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## Reinventing US Internal Migration Studies in the Age of International Migration

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### Abstract

I argue that researchers have sidelined attention to issues raised by US internal migration as they shifted focus to the questions posed by the post-1960s rise in US immigration. In this paper, I offer some reasons about why immigration has garnered more attention and why there needs to be greater consideration of US internal migration and its significant and myriad social, economic, political, and cultural impacts. I offer three ideas for motivating more research into US internal geographic mobility that would foreground its empirical and conceptual connections to international migration. First, there should be more work on linked migration systems investigating the connections between internal and international flows. Second, the questions asked about immigrant social, cultural, and economic impacts and adaptations in host societies should also be asked about internal migrants. Third, and more generally, migration researchers should jettison the assumption that the national scale is the pre-eminent delimiter of migration types and processes. Some groups can move easily across borders; others are constrained in their moves within countries. These subnational scales and constraints will become more visible if migration research decentres the national from its theory and empirics.

### Keywords

internal migration; international migration; US; migration theory

## INTRODUCTION

Four decades or so ago, immigration to the US reversed its mid-20th-century decline and began a demographic, economic, and cultural transformation of large US cities to match, if not exceed, that initiated by previous cohorts of immigrants. Just as the growth of immigration at the dawn of the 20th century motivated a broad agenda of social research, most famously by Robert Park and the Chicago School, scholars in the late 20th and early 21st centuries have entered into lively debates about the new immigration's costs and benefits broadly construed. Yet, it took a few years for the most recent resurgence in immigration to register in academic circles. In the 1970s, research on the new immigration's

causes and impacts was sparse. However, by the late 1980s, immigration issues held a firm grip on the scholarly imagination of US social scientists and the volume of published research on the topic mushroomed. Academic interest in immigration to the US – and in international migration elsewhere – has remained high ever since.

Fading from view in inverse proportion to the growth in new immigration has been scholarly interest in US internal migration. This is not to say that research on migration within the US has disappeared entirely from the research agenda, but it seems fair to assert that scholarly attention to the issues raised by international migration has displaced the consideration of internal migration's role in the social, economic, and political life of the country. Skeldon (2006) gives an apt illustration of the magnitude of this shift by noting that it is now acceptable to use the word 'migration' without the qualifier 'international' in the title of a book even when that book's contents only discuss international migration or mentions internal migration only in passing.

My own experience teaching graduate students in the US matches this observation: most of those who are interested in migration almost always gravitate to research on immigration to the US or on the international flows of workers and refugees in some other part of the world. Geographic mobility within the US barely registers on young scholars' radar screens. One can only conclude that they do not consider it a worthy or exciting topic for research. Why is there a current relative lack of interest in internal US mobilities, at least in the US case? How did it come to be?

The frequency of moves across national borders is insufficient to explain the relative disinterest in internal migration. International migration is unquestionably more common today than it was a few decades ago, but it still only accounts for the experience of 214 million people – or just 3.1% of the world's population (United Nations, 2009). As of 2009, the US housed approximately 39 million of these foreign-born people, which is a substantial share, but at the same time, it also contained over 83 million US-born people whose state of residence is not their state of birth (US Census Bureau, 2010). One could reasonably argue that the impact of these US-born movers on the economies and politics of the states and localities in which they now reside is as profound, and possibly more so, than that of immigrants.

Thus, to understand why international migration research has thrived, one has to look beyond numbers to the pressing issues that the rise in cross-border flows brought to the fore. Questions about globalisation's effect on local labour markets, immigrant-led job displacement, ethnic divisions of labour, citizenship rights, multiculturalism, border security, transnationalism, and the limits to state sovereignty, to name just a few, all flourished with the rise in international migration and sparked widespread popular and academic interest. If internal migration research, at least in the US context, is to regain a larger share of the investigative spotlight, it must be able to show that population movement within countries is as consequential for social, economic, cultural, and political transformations as international migration has been and continues to be. The motivation for this paper is to suggest a few ways for internal migration research to meet this challenge and

thereby initiate a revival in research on the causes and effects of internal migration, especially in the US.

I argue that this revival could come, at least in part, from research that seeks to discover internal migration's relationships with – and similarities in terms of causes and effects to – international migration. Through such a discovery, the compelling issues that have spurred scholarship on cross-border flows and their consequences will spill over into the domain of within-country migration. I believe three approaches stand a good chance of encouraging this outcome.

The first of these is linked-flow studies. There is already a body of empirical research investigating the interdependence of international and internal migration flows (e.g. Filer, 1992; Walker *et al.*, 1992; White and Hunter, 1993; White and Imai, 1994; Frey 1995a, b; Frey and Liaw, 1998a; Card and DiNardo, 2000; Card, 2001; Kritz and Gurak, 2001). These works show that better understandings of the dynamics and consequences of international population movement require advances in knowledge about migration within countries and vice versa. The first substantive section of this paper will review existing work on linked migration flows with a view to suggesting some potentially fruitful avenues for future research.

The second approach is to translate the concepts and the approaches developed in the study of international migration to internal migration. For example, immigration researchers have investigated how the presence of the foreign born affects local labour markets through job competition and ethnic divisions of labour (e.g. Waldinger, 1996; Borjas, 1999a). They also have examined – primarily in the Canadian context – how local licensing or certification rules hinder the employment prospects of qualified newcomers (e.g. Abella, 1984; Li, 2001; Reitz, 2001). These sorts of issues are relevant for US internal migration too, yet there has been surprisingly little effort to investigate them at this scale. The second major section of the paper will argue the need to translate a variety of economic, cultural, and political approaches from international migration research to reinvigorate the study of US internal migration.

The third option is more transformative of migration studies than the first two in the sense that it questions the utility of the analytical distinction between internal and international migration itself – or the idea that national boundaries must inevitably differentiate migration types and studies. The greater the success of the empirical projects associated with the first two approaches, the stronger this questioning will become. The demonstration of the systemic integration of flows across scale and the successful application of the same approaches to both within- country and between-country migration studies will undermine the privileged status of the territorial state hierarchy in migration ontology.

The idea that the scale difference between internal and international migration is *a priori* meaningful unnecessarily limits insights into human mobility. By privileging the importance of the territorial state in the organisation of migration studies, scholars of human mobility presuppose that state boundaries neatly delimit the forces responsible for stimulating, directing, or constraining flows of people. State boundaries clearly do matter. Yet, it is

entirely possible in some instances that ethnic group affiliation and class matter more for understanding migration than whether the movement involved crosses an international border or not.

Eroding the boundary between internal and international migration research does not mean sidelining consideration of the power of territorial states to restrict entry or limit rights for non-citizens. Rather, it means treating the territorial state's role in migration in a realist sense – as a contingent influence instead of as a determinative force or necessary organising principle for all migrations (Sayer, 2006). As such, this approach parallels calls from transnationalism scholars for a decentering of the national in international migration studies (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2003). It also accords with post-national perspectives on citizenship, which argue that the national territorial state is only one of many scales now conveying rights (Soysal, 1994). The third and concluding section of the paper offers some additional insight into what such a view of migration might entail.

A few others have already begun to sketch what a blurred distinction between internal and international migration might mean for migration research generally (King, 2002; Skeldon, 2006). Encouragingly, two of King and Skeldon's (2010) suggestions for the integration of internal and international migration research – first, treating migration as a system that transcends national borders, and, second, extending questions asked about immigrant integration to internal movers – foreshadow some of my proposals for reinvigorating internal migration research aimed primarily at the US context. Thus, in addition to the specific suggestions it makes about US internal migration, this paper amplifies a small but growing international chorus arguing that advances in migration research will come from approaches that integrate theory and empirics across scales.

## LINKED INTERNAL–INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION FLOWS

Published work on internal–international migration linkages has expanded quite rapidly in recent years, but the issue of linked flows is neither a new phenomenon nor a recent discovery. In 1954, for example, Brinley Thomas published a detailed account of international migration between Britain and North America in the 19th and early 20th centuries, showing the synchronicity of population movements across the Atlantic, internal migration flows, and national economic conditions (Baines, 1985).

Before Thomas' pioneering work, US researchers had hypothesised an internal–international migration linkage in the growth of African American migration to the north in the early 20th century on the heels of a decline in European immigration (Vance, 1938; Myrdal, 1944; Thomas, 1954; Reder, 1963). The claim was that black labour substituted for immigrant labour when the latter dried up, initially because of the First World War and later on after the enactment of restrictive US immigration legislation in the 1920s.

Two decades later, in the 1940s, another substitution appeared to occur, but this time initiated by a sharp change in US internal migration not immigration. Factories desperate for labour to satisfy World War II military demand, and later the needs of the cold war military-industrial complex, drew the southwest's rural workforce to cities by offering well-paying

jobs. The Bracero programme brought four million Mexicans north as agricultural labour substitutes (Reimers, 1985).

These apparently linked-flow events, plus the effort of Thomas previously mentioned, evidently failed to incite much interest. In the 1980s, Pryor (1981) had to reiterate the benefits of fusing internal and international migration research. And Long (1988: 145) commented that '[I]t seems plausible to assume that in many contexts immigration may substitute for and reduce the volume of internal migration, but this hypothesis has not been extensively researched'.

This time, the call for more linked-flow research stimulated a response. Early in the 1990s, there were both conceptual elaborations and empirical explorations of internal–international flow linkages in Europe and Australia (e.g. Evans, 1990; Burnley, 1992; Salt and Kitching, 1992). And a few years later, Skeldon (1997, 2006) articulated the case for extending the search for these linkages to the developing world, particularly Asia. However, it was in the US that linked-flow studies most clearly caught the scholarly imagination in the 1990s.

The motivation for this US-focused effort did not stem from an intrinsic interest in the interaction of internal and international migration. Rather, it developed out of a desire by economists to find a way to compensate for bias in cross-sectional analyses of immigrant local labour market impacts. Studies of these impacts found little or no effect of immigration on the wages of the US born at the metropolitan scale (e.g. Borjas, 1990; Card, 1990). Puzzled by the ability of local labour markets to absorb so many newcomers without any observable wage depression, economists and others speculated that measurement error was to blame.

Early on, economists identified internal migration as the most likely source of their measurement problems. The gist of their argument was that domestic workers most vulnerable to immigrant competition could have quickly relocated to areas of the country where few immigrants lived. Alternatively, domestic workers outside regions experiencing mass immigration might have avoided regions of high immigration because of perceived immigrant competition for jobs. Thus, internal migration redistributed immigrant labour effects across the country, minimising the measurable impact of immigration in high-immigration regions.

The evidence for this redistribution effect was mixed. Some researchers found that unskilled US-born workers, presumably those most exposed to immigrants in the labour force, had left regions of high immigration (e.g. Filer, 1992; Walker *et al.*, 1992; Frey, 1995a, b). Supporters of the migration displacement effect argued that findings of a simultaneous attraction of skilled US-born workers to these regions of high immigration did not contradict claims of immigrant competition. In this view, skilled US-born workers complement rather than substitute for unskilled immigrant labour. Thus, unskilled immigrants and skilled US-born workers should coalesce in the same locations, whereas domestic unskilled workers should move elsewhere.

Other researchers have countered these findings with empirical work that shows little or no effect of immigration on internal migration (e.g. Butcher and Card, 1991; Card and

DiNardo, 2000; Card, 2001; Kritz and Gurak, 2001). In addition, some claim that the measurement of these linkages is extremely sensitive to the specification of models and the scale and sample of cross-sectional units. For example, Wright *et al.* (1997) show that there is no measurable linkage between internal migration and international migration without Los Angeles and New York in the sample of metropolitan areas; this linkage also fades when model specifications control for the size of the local labour force.

There is also the question of whether internal migration and immigration have direct effects on each other or if some unobserved force is the reason for the correlation of flows. For example, the labour market restructuring of global cities, which has exaggerated skills-biased technological change, may be responsible for the configurations of international and internal migration in and out of places like Los Angeles and New York (Walker *et al.*, 1992; Wright *et al.*, 1997). From this perspective, the linkage between internal and international flows is only indirect, and efforts to explain how they relate to each are only partial unless they bring in the effects of broader transformations in the capitalist space economy.

Whereas the issue of labour market competition has been central to the linked-flow debate in the US, there has been some attention to cultural arguments too. Frey's extensive work on linked flows started from the perspective that low-skilled US-born workers would leave states of immigration because of job competition. But in adopting the language of demographic balkanisation, he conjured up the idea that the US born were engaged in a form of sociocultural flight from immigrants (Frey, 1995a, b; Frey and Liaw, 1998a). The impression this characterisation gave met with vigorous opposition (Ellis and Wright, 1998). However, as the work of Huntington (2004) illustrated, these sorts of cultural geography arguments against the new immigration continued to resonate.

Ley's work on linked flows suggests an alternative to both labour market and cultural interpretations of this phenomenon (Ley and Tutchener, 2001; Ley, 2003). He argues that accelerating house prices may explain why high immigration coexists with domestic out-migration, using empirical examples from Canadian and Australian cities as evidence. Immigrants, Ley claims, more readily accept the crowding that high house prices inevitably create, whereas the locally born are more apt to move to where they can find more housing space at a price they can afford. As such, his research echoes other work in claiming that the correlation between internal and international migration is an indirect outcome of other forces, in this case housing market trends.

Ley's work is a good jumping-off point to begin to identify what US-centred linked-flow studies should consider next. There has not yet been a comprehensive account of the way in which housing markets intervene in the relationship between immigration and internal migration in the US. Yet, it is not hard to imagine that high house prices have provoked out-migration from large US cities by those least able to afford them (e.g. Withers and Clark, 2006; Withers *et al.*, 2008). These prices may also be responsible for reduced domestic inflows as migrants look to states and metropolitan areas in which they can get the most for their money. The housing market, not labour competition or cultural clashes, may hold the key to unlocking the linked-flow issue in the US.

In addition to housing markets, three other issues come to mind as topics for future US linked-flow studies. First, although there has been considerable attention to the issue of departure from high-immigration regions, there has not been corresponding research on where these migrants go and how much immigration features in their destination choices (but see Frey and Liaw, 1998b). For example, have US-born migrants who left southern California, allegedly because of an immigrant push, moved to locations where that pressure is minimal? If immigration was the cause of their departure, it should logically have influenced their choice of destination. The initial impression is that immigration has had little bearing on the destination choices of the US born, given that many migrants who left southern California ended up in places with large and rapidly growing immigrant populations, such as Las Vegas and Phoenix.

Second, the current emphasis of linked-flow studies is on if and how immigration drives in-migration and out-migration from high-immigration regions. It is entirely possible that US internal migration could have stimulated immigration into particular parts of the country, as happened in the Bracero case mentioned earlier. California's migration history is a good place to start searching for signs of how internal migration may induce immigration. Existing linked-flow studies always posit the reverse causality: rising immigration to California was a factor in the decline in domestic migration to the Golden State. A longer-term perspective on migration to California would observe that its attraction for internal movers had begun to fade in the 1960s, *before* the new immigrants arrived in large numbers.

The reasons for California's decline in attraction to US-born movers may have had something to do with its high house prices, air pollution, or perhaps the violent racialised conflicts in its major cities in the 1960s. But it may also have had nothing to do with events in California *per se*. Rather, it may well be that California at that time began to experience major competition for migrants who came from its traditional mid-western and northeastern source regions. These migrants started moving instead to southeastern states, especially to Florida, as growth in that part of the Sunbelt took off. In any event, after domestic migration declined, California's immigrant population grew, perhaps as a substitute in the labour market. Admittedly, this account needs much more empirical elaboration, but the basic facts that it relays are correct. What is challenging about this interpretation is that it describes immigration as a response to – rather than a cause of – US internal migration.

Emigration too could follow from US internal migration following an updated version of the traditional stepwise and stage migration models (e.g. Hagerstrand, 1957; Lee, 1966; Pryor, 1969; Skeldon, 1977; Conway, 1980). Youthful skilled migrants tend to move up the US urban hierarchy in line with expectations of greater opportunity in big cities (Plane *et al.*, 2005). In some industries, such as finance or media, these career moves are a necessary first step to assignment overseas in other global cities. Thus, career-driven internal migration up the US urban hierarchy will likely increase the possibility of international moves later on. We know very little about this issue, although the work on skilled international migration in other contexts provides some guidance (Koser and Salt, 1998).

The third issue for future US-oriented linked-flow studies is to come to terms with how the new geography of immigration – the shift in immigrant settlement away from traditional

gateway regions to the southeast and mid-west –ties in to patterns of both internal and international migration. There is initial research on some of these issues (e.g. Singer, 2004). However, there are numerous unanswered questions. For instance, what drove the movement of immigrants already in the US to non-traditional destinations? Was it the absence of opportunity and the growth in anti-immigration regulatory enforcement in traditional gateway regions? Alternatively, was it the attraction of labour and housing market conditions across the country? Specifically, as the US population moved to parts of the country where housing is cheaper, did they draw immigrants with them to build more houses and provide basic services? Has, as some suggest, increased border enforcement in the southwest played a role in shifting immigrants, especially Mexicans, away from the southwest to the east (Massey and Capoferro, 2008)? Finally, does the internal migration of settled immigrants away from traditional destinations draw flows from abroad to new destinations because of the geographic dispersal of network contacts and cultural linkages (Card and Lewis, 2005)?

These questions take on additional interest given that the US economy has recently experienced the longest economic contraction since the 1930s. The net volume of international migration into the country will ultimately depend on relative economic conditions in the US and abroad. Current evidence suggests that the US is attracting fewer immigrants than before the recession but that there has not been a large exodus; net international migration remains positive (Papademetriou and Terrazas, 2009). What is unknown is how the reconfigured space-economy of the US that is emerging from this prolonged downturn will affect the settlement choices of new arrivals *and* the locational adaptations of residents, both immigrants and the US born. It is probable that all of these groups will move to the most vibrant local labour markets wherever they may be, although some groups may be more responsive to these signals than others. Networks will likely accentuate these emerging geographies of locational convergence for the foreign born as resident immigrant internal movers send information to prospective immigrants about where the best opportunities are now located. Untangling this linked system of internal and international moves as it unfolds post-recession is an important project for future US migration research.

## **ADAPTING APPROACHES AND QUESTIONS FROM INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION RESEARCH**

The second way that connections to international migration might help to jumpstart internal migration research is by the judicious adaptation of the approaches and questions developed in the investigation of the former to within-country flows. This is by no means the first attempt to argue for such a fusion of internal and international migration research approaches (Pryor, 1981). Nevertheless, as earlier attempts to ignite this effort did not gain traction, there is still a need to articulate how and why these translation efforts could be useful (cf. King and Skeldon, 2010).

International migration attracted academic interest because it raised a series of questions about state power, national identity, citizenship rights, and ethnic difference. Debates about these questions now occupy centre stage in social science. With the exception of ethnicity or



race, it might seem that, on first reflection, internal migration has little to do with these sorts of matters. However, one can make a case that questions of state power, citizenship, and identity are also relevant for internal migrants. The presumption that these questions only make sense for international migrants obscures how these forces can also be relevant for within-country flows.

Perhaps the most obvious and simplest way to translate international migration research ideas into internal migration studies is through borrowing ideas about labour market analysis. Immigration research has raised specific questions about labour market displacement and ethnic divisions of labour (e.g. Waldinger, 1996), as well as initiating general discussions about the relationship between global city restructuring and the demand for immigrant labour (Sassen, 1988). There is no reason why internal migration should not be subject to these sorts of inquiries. For example, how do internal migrants fit into the economies of growing and declining regions? Do they disproportionately slot into growing or declining sectors or into good jobs or bad jobs? What is the impact of internal migration on the employment outcomes of the resident population? Specifically, do domestic movers raise unemployment and depress wages in destination local labour markets just as immigrants allegedly do?

As with immigrants, one can ask these questions using segmentation and ethnic division of labour frameworks (e.g. Wright and Ellis, 1996, 1997). These approaches would show how internal migration sustains or transforms patterns of employment segmentation that differentiate employment outcomes by group. In all cases, comparisons between internal migration and immigration would be fruitful in the sense that they would illuminate similarities and differences in the effects or roles of each type of migration (Ellis and Wright, 1999). More generally, one could extend the link between global city restructuring and immigration to the ways in which globalisation and restructuring affect types and patterns of labour migration within countries. The collection in Pandit and Withers (1999) is a rare attempt to highlight this sort of work.

The power of the state is self-evident when it comes to international migration. In limiting entry, regulating citizenship rights, and more generally controlling accessibility to all sorts of benefits, the state has multiple ways to manage the lives of immigrants. State interventions are less overt when it comes to domestic migration but nonetheless do happen. Three examples serve to illustrate actual or attempted assertion of state power over internal migration in the US.

The first concerns state regulation of professions. US states license numerous occupations from high-end jobs in law and medicine down to more humble professions such as hairdressing and cosmetology. The net effect of these restrictions is to limit mobility of the licensed to states in which their qualifications are automatically recognised or which do not require recertification and hefty fees (Ladinsky, 1967; Kleiner *et al.*, 1982). Internal licensing restrictions are not as restrictive as licensing laws that have prevented many qualified immigrants from taking up US professions. Nevertheless, Pashigian's (1979, 1980) work suggests that the effects of state regulation of professions on spatial price disequilibria and returns to migrant human capital are not trivial.

The second instance of the application of state power to control domestic migration has been through attempts to limit state citizenship rights and the benefits they confer. The most well known example is the effort by certain states to deny or limit access to state welfare benefits for recent in-migrants. These proposals emanate from the belief that the poor migrate in response to differential levels of state welfare payments, despite the mixed evidence in support of this hypothesis (e.g. Southwick, 1981; Blank, 1988; Borjas, 1999b; Walker, 1994; Levine and Zimmerman, 1995). The Supreme Court's most recent rejection of these restrictions in 1999, in *Saenz v. Roe*, found that they imposed un-constitutional limits on the rights of residence and trade.

While this effort at delineating subnational citizen rights failed, others have succeeded, which are likely to have substantial effects on interstate migration. For example, states have the ability to differentiate fees for higher education based on their right to define who is and who is not a state resident. Young adults, who are at the age at which migration is most likely, are thus constrained in where they can go to college unless they have the financial support to choose an out-of-state or private college (Morgan, 1983). The European Union is an interesting contrast to this restrictive situation. The European Union allows students to move freely between member countries, guaranteeing that they only get charged tuition fees at the local rate. The ensuing student migrations have generated growing research interest in Europe (e.g. King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003).

The third and final instance of state manipulation of internal migration is through the various local, national, and state policies that influence the geography of growth. From local growth, taxation, and environmental policies to federally funded defense and relief policies, US governments at all scales have exerted tremendous influence over volumes and directions of migration. Sunbelt migration, for example, is impossible to account for without recognition of the tremendous disbursements of federal dollars in support of the military and defense industries in southern and western states (Ellis *et al.*, 1993). Federal and state responses to Hurricane Katrina almost certainly motivated the confluence of internal and international migration to the Gulf Coast in reconstruction.

The cultural and political issues generated by large foreign-born settlement are another area in which international migration research has blossomed. Today's international migration literature includes both traditional and reworked assimilationist interpretations of the incorporation of newcomers (e.g. Portes and Zhou, 1993; Alba and Nee, 2003). It also includes new frameworks that embrace concepts like trans-nationalism and diaspora (e.g. Basch *et al.*, 1994; Laguerre, 1998). All these approaches bring to the fore the problem of cultural and political adjustments by both newcomers and host populations in destination societies. Although less obvious, these same issues exist for internal migrants, yet, there is comparatively little research on them. The most notable exceptions are accounts –literary, journalistic, and academic – of the great northward migration of southern-born US Black people in the 20th century (e.g. Stack, 1975; Wright, 1977; Lemann, 1992; Wilkerson, 2010). The transformations these movements wrought in Black people's culture, economy, and social and family life were profound.

Two books, separated by almost 40 years, give a sense of how much cultural and political issues still matter in domestic US migration. In 1968, Kevin Philips (1969) first made his name by predicting the shift to the right in American politics. Migration was not the principal theme of his book, but its role in his key argument – that growth in the Sunbelt laid the basis for the emerging Republican majority – was central. Underlying this transformation was the ability of a prospering south to incorporate rustbelt migrants into its conservative and racialised social fabric. James Gregory's (2005) recent book describes how migration has not only concentrated southern influence in the south but also dispersed it through what he calls the southern diaspora. These two books are not the only efforts of the last few decades to ascertain the cultural and political implications of US internal migration. However, it is fair to say that they bookend a barren period of research into these ideas, especially in relation to the flourishing study of these issues for immigration.

To wrap up, the idea that markets condition individual migration decisions abstracted from larger institutional, cultural, or political contexts infuses much of the scholarship on US internal migration. However, as the preceding remarks have attempted to show, these contexts might matter a great deal for structuring the possibilities for movement within the country and for understanding its repercussions. The fact that one can explore internal migration's effects on economic, political, and cultural life by borrowing approaches from international migration research prompts the question addressed in the final section of the paper: is there utility in maintaining the internal–international divide in migration studies?

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: QUESTIONING INTERNAL–INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION STUDIES DIVIDE**

In the preceding pages, I have elaborated two ways that internal migration research can thrive by association with the conceptual, topical, and empirical approaches used in the study of international migration. One option is an expansion of linked-flow studies to fill in the rather substantial gaps in our knowledge of the ways in which domestic and international migration streams work together at multiple scales – from residential mobility within cities to intercontinental moves across international borders. Another possibility is to translate the institutional, political, and cultural frameworks used to make sense of international migration and settlement into the realm of internal migration studies. Taking up either of these approaches would diminish the conceptual and empirical gaps between internal and international migration research. Both these streams of research would further problematise the idea that national boundaries matter in differentiating migration studies and advancing migration knowledge.

The distinction between internal and international migration research is long-standing. I would argue that the origins of this division lie partly in the availability of detailed census information about within-country flows, which have typically enabled internal migration researchers to ask different questions than those who study international flows (Salt and Kitching, 1992). Aggregate census flow matrices linked to other locational data have allowed researchers to model internal migration streams as a function of origin and destination characteristics at relatively fine spatial scales, such as US counties. Census microdata samples differentiate movers, as well as stayers, by their social and economic

characteristics. The quality of these microdata in the US and their national sample coverage allows for the behavioural modelling of migration decisions by individuals and families at the scale of mid-sized subnational units, such as US metropolitan areas.

It is no surprise, then, that internal migration research has focused on questions and methods most suited to these highly detailed and large national sample datasets. Spatial interaction models of flows reveal information about the structure of migration systems; sophisticated behavioural models of out-migration and destination choice tell us how different population groups (differentiated by age, education, ethnicity, etc.) respond in different ways to origin and destination conditions. Data of this quality are usually unavailable at the international scale, and thus these approaches are generally not deployed in the study of international migration. International migration researchers have typically transcended the relative absence of detailed data in two ways: either by focusing on broader institutional and structural issues as they bear on cross-border movers or by engaging in empirical studies of specific groups in a limited number of subnational places, through small surveys, ethnographies, or biographic approaches. It is important to stress that these differences between internal and international migration approaches to research as I have just crudely summarised them are only broad tendencies. There are, of course, examples of internal and international migration research that contradict these trends. The rich body of work produced by the Mexican Migration Project is an excellent illustration of how detailed multi-locational data on international migration can yield insights into the decision-making strategies of immigrants and their socio-economic consequences for movers and stayers (Durand and Massey, 2006). Yet, it seems incontrovertible that data quality and availability have helped to differentiate the substantive focus and methodology of internal from international migration research traditions.

However, the distinction between internal and international migration research stems not only from the greater richness of data within countries but also because of the taken-for-granted assumption that the national scale matters above all else in differentiating social phenomena. Political geographers have questioned this assumption for some time, describing its effect on limiting explanatory insight as a territorial trap (Agnew, 1994). The national scale is a trap in the sense that it obscures how events and relations at alternative scales affect social, economic, and political relations. The recent transnational turn in international migration studies has generated similar doubts about the utility of the national scale for making sense of contemporary migration (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2003).

The territorial state's privileged status as the scale at which we frame our understandings of social processes, such as migration, stems from an assumption that state power, and a host of nationally based social relations that influence social outcomes, operates uniformly within countries up to their borders and then stops. Whether such a situation accurately describes the past or not (and I think probably not), one can certainly make a case now that the national scale hides from view the uneven application of state power and social relations within countries, as well as the reach of these forces beyond national borders. The claim that citizenship is now taking a post-national turn – in which the cartography of rights is no longer synonymous with the geography of territorialised states – is a prime example of this broader trend (Soysal, 1994). Thus, in keeping with the idea that the national scale is a

territorial trap, and with transnational and post-national research that argues in favour of a break from the rigid ontological confines of nation-states, there is good cause for rethinking the traditional division between internal and international migration.

This rethinking does not mean jettisoning the national scale as an analytical construct or playing down the role of state power and associated national social institutions in understandings of migration. No one can deny that the state has enormous effects on the lives of some immigrants, in both rendering their entry difficult and dangerous and in marginalising their existence in the host country through restrictive citizenship policies. Rather, what this rethinking suggests is a view of the national scale as contingent rather than absolute in its differentiation of migration types and processes. In addition, it means a consideration of the effects of state power and nationally-centred social institutions on migration freed from the bounds of the national scale.

All this is to say that one should question empirically the effect of the national scale, and of the institutions associated with it, rather than *a priori* assuming that the national scale matters. This sort of thinking allies the transnational and post-national calls for a decentering of the national with realist approaches to social scientific explanation that would emphasise the national as a contingent rather than a universally important scale for understanding social phenomena (Sayer, 2006). The issue, in a realist sense, is to explain how, when, and why the national scale matters for migration and thereby open up the possibilities for seeing how conjunctions of forces at other scales might be as, or possibly more, important for understanding migration.

As such, a realist view of migration navigates between two extreme views of the explanatory role of the national territorial state: one that treats it as a given fact that automatically conditions our understanding of all other social facts, and the other that tends to ephemeralise it in the language of social constructionism. The middle-ground position not only acknowledges that states are constructions but also recognises that their long-established position yields them considerable power. This power flows overtly through the usual instruments of the state; it also exists covertly in the way we unthinkingly privilege the national scale in our frameworks for making sense of the world. The realist insight is to see this power as contingent rather than absolute. The question is when and how the national scale matters, and when and how it does not.

Although not framed in the fusion of the transnational, post-national, and realist terms just outlined, Skeldon (2006) hinted at what such a view of migration might entail. His review of linked internal–international migration in Asia gave examples of where international movements occur with ease and resemble internal flows in their dynamics. Some internal movements, however, are highly restricted – such as in China – and these constraints are similar in effect to the situation of some unauthorised immigrants in other countries (e.g. Chan and Zhang, 1999).

It is easy to find examples of what a decentering of the national scale would mean for migration studies in the North American context. The North American Free Trade Agreement has made it almost effortless for skilled Canadian workers in industries, such as

media, entertainment, and finance to move to Los Angeles and New York. The result is that Canada's borders do not delimit the destination possibilities for Canadian workers with the right sorts of skills. Of course, the same principle holds, more or less, for select skilled workers in other regions of the world too.

Skills are not the only source of these migration privileges. International relationships, rooted in histories of imperialism and race, confer ease of international migration for some groups but not others. Australians and New Zealanders, for example, face relatively few barriers in migrating to the UK where their privileged Commonwealth association allows them to get work visas without much bother. These privileges are much more restricted for less developed Commonwealth nations in Africa and Asia.

By comparison, the national scale matters a great deal more for the unskilled than it does for the skilled nomadic cosmopolitans who jet effortlessly between global assignments. In most instances, of course, the unskilled do not have the credentials necessary to access visas and must resort to undocumented border crossing and unauthorised employment. Even in the destination, the undocumented status of many of the unskilled places constraints on their freedom to move internally. Some US jurisdictions empower local police to ask for proof of citizenship, or proof of the right to residence, in the carrying out of their regular law enforcement duty; whereas others actively prohibit their police forces from any immigration role (Madden, 2006; Coleman, 2007a, b; Varsanyi, 2008). Some towns have gone as far as to declare themselves a sanctuary for undocumented migrants (Becerra, 2006). Thus, the conceptual distinction between internal and international mobility for the undocumented is diminishing as the state tries to control both.

These briefly sketched examples illustrate how migration processes and the scales at which they operate are contingent on who the migrants are. These scalar contingencies are likely to come into sharper focus as globalised labour markets grease the flow of highly sought-after workers but maintain harsh restrictions on the movements of others. For the former, the world may look increasingly flat as Friedman (2005) claimed, but for the latter, it is likely to be anything but flat as restrictive migration regimes and citizenship policies constrain mobility at scales from the local through the international. Between these extremes will be groups for whom there are movement possibilities at certain scales, such as within countries and trading blocs but not at others. Research that is open to discovery of the dimensions of these scalar contingencies has much potential to lead us beyond the limited insights into human mobility that the rigid conceptual and empirical divide between internal and international human migration can reveal.

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