

INTRODUCTION

Labor and Migration in the 21st Century

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International migration flows have accelerated in recent decades, shifted greatly in their composition, and come to more fully pervade all regions of the world. These changes reflect both increased migration per se and the fact that there are “more national borders to cross” (Martin et al 2006a:33). There has also been acceleration in the efforts to control and shape these migration flows, including more tightly defined categories of international migration, new programs of surveillance of the foreign born, and increased fortification of borders—perhaps most graphically in the United States. There has also been, somewhat paradoxically, an increase in the level of undocumented, low wage international labor migration—again perhaps most graphically in the United States. The set of papers presented here address these issues based on an across the disciplines dialogue with agricultural economist Philip L. Martin. The opening paper by Martin, and the subsequent responses by Takeyuki Tsuda, Caroline Brettell, Ted Hamann, and myself, examine the state of contemporary migration with a focus on the interactions among migration as an economic process real-locating labor, migration as an object of policy analysis and action, and migration as a human process affecting migrants and their families, including their current and future children.

This set of papers continues a tradition of annual “interlocutor” panels organized by the Society for Urban, National, and Transnational/Global Anthropology (SUNTA). In many ways, it extends a discussion from an interlocutor panel with Michael Peter Smith held in Santa Fe in 2005 (City & Society 2005). Although the emphasis in that session was on urbanism and cities, especially cities as concentrators of transnational processes, there was also an invocation of the ways in which cross-border ties in North America

are historically based on the agricultural sector in villages and “even in the countryside” (Smith 2005a:6). This is a reminder that it is not possible to fully separate urban and rural migration. Nina Glick Schiller’s commentary on Smith’s paper raised the issue of city scale and of city autonomy from the existing “nested hierarchy of power” (Schiller 2005:58), thus suggesting that when we talk of cities we are also indicating interest in those features and processes that distinguish cities from other places. An interest in the urban is thus also an interest in the rural since it shares—to extend Redfield’s analysis—the same analytic continuum. The explicit inclusion of agricultural issues in this set of papers thus seems especially appropriate when we recognize that by focusing on the urban, SUNTA is to some extent also the de facto “rural anthropology” section as well. As early anthropologists were adept at recognizing the rural in the urban, so perhaps we now may have some facility in seeing the urban in the rural. In Rotenberg’s terms, it may be time to decouple the notion of “urban” from the physical context of “coherent, territorialized communities” and, instead, take the notion to mean “any social formation...imbued with inequalities of access...[and] differential power” (Rotenberg 2005:75). We should thus, as Michael Peter Smith put it in his final rejoinder, recognize that it is “people and not places that act in history” and thus “that places are an ever changing product of differently situated social actors’ place-making projects and practices...” (Smith 2005b:86).

There is also a connection—albeit more tangential—between this set of papers and the SUNTA interlocutor panel held the following year in Washington D.C. That panel was organized by Mary Hancock (Hancock 2006) around the work of architectural historian Richard Longstreth. To the invocation in that panel of a new “landscape of fear,” we find ourselves in this set of papers very much in a landscape of greed, where the search for marginally better profits often results in the more-than-marginally worse situation of labor. The sense of how fear begins to pervade the physical environment finds some parallel here in the extent to which migration is ever more present, ever more perceived as an issue of raw economic calculus, and ever more couched in terms of security concerns and thus also of fear itself.

For the AAA meeting in San Jose in 2006, then, we undertook a more direct focus on international migration. We again went outside anthropology to look for insight, this time to economics rather than to sociology or history. We did so on a topic that Brettell has elsewhere suggested “cries out for an interdisciplinary approach” (Brettell and Hollifield 2000:vii), that Tsuda has amply demonstrated does benefit from such an interdisciplinary approach in his

recently published volume on local citizenship (Tsuda 2006), and that I have struggled to make fully interdisciplinary in regard both to refugees (Haines 1996) and undocumented immigrants (Haines and Rosenblum 1999). Philip L. Martin, our interlocutor for this topic, brings to the discussion his long experience as an analyst of migration both within the United States and on the more global plane. In addition to his definitive work on migration, agriculture, and labor in the United States—especially California—he has also assessed the prospects for Turkish migration to the European Union, the effects of immigration on Malaysia’s economy and its labor markets, and the options for dealing with unauthorized migration into Thailand. He is thus uniquely situated to illuminate contemporary migration as a process shaping America and as a process reflecting and shaping global interaction.

As a general background note, the panel from which this set of papers derives focused on the paper by Martin that is included here, but often branched off into a broader discussion of two of his books that were published in 2006. One, co-authored with Manolo Abella and Christiane Kuptsch is *Managing Labor Migration in the Twenty First Century* from Yale University Press (Martin et al 2006a). It provides an especially broad review of labor migration issues internationally, including the problems with guest worker programs. The second, co-authored with Michael Fix and Ed Taylor is *The New Rural Poverty: Agriculture and Immigration in California* from the Urban Institute Press (Martin et al 2006b). That volume provides a more specific analysis of the agricultural situation in the United States, an analysis that underlines many of the more negative effects of recent migration policies, including the danger that rural America becomes a kind of “immigration treadmill” (Martin et al 2006b:ix)

As a result of that broad focus on Martin’s work, the dialogue presented here is also very broadly constructed, simultaneously dealing with migration as viewed from within and from outside the United States, with both relatively impersonal economic forces and very personal lived experiences, and with both immediate labor and protection issues and much longer-range issues of families, children, and the evolution of polity and society in the twenty-first century. Given that range, the challenge to the discussants has been to invoke an anthropological perspective that is true to the discipline’s ethnographic heritage yet also true to its broader role as an integrative discipline that can span both the places and issues that the topic of migration covers. Only through that kind of integration will we be able to understand and react to contemporary migration’s benefits and dangers, to the virtuous and vicious cycles that Martin describes so clearly in his opening paper.

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