

# Theories of migration

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# Definition of migration

(Lee 1966)

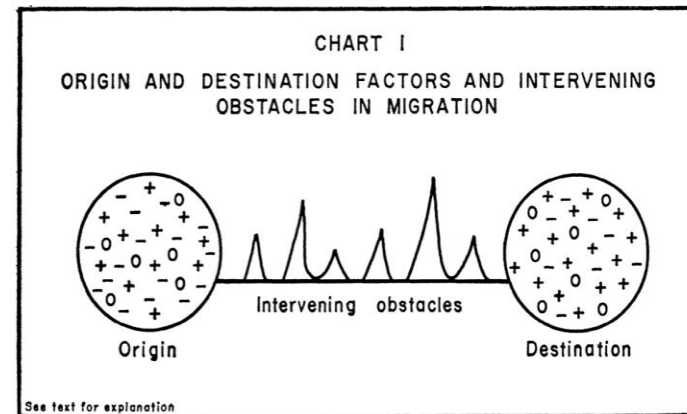
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- Migration is defined broadly as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence
- No restriction is placed upon the distance of the move or upon the voluntary or involuntary nature of the act
- No distinction is made between external and internal migration
- Every act of migration involves an origin, a destination, and an intervening set of obstacles
  - Distance is always present as an intervening obstacle

# Factors in the act of migration

(Lee 1966)

- Factors associated with the area of origin
- Factors associated with the area of destination
- Intervening obstacles
- Personal factors



Source: Lee (1966).

# Volume of migration

(Lee 1966)

varies with :

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- the degree of diversity of areas included in that territory
- fluctuations in the economy
- the diversity of people
  
- related to the difficulty of surmounting the intervening obstacles
- Unless severe checks are imposed, both volume and rate of migration tend to increase with time
- Volume and rate of migration vary with the state of progress in a country or area

# Stream and counterstream

(Lee 1966)

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- Migration tends to take place largely within well defined streams
- For every major migration stream, a counterstream develops
- The efficiency of the stream is high if the major factors in the development of a migration stream were negative factors at origin
- The efficiency of stream and counterstream tends to be low if origin and destination are similar
- The efficiency of migration streams will be high if the intervening obstacles are great
- The efficiency of a migration stream varies with economic conditions, being high in prosperous times and low in times of depression

# Characteristics of migrants

(Lee 1966)

- Migration is selective

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- Migrants responding primarily to plus factors at destination tend to be positively selected
- Migrants responding primarily to minus factors at origin tend to be negatively selected
- Taking all migrants together, selection tends to be bimodal (positively and negatively selected)
- The degree of positive selection increases with the difficulty of the intervening obstacles
- The heightened propensity to migrate at certain stages of the life cycle is important in the selection of migrants
- The characteristics of migrants tend to be intermediate between the characteristics of the population at origin and population at destination

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# Why do people migrate?

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(de Haas 2010)

- Migration is a complex process
  - It is unrealistic that one theory can explain and predict all migration events
  - However, migration is not a chaotic or unpredictable process
- Researchers have to identify regularities
- Truisms do not contribute to a better understanding of real-world migration processes
  - E.g. “most people move out of desire to improve their wellbeing” is too universal and meaningless

**Strengths:** it is practical and can explain spatial characteristics of an urban area.

**Weaknesses:** it doesn't apply to industrial areas.

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Although the push-pull theory has been acknowledged as a path breaking model that explains migration at various periods and has stood the test of time, it has also faced criticism. What do you think are the criticisms?

1. Many scholars claim that it is difficult to determine which plus factors and which minus factors at both origin and destination are quantitatively the most important to different groups and classes of people.
2. Moreover, the presence of intervening obstacles do not help demographers to identify which factors have major influence and which ones are minor factors.

For this reason, Lee's theory offers little practical guidance for policy and decision-making in developing nations.

# Conceptual frameworks

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(de Haas 2010)

- Goal is to find a medium level of generalization
- Theory should deal with the complexity and diversity of specific aspects of real-world migration processes
  - Without going down a sterile path of relativism and exceptionalism
- Utilize review of migration theories to elaborate coherent conceptual frameworks

# Conceptual frameworks

(de Haas 2010)

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- Suggestion is to develop a spatio-temporal and dynamic theoretical framework on migration transitions
- This framework would explain why
  - Human and economic development is generally associated to higher overall levels of migration and mobility
  - Relation between levels of development and levels of migration is fundamentally non-linear
  - Societies typically go through migration transitions, a universal sequence of macro-level migration events

# Regional spatial-economic equilibrium

- The study of migration determinants dates back to classical economic development theory
  - Migration is considered to be a mechanism that establishes regional spatial-economic equilibrium (Ravenstein 1885, 1889)
- Migrants move from low income to high-income areas
  - From densely to sparsely populated areas
- Population streams are expected to occur between the poorest and wealthiest places and countries

# Push-pull factors

- Migration decisions are determined by “push” and “pull” factors in areas of origin and destination  
(Greenwood et al. 1991; Lee 1966; Passaris 1989)
  - Intervening obstacles: distance, physical barriers, immigration laws...
  - Personal factors: age, sex, marital status, school, SES, job...
  - Economic, environmental, and demographic factors
- Although there are limitations in regards to the “push-pull” models, this concept is still popular in migration literature (de Haas 2007, 2010; McDowell and de Haan 1997)

# Limitations of push-pull model

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- Static model
  - It does not specify how migration affects initial structural conditions
- Essentially descriptive
  - Post-hoc device to explain migration
- Factors are generally mirrored in origin and destination areas
- Tendency to single out macro-level variables as causal migration determinants
  - But confound them with individual motives

# Neo-classical migration theory

- Neo-classical economic theory sees migration primarily as a function of geographical differences in the relatively scarcity of labor
  - Rural-urban migration continues as long as expected urban income exceeds rural income (Todaro 1969, 1980; Harris, Todaro 1970)
- Migration causes labor to become less scarce at the destination and scarcer at the origin
  - This process of “factor price equalization” will result in growing convergence between wages at the sending and receiving areas

# Structure and agency

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- **Structure** is a pattern of social relations, which tend to severely constrain the individuals' action
  - But neo-classical and push-pull theories see structure as the simple aggregate of individual behaviors
- **Agency** is the ability of social actors to make independent choices and to impose those on the world
  - But neo-classical and push-pull theories reduce individuals to atoms passively reacting to macro push-pull forces

# New economics of labor migration

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- NELM argues that most migration in developing countries can only be understood as a **household** rather than individual decision
    - Migration decision generates income diversification (e.g., remittances) rather than maximization
    - It is a conscious attempt to overcome (**agency**) failing markets and socio-economic inequalities (**structure**)
  - NELM is a **micro-level** theory applied to particular forms of migration
    - It is not able to explain long-term global migration patterns and trends and how these are connected to broader development processes

# Spatio-temporal migration theories

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- Spatio-temporal transition migration theories define migration as a constituent part of broader development processes
- These processes are associated with
  - Modernization
  - Capitalist economic development
  - Urbanization
  - Demographic transitions

# Development and migration

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- Development processes tend to coincide with generally increased levels of migration and overall mobility
- As they develop, societies typically go through migration transitions
  - Pattern of initially increasing and subsequently decreasing emigration
  - Gradual transformation from net emigration to net immigration countries

# Temporal and spatial models

Table 1. The conceptual links between temporal and spatial migration models

THE TEMPORAL DIMENSION DEMOGRAPHIC AND VITAL TRANSITIONS			THE SPATIAL DIMENSION REGIONALISATION	
<i>Stages of the demographic transition model</i>	<i>Vital transition (Zelinsky)</i>	<i>Mobility transition (Zelinsky)</i>	<i>World systems theory</i>	<i>Development tiers (Skeldon)</i>
<b>High stationary</b> (high fertility and mortality, roughly in balance, little natural increase if any.)	<b>Pre-modern traditional society</b> (pre-industrial)	Mobility mainly limited to circular migration	<b>External areas</b> (e.g., many sub-Saharan African countries, parts of central Asia and Latin America)	<b>Resource niche</b> , with variable, often weaker forms of migration.
<b>Early expanding</b> (Rapid decline in mortality due to improvements in food supply, sanitation and health care and education; but no corresponding fall in birth rates leading to major population growth)	<b>Early transitional society</b> (urbanising / industrialising developing country)	All forms of mobility (circular, rural colonisation frontiers, internal rural-urban, international) increase	<b>Periphery</b> (e.g., Morocco, Egypt, Mexico)	<b>Labour frontier</b> , dominated by emigration and internal centralisation
<b>Late expanding</b> (major decline in fertility due to access to contraception, economic growth, wage increases, urbanization, increase in the status and education of women, increases in investment in childrens' education, value change and other social changes → Population growth begins to level off, significant but decelerating natural increase)	<b>Late transitional society</b> (mature industrial country)	International migration decreases, rural-to-urban internal migration stagnates but remains at high levels, circular movements increase and grow in structural complexity, towards the end of phase the 'rural exodus' decreases	<b>Semi-periphery</b> (e.g., eastern China, South-Africa, eastern Europe, Turkey)	<b>Expanding core</b> , co-existence of immigration and emigration and internal centralisation (i.e., urbanisation and rural-to-urban migration);
<b>Low stationary</b> (fertility and mortality stabilised at low levels, slight population increase if any)	<b>Advanced society</b> (post-industrial society)	Residential mobility, urban-to-urban and circular migration increase, transformation from emigration to net immigration countries immigration of unskilled and semi-skilled workers	<b>Core areas</b> (e.g., Western Europe, North America, Japan, NICs)	<b>Old and new core countries</b> characterised by immigration and internal decentralisation;
<b>Declining?</b> (continuing low fertility and mortality; birth rates may drop below replacement level leading to shrinking population)	A future " <b>superadvanced</b> " society	Most internal migration is urban-urban and residential, immigration of labourers continues.	? ( <b>Core</b> )	<b>Old/Declining core (?)</b>

Source: de Haas (2010).

# Migration hump and transition

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- **Migration hump** theory refers to more **short-term** increases in migration in the wake of trade reforms and policy-induced contextual changes
- **Migration transition** applies for **long-term** changes in migration trends in response to more structural development trends

# Functionalist and structuralism

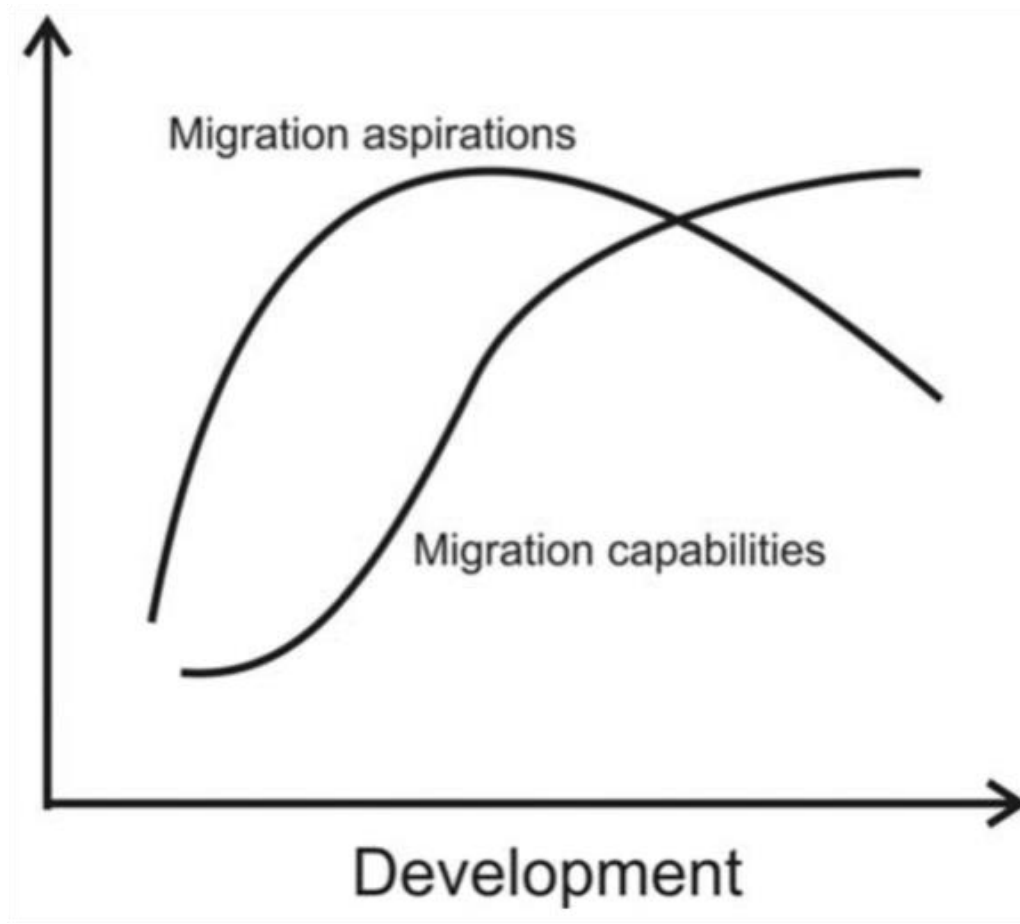
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- Structuralism (neo-Marxist, center-periphery) criticizes functionalist theory (neo-classical, push-pull)
  - Functionalist assumes socioeconomic forces tend towards equilibrium through migration
  - Structuralism sees a general pattern of disruptions, dislocations, and migrations intrinsic to capitalism
- However, they share these assumptions
  - More development leads to less emigration
  - Higher development differences across areas (spatial disequilibrium) leads to more migration

# Capabilities and aspirations

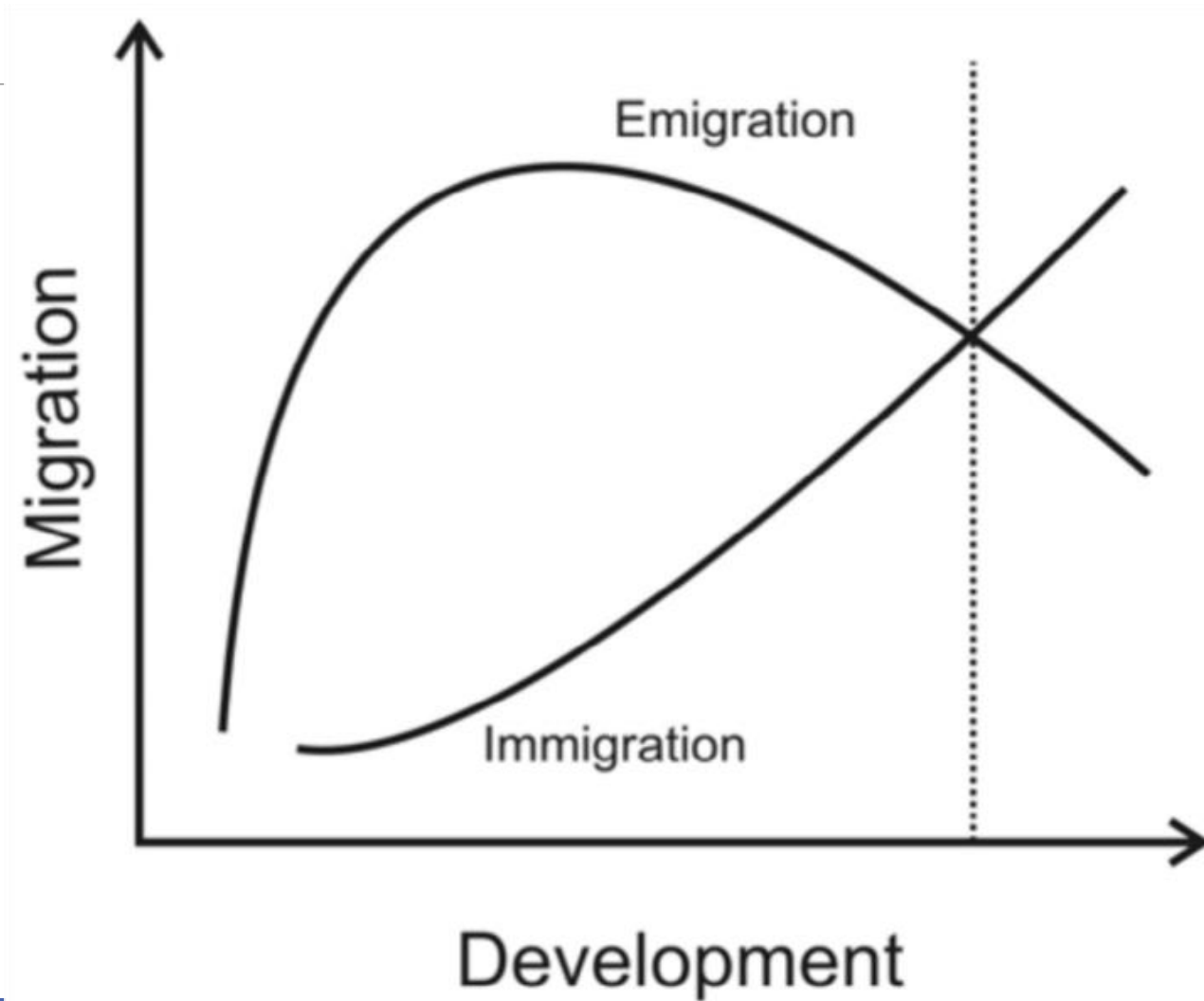
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- Migration theory should include structural constraints and independent choices (agency)
  - We can incorporate notions of structure and agency in migration theory by conceptualizing migration at the micro-level as a function of...
    - **Migration capabilities:** individuals mobilize human, social, and material capital in order to migrate
    - **Migration aspirations** for personal, social, economic, and political opportunities, which vary for different people, based on their education, information, and social networks

# Hypothesized effect of human development on migration capabilities and aspirations



Source: de Haas (2010).

# Migration transition theory



Source: de Haas (2010).

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