

INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF COLOMBIAN-CANADIAN MIGRATION

Santiago Calderón-Canola

International Business Student

EAFIT University

scalder1@eafit.edu.co

Abstract

The results presented in this paper are aimed at examining and comparing the migratory events occurred between two countries which have different social and economic conditions. The information developed along this text is, therefore, an initial assessment on migration between Canada and Colombia. The author used hermeneutics as a main methodological tool for conducting this study.

This paper concludes that, although there are a range of motivations behind the decision to leaving one's home country, the pursuit for better economic conditions is the dominant factor.

Key words: migration, motivations, social and economic conditions, Colombia, Canada

1. Introduction

Because of the broad thematic nature of international migration issues, any thorough analysis requires a multi-perspective approach. Human migration has been studied within the context of disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, politics, economics, and hermeneutics among others: each of these disciplines has offered valuable contributions to this area of study.

Nonetheless, hermeneutics outstands as a powerful tool, since it serves to the betterment of the understanding of the presuppositions and assumptions of the human expressions.¹ Therefore, hermeneutics is a proper tool for conducting a qualitative inquiry like the one being developed.

¹ A. Thomas Schwandt, "Three Epistemological Instances for Qualitative Inquiry. Interpretivism, Hermeneutics and Social Constructionism", in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: 2000), 189-213.

1.1. Hermeneutics as a Tool of Analysis

After having elucidated the use and application of hermeneutics it is proper to contextualize it with the main object of analysis. Why is it important to take advantage of using a tool such as hermeneutics? Firstly, hermeneutics is a powerful tool in enabling a sharper delineation and clarification of the object of analysis. Since an issue like migration, is comprised in the area of social and behavioural sciences. Therefore, this aspect makes crucial the understanding of the other, in order to determine why those individuals migrate. On the other hand, it helps to understand the underlying reasons and causes of why individuals make the decision of leaving their native countries, and establishing in a different country. Most of the times, the new comers arrive to countries in which cultural aspects mark an obstacle of great magnitude like the language, manners, attitudes, religion and so on. Moreover, the treatment at which they are exposed, due to the fact that they are not nationals of the destination country, makes harder the process of adaptation to the “new cul-

ture”. As some authors² explain, immigrant workers are confronted with a variety of exclusion and marginalization factors including a lack of information and differential treatment in public services, such as hospital attention charges and social welfare support.

The main question that this research aims to answer is why do people make the decision of leaving their own countries? What factors contribute to this? For this reason, all the data, information and analysis collected was centered in trying to answer these questions to finally obtain a general conclusion.

2. Some Theoretical Considerations

Migration, especially that one occurring across borders, has a close relation with the individual personality.³ At trying to better understand why people make the decision of leaving their native countries, personality plays a crucial role. The background of a person that migrates is of great importance at the time of analyzing his or her decisions to leave. Since the background of a person is determined by

² Karl Eschbach and C. Mary Waters, *Immigration and Ethnic and Racial Inequality in the United States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts - Madison: Department of Sociology, Harvard University - Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin, 1995); María Alejandra González-Pérez, *Integration of Immigrant Workers in Ireland and United States* (Ireland: Department of Management, National University of Galway, 2003).

³ Blaine Fowers and Frank Richardson, “Why is Multiculturalism Good?”, *American Psychologist* 51, No. 6 (1996). V. Benet-Martinez, *Cross Cultural Personality Research: Conceptual and Methodological Issues* (Riverside, California: Department of Psychology, University of California, 2006).

his/her particular way of interaction and development inside his/her own region and environment.

McCurdy states that it is appropriate to separate persons from personality. He provides a particular definition: "A human person is that psychophysical compound which is capable of establishing emotional relations with objects, sensed, imagined, and conceived. Personality is the actual existence of these relations".⁴

There are several factors that may cause the decision of leaving one's own country. Displacements for work reasons, identity with other cultures, political instability, lack of social security, mistrust in the governmental entities and even religion, are amongst the range of factors that move persons to migrate. Nevertheless, obtaining a job overseas seems to be the fundamental reason for which most people migrate especially to developed countries.⁵ Millions of workers and their families move each year across borders and across continents, seeking to reduce what they see as the gap between their current position/status and wealthier places elsewhere.⁶

3. Colombian Considerations

Colombian migration, for instance, represents a clear example of individuals emigrating in search of better economic conditions that are reflected in the obtaining of a job overseas. Nonetheless, the problem of migration in Colombia is also linked to social security and violence. Economic and political factors have as well influenced Colombian emigration. According to the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is estimated that some 4.7 million of Colombians have migrated, but only 700,000 are currently registered in Colombian foreign consulates (IOM Colombia). This evidence results important and alarming since it represents a 10% of the total country's population.

The fact that a relative high percentage of the population is living in other countries has also consequences for the national economy. It also affects at the micro-level family income. The reasons behind emigration in Colombia seems to be associated to the searching for better economic conditions, this means, better income that will be translated into welfare. Welfare is a condition that States must guarantee to all its citizenry, since is its underlying reason of existence. As Xu explains, the

⁴ Quoted in Grant Dahlstrom, *Personality* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina, 1970), 4.

⁵ Richard Black, Claudia Natali and Jessica Skinner, "Migration and Inequality" (Second Draft, Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, University of Sussex, 2005), www.siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2006/Resources/477383-1118673432908/Migration_and_Inequality.pdf

⁶ *Ídem*.

Welfare State has been created in order to deal mainly with issues regarding economic and social well-being.⁷ Therefore, the perception, according to the numbers recently showed, entails a discontent from the nationals towards the resource allocation that is effectuated by the public entities. Hence, nationals start to fill this lack by going abroad.

3.1. Colombian Migration to Canada

Colombian migrants living in Canada are an important group of individuals.

When analyzing data from the statistics compiled in the different censuses that were carried out by the Canadian entities in charged, some numbers were relevant.

In the top ten of country of birth of recent immigrants, from 1981 to 2006, Colombia ranks ten; however, it only appears in the census of 2006. Additionally, Colombia has the same place in countries of origin for immigrants to Canada, with a population of 25,310 Colombians living in Canada.⁸ All these numbers are better showed in the following tables.

Table 1. Top 10 Countries of Origin for Immigrants in Canada (2001-2006)

Ranking	Country of origin	Total population
1.	China	155,105
2.	India	129,140
3.	Philippines	77,880
4.	Pakistan	57,630
5.	United States	38,770
6.	South Korea	35,450
7.	Romania	28,080
8.	Iran	27,600
9.	United Kingdom	25,655
10.	Colombia	25,310

Data source: Statistics Canada (2008).⁹

⁷ Qingwen Xu, *Globalization, Immigration and the Welfare State: A Cross-National Comparison* (Boston: Boston College Graduate School of Social Work, 2005), www.cat.inist.fr/?aModele=afficheN&cpsid=18945110

⁸ T. Chui, K. Tran and H. Maheux, "Immigration in Canada: A Portrait of the Foreign-Born Population, 2006 Census", 2007, www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-557/pdf/97-557-XIE2006001.pdf

⁹ This information was taken from a Statistics Canada report on Canada's demographic situation between 2002 and 2004, and from 2001 and 2006 census data by Statistics Canada, with some information from citizenship and immigration.

The fact that Colombia is placed in this rank, not necessarily suggests that Colombian migrants are the most representative group of individuals that have migrated to Canadian territory. However, as it is shown in the 2006 census, Colombia just appears after decades of statistical compilation in 2006.

This fact may suggest that the armed conflict present in Colombia and the general violence against *Human Rights* is causing that some individuals leave. Nonetheless, the search of better economic status and welfare is a main cause too, as it is supported along this text.

As it has shown in the last chart, the main reason of Colombian immigrants is the requesting as refugee, followed by the individuals who have migrated in search of better economic conditions.¹⁰

3.2. Some Words about Remittances

On the other hand, there is another element which is vital to the economic purview. According to the Forum on Colombia's current situation on migration¹¹ which took place at EAFIT University in March 2008, the remittances that entry to Colombia have many advantages.

Table 2. Number of Immigrant by Socio-Economic Status and Nationality (2004)

Country of Birth	Economic	Family	Refugees	Others	Total
China & Hong Kong	25,945	9,657	2,541	465	38,608
India	17,612	9,090	1,121	360	28,183
Philippines	9,559	4,053	39	249	13,900
Pakistan	6,216	3,906	2,697	192	13,011
Iran	4,078	1,122	1,166	125	6,491
United States	2,900	2,924	88	558	6,470
Romania	4,887	708	137	84	5,816
Great Britain	3,520	1636	15	182	5,353
South Korea	4,478	670	46	157	5,351
Colombia	1,214	414	2,919	53	4,600

Source: *Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Facts and Figures*, 2004.

¹⁰ Chui, Tran and Maheux, "Immigration in Canada", *cit.*

¹¹ Forum that took place on EAFIT University on March 12, 2008, in which several indexes and information about Colombian migration were given.

They alleviate poverty in some families with limited income with members abroad. According to the same source (the Forum); this money is allocated to the payment of public services, food obtaining, education and health. These remittances are received mostly by limited income workers who represent a 40% and also by housewives who are 35.6%. Additionally, remittances play a crucial role in Colombian economy since they make that foreign currencies flow inside the market and make poverty diminish in 5%.

At considering remittances from Colombian living in Canada, it is possible to observe that Colombians in Canada contribute in a significantly way to Colombian's economy. According to a survey effectuated by Houle and Schellenberg, the proportion of immigrants making remittances from Canada, varies considerably by country of origin.¹² In the case of Colombia it has been estimated that remitters reached a threshold of some 35%¹³ of the total individuals who also make remittances. For instance, this means that Colombia ranks

first, over other remitters like those from Morocco and Bosnia.

A paper recently issued by the International Monetary Fund, argues the importance remittances have to the economy of a country and social welfare. Remittances improve household's welfare in the sense of letting families find another way to fight against poverty and secure their eventual expenses.¹⁴ Notwithstanding, the amount of the remittances sending, can be influenced by the age, sex and income of the remitter.¹⁵

5. Canadian Considerations

At analyzing the case of Canadian migration, one can find a history full of a constant flow of persons entering the country. Canada is a country that has a background tied to immigration. Even the first Canadian Nations are composed of foreign people that sought to settle and establish along the country. As Messamore argues, the historical background of Canada is sociologically a history of migrations which have influenced the culture of the Nation.¹⁶

¹² René Houle and Grant Schellenberg, "Remittances by Recent Immigrants" (Statistics Canada, Catalogue No. 75-001-10: 5-16, 2008), www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/2008107/pdf/10656-eng.pdf

¹³ Source: Statistics Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, 2000/2001 cohort.

¹⁴ Ralph Chami *et al.*, *Macroeconomic Consequences of Remittances* (Washington DC: International Monetary Fund., 2008).

¹⁵ Houle and Grant Schellenberg, "Remittances by Recent Immigrants", *cit.*

¹⁶ Barbara Messamore, "Canadian Migration Patterns from Britain and North America", *International History Review* 27, No. 3 (2004), www.jstor.org/stable/4010962

Therefore, for Canadian people, immigration is considered as an essential characteristic, since their culture has been affected by the origin cultures of the newcomers.

Furthermore, statistics of the census, that were carried about, in 2001 and 2006, clearly show facts that confirm the huge *core of immigrants* that Canada is. These statistics place Canada as one of the major immigrant-receiving countries.

In order to better understand the amount of immigrants in Canada, a comparison made in the census is worthy of mention. "There are six times as many foreign-born persons living in the United States as in Canada, but in that country the foreign-born make up 11% of the population, compared to 18% in Canada".¹⁷

On the other hand, it is important to mention the number of Canadian people who has entered Colombia during the last months. According to the Department of Security Administration of Colombia (DAS),¹⁸ by August 2008 a total of 441 Canadians were registered in its databases.

This number means that of a total of 36,846 foreigners who are numbered, a 1.19% is represented by Canadians.¹⁹

6. Empirical Research

The motivation of Colombian people to move abroad can be better explained through some personal experiences. In a pilot study using interviews made to 4 Colombian nationals who have relatives abroad, it was shown that Colombians emigrate in search of better economic conditions and welfare. When they were asked about the main reasons for leaving their countries, they said: "Improve my life's quality in general"²⁰ (man, age 50); "I was scared of the violence operating in my country and I was looking for a better life's quality"²¹ (woman, age 33).

The following quotes show the reason why a Colombian national decided to migrate: "My parents were unemployed, this take us to an economic crisis; we were unable to live in a decent way in Colombia, so I take the decision to emigrate to the United

¹⁷ Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Strategic Research and Statistics Canada, *Recent Immigrants in Metropolitan Areas. A Comparative Profile Based on the 2001 Census*, 2005, www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/research-stats/2001-canada.pdf

¹⁸ DAS. Statistics taken from the Department of Security and Administration of Colombia which is in charged of the compilation of the entries and departures of Nationals and foreigners.

¹⁹ Colombia, Department of Security and Administration (DAS), *Migratory Statistics*, 2008, www.das.gov.co

²⁰ "Mejorar mi calidad de vida en general".

States in search of opportunities and conditions to afford my needs and expenses”²² (man, age 23).

When these individuals were asked about the fundamental reasons that caused their relatives to leave Colombia, all their answers can be summarized in the motivation to obtain better economic conditions as a fundamental factor.

“They wanted to know other cultures, and look if there were better conditions to live there”²³ (man, age 50).

The following quote shows the explanation of the reasons behind migration which are economically driven: “The parents of my two relatives emigrated to the United States because of the lack of a job and the impossibility of afford their familiar expenses, so they saw in this country an opportunity that will permit that each family member work for the sake of all”²⁴ (man, age 20).

As the words of these individuals express, it is possible to reaffirm that the search for better economic conditions that

are finally reflected in welfare are crucial motivations for people to migrate. Furthermore, the trend of migrating seems to be located in North America, since the persons interviewed answered that their relatives emigrated to United States or Canada.

On the other hand, people living abroad try to perpetuate their values, customs, culture and social manners of their country of origin. This kind of behaviour is known as sociocultural transnationalism.²⁵

According to Itzigsohn, socio-cultural transnationalism refers to “those transnational linkages that involve the recreation of a sense of community that encompasses migrants and people in the place of origin.”²⁶ At this point is important to say that, according to a study by the International Organization of Migration (IOM), most of the Colombian migrants are economically active women and their main destinations are Canada, Italy, Japan, Spain, The United Kingdom and The United States (IOM Colombia). Nevertheless, the United States is the main destination to Colombian

²² “Mis padres estaban desempleados, lo que nos llevó a una crisis económica; era imposible llevar una vida digna en Colombia, así que tomé la decisión de emigrar a los Estados Unidos en busca de oportunidades y mejores condiciones para cubrir mis gastos y necesidades”.

²³ “Ellos querían conocer otras culturas, y mirar si allí había condiciones mejores para vivir”.

²⁴ “Los padres de mis dos parientes emigraron a Estados Unidos por la falta de empleo y la imposibilidad de cubrir los gastos familiares, por lo que vieron en este país una oportunidad para que todos los miembros de la familia pudieran aportar por el bien de la misma”.

²⁵ José Itzigsohn and Silvia Saucedo, “Immigrant Incorporation and Sociocultural Transnationalism”, *International Migration Review* 36, No. 3 (2002): 766-798, www.jstor.org/stable/4149563

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 768.

migrants since it represents 1'179,212 of Colombian nationals living there.²⁷

7. Conclusions

Personal reasons that make people to migrate are diverse, but whatever the reason everything seems to be aimed at improving and reaching welfare. The dream of reaching better opportunities to develop and obtaining a well paid job are the common reasons illustrated with the examples presented along this text. Moreover, it is important to highlight that there are several factors that contribute to the movement of persons internationally such as political instability, lack of social security (Colombians in Canada), mistrust and other elements that jointly are translated into discontentment. This discontentment is, finally, a main motor for individuals to consider leave their own countries.

Personality is a crucial factor at the time of approaching aspects regarding individuals and motivations. The importance of going directly to the psyche of the

individual is a crucial element that will serve anybody who wants to understand the basic conditions and reasons that motivates individuals to migrate. Additionally, the *epistemic* process that an element like personal behaviour entails permits a properly field in which hermeneutics can be applied as a tool of analysis; given the subjective and vast information that demands interpretation.

Colombia and Canada are countries that maintain linkages regarding culture, economy and social life. The data presented here serves to better understand the reasons through which Colombians have decided to migrate to Canada. Nevertheless, more research is necessary for a better understanding of the reasons for Canadians coming to Colombia.

Migration represents a current issue that must be properly analyzed in order to help governments and organizations to implement and establish policies and actions focused on trying to solve the social problem it entails.

²⁷ Forum on Colombian Migration, General Data Section, 2008.

References

- Benet-Martínez, V. *Cross Cultural Personality Research: Conceptual and Methodological Issues*. Riverside, California: Department of Psychology, University of California, 2006.
- Black, Richard, Claudia Natali and Jessica Skinner. "Migration and Inequality". Second Draft, Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, University of Sussex, 2005. www.siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2006/Resources/477383-1118673432908/Migration_and_Inequality.pdf
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Strategic Research and Statistics Canada. *Recent Immigrants in Metropolitan Areas. A Comparative Profile Based on the 2001 Census*. 2005. www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/research-stats/2001-canada.pdf
- Chui, T., K. Tran and H. Maheux. "Immigration in Canada: A Portrait of the Foreign-Born Population, 2006 Census". 2007. www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-557/pdf/97-557-XIE2006001.pdf
- Chami, Ralph, Adolfo Barajas, Thomas Cosimano, Connel Fullenkamp, Michael Gapen and Peter Montiel. *Macroeconomic Consequences of Remittances*. Washington DC: International Monetary Fund., 2008.
- Dahlstrom, Grant. *Personality*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina, 1970.
- Colombia, Department of Security and Administration (DAS). *Migratory Statistics*. 2008. www.das.gov.co (accessed October 6, 2008).
- Dundon, Tony, María-Alejandra González-Pérez and Terrence McDonough. "Bitten by the Celtic Tiger: Immigrant Workers and Industrial Relations in the New Globalized Ireland". *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 28, No. 4 (2007): 501-522. www.eid.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/28/4/501
- Eschbach, Karl, and C. Mary Waters. *Immigration and Ethnic and Racial Inequality in the United States*. Cambridge, Massachusetts - Madison: Department of Sociology, Harvard University - Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin, 1995.
- Fowers, Blaine, and Frank Richardson. "Why is Multiculturalism Good?". *American Psychologist* 51, No. 6 (1996).
- González-Pérez, María Alejandra. *Integration of Immigrant Workers in Ireland and United States*. Ireland: Department of Management, National University of Galway, 2003.
- Houle, René, and Grant Schellenberg. "Remittances by Recent Immigrants". Statistics Canada, Catalogue No. 75-001-10: 5-16, 2008. www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/2008107/pdf/10656-eng.pdf
- Itzigsohn, José, and Silvia Saucedo. "Immigrant Incorporation and Sociocultural Transnationalism". *International Migration Review* 36, No. 3 (2002): 766-798. www.jstor.org/stable/4149563
- McCurdy, H. G. *The Personal World. An Introduction to the Study of Personality*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1961.
- Messamore, Barbara. "Canadian Migration Patterns from Britain and North America". *International History Review* 27, No. 3 (2004). www.jstor.org/stable/4010962
- Schwandt, A. Thomas. "Three Epistemological Instances for Qualitative Inquiry. Interpretivism, Hermeneutics and Social Cons-

tructionism". In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln, 189-213. Thousand Oaks, CA: 2000.

Xu, Qingwen. Globalization, Immigration and the Welfare State: A Cross-National Com-

parison. Boston: *Boston College Graduate School of Social Work*, (2005). <http://cat.inist.fr/?aModele=afficheN&cpsidt=18945110> (accessed June 1, 2008).