Sociology of Migration

In his treatise on *Eternal Peace,* the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1795) argued that all 'world citizens' should have a right to free movement, a right which he grounded in humankind's common ownership of the earth. One can hardly imagine a 'right' that has been so extensively violated as the right to mobility. The nation-state system has arrogated to itself the right to determine who shall enter and who shall leave. In this sense, the 'illegalised' migrant is the unconscious bearer of Kant's message for the right to move fearlessly and freely across borders.

Migration is at the heart of sociological concerns. From August Comte to Emile Durkheim to Karl Marx, all these thinkers have been interested in the movement of people and the consequences thereof. Durkheim, for example, was concerned with the break-up of rural solidarity and the consequent migration to the cities. But in contrast to early sociologists like Comte and Durkheim, who described migration in peaceful, evolutionary terms, subsequent sociologists, since Karl Marx's theories, have come to see **migration as a more violent process**. Displacing the peasant from the soil for industrial purposes came to be seen as a brutal practice. Marx argues: "great masses of men were suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled on to the labour market as free, unprotected and rightless proletarians". The expression 'free' proletarians, according to Marx, implies that labourers were now free from their own means of production and subsistence and 'free', but of necessity required to sell their remaining possession, their labour power, in the market.

Later sociological studies have explored the extent to which modern capitalism required 'free' and 'unfree' labour to function successfully and profitably. The most evident example of **'unfree labour'** is the deployment of slaves from West Africa in the plantations of the 'New World', the first important example of mass forced migration in the modern world. On the other hand, is the post World War II *gastarbeiter* (**guest worker**) model of rotating 'free' labour in countries like Germany. The aim was to avoid social wage costs, prevent settlement, deny civic rights to foreign workers. At the same time, the local population was swayed by populist allegations that the foreigners were stealing their jobs, housing and benefits. Despite the rigour with which these policies were implemented, they were ultimately unsustainable. Employers retained good workers, migrants organized themselves to advance their human rights and long-term settlement took place.

Another area of interest in contemporary sociology of migration is the role of **women migrants** in the global labour force and the specifics of gendered consequences of migration.

In contrast to viewing the 'woman question' in the context of 'family migration', the rise of independent women's migration is both a reflection of increasing demand for female labour and the transformation of patriarchal relations.

Like economists, sociologists too are vitally interested in the role of migrants in the labour market. But in contrast to the 'dual labour market theory', which has dominated the literature on immigrant labour markets in the previous years, there is increasing interest in phenomenon of **ethnic economies**. Here, it is explored how particular niches are 'monopolised' by particular immigrant groups. Yet another important area of interest for the sociologists is the question of effects of **return migration and remittances**. A number of 'third world' countries are crucially dependent on remittance income from migrants abroad. This in turn has important consequences for the social structure in the sending family, household and community.

Sociological theories of migration seeks to overcome the drawbacks of the neo-classical approaches with the exclusive focus on labour market. A social-relational meso-level approach helps to fill the lacunas left by overly general rational choice (micro-level) and systems (macro-level) theories, thereby explaining the **inter-personal decision-making** processes and the **inter-temporal dynamics** of international population movements. Thus there is increasing literature on the processes of immigrant incorporation as well as empirical work on migrant networks with focus on issues such as social ties, social capital and social networks.

One of the dominant models of studying micro-level causes of migration and decision-making is the **'deterministic'** approach. Deterministic theories, such as the one developed by Ernest George Ravenstein (1885) and later refined by Everett Lee (1964) analyse relations between distance and propensity to move. Indeed, most sociological overviews start with **Ravenstein's seven laws of migration**:

1. The majority migrates only short distances and thus establishes "currents of migration" towards larger centers.
2. This causes displacement and development processes in connection with populations in sending and destination regions.
3. The processes of dispersion and absorption correspond to each other.
4. Migration chains develop over time.
5. Migration chains lead to exit movements towards centers of commerce and industry.
6. Urban residents are less prone to migrate than rural people
7. This is also true for the female population.

In contrast to this empirical approach, **'instrumental'** accounts provide theoretically founded explanations for migration decision-making. The basic instrumental motto is: In choosing

between two alternative courses of action, a person is apt to choose the one for which the perceived value of the result is the greater. In sociological theories this approach makes the assumptions of methodological individualism, the social process is seen as the aggregate of individual action. In this view, the actor is assumed to have certain specified properties including capacity for rational decisions or the ability to choose the most efficient resolution to his choice dilemmas. The emphasis here is on individual decisions to migrate and migration is considered to be a way of improving one's living conditions. Its bedrock is the neo-classical individual utility or value maximizer. In migration decisions people are thought to migrate in response to wage differences, whereby the focus is exclusively on labour migration. Thus, instrumental perspectives on migration accept the prominent role of social actors in migration decision-making, conceptualizing their activity in utility-maximizing or utility-satisfying forms.

In contrast to the 'instrumental' approach, a meso-level approach emphasises how migration decision-making comes to be coordinated in groups of people rather than carried out by isolated individuals. Migration scholars are increasingly beginning to appreciate how migration decisions are taken collectively, as families and households jointly seek to mitigate misfortunes or advance the interests of their members. The role of the family and kin group in sustaining migration once it has commenced has also been identified as a key phenomenon in perpetuating movement. At the same time it is important to note that it would be naïve to conceptualize all social units such as households as single-interest decision-making bodies. This would risk ignoring hierarchical and patriarchal decision-making. Thus it is important to focus on the relational aspects of decision-making, which unfolds how family members occupy a crucial role in the decision-making process and changing dynamics of international migration. Thus the decision to move or to stay are embedded within specific economic, political and cultural contexts that are determined by larger structural relations in the family, neighbourhood, workplace, community and also the national and global economies. Structural constraints and opportunities determine to a large part what kind of options people have for migrating or staying.

On the individual level, money (economic capital) and human (cultural) capital functions as a resource for potential movers. Movers and stayers are embedded in a social-relational context characterised by social ties. **Social ties** are a continuing series of transactions to which participants attach shared understandings, memories, forecasts and obligations. Social ties are a prerequisite for the accumulation and use of various forms of **social capital**, which can be understood as the capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their

membership in networks or broader social structures. Such resources may include information on jobs in a potential destination country, transportation tips or loans to finance a journey to the destination. Individual-level resources are pooled in **migrant networks** that make collective action possible. Such networks of social interaction distribute resources such as money, give advice on transportation and job opportunities, channel information and even provide emotional support. One can distinguish between at least two different kinds of networks: first, there are networks of social interaction based on kinship and communal ties that extend from the household to the community. Second, there are organizations based on ethnic, professional or religious ties. These migrant networks and organizations do not just emerge overnight, rather they develop over period of time and differ according to geographical locations.

Moreover, different kinds of social capital is used differently by social actors that shapes the dynamics of migration. Different types of social capital can be distinguished along the density or strength of social ties, weak, strong or absent. **Strong ties** are characterized by more intense transactions between the actors involved. They are more widespread in small, well-defined groups such as families, kinship and communal organizations. By contrast, **weak ties** are defined by indirect relationships with no direct contact. For example interactions among 'friends of friends' is a good example for weak social ties. In this context, Douglas Massey (1987) has developed a series of hypotheses:

1. The probability of international migration should be greater for individuals who are related to someone who has prior international experience, or for individuals connected to someone.
2. Once someone has migrated internationally, he or she is very likely to do so again, leading to repeated movements over time. Thus the likelihood of an additional trip should increase with each trip taken; the probability of transnational migration should be greater among those with prior international experience than among those without it.
3. As the stock of social ties and international migrant experience grows over time, migration should become progressively less selective and spread from the middle to the lower segments of the socioeconomic hierarchy.

A first context in which social capital provides a context for migration decision-making and the evolution of networks is **social exchange**. In contrast to material cost-benefit calculations, social exchange does not centre on money and material goods, but on social debts incurred during the process of social interaction. For example, pioneer migrants who help movers to go abroad accumulate social standing and favours that may be reciprocated by the migrants in the future. Thus reciprocity plays an important role in the context of social capital. Individual

members subordinate their present desires to collective expectations in anticipation of long-term advantages by virtue of group membership. These members keep loyal to the sending family and community. Here **solidarity** plays an important role in migrant networks, whereby the participants must be strong believers in ethnic, religious, national and political bonds uniting actors who do not know each other personally.

Studies on migrant networks have had considerable influence on theorizing the dynamics of international migration, which has shifted from considering migration as a linear, uni-directional, push-and-pull, cause-effect movement to notions that emphasize migration as circular, interdependent, progressively complex and self-modifying systems in which the effect of changes in one part can be traced through the whole of the systems. Macro-sociological accounts point out that movement often occurs from certain regions and states towards others in so-called **migration systems** that link sending and immigration states. Study of migration systems identifies how migration flows turn into 'mass migration', namely, migration as a group style, an established pattern. Close attention is paid to specific geographical locations, for emigrants come not so much from a particular country as they do from a specific region within sending countries. International movements, once it has started, turns into a self-feeding process with pioneer migrants or groups setting examples for others. With increase in flows, the expansion of networks reduces the costs and risks of movement, which in turn increases the probability of migration to rise, which promotes additional movement, which causes expansion of networks, and so on. Thus, international movement becomes self-perpetuating because it creates the social structure necessary to sustain it. Networks of circular migration, a regular circuit in which migrants retain claims and contacts and routinely return home, may transform into **chain migration.** The processes can be described as a 'snowball' effect, whereby the more migrants of a given place and state in the destination region, the more want to come. Over time these develop into full-fledged migrant networks that are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, formers migrants and non-migrants in countries of origin and destination through relations of kinship, friendship and shared community origin. In international contexts, networks are of great importance as there are so many 'barriers' to overcome. In fact, Charles Tilly remarks that it is not people who migrate but networks. Migration becomes a collective endeavour, wherein individual use their resources- economic and social capital- that is activated through networks that are in turn built on social capital. Over time, migration networks can turn into migration organizations and public associations. Successful migration histories are rapidly emulated by friends, relatives and others, reinforcing the strategies and social relations in which they are grounded.

Successful international movers are likely to build and exploit the practical knowledge they have gained from their experience, becoming brokers of information to potential movers. At the same time it is important to note here that access to migrant networks is selective with participation being governed by financial resources, social status but also by informal norms of reciprocity. Thus the bedrock of international migration are strong ties within and weak ties between social units in both the country of origin and destination that come to constitute **transnational spaces**.