

Globalization & Migration—A Little Goes A Long Way—Home

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The emergence of new economic systems has always demanded profound and multiple adjustments in social and economic relations. It has forced societies to destroy old orders and create new paradigms, regulations, and institutions. The convergence of various technological and political factors which occurred during the 1970s-1980s, most importantly, the invention of the microchip and the end of the Cold War, provided the conditions for a new system to emerge: the era of globalization (Friedman, 2000). The debate shaping globalization has been controversial and divisive. Much like the Roman deity Janus, globalization has two faces; it can look in two directions simultaneously viewing the past as it engages the future.

Globalization brings with it an inherent dichotomy. It has the potential to promote equality, democracy, and the opportunity for humanity to achieve more harmonious levels of co-existence; or, it can further polarize the world's wealthy and poor nations. The current, unprecedented advances in technology could be directed to eradicate hunger and diseases worldwide. Since technology now allows workers to produce more in less time, it is feasible to shorten the eight-hour workday in support of family and community life. But, to move in that direction demands the full participation of civil society in the current globalization debate. It requires that we go beyond the sole economic interests of corporations in order to create policies embracing sustainable economic development, workers rights, human rights, international migration, and the protection of the environment.

The present international mechanisms and forums lack a diversity of voices, resulting in a distorted shape and direction of globalization policy. This undemocratic process forces civil society to insert its voice through protests and rallies against the institutions that drive globalization, open markets, and privatization. Powerful countries, led by the United States, have entrusted global institutions to develop and implement economic policies to remove barriers or regulations to the free movement of capital and products. However, critics of globalization believe that the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank structures give disproportionate power to wealthy

nations, while promoting almost exclusively the interests of multinational corporations (AFSC 2001).

This can be illustrated by the shortcomings of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which was passed in 1993. Sectors of civil society including academics projected that opening the markets indiscriminately to agricultural products would generate a large-scale crisis in the Mexican agricultural sector and the bankruptcy of many Mexican peasants. These farmers would not survive the unfair competition created from cheaper U.S. subsidized grains sold at prices below the cost of production. Such policies would trigger a crisis in the Mexican agricultural sector and potentially displace 1.4 million peasants causing 800,000 workers to migrate internally and 600,000 to immigrate to the United States (Garcia Zamora, 2001).

Consistent with those projections, Mexican migration to the United States expanded significantly during the 1990s. U.S. Census 2000 data indicates that Latinos were the fastest growing population during the 1990s. According to the National Council of La Raza half of this growth is due to migration. Immigration is one of the most important binational issues between the U.S. and Mexico. However, it was not part of the NAFTA negotiations because the U.S. refused to include it in the agenda. Instead of addressing the inevitable increase of migration accelerated by free trade, after NAFTA was signed the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service received more funding to increase border control (Garcia Zamora 2001). Despite the imminent dangers of an increasingly militarized U.S.-Mexico border, thousands of Mexicans and Central American displaced workers, casualties of economic restructuring forces, cross over looking for jobs to support the families and communities they left behind.

Globalization factors have introduced new elements to the immigration experience. The low cost of transportation and telecommunications technology allow today's immigrants to remain connected with their communities of origin in an unprecedented way. Immigrants that came at the turn of last century had many pressures to sever ties with their countries of origin, some of which were political and religious persecution. However, the most significant obstacle to maintaining one's connection to the home country was technical in nature. A letter took about a month to arrive at an overseas destination and a phone call was out of reach due to cost and/or technology. For example, the cost of a three-minute phone call to London in 1930 is the equivalent of \$300 in today's currency (Friedman 2000). Today, the cost of long distance phone calls has dropped significantly as low as nine cents a minute to Mexico and communication through the Internet is even cheaper. Satellite dishes produce timely news and information to keep abreast on the salient events of other countries. International financial networks make it faster and more reliable to send money back home.

Regarding immigration, globalization's two faces emerge once again. One side uproots people and forces them to leave their families and communities in pursuit of a job. The other side supports continuity of relationships, fosters connections not termination of ties, and encourages integration not acculturation. Emerging out of this complex redesign of relationships is a new consciousness among immigrants best defined as global citizenship and an international social order of "transnational communities" (Moctezuma 1999). Two areas illustrate the organic social orders "dual citizenship" that immigrants are creating in this new global context: remittances—sending money back home—and social networks.

Remittances

Family remittances are the most important form of international linkage between immigrants and their countries of origin (Orozco 2001). The 9 million Mexican immigrants living in the U.S. sent home \$7 billion in 2000 and \$8 billion in 2001 to support approximately 1.2 million families (Garcia Zamora 2001)(Sandoval 2001).

For Guatemala and El Salvador, remittances constitute the largest source of the countries' revenue. In addition to their economic importance, remittances provide social and political stability to Central American post-war societies. The Guatemalan Central Bank reports that Guatemalan immigrants sent \$584 million in 2001 and from January to August 2002 remittances reached \$944 million. According to the Inter-American Development Bank, Latino immigrants send \$15 billion annually to their home countries. These amounts are significant knowing that Latino immigrants work in the lowest paid sectors of the U.S. economy.

Remittances are the only hope for many families to provide a better future for their children, a goal that is no longer attainable in many countries suffocated by large foreign debt and neoliberal policies that prescribe austerity, privatization, open markets, and the elimination of already precarious social services. Remittances have become the new social safety net in Latin America (Alarcon & Iniguez, 2001). They support children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations marginalized by this new economic order.

With time, collective remittances have the potential to become catalysts of economic development. There are cases, especially in Mexico, where families have used a percentage of their remittances to start small businesses such as bakeries, tortillerias, grocery stores, and barbershops. Cooperatives are emerging with the pool of family remittances to raise cattle or to grow produce. Most importantly, local governments are starting to create programs to support immigrants' investment in Mexico (Torres 2001).

In addition to the economic impact that remittances have in the receiving countries, they also generate business and jobs in the United States. Money transferring businesses (couriers) make millions in profits from the fees and speculations involved in the transactions. Airlines might be facing a tough time in other areas of the world but the flights to Mexico and Central America are always full and the ticket prices high. Increased demand of long distance phone calls has fueled the telecommunications business. Moreover, immigrants in the U.S. pay taxes contributing their fair share in this society.

Social Network: Home Town Associations

Community life is a strong value in Latin American culture. The community is considered an extension of one's family and it is a source of solidarity and support for its members. When immigrants from Latin America come to the U.S. they bring their traditions and cultural values, providing each immigrant with a social compass to explore an unknown territory. This internal, "cultural DNA" sets the framework to establish relationships with their new neighbors and new environment. Studies indicate that relationships in rural communities in Mexico are guided by strong values of trust, solidarity, equity, and integrity (Moctezuma, 2001). It is this cultural matrix that provides the internal point of reference for immigrants, permitting them to feel at home and to recreate familiar settings in a foreign environment. These cultural dynamics are reflected in the strong social networks that Mexican immigrants have developed in the U.S. during the last two decades. There are hundreds of hometown associations, primarily in cities with large numbers of Latino immigrants. Chicago is one of them.

The original purpose of these organizations was to assist immigrants with moral and material support during a crisis such as illnesses, accidents, or funerals. Moreover, they served as a mechanism to maintain cultural traditions and to socialize. As the organizations evolved, they took on more responsibilities including sending funds back home for local development. Through these collective efforts, Mexican and Central American immigrants have generated millions of dollars to assist their countries during natural disasters (i.e., hurricanes, earthquakes, etc.) and to finance projects to improve the quality of life of their communities with running water, clinics, schools, roads, and libraries. For example, in the year 2000 the Federacion de Clubes Zacatecanos contributed \$1.5 million to build the infrastructure of their hometowns (Garcia Zamora 2001).

These extraordinary sums of money have leveraged larger pools of funds in Mexico since 1992, when the federal and state governments each started to match the amount of dollars sent by immigrants (Garcia Zamora

2001). This dynamic interplay has also leveraged the political clout of immigrants in the Mexican political arena. Mexican officials recognize the power of immigrants and spend time and resources strengthening those relationships. State governors and members of the Mexican Congress frequently attend events organized by the Mexican immigrant organizations in the U.S. Political analysts noted that a strong factor in President Vicente Fox's victory was the support of Mexicans in the United States, who cannot vote here but contact their relatives back home to encourage them to cast their vote for a specific candidate.



School in Chiapas

The impact of globalization is manifested in all spheres of life. In a recent trip to Central America, I was in Guatemala visiting the church where the recently canonized saint, Hermano Pedro de Betancourt, is buried. While I was standing in line to light a candle, I spoke to a woman in front of me who had several candles in her hand. She told me that she was there to thank Hermano Pedro for helping her son arrive safely in Chicago. She had her cellular phone in hand in order to have her son directly thank the Saint for the favor. When her turn came, she lit the candles, knelt in front of the tomb and dialed the number in Chicago to "bring" her son, now over a thousand miles away, to the ritual. She put the phone against the tomb to allow her son to say a prayer directly to the Saint that had protected him during his dangerous journey to the north. I was perplexed about the possibility of being in two places at the same time, and the paradox I was observing. The poorest areas of Central America are examples of the far-reaching impact of globalization. Rural areas don't have running water, electricity, or telephone service. However, in the most remote areas people have cellular phones to call their relatives in the United States. Some of the people who live in the mountains of Guatemala never have been in Guatemala City, but they know about other places of the world where their relatives have emigrated thanks to satellite dishes.

There is much to be learned from the new social and economic models that people are creating as a result of globalization forces. Their ideas, creativity, and commitment are transforming the concept of citizenship, community, philanthropy, and civic participation. What globalization has ripped apart, immigrants and their families are stitching together in new forms of financial and technological connections. The result is a global citizenship that makes positive contributions to native and adoptive homelands and gives allegiance to multiple communities. We can learn from what they have created in order to develop macroeconomic policies that correct the major weaknesses of free market capitalism. This is the face of Janus that must be integrated into the current official globalization debate, the side that sees people, families, communities, and countries interconnected through mutual concerns and a global vision.

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