



Track: New Dimensions

Dialogue: Perceptions of Migrations

Title: The Discourse on the "other"

Author: Reginald Appleyard

#### Key issues (300 words)

---

1. Perceptions of the 'other' have been greatly influenced by recent changes in the magnitude, composition and direction of specific 'types' of migration. Each type has contributed differently to overall perceptions, depending on the specific intakes in receiving countries. There is now a clear need to carefully research and debate the roles and influence of each type of migration in ongoing global political and economic change. The outcomes of dialogue would not only go a long way towards "setting the record straight" but also in contributing to reduction in what is presently a demonstrably high level of ethnic intolerance and racism.
2. Appropriate policies to achieve these objectives should draw on the same principles of law and human rights that are enshrined in many multi-cultural countries. Application of these principles should not be distracted by the discontent and dislocation attributed to past (and especially current and likely future) diversity of migrant populations. Academics and journalists will play leading roles in the dialogue. The former by carefully articulating the costs and benefits of human mobility, now reaching, for good reasons, the levels of mobility of capital and goods between countries; the latter by articulating and encouraging dialogue that fairly informs public perceptions.
3. While the foundations of ethnic intolerance will be difficult to shake, its potential cost to humanity, especially the consequences of war and terrorism linked to that intolerance, could be enormous. Greater appreciation and understanding of the role that migration is playing in global change, and being more tolerant to the "other" within nations, would be a step in the direction of reducing that conflict.

#### Content (1200 words)

---

### Perceptions of Migrations

The generic term 'migration' is no longer relevant to articulate the nature and purpose of many new types of international human mobility. These have evolved in response to unprecedented political and economic changes across the world. In this context, 'perceptions of migrations' is an appropriate title for the dialogue.



- A large increase in the number of *high-level personnel*, usually on non-immigrant visas, has been due in part to an increase in the number of global firms, and the higher content of intellectual property in the production of goods and services.
- Increased flows of so-called *irregular or 'illegal'* migrants have occurred to fill jobs generally at the lower end of labour markets. While often associated with inter-continental differentials (developing to developed), it has also occurred within continents. In Sub-Sahara Africa, for example, the unstable political landscape, ethnic conflict and persistent economic decline have combined to increase the volume and determine the direction of irregular migration which now includes a significant proportion of females. Expulsions and deportations are common policy measures which occurred before, and even after, the formation of sub-regional economic unions. In some European countries, decision-making has been transferred from the national to the regional level, thus challenging the traditional basis that restriction is designed to protect the domestic labour force.
- Significant change in the source and composition of traditional *permanent migration*, associated historically with the United States, Canada and Australia was initiated (in the latter two countries) by policy decisions to select migrants on the basis of points scored for education, skills, job offer, etc., and give no place in the process to race or color. This led to a significant increase in number of non-Europeans, including those under family-reunion programmes.
- While some scholars argue that *refugee* migration should not be associated with economic migration, global conflict has created such a large number of refugees (17.1 millions according to the latest UNHCR estimate), that the phenomenon is now linked more directly to the inequality and conflict traditionally associated with irregular/illegal migration. Large flows of *asylum seekers*, persons who attempt to enter a country and claim status, have tested the capacity of governments to handle the situations in an "orderly manner". While surveys show that some asylum seekers utilise the services of traffickers to assist with their documentation and travel, trafficking per se operates at a much wider level and is deemed to be a major international problem yielding the perpetrators annual income up to eleven billion dollars. The implied association of irregular and asylum seeker migration with trafficking has clearly contributed to negative perceptions being expressed in many receiving countries.

Although perceptions clearly differ regarding the role and acceptability of each 'type' of migration, little attempt (or research) has been made to explain the changes in terms of "unprecedented political and economic changes across the world". At a recent conference it was argued that part of the reason why many scholars cannot get their minds around changes in migration is that they cannot get their minds around what is happening to the concepts of State, sovereignty and citizenship. This applies in particular to intra-continental migration relating to regional economic unions. While some scholars have argued that migration should be researched as a continuum ranging from permanent to (even) daily patterns of mobility, qualitative methods of research and



social theory are also needed to try and explain how and why migration is seen as a threat to local and national identity.

Discourses on perceptions of migration typically focus on divisions and dislocations that *previous* migrations have allegedly created, and on the acceptability of current policies that fail to control present (and, by extension, likely future) intakes. Negative perceptions are invariably created, or fortified, by the tendency to associate minorities with anti-social behaviour. To the extent that the claims are unobjective, or based on fragile evidence, they exacerbate ethnic prejudice and racism. The rapidity and magnitude of change in flow and composition of migration, and the inherent tendency for societies to be suspicious of, even antagonistic towards, newcomers, call for discourses on an objective review of the many factors/forces that have led to the entry of migrants of all 'types'.

At all levels of discourse, there is clear need to emphasise not only the benefits that migrants offer – from those who undertake 3D-type jobs to those who provide skilled and professional services – but also to acknowledge that adaptation is a long process requiring respect and understanding from both 'parties'. If a country recognises that migration is closely connected with personal freedoms and human rights, then it is difficult for its government to impose rigid border controls and assimilation policies. Family reunion, in particular, is an integral part of the adaptation process, as is the tendency for many first-generation migrants to settle in enclaves. Calls for them to disperse are often made because of concerns that the migrants' religions and lifestyles are so different (even incompatible) with those of the host culture. It can be only a short step from this perception to identifying migrants not only as disruptive but, in some cases, as potential enemies within.

Just as the development of Western multi-cultural societies was brought about by the application of the principles of law and human rights, so the role and success of discourses and representations in the resistance against ethnic prejudice and racism will depend primarily upon application and acceptability of the same principals. Effective legislation designed to punish racist-inspired activities can set appropriate parameters, but dissemination of information on the overall costs and benefits of migration in contemporary and future situations needs to be directed at all levels and ages in the host society. Through technology now available, the media can play a major role in this discourse. Education curricula can also be a significant contributor to the discourse, including dissemination of information and initiating debate on such subjects as biological/behavioural determinants of inferiority, while recognising the demonstrable influence that parental perceptions play in supporting or negating the views held by children

'Collective will' to initiate change requires the involvement of all persons – host and migrant alike – through a comprehensive range of effective dialogues. While education will be more important in the long run, discourse is the essential medium through which the outcomes of education and research will be disseminated.