



The Shock of the New

Global media, and a global cash economy, have accelerated the movement of workers across borders.

BY PETER STALKER

A gap in living standards between one country and another is the fundamental cause of international migration. But it takes more than this to make people actually move. They may, for example, be pushed by some sudden change in local circumstances, or they may be exposed to hitherto undreamed-of alternatives in other countries. Globalization contributes to both of these processes by shaking up settled communities and offering new horizons that stretch way beyond the borders of the village or the nation.

The link between economic development and migration is well established. Mass emigration from Europe to North America and Australia from the mid-19th century onwards can be fairly closely correlated with social and economic transformations—changes in agri-

cultural productivity, a growth in rural population, and the onset in each country of the Industrial Revolution.

People unable to find work in the countryside were driven to the cities. Most of them succeeded and remained in their own countries. But the process was very uneven, and many who found themselves shaken loose from the countryside were unable to find work in the cities and had to try their luck overseas.

Revolutionary Changes

Increased rates of emigration are directly correlated with the Industrial Revolution. Historically, one marker date for the establishment of the Industrial Revolution can be the year when railway tracks first exceed 1,000 kilometers (621 miles). On this basis, the wave of European industrialization started

in the 1830s, in the British Isles; in the 1840s, in France and Germany; in the 1850s, in Russia-Poland, Austria-Hungary, and Italy; in the 1860s, in Spain, Switzerland, and Sweden; and in the 1870s, in the rest of Southern Europe. On average, the peak year of emigration from these countries was 28 years after this marker date.¹

A similar process occurred in Japan, where industrialization spanned the period from 1891 to the 1920s, an era that also saw large-scale emigration to the United States and Australia. Even as late as the early 1960s, Japan was the most important source of Asian immigration to the United States—a flow that abated only after 1965, when Japan's economy began to grow more rapidly.²

The same processes of uneven and disruptive development that displace people from rural areas and draw them to cities also increase pressure for emigration from developing countries. Here, though, technological spillover from industrial countries seems to have accelerated the process. Agricultural innovations, improvements in health, and the prospect of work in urban areas have provoked very rapid upheavals.

City Bound

The most obvious symptom of rapid development is the explosive growth of cities—20 to 30 million of the world's poorest people migrate annually to towns and cities.³ As a result, the proportion of the population of the developing world living in urban areas is growing dramatically. In 1960, it was 22 percent; by 1994, it had reached 37 percent; and by 2025, it is expected to reach 57 percent. By 1990, the world had some 20 cities with populations of more than 8 million, of which all

but six were in developing countries. Mexico City is currently the largest, but others are not far behind.⁴

This trend toward urban growth echoes the experience of industrial countries around 100 years ago, but the process in the developing world is altogether more rapid. London was the first industrial city to top a million, but it took 130 years to grow from 1 to 8 million. Mexico City has grown from 1 million to 15 million in just 50 years.⁵

Almost all these people are traveling, temporarily or permanently, in search of work. In most cases they do manage to find it, or create it, if only in the informal sector at desperately low wages. In Dhaka, for example, 65 percent of all employment is in the informal sector, and in Bangladesh as a whole, half the population lives below the poverty line.⁶

Migrants to cities generally trade one kind of poverty for another. Most will drift into squatter settlements where living conditions are miserable. Recent studies in 10 major cities in low-income countries found the average family to have only 6.1 square meters of floor space, and 44 percent of households lack access to drinking water in their plot.⁷ A logical next step, once people are uprooted from their rural communities, is migration to another country.

This can also be traced historically. Mexican emigration to the United States, for example, has proceeded in a series of waves that correspond to different stages in Mexico's disruptive transition from an agrarian to a more industrial society. The first peak was in the 1920s after the devastation caused by the Mexican Revolution, which lasted from 1910 to 1919. Between 1841 and 1930, some 744,000

Mexicans emigrated to the United States, or 4.5 percent of its 1930 population.

By European standards, however, the Mexican emigration movement was relatively modest; between 1864 and 1924, the British Isles, for example, sent 17 million people overseas—equivalent to 41 percent of its 1900 population. The second Mexican exodus began in 1942 and peaked in the 1950s, a period when a series of droughts and a lack of capital plagued rural areas. The third wave began in the 1960s and continues today, closely connected with mechanization in rural areas that has reduced the demand for labor, and more recent changes in land tenure that have permitted farmers to sell plots that previously were communally owned. However, in each of these waves the number of emigrants has never exceeded 15 percent of the population. Given the pace of economic development, emigration from Mexico, in historical terms, has been surprisingly modest.⁸

Economic development has always been associated with emigration. To what extent has the modern phase of globalization changed the picture? This is partly a question of scale and speed. Many of the political, economic, and social processes that provoked emigration in the past have been accelerated.

Political Disruption

The political changes linked with globalization correspond to a weakening of national government control over many aspects of life. In general, this has accompanied the spread of liberal democracy, which, though it permits greater popular participation, also raises the prospect of instability. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of the world's people now live under rela-

tively pluralistic and democratic regimes.⁹

The most dramatic changes have occurred in the former communist countries, with the collapse of some states and the formation of many new ones. These forces have increased international migration, particularly among states that formed part of the former Soviet Union. Between 1990 and 1996, more than 9 million people were on the move—one in 30 of the population. Many of these were fleeing fighting, but others feared discrimination—particularly Russians who had relocated to other republics and now found that they could not speak the new official national language. Between 1993 and 1996, some 2.7 million people returned to Russia.¹⁰

At one point, it was thought that the fraying of borders in Eastern Europe would also release a flood of migrants to the West. In practice, this has not happened on anything like the threatened scale, for a number of reasons. First, most people would not know where to go because there are no established networks for them to plug into. Second, the cost of travel is more than many can afford. And third, Western European countries have tightened up their borders.

The most significant exodus has been of people who do have somewhere to go and know they will be accepted, such as the *Aussiedler*, or ethnic Germans. These are people whose ancestors came from Germany, but who live outside its borders. Many settled in Poland and other Eastern European countries as well as the former republics of the Soviet Union in the 18th and 19th centuries. They used to have an autonomous republic along the Volga River in Russia, but in 1941, Stalin deported them to Siberia and Cen-

tral Asia. From the end of the Cold War to the beginning of 1996, about 2 million ethnic Germans emigrated back to Germany. The scale of the flow was such that in 1993 the German government set a limit of 220,000 per year and pumped huge sums into the former Soviet republics, hoping to improve conditions sufficiently to encourage people to stay. In 1996, around 1.5 million ethnic Germans remained in what was the Soviet Union.¹¹ The 1989 census had recorded 2 million.¹²

Even if there has not been a mass exodus to Western Europe, the loosening of state control on migration in Eastern Europe has resulted in considerable circulation of workers among Eastern European states. Russia has become an area of net immigration. Moscow has a large immigrant labor force, with workers from Ukraine, Turkey, Georgia, Moldova, and Belarus. Many Eastern European countries are now both importers and exporters of labor. Hungarians go to work, often illegally, in Austria, while Ukrainian and Romanian migrants fill jobs in Hungary. The Hungarian Central Statistical Office reported in 1994 that some 120,000 Hungarians were living abroad, while 200,000 foreigners were living legally in Hungary, including 105,000 Romanians. Similarly in the Czech Republic, rapid economic growth is fueling demand for construction laborers. While Czechs head for Austria and Germany, foreign construction workers are streaming into the Czech Republic, mostly from Slovakia and the Ukraine. In June 1996, there were an estimated 100,000 Ukrainian workers employed in Prague.¹³

The more-porous borders in Eastern Europe, with chaotic controls and lax visa requirements, have

also opened up the potential for using Eastern European countries as staging posts into Western Europe for immigrants from further afield. The Centre for Migration Policy Development in Vienna has estimated that 300,000 people are smuggled through Eastern Europe into Western Europe each year. Traffickers charge anywhere between US\$500 and US\$5,000 per person—earning an estimated US\$1.1 billion per year.¹⁴

At any one time there are a number of regular smuggling routes—though these change rapidly as standards of enforcement, and levels of bribes, rise and fall. For Central Asians, one established route has been through Russia to the Baltic states—often ending with a perilous voyage to the Nordic countries.¹⁵ Africans and people from East Asia have been traveling via Turkey and Hungary. Poland is also used as a transit area—in 1995, the Polish government estimated that there were 100,000 foreigners waiting to smuggle themselves into Germany. Gangs from Vietnam and China also use Hungary and the Czech Republic as staging posts. This is made easier because thousands of East Asians came to Eastern Europe as guest workers during the communist era and have established restaurants that they use as fronts. In 1995, police in Prague raided a small Chinese restaurant that had 800 “registered employees.”¹⁶

Moscow is also a regular staging post, with Asians flying in on forged documents that cooperative officials choose not to inspect too closely. For those wanting to get to Italy, Albania is a favored transit point—they complete their journey across the Adriatic by speedboat—a route that has accommodated up to 50,000 travelers per year.¹⁷

Unstable Africa

Other parts of the world have also been going through political upheavals. In Africa, borders have always been very porous, with people passing from one country to another, paying little heed to national frontiers. In this region, the spread of democratic ideas creates even more fluid environments. In 1996, more than half the African states were undertaking democratic reforms.¹⁸

The collapse of Communism has also been linked with increased migration. After the Cold War, superpowers who had fought the war by proxy in Africa withdrew aid to a number of African states. This, along with the spread of democratic ideas, helped to undermine the centralized states, allowing other divisions to emerge. At one extreme, this has forced millions of people to flee as refugees from war and genocide. But wars and emigration contribute to economic collapse, which means more people searching for work.

These changes have accelerated the flood of people heading for South Africa, the most industrialized sub-Saharan country. The apartheid regime had a fierce attitude toward undocumented immigrants, backed up with a high-voltage electrified fence along its eastern border. The democratic government is now facing a fresh flow of immigrants, partly because the fences are not that difficult to negotiate. In one demonstration in 1995, an undocumented immigrant crossed in only 1 minute, 17 seconds using forked sticks to straddle a barrier consisting of an 8-foot-high game fence and razor wire stacked three layers high. The South Africa Defense Forces estimate that they catch only one person in four who crosses, and even these will try

again until they succeed—one person was caught 28 times in six months.¹⁹ No one knows how many undocumented immigrants are in South Africa, but estimates vary from 2.5 million to 8 million, or one-tenth of the population. These estimates are largely guesswork, but figures based on expulsions are more solid. In 1990, the year Nelson Mandela was freed, 53,418 people were expelled. In 1995, the first full year of democratic rule, South Africa expelled 157,084 people, mostly to Mozambique.²⁰

Economic Disruption

While modernization and capitalist development have always been disruptive, a number of recent processes integral to globalization have intensified the effects. Events since 1973 have shaken the economies of many countries. After the first oil shock, the recession in industrial countries, along with the sharp rise in oil prices, hit many developing countries hard. Between 1972 and 1981, the debts of developing countries rose six-fold, from less than US\$100 billion to more than US\$600 billion.²¹

The struggle to resolve the debt crisis drew many countries into an uncomfortably close relationship with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The World Bank gave loans to most countries in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa on the strict condition that they restructure their economies along free-market lines. These measures had a profound impact, often negative, on employment and livelihoods. The lowering of trade barriers, for example, exposed both agriculture and industry to the cold winds of international competition, often reducing employment and wages. Cuts in government expenditure reduced public-sector em-

ployment and curtailed many vital social services and subsidies on which the poor depended.

The experience of the developing countries was far from uniform, however, and the impact on employment, and hence migration, varies.

■ **Latin America and the Caribbean.** The economic collapse of the early 1980s wiped out many gains of earlier decades. Between 1980 and 1990, per capita gross domestic product fell by 9.6 percent and consumption by 6 percent.²² As formal employment opportunities declined, more people moved to the informal sector: between 1980 and 1992, the proportion of those in nonagricultural work who worked in the informal sector rose from 25 percent to 32 percent.²³ This brought total underutilization of the labor force—unemployment plus underemployment—to 42 percent. At the same time, wages in the region were falling. The decline varied across sectors, ranging from 5 percent in industry to 20 percent in agriculture. In the informal sector, average wages declined even more sharply—by 42 percent.²⁴ Unsurprisingly, the 1980s were regarded as a “lost decade” in Latin America. Since then there have been signs of recovery. Most countries have achieved greater macroeconomic stability and growth rates of over 3 percent. But this has yet to translate into significant improvements in employment and income.²⁵

■ **Sub-Saharan Africa.** The recession after the oil shock had a disastrous effect on livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa, the only region of the world where standards of living have been on a steady downward path. Since 1973, per capita output has declined by 10 percent. Over the past two decades, total agricultural income has dropped by 15 percent. This has driven 6 to 8 percent of the popu-

lation to leave the countryside each year for the cities, compounding the already deteriorating conditions in urban areas in both formal and informal sectors. Urban unemployment, which was around 10 percent in the mid-1970s, now ranges between 15 and 20 percent. The informal sector in most African towns and cities became the employer of last resort and is now believed to account for over 60 percent of the urban labor force.

■ **South Asia.** The countries of South Asia avoided the extreme experiences of Latin America and Africa. Less exposed to international financial and commodity markets, they largely missed the debt crisis of the 1980s. Most employment is in agriculture, and increases in production as a result of the green revolution helped absorb much of the increase in the labor force. Industrialization in South Asia had been based on import substitution, a policy that encourages local production of goods, which increased output, but not very efficiently and without absorbing much of the urban labor force. Manufacturing employment during the 1980s grew at less than 1 percent per year. As elsewhere, the burden has been passed to the informal sector, which in India and Pakistan in 1990 accounted for over 70 percent of total manufacturing employment.

■ **North Africa and the Middle East.** This is a very heterogeneous group, including rich oil exporters and labor importers in the Persian Gulf, as well as poorer labor exporters such as Egypt and Yemen. Most of these countries gained from the oil price rises, either as oil exporters or through remittances from migrant workers who sent wages earned abroad back home. The fall in oil prices in the mid-1980s provoked something of a crisis in the

region, and since then a number of countries have undertaken adjustment programs. In most countries, unemployment was around 7 percent in the 1970s, but in the post-recession period it is now 10 percent or more.²⁶

■ **East and Southeast Asia.** Until recently, this was the world's fastest-growing region, and growth meant the creation of new jobs and lower unemployment rates. In 1990, only 15 percent of the region's population lived below the poverty line—compared with 28 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is not just because of economic growth, but also because of much greater socioeconomic equality.²⁷ China has followed a somewhat different path. Its steady progression toward a market economy has been accompanied by a further boost in economic growth. Inequality has certainly increased, as more people are able to make substantial improvements in income, but most people in China are better off, and the number of people living in absolute poverty has fallen steeply over the last two decades. By 1998, however, the future was looking much less certain, and economic disruption—if it persists—could eventually start to dislodge many people who thought their futures would be at home.

While the pressures of recession and structural adjustment have had diverse impacts around the world, the general effect has been a crisis of economic security. People moving from rural areas to cities find that they have to take two or three jobs in the informal sector to survive. It is just this lack of security that drives many individuals to migrate overseas.

In many cases, however, the decision to migrate is not an individual decision. Most emigrants are

playing their part in a family survival strategy. Thus a rural family might spread its risks by having some family members work in agriculture but send others to work in the city or overseas as a way of spreading the risks of failure. The emigrant thus takes out a kind of co-insurance with the rest of the family. The head of the family will pay the emigrant's initial expenses of travel and subsistence while he or she is looking for work, and the emigrant promises to send regular remittances—increasing them at times when the family at home is in particular difficulty.²⁸

Consider those families divided across the U.S.-Mexico border. Those who work in the United States tend to be young or middle-aged men who can earn higher wages than they could in Mexico, though the risks and costs of unemployment are high. Meanwhile those under 18, the women, and the old stay in Mexico, where wages might be low, but there is greater security and fewer out-of-pocket expenses.²⁹

Global Village

Beyond unsettling people who lose their jobs, globalization is also altering the character of society. This can be seen partly as a continuation of the process of modernization, as traditional communities and extended families give way to nuclear families, and as subsistence economies are penetrated by capitalism and consumer culture.

Globalization has certainly intensified the process of opening up and atomizing communities, and it is challenging people in every society to see themselves in relation not just to their immediate neighbors but to the rest of the world. This is evident in the spread of global media. Even in the least-developed coun-

tries, there is now approximately one radio for every 10 people, and one television set for every 100.³⁰ Within the urban areas that are the stepping-off points for most emigrants, the proportions are much higher—even the most miserable slums in Latin America usually display a forest of television antennae. Added to these are myriad other forms of communication—from cinema, to magazines, to popular music.

Much of this material is imported. Every country has 24 hours in the day, and each national television broadcaster tries to fill up the air time. The cheapest way to do this is by buying programs from abroad. Similarly, the most spectacular movies will generally come from wealthier parts of the world. China is only the latest country to find itself swamped by the products of Hollywood: Chinese moviegoers are increasingly ignoring government-produced films and, despite official disapproval, are flocking to see the latest movies from Hong Kong or the United States. Added to this is the information beamed in directly by satellite. At the end of 1996, there were an estimated 700 live satellites orbiting the earth.³¹

Nevertheless, the flows are becoming increasingly dispersed. UNESCO has looked at the sources of the trade in cultural goods of all kinds—from literature, to television, to music. It found that the share of industrial countries dropped between 1975 and 1990 from over 90 to less than 70 percent.³² American television may still have the biggest audiences, but movies from India and Hong Kong, soap operas from Mexico and Argentina, and pop music from Africa are finding a worldwide audience. Yet people don't inevitably prefer the foreign product. When a choice ex-

ists, well-produced local programs tend to score higher in the ratings than imported programs. Nevertheless, people are increasingly able to judge their culture in relation to foreign alternatives. Of migrant-sending countries, the Philippines is probably the most penetrated by foreign, almost entirely U.S., media. A 1994 report on television patterns found that foreign programs made up 32 percent of air time and accounted for 37 percent of programs.³³

Not only are the foreign media penetrating local cultures, the distribution of products also contributes to a sense of belonging to a global consumer culture. The leading global brand in 1996 was judged to be McDonald's, with 19,000 hamburger restaurants scattered around the world, followed by Coca-Cola, Disney, Kodak, and Sony.³⁴ Just as much as the consular offices of migrant-receiving countries, the global brands serve as focal points of a new and increasingly hybrid consumption culture. Again, McDonald's is the archetype of imposed uniformity. In Egypt, for example, it has been pointed out that almost all the menu items, even *apple pie* and *milk shake*, are not even translated but merely transliterated into Arabic.³⁵

However, such companies do not necessarily displace local alternatives and not all come from industrial countries. A number of fast-food chains such as the Philippines company Jollibee—which offers a kind of hybrid burger, the Amazing Aloha burger, which comes with a slice of pineapple—are springing up in other developing countries, and advertising developed in one country may soon be seen elsewhere. One highly successful campaign for Nescafé, for example, originated in Chile and in 1996 was being seen

in many other countries.³⁶ Some would argue that all this has made the world a more peaceful place. At the end of 1996, the *New York Times* was able to report that no two countries with a branch of McDonald's had ever gone to war against each other—though this observation was subsequently contradicted by the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia.³⁷

The increasing complexity of the global cultural environment has led sociologist Arju Appadurai to suggest that it can best be understood through a new series of “scapes.” The Ethnoscape is the landscape of people—tourists, immigrants, refugees, and others who move around the world affecting the countries where they arrive. The Technoscape is the fluid configuration of technology that allows products in one place to arrive from almost anywhere—a steel plant in the Libyan Arab Jamahariya, for example, might involve interests from India, China, Russia, and Japan. The Finanscape consists of the flood of capital that rushes at breathtaking speed through international networks. The Mediascape refers both to multinational media distribution networks and to the images they portray, which through complex narratives and mixtures are creating new “imagined worlds.” The Ideoscape consists of ideologies and counterideologies and ideas such as “freedom,” “welfare,” and “rights.” Appadurai argues that modern culture is increasingly shaped by the growing disjuncture between all these scapes.³⁸

Cash Economy

One of globalization's most important disjunctions is to draw people into the cash economy—and yet offer them little by way of reward. In Mexico, for example, Mixtec Indians are increasingly being drawn

out of their own areas in the south to work on huge farms in the north that export cash crops to the United States. They go to Sinaloa to work on winter vegetable production and to Baja California to grow tomatoes and other vegetables. Once there and earning money, they soon realize they could do better by venturing further north. One survey found that 77 percent of Mixtecs in California and Oregon had previously worked either in Baja or Sinaloa or both before migrating to the United States. When people move from remote rural areas, they are exposed to networks of contacts that open up a new range of possibilities—especially since work in both places is much the same, making it easier for the migrants to find employment.³⁹

Deeper involvement in the cash economy can also encourage migration since it allows people to pay the costs of emigration. Even so, they will still have to save up. North Africans in Morocco, who might be earning around \$4 per day, would have to work the best part of a year to be able to afford the perilous 10-mile crossing from Tangier to Tarifa on the southern tip of Spain. In 1996 this illegal trip cost US\$600. Even legal migration is very expensive. In the Philippines, recruiters are officially permitted to charge migrants around US\$200, but in fact charge up to US\$4,000, for jobs in Japan or Taiwan. South Asian and Chinese migrants to the United States have been charged much more. A group of immigrants apprehended in 1996 told officials that they had paid a US\$28,000 fee in three disbursements made to handlers in Asia, Nicaragua, and Mexico, and were lodged along the way at safe houses in Moscow, Havana, Managua, Guatemala, and Mexico City.

Many migrants do not pay up

front. Rural families frequently borrow at exorbitant interest rates to finance emigration. In other cases, recruiters and contractors often find it more profitable to take money out of the migrants' future earnings—even keeping them locked up in workplaces to ensure that they do not escape. Nevertheless, the process of economic development that enables emigrants to save up at least a part of the cost is an important contribution toward emigration.

The Migration Hump

The disturbing effect of development—shaking people loose from their communities, raising new possibilities, and providing them with the funds to travel—means that as countries achieve a minimum standard of economic development, migration is likely to increase rather than decrease.

This can be expressed graphically as a migration hump: emigration first rises as per capita gross domestic product rises, but after a while starts to fall again.⁴⁰ On the basis of emigration patterns in southern Europe from the 1960s to the 1980s, the turning point for a sample of countries was estimated as an average per capita gross domestic product of US\$3,615—ranging from US\$3,400 for Turkey to US\$4,100 for Greece—in 1985 international dollar prices.⁴¹

However, it has also been suggested that the watershed level is different depending on the level of skill of the potential migrant and the cost and distance of migration.

For almost everyone caught up in the modern phase of globalization, one of the most significant effects has been an increase in uncertainty. With communities all over the world more closely interlinked, the global economic environment has become steadily more

dynamic—and in many respects more unstable—as competition intensifies and economic shocks are transmitted instantly around the globe. Among those most sharply affected by this new environment are people in the poorest countries who find themselves drawn ever further into a global economy. In the short term, even if the poor benefit from these links, they will probably be more prone to emigrate—though in the long term, as the standard of living begins to approach those of the developed world, the same processes of economic development could provide them with greater incentives to stay at home.⁴²■

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