



Policy Forum 04-45A: Migration



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Japan, Heisei Militarization and the Bush Doctrine

PFO 04-45A: November 5th, 2004

Migration

By G. Pascal Zachary

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I. Introduction

G. Pascal Zachary, the author of *The Diversity Advantage: Multicultural Identity in the New World Economy*, writes: "the influence of migrants is not limited to themselves?. In short, migrants have a "multiplier effect" and it is only by understanding the broader social reality of migrants that we can begin to understand their actual influence."

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II. Essay by G. Pascal Zachary

- "Migration"

By G. Pascal Zachary

Britain's David Beckham plays for a football team in Spain. Germany's Dirk Nowitzki and China's Yao Ming play basketball in America. Americans play in Japan's baseball league, and Japanese play in America's.

As I write from my home in Berkeley, California, the morning's newspaper reports that Ichiro Suzuki, Japan's greatest hitter, broke the record for most base hits in a single season of professional baseball - in the United States. "Baseball is America's sport, so for a Japanese player to go over there and break that record is truly amazing," one of Ichiro's fans in Tokyo told reporters. "I think Ichiro has changed the way people look at the game."

Ichiro's achievement - and that of other globe-trotting sports stars - also changes the way people look at nationality. Today, people routinely cross national boundaries in search of work, adventure, greater competition and of course romance. People even retire, in increasing numbers, outside of their countries of origin. And of course, sadly, some people flee from their countries in pursuit of safe havens.

For a variety of reasons, then, the people of the world are in motion.

But to what degree? In a world of 6 billion, most still stay close to home. According to the most authoritative data, produced by the United Nation's Population Division and repeated verbatim by such influential bodies as the International Organization for Migration, 175 million people in the world live outside their country of origin. That's more than 25 years ago but amounts to less than three of every hundred people on the planet.

For policymakers, the number seems small and so justifies a longstanding practice in international forums: migrant communities are neither seen nor heard. The failure to take advantage of the power of these communities - a power stemming from their having links to both "sending" and "receiving" nations - is justified by the small numbers of these people. However interesting migrants may be individually, their numbers are too small in aggregate. And so, the argument goes, there is no need to integrate the concerns and characteristics of transnational migrants into efforts to promote international security and economic development, say, or to reduce global strife.

But what if the number of people living outside their countries of origin is far greater than the experts believe? Might then policymakers build more forthrightly on the power of these communities?

In this short note, I want to briefly examine how population experts have arrived at the 175 million number and to suggest that the number is indeed too low, perhaps fantastically so. I am not alone in making this suggestion. Joseph Chamie, the director of the UN Population division and a respected demographer in his own right, agrees.

"All data are guilty until proven innocent," he says.

Dr. Chamie believes that some undercounting of transnationals is inevitable. The U.N. relies on

individual governments to supply data, and there can be vast differences in how they define "foreigners," "migrants," or "resident non-nationals." In Germany, for instance, the German-born son of two Polish immigrants may be classified as Polish in census figures. In the U.S., official statistics put the percentage of foreign-born people at about one in nine. That's a high percentage, the result of nearly 25 years of high-levels of in-migration. Yet Dr. Chamie concedes that the U.S., home to the largest population of migrant stock (at 35 million), might actually have another 10 million resident foreigners.

Dr. Chamie thinks that migration to rich countries - running about 2 million a year, about half of which are going to the U.S. -- is generally well captured because receiving governments have an incentive (and the means) to do so. Poor countries are another matter. Data from the poorest countries (many in Africa) is generally suspect, for instance.

But even middle-income countries provide suspect reports. The UN reports that China, excluding Hong Kong, is home to a mere 500,000 foreign nationals. Yet reports from the ground suggest that the number of North Koreans alone living in China could exceed that number.

One significant reason for undercounting, of course, is political. Migrations remain highly sensitive and few governments wish to fully account for the number of foreigners on their soil, if only to avoid inflaming the opinion of "nativists," native born residents who resent newcomers. There is also the risk that accurate census tallies will embolden "minority" groups to seek greater autonomy or at least a political voice.

The politicization of migration cuts both ways certainly. Countries may have an incentive to overstate the number of resident foreigners as a means of whipping up anti-migrant sentiment. The trouble with this tactic, of course, is that migrants are not easy to hide. Governments usually campaign against them because they are so visible, and indeed more numerous than official statistics suggest.

Dr. Chamie cites the case of Malaysia, where government officials repeatedly have referred to "millions" of legal and illegal migrants living in their prosperous country. Having flocked to Malaysia from throughout Asia, the migrants are viewed as a burden during slower economic times, hence the government's campaign to reduce their number. Yet according to the UN Population Division, of Malaysia's 22.2 million people, only 1.4 million, or about 6 percent, are foreigners. Why then does the government talk of millions of migrants if the number is accurate? Dr. Chamie's conclusion: the number isn't.

Such curiosities abound in migrant tallies. Consider the case of Libya, which the UN claims is home to a mere 500,000 foreigners. Libya is an oil-blessed, sparsely-populated country in North Africa that is a magnet not only for sub-Saharan Africans looking for casual labor but also for those seeking illegal entry into Europe. Italy, after all, is easily reachable by boat from the shores of Libya. The government of Libya periodically cracks down on migrants within its generally porous borders, which suggests that the official figure is far too low. A couple of years ago, for instance, Libya claimed to have expelled one million West Africans. And the expulsion was no mere phantom: lots of people left, according to eye witness and media reports.

Other African countries face a similar undercounting. The UN reports that Ghana, for instance, has 600,000 resident non-nationals out of a population of 19 million. Yet the Nigerian embassy in Ghana claims that one million Nigerians live in the country. The presence of neighborhoods called "Lagos Towns," after Nigeria's capital, in large Ghana cities suggests a significant presence. Similarly, civil wars in nearby Liberia and Ivory Coast have brought many migrants from these countries to Ghana. Just how many? The UN estimates 70,000 Liberians, but the actual number is believed to be much

higher.

"Africa is a very gray area," Dr. Chamie says. "Quality data doesn't exist."

And that problem is not limited to Africa either. Mexico, with its official population of 98 million, claims only 500,000 migrants within its borders. Yet the government of Mexico told The New York Times that it had apprehended 112,000 non-Mexicans trying to reach the U.S. in the first seven months of this year alone. While Mexico is certainly a transit point for illegal immigration, the country is also a staging ground for migrants from as far away as Poland and Ethiopia as well as haven for nationals throughout Latin America. If the percentage of foreigners in Mexico was three percent, a reasonable guess, that would be six times more than the official number of migrants.

To be sure, then, there is a large undercounting of migrants around the world. But is this undercounting significant on a global scale? Is it so vast as to fundamentally distort the picture?

Dr. Chamie thinks the official figure of 175 million is close enough. And even if it isn't - even if the actual number is 250 million, or 300 million -- migrants would still only count for 5 percent of the world's population. Would that cause us to change our thinking about their significance in world affairs?

There is no yes-or-no answer to this question but that may be because the question is too narrow. The influence of migrants is not limited to themselves. Migrants have children, they have wives and husbands, they have co-workers and neighbors. In short, migrants have a "multiplier effect" and it is only by understanding the broader social reality of migrants that we can begin to understand their actual influence.

We can capture this "multiplier effect" or at least begin to. The U.S. Census Bureau, for instance, has found that there are nearly 60 million people in the U.S. who are either foreign-born themselves or the children of a foreign-born parent. The number of Americans who have married foreigners and live with them in the U.S. is nearly 5 million. Add that to the number and it reaches 65 million, nearly twice the UN's official number.

That's only a start on quantifying the diverse linkages between migrants and recipient countries (and then there is the effect of migrants on their home country, through remittances, skills transfers and political participation - a subject for another time).

My notion of a "migrant multiplier effect" of course has a back-of-the-envelope quality and might not stand up to the rigors of analysis, but the concept could help policymakers and scholars get their hands around a central conundrum: that migrants seem to be changing the terms of human existence far more than the official numbers suggest.

III. Nautilus Invites Your Responses

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org . Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

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