are either too expensive or not found in great enough numbers.<sup>31</sup> Foreign maids and foreign brides are parallel solutions to the care crisis in receiving countries.<sup>32</sup>

Again, the conditions of maids varies depending if they are live-in or not, fulltime or not. There is also variation in the conditions of international brides, depending on how they meet their spouse (brokers, pen pals, through relatives or friends, etc.) Many Filipina and Indonesian domestics received marriage proposals from their middle-aged divorced or widowed Taiwanese employers. For some of the employers, it was

about love. For others, it was really an extension and solidification of a labor arrangement where these women were taking care of the man's old parents.<sup>33</sup>

The story of "mail-order" brides and other women looking to get married and go to the West is an old one.<sup>34</sup> It is the story of global inequality, that is, women from poorer parts of the world looking to escape poverty, economic stagnation, or to be upwardly mobile by going to a richer country. For many, marriage also means the opportunity to remit. If we think of marriage as labor, sexual labor, it make sense these workers would want to migrate, as so many other types of migrant workers do.

In some countries, many young women try to seek marriages with Western men through sex work.<sup>35</sup> One study of Vietnamese sex workers found this to be a quite common strategy. Among the sex workers interviewed, almost half got married and of those more than a third got visas and emigrated to the United States, Australia, France, and Canada. These women were not looking to move West to work, though most of them ended up being the family's primary breadwinner, largely as their husbands were old.<sup>36</sup>

The men of course wanted something from the arrangement as well. They had gone to Vietnam to deliberately seek a wife, a woman who would be a "traditional" wife. The man would be the breadwinner, and the women would take care of the house. But once in the West, most of the women ended up working to supplement, or in many cases replace, their older husbands' incomes, and to send remittances to family in Vietnam.

Sex work for these Vietnamese women was instrumental. That is, they did it because it paid far and away better than other work such as farming, factory work, or being a maid. None of the women interviewed who made it to the West wanted to return to sex work, though one secretly did work in a massage parlor. But she "drew clear boundaries for herself around the kinds of sexual practices she would perform."<sup>37</sup>

Most of these women thought they would end up in some place exciting, like Los Angeles, or New York. Instead, they mainly went to small towns or the countryside. They also had to take up jobs that were

basically a financial step down from the sex work they did in Vietnam. But the women who were interviewed for the study, while they were not pleased with some aspects of their lives, and though they were mercenary about getting a Western husband, they by and large stayed married. Once in the West, their desires, dreams, and attitudes toward their husbands and work shifted.

As many Asian countries are becoming wealthier and are becoming immigrant-receiving countries, the number of international marriages there are on the rise, with brides coming from China, Vietnam, Philippines, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, marrying men in Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan. In South Korea, the number of international marriages jumped from about 5 percent to almost 14 percent in the mid-2000s, mostly of ethnic Korean women from China, but also Vietnamese and Filipinos. In Taiwan in 2005, 20 percent of marriages were international marriages. In Singapore, more than a third of all citizens have foreign spouses. Even in Japan this trend holds. In 1980, less than 1 percent of all marriages were international, but by 2005, nearly 6 percent were. A common thread in all these countries is that working class and rural men are having a hard time finding local wives and are compelled to look elsewhere.<sup>38</sup>

Caren Freeman in her book *Making and Faking Kinship* looks at how a bride shortage in the South Korean countryside in the 1990s led the South Korean government to encourage ethnic Koreans in China (*Chosonjok*) to migrate as brides and to reunify with South Korean kin.<sup>39</sup> This led directly to a rush for these *Chosonjok* to go to South Korea.

The “making kinship” part of her story concerns the brides. Marriage brokers would lead tours to China of South Korean farmers and others who had trouble finding brides there, as women left the countryside in droves, and female city dwellers could marry up leaving many men unwilling bachelors. The brokers would bring the men to China, set up meetings with eligible *Chosonjok* women, deal with Chinese and Korean authorities, and help to seal the deal. Once in South Korea, these women often themselves became brokers. Other South Korean matchmaker/brokers would pester them to help them recruit would-be *Chosonjok* brides in China, and *Chosonjok* women in China would try to enlist them to find husbands in South Korea.

Chinese and South Korean brokers offered a wide range of services, including forging of fictional identities and setting up paper marriages. This is the “faking kinship” part of her story. Many *Chosonjok* women had no real desire to marry, or already were married, so brokers would also arrange bogus marriages. For married women, the brokers would have to get local officials to record a divorce so they could marry these South Korean men. Once in South Korea, these women would go to work in places where the wages were low, conditions were tough, and hours long. Still, the pay was much greater than in China, though it would take a few years to pay off their debts to brokers and often bribe Chinese officials at various levels, and sometimes to bribe South Korean officials in the consulate in Shenyang in northern China, closer to where the *Chosonjok* live.

Still another path was through proving South Korean ancestry, a kinship to the nation. This gave rise to a broader kind of fake kinship, where brokers would forge documents that proved South Korean genealogy. Once the documents were made, would-be migrants would have to go to the consulate for their interview. Interestingly, those with fake documents often fared better than those who actually had South Korean roots, as they had to rehearse and memorize all the minutiae of their stories. Those who had real kinship apparently did not rehearse and would sometimes slip up in the interviews.

Another way to get to South Korea, as a corollary to real and fake marriages, was as a “paper parent.” South Korea gave visas for parents to attend the weddings of their daughters. An unintended consequence of this was to generate a black market in the buying and selling of parental identities.

Some enterprising *Chosonjok* saw a different kind of opportunity running boarding houses or as brokers’ right by the consulate in Shenyang. They realized that the dirty and difficult life that faced migrants to South Korea was not for them. So they set themselves up around the consulate, facilitating the visa process for other *Chosonjok*.

Freeman describes a hierarchy of brokers. The small ones did the legwork for the big ones by traveling back and forth to South Korea looking for citizens willing to give bogus invitations to fictional *Chosonjok* relatives. At the top of the broker chain were those with high-level

connections to South Koreans working in the consulate. One broker said, "It is essential that these connections be continually nurtured, by dining and drinking with the South Koreans. It's hard work." Many of these consulate workers, as the gatekeepers, made a lot of money from bribes from would-be *Chosonjok* migrants.

Many married *Chosonjok* couples would go to South Korea together, but more often one spouse went while the other stayed behind. Men and women migrated in roughly equal numbers, but there were more options for women to enter due to the prevalence of fake marriages and more lucrative options on the job market because women could take up work in restaurants that provided housing (male laborers had to pay for their own housing). The splitting of families is of course very stressful, and sometimes led to infidelities by one or the other partner, both in China and South Korea, and sometimes the marriages broke up. Or the partner in China learned of it when the other one stopped sending remittances.

This was the story in the 1990s. By the end of the first decade of the new millennium, many *Chosonjok* had tired of South Korea, as the economic gap had begun to close. They no longer greeted each other in China by saying "When are you going to South Korea?" Instead they said, "You're going to South Korean, again?"<sup>40</sup> The economic compulsion was gone, and the culture of migration to South Korea had waned. Many *Chosonjok* then began aiming to be migrant workers or brides in Japan. Interestingly enough, around this time many South Koreans had begun migrating to China to live the expatriate life (discussed in the next chapter) to try to maintain or exceed the middle-class lifestyle that was beginning to be more difficult in South Korea itself.

South Koreans had also become fed up with *Chosonjok* brides, who they saw as opportunistic, and they were fed up with *Chosonjok* workers in general. Rural men started to look to Filipina and Vietnamese women as better potential partners, as these women are seen as more submissive, and more easily assimilated into the Korean social fabric.

### **Sexual Labor: Sex Work and Human Trafficking**

In the 2008 thriller *Taken*, Liam Neeson plays a former CIA operative. An Albanian human trafficking ring kidnaps his daughter while she's



traveling in Paris. The Albanians sell his daughter, a virgin and thus quite valuable, to a French auctioneer. He then sells her to an Arab sheikh who is about to rape her when Neeson heroically climbs aboard the yacht in open water and shoots the sheikh in the head. Thus the day, and his daughter's virginity, is saved.

*Taken* is one of a growing number of movies and documentaries that focus on human trafficking as one of the great evils of our time. Alongside these films, movie stars, politicians, and NGOs have also worked to raise the plight of trafficking victims in the public eye.

Human trafficking became a highly visible issue with the passage of the US Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000. This law established the US Department of State's annual Trafficking in Persons Report (TIPR), which ranks countries on their work to end human trafficking. Countries that the US State Department deems not to have done enough to eradicate human trafficking are subject to various sanctions. Around the same time, the United Nations' Transnational Organized Crime Convention in 2000 established a trafficking protocol. It assumed trafficking was a product of organized criminal activity and that trafficking is a result of calculated and organized conduct. Basically, traffickers are evil and powerful, and victims are unaware, innocent, and weak, and in need of saving.<sup>41</sup> (Just like in the film *Taken*.) The saviors are sometimes police, sometimes NGOs like sociologist Kevin Bales' Free the Slaves, and sometimes journalists like Nicholas Kristof of *The New York Times*.

The image we have of the trafficker is that of an evil person intent on treating women badly, and as disposable commodities. While some traffickers are like their characterizations in the mass media, the reality is not cut and dry. Traffickers are often friends or family members. Many are sex workers themselves bringing the women to work with them. But this nuance is lost in the mythology of trafficking and traffickers.

One of the notions that trafficking hinges on is the idea of deception, that women are tricked into migrating and/or tricked into prostitution. One woman from Moldova (one of the poorest countries in Europe) was told by her boyfriend of a year and a half that he could get her a job waitressing in Portugal. He paid for her airfare, drove her to Odessa (in Ukraine), and put her on a plane to Lisbon. There, a friend of his met

her at the airport and said the job had fallen through, but that he could take her to Dubai where there was more work. He seemed trustworthy enough to her, so she went. Once they arrived, an Arab man met them, and a woman from Uzbekistan took her to an apartment. The Uzbek woman gave the Arab man money, and she took her passport. Then the Moldovan woman realized she had been sold into prostitution. After a few years as a sex slave, she escaped with two other women.<sup>42</sup>

The example above is horrible, and there are far, far worse stories we could have told. Still, the results of trafficking by deception are not always or necessarily so awful. For instance, a rural Laotian girl's friend from her village recruited her and said she would take her to work in a noodle shop in Thailand. When she got there, she found it was a "beer shop," a place where sex is sold. The madam didn't force her to sell sex, instead letting her do chores and sit and drink with customers. But after a month, she saw how much the other women were earning, and she started selling sex. Basically, this was a socialization process that eased her into sex work.<sup>43</sup>

Often, what looks like trafficking to some is actually not. For instance, Rhacel Parrenas gives the example of Filipina hostesses in Japanese nightclubs who in the mid-2000s were thought to be the largest group of trafficked individuals in the world.<sup>44</sup> Parrenas worked as a hostess and interviewed 55 hostesses (including 11 transgendered hostesses). She made the point that while flirting is central to their jobs, sex is definitely not. They were not forced to migrate, and importantly, their work was not coerced. So in no sense were these migrants trafficked.

However, hostessing was thought by many, most importantly the US State Department, to be a euphemism for trafficked prostitution. In its TIPR the State Department dropped Japan from Tier 1 to Tier 2. Because of this, Japan greatly restricted the number of Filipina hostesses, from about 83,000 in 2004 to under 9,000 in 2006.<sup>45</sup> Again, these migrants went to Japan of their own accord, but faced what Parrenas called "severe structural constraints." Once in Japan, due to the actions of sending and receiving agents and government policy that affected the ways they were paid (the clubs where they worked could not pay them directly, and instead paid their agents), these female and transgendered workers had to survive on tips because they didn't get paid until they

were about to leave. They were certainly in a bind, but this made them bonded laborers, not trafficked.

The contrasting backgrounds of these female and transgendered migrants, and how and why they went to Japan are quite interesting. Women went to escape poverty, while the transgendered migrants truly went for the purpose of being entertainers. The transgendered hostesses were for the most part college educated and came from fairly well-off families—they rarely sent remittances. For them, migrating was about professional advancement, something they could not achieve in the Philippines. They were not in it strictly for the money.<sup>46</sup> Most went to fulfill their desire to sing and dance on stage and for a sense of risk and adventure for “sexualized work.”

The female migrants were less educated, and went because the money they could earn was far more than in the Philippines. Their brokers had a “fly now, pay later” system, so even the poor could go. This contrasts with migration patterns elsewhere in the world where the poorest of the poor are generally too poor to migrate, that is, they can’t afford to make the trip. Some of these hostesses came with entertainer visas, some with tourist visas. None of the women Parrenas interviewed wanted to be domestics. That was beneath them and actually more expensive as they would have had to pay broker fees up front. Also, Filipino domestics often went to the Persian Gulf, an area of the world the people she interviewed had no desire to go to.

Trafficking does not have to be to a geographical location. Some believe that trafficking also occurs around particular events. For years, many in the media have been saying sporting events like the Super Bowl and soccer’s World Cup are magnets for sex trafficking.<sup>47</sup> But, like so many supposed instances of trafficking, it turns out to not be true. According to a report by the Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women, there is no increase in prostitution during those events, and no evidence of any link to sex trafficking.<sup>48</sup>

What is the full extent of the trafficking problem? No one really knows, because it’s completely underground. The anti-trafficking crusaders—evangelical Christians, anti-pornography activists, journalists, some feminists, and government officials—have an interest in inflating the magnitude of the problem and creating vague and large

numbers. Trafficking victims are said to be anywhere from hundreds of thousands to millions per year.<sup>49</sup>

Estimates vary so wildly, and also from year to year, because they are literally all pretty much pulled out of thin air. The Bangkok office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said that most such statistics are “false” or “spurious,” and that “[w]hen it comes to statistics, trafficking of girls and women is one of several highly emotive issues which seem to overwhelm critical faculties.”<sup>50</sup> While the US State Department claims there are anywhere between 24,500 and 50,000 people trafficked into the United States (the numbers vary widely year to year, and the estimates have fallen precipitously), not all government departments are convinced. The US Department of Justice in 2005 said, “[T]he government must address the incongruity between the estimated number of victims trafficked into the United States—between 14,500 and 17,500 [annually]—and the number of victims found—only 611 in the last four years.”<sup>51</sup>

Some small-scale studies suggest that trafficking is not as big a problem as anti-trafficking activists and many governments make it seem. One study of Vietnamese sex workers in Cambodia who moved through brokers found that only 6 of 100 women were brought over under false pretenses; the rest knew before they left Vietnam they would be working in brothels in Cambodia. Many women who have been “saved” from brothels by rescue organizations returned to the brothels as quickly as they could after obtaining their release through bribes or getting relatives in Vietnam to come get them. Rather than saving them, the rescuers compounded their problems by increasing their debts (due to the paying of bribes) and scaring off customers. This had the effect of reducing their incomes and damaging relations with brothel managers who further restricted their movements.<sup>52</sup>

The same team also surveyed migrant child workers, a secondary preoccupation with anti-trafficking activists, and found of 1000 young migrants in Mali only 4 could be classified as having been deceived, exploited, or not paid for their work.<sup>53</sup>

Again, many migrant women have been deceived by migration brokers/smugglers into thinking that they would be working at some other sort of job—maid, waiter, etc. This deception does constitute

trafficking. The results can be devastating, often wrecking these women's and often their families' lives.

And yet, many studies have found that even when migrants feel they have been deceived into going into sex work, their complaints are usually about the working conditions, rather than that the work is sexual. Often they don't mind the work itself, as it pays quite well.<sup>54</sup>

The anti-anti-trafficking scholar and activist Laura Agustín makes the point that migration scholars, especially those studying transnationalism, should be interested in migrant sex workers as, in Europe and elsewhere, many workers tend to stay only a few weeks or months in a place then move on, in a circuit crossing national borders.<sup>55</sup> That is, their multiple movements across country borders should be an important topic for people who study multiple movements across country borders. Instead, she asserts that sex workers have "been disappeared" from migration studies, only to reappear in criminology or feminist studies as victims. Male, transsexual, and transgender sex workers are even more neglected in migration studies and don't reappear anywhere.<sup>56</sup> The idea that women (and others) could *knowingly choose to engage in sex work* rarely makes its way into the scholarly literature or popular press.

Does sex trafficking occur? It does. It's just not clear to what degree it's a problem. More importantly from a policy and humanitarian standpoint, it obscures the broader problem of human trafficking for other forms of trafficked labor, such as factory, agricultural, and domestic work, working in restaurants, etc. And what happens once their trafficking ordeal has ended? Once they've escaped, or been given their freedom, they face still more problems. Denise Brennan, an anthropologist who has worked with trafficking victims for over ten years, found that trafficking victims who've found their freedom in the United States have to rebuild their lives from scratch. They have no money, and often only the clothes on their backs. They don't know anyone, and they stay away from their co-ethnics out of shame and also out of fear of seeing their abusers. So they have to forego the ready-made communities that often give help and emotional support to migrants. Still, many insist if they could survive their abusers, they can survive the mundane struggles of poverty.<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

Migrants, like people everywhere, have hopes and dreams and desires for better lives for themselves and their children, and they migrate with the intention of fulfilling these. Some migrate to Western countries, like Mexicans to the United States, to make a better life there. Temporary workers like Filipino maids going to Hong Kong or Bangladeshi construction workers going to Kuwait have no chance of settling. For them, they toil and live, sometimes in atrocious conditions, for the chance to make a better life back home through remittances. They willingly go to these places, as the promise of the future is much brighter than the bleakness of the present. For some, it's an empty promise. For others though, the promise gets fulfilled. But it's a risk that they feel they have to take, a risk that millions before them, and millions after them, will take.

For others—employers, natives, and government officials in receiving countries—the hopes and dreams of these people are often invisible. Many see working-class migrants as nothing more than disposable, interchangeable parts, factors of production, and little else. Anne Gallagher extends this idea even further in her writing on trafficking in organs, saying that migrants are desirable *for* their parts.<sup>58</sup> Because we live longer, and because of an organ donor shortage in the West, a black market in other parts of the world has arisen to fill this need. Many of these organs come from migrants from poor countries who are deceived or threatened into “donation.” These migrants usually don't make it to the West; their organs are harvested in Cairo, Kosovo, South Africa, and other developing world countries. Then the organs migrate to the West. In this sense, migrants truly are meat.

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