

Continental Divides in an Age of Technology: Unanticipated Consequences of Emigration and Implications for the Economic, Political and Socio- Cultural Arrangements in the Home Country

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This paper reflects an extensive and in-depth review of the literature on the role of *hyper-reality* in our contemporary lives and its impact on our migratory decisions. Hyper-reality is defined as the somewhat surreal ability to peer into living rooms thousands of miles away using state-of-the-art communication technology such as *Skype*. Examining development issues, one could highlight groups of individuals for whom living conditions have improved substantively back home and who choose not to migrate, based on what they see in the receiving country, in terms of reversal of cultural norms and erosion of traditional values. Or, migrants in the receiving country might choose to turn their attention homeward to take advantage of upbeat economies, viewing the increase in material prosperity firsthand through the new informational communication technologies. The paper includes aspects of material, including a chapter by Buzzi & Megele on “hyper-reality” in our upcoming co-edited book, an anthology of global writings on migration, technology and transculturation (Lindenwood University Press, 2011). The paper concludes with perspectives on reversing the “brain drain” which has created pockets of wealth in educated new-immigrant communities in the developed world while creating shortages in the developing world. The paper builds on the three conceptual strands in the German & Banerjee co-edited book, starting with material on “digital diasporas” (technology), moving into material on “social networks” and “chains of migration” from certain locations (transculturation or social perspective) to future migration scenarios (as in reversing the “brain drain”).

Keywords: Hyper-reality, mass communications and globalization

Traditionally, societies have tended to view emigration as a “brain drain.” In recent years, this view has been modified somewhat through the wide-spread recognition that many emigrants worldwide, more often than not, send monetary remittances home, invest in initiatives in their home-countries, maintain their social networks across borders, visit their families periodically and sometimes return home at the end of their active working careers. This has received the attention of many who are interested in the large-scale implications of international migration, including social and political scientists, economists and even the United Nations (Amersfoot & Doornik, 1998; Castles, 2003; Galgoczi, Leschke & Watt, 2009; Koser, 2010; Newland, 2009; Pozo, 2007; Taylor, 2006).

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However, much of the discourse has taken place at macro- and meso-levels and relatively less attention has been directed to the focused micro-level study of observable daily lived experiences of emigrants or their internal conflicts, silent decisions and compromises in their context-bounded lives (Asis, 2003; Ros, 2010; Werner, 1996). Including such fine-grained methods of analysis at individual and group levels can provide more nuance and richness to the ongoing discourse.

Nevertheless, there are other risks and consequences that have not always received attention for instance, a main breadwinner, aided by the chain of migrants in the new country, may drift off into another world socially and psychologically. He or she could form new attachments, send money home, and yet never bring the family to the host country for reunification despite technological advances and affordable travel that allow them to stay in frequent contact with family members back home. Or, they could reveal too much about their new life and frighten non-emigrant family members who prefer to stay behind and preserve the old familiar ways. Virtual social interactive networks, such as Facebook, and various forms of hyper-reality that occupy our everyday lives allow realistic glimpses into conditions in the new receiving society. But could it be TMI (too much information) that sends family members into a state of cultural shock so that they decide to keep accepting the remittances—as long as the flow keeps up—but shun the physical migration to the New World?

It is often said that we are global nomads, wandering in a post-modern hyper-reality propagated by the Internet and electronic media. Technologies of information and communication have transformed the way we think, how we travel, how we remain connected to those we have left behind in other places, and have challenged our very definitions of time and space. Within this hyper-reality, migration takes on a new coloration, a form of hybridity, with hyphenated identities the norm, the possibility of instantaneously travelling home with the “click” of a mouse. Similarly, we can peer into the living rooms of where we want to go and decide if it is a favorable destination or one that we need to avoid (Buzzi & Megele, 2011).

Much has been written in the popular press about the “brain-drain” from the developing world to the developed world, where educational and monetary resources may be more accessible. For the past twenty years or more, education has often occurred in the big cities of the West, such as New York, London, San Francisco and a trickle of migration from India, China, Pakistan to staff the hospitals, boardrooms and academic offices could not be stemmed, leaving shortages in Mumbai, Beijing or Islamabad.

The Internet heightened the flow of educated and skilled workers to the higher-paying economies once migration became global and second- and even third-wave migration occurred. But now, with possibilities even greater back home and a movement from developing to developed-nation status in many hitherto perceived-as-provincial places, many foreign nationals are returning home or deciding not to migrate in the first place.

This paper considers the role of the Internet and technology in keeping potential-migrants in the home country, fostering development there or prompting educated workers who may have “peaked” in their careers to return to the site of original migration. This follows the “myth of return” as propagated in *The Gilgamesh Epic* or Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero’s Journey*, returning from the wandering to see the birth-city in a new light.

The Impact of Social Networks—Meso-Level Reality

Social network analysis is an important tool for understanding various aspects of migration, including migration processes, social control, deviance and varied influence upon groups. Migrant social networks, where migrant actors are embodied, act as social capital and as

tools for social control. New technologies, enriched with long-distance communication and internet-linked carriers such as mobile phones and virtual social interactive networks like *FaceBook* or *Orkut*, have rapidly extended the reach and influence of social networks. They are instrumental in providing social capital and social control in the lives of migrants, and their social networks span host and home countries in new and unexpected ways for different individuals. (Roy, 2011)

Just after World War II, many metropolitan areas experienced vast internal and external migration. There was widespread apprehension that these large groups of immigrants, isolated from home-country or state-controls, would stray into social deviance, lose their identity and become so assimilated that the social mores in the home-country would be lost. (Handlin, 1951; Park and Miller, 1921). However, this notion of societal disorganization through rapid immigrant -assimilation was discredited through actual world events. Higuchi (2010; cited in Roy, 2011) notes that migrants are not necessarily uprooted from their cultures and societies of origin, but rather they transplant their ways of life into their countries of destination.

Lifestyle migration, rather than strictly economic-induced migration, has changed the nature of the decision-process. Bankers in Singapore are living on the west coast of Australia and engaging in Internet day-trading from there in order to engage in the pastoral coastal lifestyle apart from the crammed-in spaces and high-rises of the island city. While lifestyle can be an attraction, it can also be a motive for staying-put, when religious, social factors in the potential destination target are far from one's liking.

Many religious individuals are dismayed by the lack of adherence to traditional rules in many potential destination countries, which become apparent through the YouTube videos posted by persons from the diasporas already on location. Parents become aware through the immediacy and ubiquity of Internet media the level on which teenagers can be flaunting age-old dating and courtship customs, now visible in graphic detail, and decide to make a lifestyle-decision to stay home, now that more opportunities are available in the developing nation. "The changing notion of family from a gendered definition to one based on the dynamics and quality of relations and the increasing importance of its position in society have raised the need for a new focus on the study of migration based on the role and influence of family, community, social network and social capital" (Brettell and Hollifield, 2000; Castles, 2000; Massey et al., 1998; 1993; Portes, 1997 as cited in Buzzi & Megele, 2011)

The study of family and social networks to which an individual belongs is considered part of a meso-reality further of commentary. The "micro" level of understanding reflects the reliance on the self, understanding how the inter-psychic processes determine our inner reality. But further research (Brooks 2011) explores the role of networks as intermediaries between the self and the more "macro" processes, such as politics, law, and "nation-statehood" that control our circumstances. In "The Social Animal," Brooks discusses how this "meso-level" of acquaintances and those with whom we are networked electronically or in-person form the backdrop against which we receive and interpret new knowledge. With migration, particularly for young people, it is often the email address, which is constant, which provides the "hyper-real anchoring of reality." (Buzzi & Megele, 2011; Brooks, 2010)

Migrants pursue such individual or collective relationships for varied reasons, including: difficulties with achieving economic stability in either sending or receiving societies, various forms of discrimination (such as racial, ethnic, cultural, etc.) in host society, and/or a desire to assist the socio-economic development of their communities of origin, which are often neglected by their 'home' government or destroyed by various

conflicts (Basch et al., 1994; Popkin, 1997). Such migrants maintain kinship and social networks across borders, and support their communities of origin both financially and through collective/community action, as well as other activities (Goldring, 2002; as cited in Buzzi & Megele, 2011).

A type of “fluidity” has come to typify global migration, with a two-way feedback loop more pronounced. The home country influences the diaspora through electronic hook-ups, chatrooms, websites: the diaspora influences life back home through the sending of remittances, checks and exportation of diaspora host-site culture. With greater globalization and the advent of many jobs that while not “telecommuting” offer the prospect of working from anywhere, the diaspora migrant now has to equate lifestyle and conditions in the new place with opportunities for friendship, home-culture ties and the upbringing of children according to traditional norms that is afforded in the back-home culture.

Turner (1991) states that “network sociology is doing the very thing that early sociologists and anthropologists saw as crucial – the mapping of the relations that create social structures” (1991:571). Although, network theory and research are in continuous evolution, the past few decades have seen the development of rigorous methodological approaches and a rich body of research which have enabled network theory to offer accurate presentations of some of the central elements of social structure (Freeman, 1989; Smith-Lovin and McPherson, 1993; Wellman, 1988) as cited in Buzzi & Megele, 2011.

The return of initial migrants and the diffusion of their stories and experiences diminish the uncertainty and provide transfer of individual and social knowledge, which facilitate the journey of others. Therefore, the prospect of migration is diffused and idealized through the promise of self-realization and meeting the goals of individuals and families. This feedback loop continues until the point at which, the migration and feedback processes become self-sustaining. (Buzzi & Megele, 2011)

Chains are the most frequent type of migration (Roy 2011). One individual migrates to the new country and brings relatives and close friends with him/her to replicate the culture in the new country, with some twists and turns. Hence, outward migration encourages more migration. However, what about inbound-migration: to what extent do chains back-home disseminate favorable (always to be corroborated) information on home-country culture, provide “hyper-reality” through Skype and the Internet and exert a pull on the migrant to return home?

In the book *Diasporas in the new Media Age* edited by Alonso and Oiarzabal (2010), an example is given of a Catalonian family in Barcelona with children around the world who are expected to synchronize their family dinner with the extended family back home via Skype. Whether one settles in Australia or Buenos Aires, dinner is set by group arrangement and all the members eat online in front of the set. One must still be excused by the patriarch or matriarch for permission to be absent, hence parental control can amount to obsessive surveillance. However, once conditions are better at home, the wayward generation may become prodigal and the pull to be seated at the table in physical reality may prevail.

Virtual migration, however, is quite different from physical migration. There are many countries; such as India, the Philippines, Ireland, South Africa and so on, competing to attract multinational employers and organizations to invest in different transnational operations and services (such as call centers, or various business processing or customer service centers, etc.). Most of such virtual migrant workers are employed either by multinational corporations that spin-off part of their services, research and development to ‘offshore’ centers, laboratories and subsidiaries, or by national companies who serve as subcontractors to businesses from abroad (ibid). These workers collaborate on joint

projects and in real-time with their 'colleagues' across the globe. In the sample of workers investigated by Aneesh (2006), he found one Indian team that "worked on a project with five teams in [...] Tokyo, Singapore, Sydney, Beijing, and Arlington Heights" (2006:77). Such global networking is quite commonplace in software development and many other IT-enabled services. (Buzzi & Megele, 2011) Given this reality, might successful offspring choose to live in the home-country with lower cost-of-living and cultural similarity, as aided by the possibilities of virtual employment?

Don't Look Back

For immigrants who cannot go back, living in the host country provides a new setting, a new opportunity and new objects (Mirsky & Peretz, 2006). It provides a sense of excitement that can not be matched and the opportunity for psychological growth. (Lijtmaer, 2011). However, with electronic media, the possibility of looking back is always there. Lijtmaer (2011) writes:

Migrating individuals from different ages face different problems. Children have to follow their parents and have no say about this process. The parent's attitudes play a significant role in the way they deal with a different environment. Adolescents removed from the known environment can suffer confusion regarding their identity. However, the need to be as similar as possible to their new peers can help them adapt more easily. The following observation of Grinberg and Grinberg (1989) is highly significant: "Parents may be voluntary or involuntary emigrants, but children are always 'exiled': they are not the ones who decide to leave and they cannot decide to return at will" (p. 125). An older person, in general, does not want to move since it means leaving behind their whole lives (Akhtar, 1999b; Bar-Yosef, 2001; Espin, 1999; Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989; Mann, 2004; Tummala-Narra, 2004).

Given the psychological backdrop of migration and the baggage that the family carries, which often influences second-generation experience, might children be lured homeward by the emotional comforts made visible through Skype and the Internet? Migration is difficult. It involves profound psychological change, leaving roots and culture for the adventure to be gained through new experiences. As children marry and settle into their 30s and 40s, might these adventures seem more cumbersome and the tranquility of the homeland be appealing if it is visible on the Internet and the economy seems inviting?

Laungani (2002) described his personal account of choosing to migrate to England and how he experienced culture shock as an Indian immigrant. He stated, "We carry our culture as a tortoise shell. Destroy the shell and you destroy the tortoise" (p. 388). Laungani told of his struggles as an immigrant "fighting a lone fight on several fronts: the weather, the food, the customs and conventions, the patterns of day-today life and the people. A consequence of this is "disorienting anxiety" (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1989), which arises when problems differentiating the feelings about the country and the people left behind and the new environment are in conflict (pp. 87-88). As a result, there is splitting of the object world into *good* and *bad*: everything is good in the native country, everything is bad in the host one. This splitting can lead to the idealization of the lost past, and the devaluation of the new environment. (Akhtar, 1995, 1996, 1999a, 1999b; Garza-Guerrero, 1974; Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989; Lijtmaer, 2009) as cited in Lijtmaer, 2011.

Aneesh (2006) notes that one of the most devastating experiences for workers abroad is the realization of their being constituted as the 'other' particularly the gradual mental

resignation to the idea that even in time, they cannot expect equal treatment in the host society/community. The increasing speed and efficiency of communication and the development and expansion of cyber-technologies may allow talented, educated work forces in the home country where conditions have improved to decide to stay home. Hence, that works in favor of in-country development.

In a way the "hyper-reality" afforded by technology shows homeward-yearning immigrants the real truth about life back-home. Lijtmaer writes (2011)

Another psychological experience in migration is nostalgia that has particular cognitive and affective components. The cognitive aspects consist of memories of a given place at a given time, and the affect associated with these memories is characteristically described as bittersweet. It is a mixture of joy and sadness for what had "formerly been part of our lives" and from which we are cut off by time and space; and, if we manage to "return home," we find it is not the way we remembered it (Werman, 1977, pp. 389-390).

Achter (1995) described the idea of "re-fueling" when the immigrant goes back for a visit or makes a home telephone call. He stated that the distance between the two lands or the two mothers, the "mother of symbiosis" and the "mother of separation," is bridged. These connections serve as "transitional objects" (Winnicott, 1953) and help bring what has become externally 'too far' a bit nearer..." (p.1062). On the other hand, this situation can also stimulate the "if only" fantasy: If the person had not left, life would have been wonderful., as cited in Lijtmaer, 2011.

Providing a defense against false hopes is the Internet, the same communications network which is sending out signals of "Look Homeward Angel." With Skype, hyper-reality and the ability to peer into living rooms back home, one can ascertain if the back-home conditions are as favorable as they see it through the window of nostalgia. Economic reports are available online; currency translations, Government production figures can convey the cost of living, but only the real-time exposure of the Internet and technology can show the potentially-homeward bound what to expect literally and viscerally.

According to the research of Hiller and Franz (2004; cite in Cordini) migrants can have three kinds of ties: old ties, new ties and lost ties. New ties are essentially instrumental: migrants need them to orient themselves in the new society. On the other hand, old ties are usually primarily expressive and affective, concerning the emotional side of a person, such as reminiscence, family history, and childhood. Old ties are often reinforced through computer-mediated communication because it builds an online community able to preserve a generalized sense of belonging based on a group identity and physical homeland (Hiller and Franz, 2004) as cited in Cordini (2011).

As adults marry, have children and look for rooting with their parents and the childrens' grandparents, the appeal of emotional ties can increase, providing an extended family in traditional cultures, which is important. With the possibility of returning home without taking a drop in standard of living due to improved economic conditions, virtual commuting and cyber-networks, homeward migration becomes more attracting, reversing the "brain-drain."

The Internet becomes one of the windows through which young people and children learn to look at the world, to interpret it, to give it significance. As a reflex, through the Internet, they can watch and try to define themselves. The Internet is the means by which the transnationalism of young migrants acquires visibility and finds ways of expression. The multiple identity, if it is not just their own prerequisite, is really visible in young

migrants, who, through new ways of communication, can decide, more or less consciously, to belong to one culture for some dimensions and to another one for other dimensions. They choose what they like, what is useful, what they need in that moment and what is more suitable. This does not mean, however, that they can reach for and integrate any identities that they want. In fact, "deciding to stick to one's cultural heritage or deciding to assimilate and conform to the mainstream dominant culture can result in being ostracized from either group, when in reality the individual belongs to both cultures" (Plaza, 2009: 37-52) in Cordini, 2011. With more young people belonging to both cultures, the possibility of reverse-migration is even stronger.

Migration is determined by technology in various ways. First, international migration is enhanced by technological improvements in the host country, and technological gaps in the home country (Koslowski, 2006; Rivera-Batiz and Maria-Angels Oliva, 2003). To be precise, migration is caused by some imbalance between opportunities in specific countries and how the individual wishes to improve his or her quality of life. The level of technology, together with income and age structure differences, constitutes the most important reason for migration (Sevilla, 2006). In the case of less-industrialized countries sending workers abroad leads to long-term increases in productivity and standards of training (Stalker, 2000). Consequently, we can talk about a *Beneficial Brain Drain* (Di Maria and Stryszowski, 2009), since workers can acquire technological skills abroad which can be profitable for their home country once the assignment is over (as cited in Bielenia-Grawinai, 2011).

Reverse-migration brings the benefits of technological exploration in the Western world back to the home country. Technology transfer becomes incorporated in the role of the expatriate (Gordon and Teagarden, 1995; Szirmai, 2005), since he/she will bring new technological expertise to his/her home country after the international assignment is over (Farrant, MacDonald and Skiskandarajah, 2006; Hocking, Brown and Harzing, 2007). (in Magda)

Implications for Media Scholars and Reversing the Brain-Drain

Bertagnoli (2011) views the satellite dish as coming to symbolize globalization for media scholars from the 1990s onwards. Research is a practice that strives for evolution and complexity. Every level of research practice calls for more advanced analyses in the next round, and this paper is no exception. What is needed is for media scholars to examine the lives of newly-returned migrants and determine if they are happier and if they feel the Internet media attracted them falsely or legitimately.

There are generational differences in the view of homeland (Krestinina, 2011). Young people may have a different construction due to the Net, and the email address (or addresses) that are shared through social networks may be the most tangible form of homeland that they know. The "brain drain" was discussed in popular magazines such as the USA's Today. Now it may be becoming a thing of the past due to the fact that, as conditions improve in the developing world, many émigrés are lured back, having completed their education and acquired technical skills while living abroad.

The use of technology to peer into living conditions back home tempts migrants to move in reverse from a more developed country to a less developed country. Often, migrants accumulate savings and develop skills overseas that can be used in their home countries. (Stark & Bloom, 1985).

Migration homeward to avail oneself of better conditions in a more comfortable cultural environment can occur when scientists, engineers, or other intellectual elites migrate to a less developed country to study, do research, or gain work experience in areas where education and employment are limited back-home. These professionals often return home after several years to start a business, teach at the university, or work for a multinational corporation (Crynoski, 2005). Such movement can even harm the former receiving country, but that is outside the scope of this paper.

The occurrence of reverse brain-drain can depend on the state of development at home, but also technology, transportation, visa situations and other factors which come into play in reversing migration. Countries that are attractive to returning professionals will naturally develop migration policies to attract foreign academics and professionals. This would also require these countries to develop an environment which will provide rewarding opportunities for those who have attained the knowledge and skills from abroad but simply prefer to work at home (OECD Observer, 2002). Many second-generation professionals are returning to India and China, where they see working conditions as favorable.

China has generally been seen as a developing country, and they have impacted by brain drain through the migration of their talented minds to the developed world. What has assisted China in the flow of return migration is through central government policies. These policies are changes in the domestic environment, the freedom to immigrate and emigrate freely, political stability, and changes in how the government uses people (Zweig et al, 1995). In addition, the local government was involved in the enhancement of return migration by cities rewarding the returnees with large bonuses from their home unit (Chacko, 2007). There are also other reasons which encouraged the migration back to the home country, which were higher social status in China, better career opportunities in China, and patriotism (Sackian, 2005). Besides the government policies and economic reasons for returning back to China, certain family factors influenced the decision to return, some of the reasons were parental views about returning, concerns for children, and the attitude of one's spouse about returning (Yoon, 1992).

There is no doubt that hyper-reality, the ability to peer into the living rooms back home creates a sense of ennui, sparking the nostalgia that Lijtmaer refers to in her article (German & Banerjee, 2011). Whether that emotional nostalgia is enough to draw the migrant homeward remains to be seen and is untested.

Conclusion

This paper has looked at three complementary ideas: the view of digital diasporas and ICTs facilitating a hyperreal peek into an idealized other country which offers escape from ills but may pose new dilemmas (micro-level consciousness); the nature of social life and being a social animal, which leads immigrants to migrate in chains (meso-level consciousness); and reversing the "brain drain" from underdeveloped and developing nations to developed nations (macro-level consciousness).

No paper is complete without predictions for the future and extended research. Without advocating migration in either direction, the future research would involve empirical testing on whether migrants have indeed been lured homeward by the new technologies in greater numbers than they have been lured to the new country. Isolation of these variables (use of technology and the impulse to migrate) could be tested through

survey research or even lab experiments (in which video segments are fabricated of the new-country environment while also showing the downside). Research is often scant in terms of the “melting pot” in identifying those who did not make it in the new country, because it is an unpopular or unglamorous notion, returning homeward, what is often called “contrarian research,” with no finding of a glamorous new home at the end of the journey.

We all want to be successful, so that the thought of doing an article on those who did not meet with success in an achieving society seems a dismal application of social science research methods. Still from an economic or development outlook, a rational, utilitarian approach, one could look at the equalization of resources, in terms of location, as beneficial to society.

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