

HUMAN TRAFFIC

Imagining Mobility in Unsettling Times

Cambridge University 29.09.10

UC Berkeley 19.10.10

Interpol, Lyon, France 26.10.10

University of Utrecht, Netherlands 27.10.10

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Why “Human Traffic”?

International migration and resettlement can no longer be considered outside the **regulatory restrictions and incentives provided by states** nor the crucial role of **organizations**: Legal corporations, non-profit organizations, and criminal syndicates.

Individual **agency** is increasingly constrained, but may be leading to more cross-border mobility.

Today's presentation

1. Irregular Migration/Trafficking: Significance and Trends
2. The Challenge of Predicting Migrants' and States' "Big Decisions"
3. Intermission: Ana's dilemma in Ecuador to stay or hire a smuggler?
4. **Cognitive migration**--a novel empirical concept for understanding migrant decision-making
5. **Migration Industries** consistent with globalized economies. Transnational criminal syndicates often play a role but there are many other actors.
6. A New **Mobile Underclass**?
7. Conclusion: Imagining Mobility in Unsettling Times

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When we have **slavery**, why should we care about **irregular migration**?

1. Irregular migration is a major source of vulnerability leading to human and civil/labor rights abuses of migrant workers, including slavery.
2. Intersects with other criminal activities, including extortion of migrants en route and drug smuggling
3. Source of domestic political conflict dividing publics and leading to further victimization of migrants

MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT IS HOW IRREGULAR MIGRATION WILL LIKELY INCREASE GREATLY OVER THE NEXT DECADE

Aging Populations, Population Growth, and Climate Change, will likely deepen the push and pull factors of irregular migration.

However, the biggest factor will be responses by states to allow higher levels of legal immigration—this appears unlikely.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND MIGRATION

- ✓ Demographic trend lines cannot predict future migration: the world in 2030 will look rather different than that of 1990.
- ✓ Resource and ethnic conflict due to anthropogenic climate change is now shaping global migration patterns.
- ✓ What we do know is that many more will have to imagine a life in a new location— estimates range from 200 million to a billion climate refugees by 2050. Most of this number will be internally displaced or irregular migrants.

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Smugglers and Employers are predictable opportunists, while states are unlikely to reverse the current trend of further restrictions.

In the first instance, states create the foundations of illegal migration through laws—human mobility has been a feature of humanity ever since we all migrated out of Africa.

Therefore, the most dynamic element of this phenomenon are the future decisions of people mistrusting states, choosing to hire smugglers and believing life will be better

CAN WE PREDICT TRENDS IN IRREGULAR MIGRATION BASED ON MIGRANTS' DECISIONS?

CONVENTIONAL MIGRATION THEORIES

- ✓ Economic models assume rationality (cost vs. benefit)
- ✓ Sociologists expand the push-pull list: attributes of migrants, social networks, and globalization
- ✓ Political scientists focus on state policies and policy-makers

Yet, there is a significant **migration mystery**:

Why do millions risk their lives on international journeys to countries that officially don't want them and are actively trying to stop them through border controls and punitive laws?

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Ana's Dilemma

Consider 24-year-old Ana from the remote Andean community of Tomebamba, Ecuador . . .

After ten years of most of the adult men from her small community living in NYC, she and other women have decided to hire the services of a human smuggler against the wishes of her husband, and the states of Mexico and US. With her typical cash income of \$80 per month in Ecuador, she will pay the \$8,000 fee through future work abroad with an interest rate of 10% compounded monthly.

Ana's Dilemma

Consider 24-year-old Ana from the remote Andean community of Tomebamba, Ecuador . . .

Far from being entirely unaware of the myriad dangers en route and at the destination, the group of women traveling together have begun taking birth control pills in case they are raped en route. Both excitement and anger at the men for leaving them.

She describes her motivation this way: “If I have to burn his body and bring it back in a box, he’s coming home!”

Ana's Dilemma

Ana's story raises a central question largely unanswerable by existing migration theories from mainstream social science:

Why leave her community given the many known state barriers and physical and financial risks of "joining" her wayward husband in NYC?

Far from being unusual, Ana's journey was to be with co-villagers also taking the same risks; similar reports of women taking precautions in the event of rape have been reported.

Ana's Dilemma

Two observations:

- 1) This demonstrates the enormous challenge of predicting social behavior when it comes to “Big Decisions” based on simple causal schema using rational choice, the role of information, and even social networks.
- 2) The significance of her story is not just personal; it raises many policy challenges as individuals and communities place themselves in extremely vulnerable situations and statuses making them easy targets for traffickers tricking them into modern-day slavery.
- 3) We need a better understanding of the cognitive social process that led her to make this choice.

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COGNITIVE MIGRATION: An Empirical Concept



Cognitive migration refers to the role of the experimental imagination in the migration process.

By first engaging in a **vivid visualization of ourselves in a future place and time**, including imagining the expected social and emotional impacts on our future selves, our minds pioneer paths that our bodies may or may not follow.

COGNITIVE MIGRATION:

An Example

How many of you have had an offer to live and work abroad?

What kind of images of your future life did you 'see' before making a decision?

Did you have many different scenarios – or a particular one you kept revising?

Can you recall the feelings attached to these images?



THREE RELEVANT RESEARCH AREAS

#1: DECISION SCIENCES: HEURISTICS AND COGNITIVE BIASES

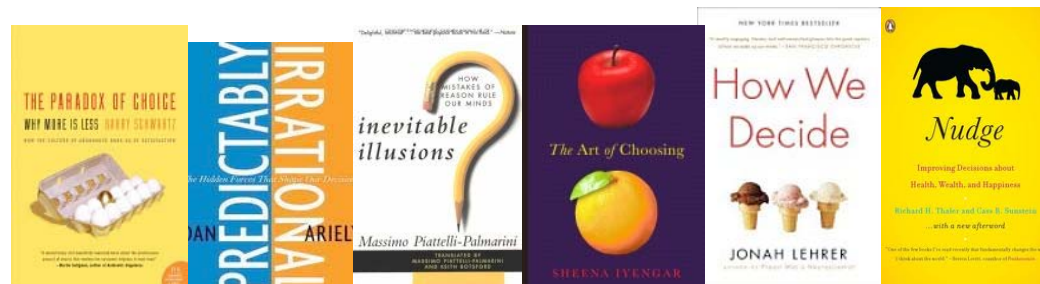
- ✓ Nearly a book a month recently on how we decide, mostly based on controlled lab experiments.

#2: IMAGINATION AND MENTAL SIMULATION/ TIME TRAVEL

- ✓ Episodic future thinking (Atance & O'Neill 2001)
- ✓ Pre-experiencing moments of ones possible life in the foreign destination

#3: EMOTIONS AND AFFECTIVE FORECASTING

- ✓ Affective forecasting (Loewenstein & Lerner 2003)
- ✓ Experimenting with possible futures: how will I feel in a future located abroad?



THE COGNITIVE SOCIOLOGY OF DECISION-MAKING

With a big, life-changing decision, such as resettlement abroad, it's clear that there is also a social dimension that transcends these three elements:

our social world provides us with a menu of acceptable choices framing the decision to be made.

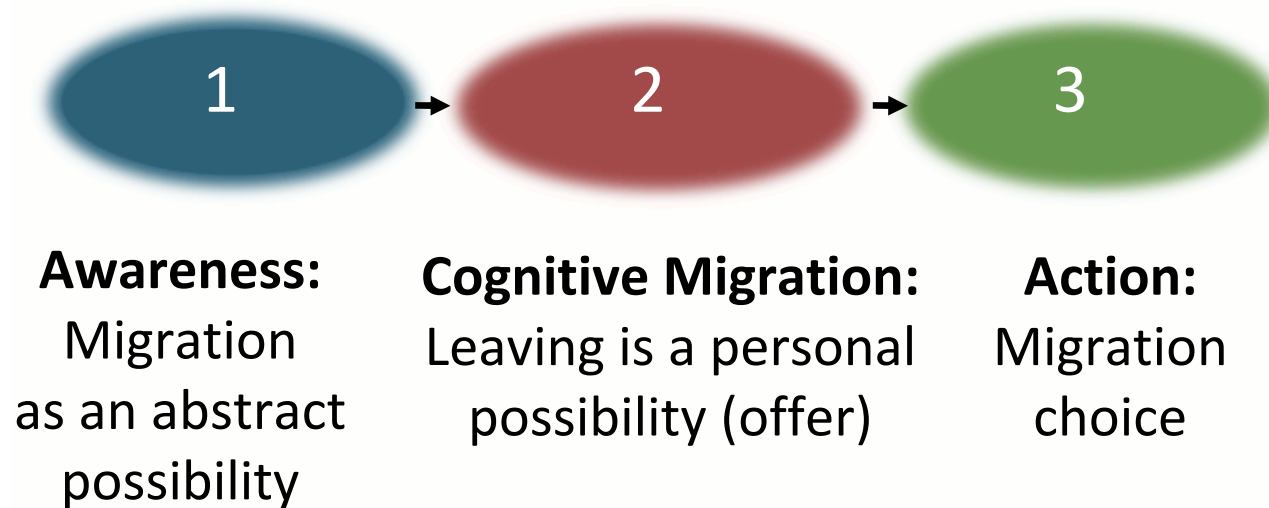
By engaging in mental time travel into our personal future we work out the highly-complex emotional and social impacts of that decision.

This is a socially-mediated process leading to a negotiated future that feels emotionally right.

COGNITIVE MIGRATION IN PRACTICE

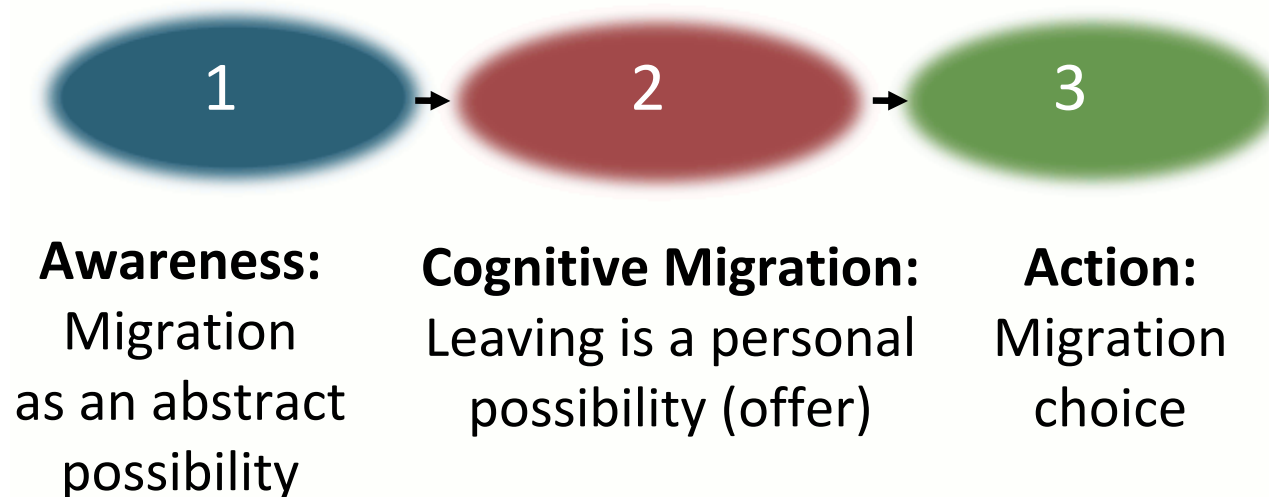
The role of experimental imagination in creating a viable narrative on why you will / or will not make the big decision you face.

THREE MIGRATION MOMENTS



People begin to seriously imagine themselves at a particular destination when they know there is a concrete possibility or are made an offer by a smuggler. The only thing between them and a way out abroad is a fee, repaid with future earnings.

THREE MIGRATION MOMENTS



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REGIONAL AND GLOBAL MIGRATION INDUSTRIES

We understand so little of about the cognitive dimension of migration because in the post-WW II era of strong states researchers have not felt an obvious need to focus on the psychology of decisions in any sustained way.

In addition, until recently, it seemed that “transnational migrants” were not deciding to resettle as much as commute long distances.

The notion that states in a highly globalized world can control who crosses their national borders is challenged by the for-profit, legal and illegal **migration industry**, which can transport virtually anyone to almost any destination for a price—typically paid with future earnings. They exploit the weak links in the system and are highly flexible.

MIGRATION INDUSTRIES: DEFINITIONS

What is a “migration industry”?

A “migration merchant” is anyone (individual or organization) profiting from the commodification of the migration process, legally or illegally, without specifying the multitude of possible activities connected to this process (Kyle, 1996). Criminal syndicates often play a role, but do not encompass the entire industry.

They are typically “a distinct type of ethnic entrepreneur specializing in the migration-driven mobility of people, remittances, and goods across international borders and moving between formality and informality, legality and illegality, depending on the activity, financial resources, and other circumstances” (Hernandez de Leon, 2008)

(ILLEGAL) MIGRATION INDUSTRIES: The Fuel

- They thrive due to current global trends that lead to increased insecurity
 - *global capitalism and cultural globalization*
 - *declining social protections (e.g.: social welfare)*
 - *widening of state border controls and restrictive immigration and refugee policies*
 - *Increasing border controls increase the profits of migration industries as only they have the resources and know-how*

MIGRATION INDUSTRIES: The Fuel

- For a set fee, paid with future earnings, these diverse transnational social organizations/ markets offer a concrete solution to widespread insecurity . . .
 - Political/ Ethnic conflict
 - Economic poverty and insecurity
 - Individual/ethnic community/gender
 - Environmental degradation and climate events

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EFFECTS OF THE MIGRATION INDUSTRY: The Mobile Underclass

- The concept of the emerging **mobile underclass** encompasses those affected by these trends
 - “stuck and stateless”
 - “living in limbo”
 - Given the way digital data can live forever and share globally, many will have a sort of latent “migration disorder”

EFFECTS OF THE MIGRATION INDUSTRY: The Mobile Underclass

- An emerging mobile underclass display a common set of perceptions and feelings vis-à-vis the state—a sense of unsettledness and insecurity.
- A mobile underclass is distinguished from the true underclass by its geographic mobility, yet it also shares with the true underclass an increasing sense of vulnerability and loss of viewed potential for upward socioeconomic mobility *despite* its geographic mobility.
- As many states increasingly attempt to control and restrict the movement of human beings, especially those they view as migrant outsiders, members of this group are being increasingly pushed into an ever more precarious quasi-legal space.

EFFECTS OF THE MIGRATION INDUSTRY: The Mobile Underclass

Ibrahim Ahmed Mohammed, Libya

- Background: In May 2009, Italy traded an official apology for colonial rule and a \$5 billion investment pledge to Libya in exchange for Libya cooperating with Italy's efforts to curb smuggling of Africans into Italy. As a result, Asylum applications dropped 42 percent (Mahr and Pinang 2010).
- Instead of being transported all the way to Europe, Ibrahim now speaks with the growing pessimism characteristic of the mobile underclass "living in limbo" in Libya:
 - *"I cannot go forward and I cannot go backward... It is better if I go back to my country, even if I die of poverty" (Mahr and Pinang 2010).*

EFFECTS OF THE MIGRATION INDUSTRY: The Mobile Underclass

Sayed and Sayeeda Ali Jan, Afghanistan

- Background: Sayed and Sayeeda Ali Jan were stripped of their passports and belongings and left indefinitely in Indonesia after being smuggled via “an increasingly well-traveled route through Pakistan to Malaysia”.
- Despite fleeing violence in Afghanistan, Sayeeda wished they never left:
 - *“If we knew, we would have stayed in Afghanistan”*
(Mahr and Pinang 2010).

EFFECTS OF THE MIGRATION INDUSTRY: TRAFFICKING of SLAVES

- The global increase in militarizing borders and restricting immigration creates extreme vulnerability.
- Makes migrants both more vulnerable to criminal syndicates en route and less likely to seek help at the destination if forced into slavery—the shackles are often psychological.

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A POLICY FORK IN THE ROAD:

1. WACK-a MOLE,

MIGRATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES;

or

2. DEVELOP A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE-CHANGING,
"BIG DECISIONS"



In the context of unpredictable global environmental and social systems, states need to find ways to offer legal pathways to work and resettlement.

Pursuing other serious crimes that inflict harm on people and the environment, creating political instability, poverty, and violence will ultimately be a more effective strategy than anti-immigration laws and enforcement strategies



THE POLICY RELEVANCE OF COGNITIVE MIGRATION

- ✓ Millions are starting to consider that climate change *may* severely impact their lives: some will be forced to leave in every region of the world
- ✓ Many may consider moving to avoid becoming a climate refugee – how do we understand this process?
- ✓ As we urge communities to consider “managed retreat,” they will need to imagine emotionally and culturally acceptable futures, new collective narratives about a future that feels right.
- ✓ Research on cognitive migration may lead to new migration policy interventions and better use of strategies for getting us to imagine that we all live in pre-Katrina New Orleans.

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