

# Migration, Immigration, and Community: A Commentary\*<sup>1</sup>

## Migración, Inmigración y Comunidad: Un Comentario

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**Abstract.** This paper comments on six papers that deal with aspects of migration in different countries. While each of the papers provides important and interesting facets of the issue of migration and are very welcome, they also use different methodologies, sometimes within the same article, as might be expected in a rather new field. Generally, this commentary focuses on methodological issues since those will lie at the heart of any assessment of the credibility and usefulness of the various findings. After the six articles are described and strengths and concerns outlined, the commentary concludes with some thoughts on implementations.

**Keywords:** action-research, intervention, Lewin, methodological issues, migration, qualitative research, quantitative research.

**Resumen.** Este artículo comenta los seis que integran este monográfico, los cuales tratan diversos aspectos de las migraciones en diferentes países. Cada uno de ellos provee diferentes e interesantes facetas de las migraciones, y emplean múltiples metodologías, a veces en un mismo estudio, como es esperable en un ámbito bastante novedoso. Este comentario se centra en las cuestiones metodológicas de los artículos, con la intención de resaltar la credibilidad y utilidad de los hallazgos y propuestas que ofrecen. Primero se describen los seis artículos, subrayando sus puntos fuertes y debilidades y, posteriormente, se concluye con algunas reflexiones sobre el valor de cada uno de ellos para futuras intervenciones.

**Palabras clave:** aspectos metodológicos, investigación cualitativa, investigación cuantitativa, intervención, investigación-acción, Lewin, migraciones.

The six papers in this Special Issue of *Psychosocial Intervention* form an interesting, if heterogeneous, set of perspectives on migration. While there are a number of dimensions along which the papers can be arranged (e.g., the Paloma and Manzano and Xu and Palmer are macro-focused while the remainder tend to deal more with individual reactions to migration), my commentary will concentrate on methodological issues. There are data, of varying quality, in five of the papers and a purely theoretical exposition in the remaining one. Within the papers containing data, two are quantitative and three are primarily qualitative. I will comment on each paper *in situ* starting with the data-less theory discussion and proceeding to the qualitative papers and finishing up with the papers that used a quantitative methodology.

There can be no doubt that migration (whether emigration or immigration) is a social policy issue that countries at their peril will fail to address. Each of the articles makes a persuasive case for the importance of the issue for their particular country (sub-Saharan Africa, China, Spain, Moldova, New Zealand, and Italy). It is an issue that cuts across political persua-

sions. In the United States, immigration policy has surfaced to become one of the most contentious issues between various conservative candidates vying for the Republican Presidential nomination<sup>2</sup>. The fact that none of these papers deal with migrants in the US is a strength since Americans have a myopia about this issue, perhaps thinking we are the only culture facing the problem. These papers provide a welcome prophylaxis against the feeling of American exceptionalism.

At least two of the papers (Paloma and Manzano-Arrodo; Stuart and Ward) appear to be in the tradition of action research, though neither references the classic article by Lewin (1946; see also Morrow, 1969). Action research, for Lewin, was defined as "...comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action" (p. 35). Although neither paper investigates various forms of social action, their data nor analyses can, and should, inform social action efforts.

Migration can be thought of as a conclusion or a process. As a process it has a beginning when the individual first conceives of leaving the culture of birth and passes various points along the way as he or she makes the journey to the culture of settlement. Once in the new culture, migration continues as he/she adopts and negotiates the aspects that will become part of his/her behavioral and cognitive repertoire. An individual will also decide when the adoption will occur and how conflicts between the past, present, and future cul-

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tures will be resolved. The intra-individual aspects of migration do not occur in isolation. The views of the host cultures toward the migrant have a great deal of impact on the pace and nature of acculturation. At least one of the papers advances a theory that, if implemented, can change the views by the host of the migrant, perhaps offering migrants more agency (or power) in the host culture.

### *A theory paper*

The paper by Paloma and Manzano-Arrondo takes consideration of the host attitudes and behaviors further by considering the impact of the power relationships between the migrant (whom they label as “oppressed”) and the organizations and societal structures that do the oppressing. Power is an important construct, one that is often ignored in studies of minority/majority relationships. These authors propose a radical change in the approach that psychological scholars take toward changing the relationship between migrants and the host communities. This change—which they term “Liberation Psychology”, no doubt by analogy to “Liberation Theology” developed in Latin America, and with echoes of Franz Fanon—proposes to analyze “...migratory phenomena in terms of power and call for a transformation of societies at all levels (structural, organizational, and individual) as a means to create social justice and conditions of well-being for all social groups.” Liberation Psychology’s three main components: a focus on social rather than individual improvement, a focus on pragmatics rather than theory, and lastly a focus on the minority rather than majority; can be said to represent Community Psychology on steroids. Much of the article deals with the necessity of changing the structural organization that, immediately upon their arrival, condemns migrants to permanent subservient social positions with limited or no ability to improve their situations. This is an attractive, even revolutionary, idea presented as a purely theoretical position, albeit without any data that would indicate that the approach would be successful. It would seem to me, following Lewin that we would also need a specification of what success would look like.

As I read the description of Liberation Psychology it brought on a feeling of *déjà vu*. During the 1960s, when almost all aspects of society were under (justifiable) attack, the academy was not immune to criticism. Many felt that the gateways to entrance to the academy and consequently to the good life were systematically blocked via entrance exams that were “irrelevant” and by requirements for graduation that favored individual achievement over societal wellbeing. Psychology, as a discipline, was certainly not free of these attacks. One of the most closely reasoned was Carl Rogers’ prescriptions for graduate work that first surfaced in 1964 at the University of Wisconsin (Rogers, 1969).

Rogers is relevant here because Paloma and Manzano-Arrondo do not discuss just whose responsibility it is to apply Liberation Psychology to the problems of the migrants. Those service deliverers will have to be trained by trainers well-steeped in Liberation Psychology. That is, the trainers and the trainees would probably be doctoral level community psychologists. Graduate programs which focus on action research (i.e., Liberation Psychology) will need to carefully consider the best ways to attract students and keep the most able and socially committed students. Rogers could not have foreseen another aspect that pushes graduate students away from social action efforts (which, to be honest, simply do not pay as well as other jobs): the crushing debt that most have upon graduation. Even when universities provide stipends, the amount is rarely sufficient to cover expenses. Indebtedness by students of USD100,000 or more is not uncommon at the end of doctoral programs. This drives the best students into fields that pay more than either the academy (where they might be free to devise social action programs) or the public sector and away from employment at the community level. Government agencies, if they are serious about supporting social action programs, need to consider loan forgiveness programs to encourage these graduates.

### *Three qualitative studies*

The papers in this section use qualitative methods (e.g., van Maanen, 1983) as their method of research. Stuart and Ward focus on identity issues of Muslim migrant youth in New Zealand. Siankam deals with physician brain drain from sub-Saharan Africa, and Robinson is interested in the extent of knowledge in the population of Moldavia about human trafficking.

Stuart and Ward provide three studies described as facets of action research. Each study uses a different methodology to focus on how Islamic migrants to New Zealand adapt to the new culture. Study 1 uses a workshop format to explore a number of issues (e.g., identity, the definition of success in adaptation, and how identity can be pictorially represented). Study 2 is a rather conventional survey on “risk and resilience” of first and second generation Muslim youth. Focus groups were used in the last study with the aim to explore how the respondents handle competing identities. The studies were conducted independent of each other and were apparently not used to shape the subsequent studies.

While the use of multiple qualitative methods is a strength of this paper, the failure to cascade information from study to study reduces the cumulative impact of the overall study. In addition, though the phrase “action research” is invoked, an inspection of the Lewin criteria for such studies raises questions about the accuracy of the label. In particular, since studies 1

and 3 were designed to produce change, it would be useful to specify the criteria that would indicate that successful change had occurred. A further issue applies not only to this paper but also to the two other contributions that use qualitative methods (Siankam on physician brain drain from Africa, and Robinson on human trafficking in Moldova). In my view, qualitative research, no less than quantitative, must be reproducible by other researchers in order to be credible. That means, for example, in the case of the analyses of thematic material that there be at least two naïve coders whose agreement is assessed. It also means that the character of the facilitator/interviewer must be specified as well as the setting. None of these three studies present such information and, hence, one might question the reliability and validity of the conclusions.

Both of the above papers talk somewhat about the importance of involving the migrant populations in the design and prosecution of the research. Still, more information would allow us to assess which aspects of the research were put forth by the community and which came from the researchers. In studies that claim action research designs, it is critical to recognize that the researchers occupy a power-positive position relative to most study participants. The researcher must always be aware that his/her selection of methods and variables may not be the ones that are most interesting to the participants and instead will be selected more due to the superordinate status of the investigators. Again, more details from Stuart and Ward on steps they took to mitigate the asymmetric power positions would have been helpful.

An important finding that Stuart and Ward present is the construct of “balance.” That is, their participants (Muslims in New Zealand) strive to achieve a *balance* in their various identities as they acculturate to the new setting. The teasing out of this finding is a strength of the paper. Although the authors do not explicitly define what they mean by the term, their description sounds very much like the concept of “homeostasis” that Walter B. Cannon introduced in 1932 and later (1941) applied to politics. Later on, Ross Stagner expanded the phenomenon to motivation, personality, industrial conflict and other social motives. (cf. discussion in Stagner, 1961, 1956, Stagner and Karwoski, 1952; Stagner and Solley, 1970; and Dempsey, 1951. An opposing point of view is found in Allport, 1955). Understanding Stuart and Ward’s “balance” as “homeostasis” links it to a much larger body of literature on physiologic and other mechanisms. As Landis and Bhawuk (2004) noted, psychology often falls prey to putting “Old wine in new bottles,” something that should be avoided.

Siankam’s exploratory study tries to understand, beyond simple neoclassical economic theory, why physicians trained in sub-Saharan Africa have chosen to leave and become migrants to the United States or other Western countries. The focus is on a set of

migrants now living and practicing in the US, but an expansion is planned to interview cohorts who have not migrated. As his theoretical orientation, he applies the ecological and psychopolitical validity structure of Christens and Perkins (2008). This orientation, which emphasizes among other variables *power*, has a similarity to the Liberation Psychology discussed earlier. This is a most interesting theory and alerts us to the complex of variables that drive medical professionals to leave one country (particularly those in the developing world) and travel to another (usually in the industrialized West).

While the theory is interesting, the connection to the research design is not as clear as it could be. More information on the interview process would enhance credibility. As it stands, the lack of information about how and where the interviews took place and the ambiguities of snowball sampling leave some doubts as to the applicability of the theory in this case. The two main reasons that the doctors left their countries to practice elsewhere were financial considerations and working conditions, which are easily predicted from a neoclassical economic theory. Thus, it is not clear that the underlying theory significantly influenced the design of the study. Future studies probing this phenomenon should make the link between theory and method more transparent.

The same methodological problems that bedevil the Siankam paper are also apparent in the Robinson manuscript<sup>3</sup>. But, where Siankam operates from an interesting theoretical standpoint, Robinson’s paper is exploratory and thus not guided by theory. The topic is certainly interesting and potentially important; human trafficking is a scourge upon civilized society. According to Robinson, Moldova is a prime supplier of the humans (often for sex) that are used and sold. At the same time, the sampling approach almost guarantees a restricted view of the beliefs of the Moldovan population. Two major findings stand out: The population, represented by the sample, is well aware of the human trafficking (many report knowing at least one person who had been trafficked) and also, in the case of women, the belief that they knew what they were getting into and were largely to blame for their situation. We have seen the latter before: it is called the “rape myth,” and its appearance in Moldova needs to be explored more fully (e.g., what are the push factors in this country that make it a prime source for trafficked individuals).

### *Two Quantitative Studies*

Cristini *et al.*’s study tests whether migrant teenagers exhibit some level of depression when faced with discrimination, a finding that has appeared with some regularity in other studies (e.g., Behnke *et al.*, 2011). The authors then try to identify some variables that act

to reduce the level of depressive symptoms. Previous literature, which is well reviewed in the paper (and this thorough review is a strength), would suggest a number of buffers: cultural and national identity, teacher and social support, etc. Rather than presenting an overarching theory or proposing major modifications to an existing one, this paper sticks rather closely to the variables which are measured. In this way, the paper's goals are modest, and this is strength in comparison to some of the other papers in this Special Issue.

The sample consists of 214 (two-thirds male) migrant adolescents from two small cities in Northern Italy. The subjects originated from a number of countries, some within the EU and some without, although most came from Eastern Europe. The sample size is adequate for most purposes, but the heterogeneity of the subjects makes disaggregating for more precise analysis problematic. Even though there were a number of significant correlations between the variables, the strength of those statistics was quite low (i.e., below .30), a problem that the authors recognized. This would suggest that sample size played a significant part in the results. Had they had a larger or more homogeneous sample they could have selected subsamples for analysis and perhaps found more potent relationships? In any case, the most significant relationship was that perceived teacher support did moderate the relationship between perceived discrimination on the part of the respondents and depression. This is not a surprising result. We know from decades of research on teacher behavior that support is not given uniformly across all students in a classroom (Amidon & Hough, 1967; Medley, Coker, & Soar, 1984). Contemporaneous measurement of the teacher behavior directed at particular students might well have yielded stronger effects, and I suggest such an extension in a future study.

The study of rural to urban Chinese migrants by Xu and Palmer is a fascinating effort using a very large and representative sample adequate to understanding the role of social networks in well-being and political participation. The selection of China to conduct the study is fortuitous since over 200 million people (a number equivalent to two thirds of the population of the United States) make the transition each year from farms to the large cities and back again. The last time that America saw such an economic internal migration was during the Dust Bowl of the Great Depression.

As the migrants settle into their (temporary) host environments, social networks do develop. The question that Xu and Palmer addresses is: are these social networks related to well-being and political participation. The problem lies, of course, in measuring the nature and extent of the social network in an unobtrusive way. The authors hit upon a novel solution, one that is unique to China. First, the authors selected a representative sample of respondents from the 2006 Chinese General Social Survey. This carefully selected

sample resulted in 1,023 rural to urban migrants. For each migrant, a social network was constructed based on *Bainian* activities (e.g., giving getting cards) that are given out by each person at the New Year. The extent of a person's social network was then calculated by counting the number of individuals to whom the respondent made *Bainian*. The authors note that using *Bainian* to assess social networks has been found to be both reliable and valid.

Xu and Palmer measured two aspects of the *Bainian* diversity: Job diversity (i.e., the number of different jobs held by people in the network) and Organizational diversity (i.e., different types of organizations that people in the network worked in). They also measured life satisfaction and political participation. After including these variables (demographics, *Bainian* diversity, life satisfaction and political participation) in a cluster analysis, five clusters resulted. The meaning of each cluster was further determined by traditional analysis of variance procedures.

The five clusters are quite fascinating but not unexpected: traditional generation, new generation, older migrant, wife, and, lastly, young female. Without taking the space to delve into each profile, let me say that this individual differences approach has been a long time coming in this field. Historically, many have argued that normative approaches, which ignore individual differences, hide more than they illuminate. Several different multidimensional scaling algorithms have been developed: Tucker and Messick's (1963) individual differences multidimensional analysis and Tzeng and Landis' (1978, 1979) three-mode multidimensional analysis, with points of view analysis, are just two examples. These approaches have been used successfully to analyze visual forms (Silver, Landis, & Messick, 1966), air traffic controllers' response to potential mid-air collisions (Landis, Silver, Jones, & Messick, 1967), affective judgments of kinship words (Tzeng & Landis, 1978, 1979), and points of view about romantic love (Landis & O'Shea, 2000). The cluster analysis used in this study is not only conceptual similar to the above methods but is part of their analytic strategy. The point here is that by looking for clusters of individuals who have similar viewpoints about a set of stimuli rather than aggregating all the respondents into a common group, we can develop a more accurate picture of the cognitive and behavioral states of individuals. I would hope that the individual differences multidimensional analysis will become the standard way of understanding the migrant experience. Xu and Palmer have done a great service with this study and it only needs to be expanded and applied to other relevant groups and phenomena.

### A few comments on interventions

None of the papers in this special issue present

interventions based on their research findings. This is a bit bothersome given the title of the journal. At the same time, I am aware that the authors were not required to present true action research papers at either the conference symposium or in the papers that resulted. I have no quarrel with that decision and, certainly, the papers can stand on their own and serve as useful prologues to true action research. The data in these papers are rich and can be used to further develop theory, from which action programs can be constructed and implemented. With a clear understanding of the desired end state, ongoing monitoring of the programs can be used to modify the theory and begin the cycle anew.

In the spirit of looking ahead to the next phase of these studies, one that will bring them fully into the pantheon of action research efforts, we first have to ask the question: what is the desired state? For Paloma and Manzano-Arroondo, it is more than changes in host (i.e., native Spaniards') attitudes toward the migrant; the authors would also want to see changes in the structure of the critical institutions of society (governmental, business, and even the Church). Stuart and Ward would desire that the Muslim migrants develop the ability to balance competing identities, and they would assert that such a state is better than any other state and would result in better ethnic relations in the wider New Zealand society. (An additional question: should the wider Pakeha and Moari members, as the society becomes more multicultural, also develop balances between competing identities?).

In the case of Moldova, the desired end state is not very clear. Should the young people at risk (mainly women) be given the tools to develop a strong positive self-image? And, should the Moldovan government mount programs designed to change attitudes toward trafficking? Moldova is not a rich country, and programs designed to make it more attractive to stay in the country are likely to be expensive; perhaps efforts should be directed at outside countries (particularly those that are the main receivers of trafficked individuals) to fund the required governmental programs. The ameliorative programs will need, as preliminary, an extensive study to identify the people who are at risk for being trafficked. Then, something like a jobs program might prove effective in reducing the level of trafficking.

Sub-Saharan physicians are looking for respect translated not only into salary but facilities to practice the best medicine that they can. Any intervention program must be directed to these twin concerns. It would seem that in addition to providing a better standard of living (perhaps through some sort of governmental stipends) and building well equipped hospitals and clinics, the number of medical school graduates may need to be increased. In addition, governmental support to the families of the physicians could relieve pressures that result from medical work in developing countries, perhaps improving the physical and psycho-

logical wellbeing of physicians and their families. Physician burnout due to, for example, lack of sufficient coverage for emergencies is no less a problem in poor countries than in more developed ones (e.g., Linzer, et. 2001).

Cristini et al.'s paper suggests a need to develop efficacious programs to buffer depressive effects of migration. Since teacher behavior seems to be such a buffer, a program of training on how to provide positive support might be effective. Such an approach might use Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS: Bennett, 1993; Bennett & Bennett, 2004; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003) to good effect. Since the DMIS is a stage model, we might expect that movement on the part of the teacher trainees toward ethno-relativism would be accompanied by lower depression scores in migrant students. There is already considerable research (e.g., Ward, 2004) that suggests that lower depression scores are negatively correlated with successful acculturation.

Lastly, in order to develop ameliorative programs for the Chinese internal migrant, one has to define a desired end state. Is it that social support networks should be larger or more heterogeneous in terms of occupation or ethnic origin or something else? Until such an end state is defined (and I will leave that to scholars more familiar with Chinese culture), it is difficult, if not impossible, to develop programs that will be effective. Certainly the paper by Xu and Palmer is a good start to that goal.

## Conclusion

My comments on the papers in this Special Issue were done in the spirit of, hopefully, suggesting some ways in which their already interesting, and potentially important, studies could be made even better and lead to useful interventions. There is much to be praised in these six papers and it is to be expected that the authors will continue their probes. The various authors have highlighted a number of variables that will be central to any effort intended to integrate the migrant into the host society and to change the host culture's orientation toward the migrant. I am sure we can look forward to reading their future efforts in the pages of this and other journals.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> I do not mean to suggest that only conservative politicians argue about the wisdom of immigration, only that it is taking up a large part of the political discussion on the right. Liberals are, to be sure, not immune from xenophobic outbursts.

<sup>3</sup> I do not mean to imply that the results have no validity. The authors did their best under very trying data collection circumstances. Qualitative research is, in many ways, more difficult to prosecute than quantitative studies. The studies could have been improved if the authors had included more information about the particulars, as noted above, of the data gathering.

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