AN ECOLOGICAL MODEL FOR MIGRATION STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

The study of internal migrations as an ongoing demographical and sociological process represents one of the major problems in contemporary social science. The lack of a unifying point of view among the wealth of contributions by sociologists, demographers, anthropologists, and economists on this subject has already been pointed out (Mangalam and Schwarzweller, 1968:6-7). There are a number of critical review papers (Muñoz and Oliveira, 1972; Cornelius, 1971; Kemper, 1970; Butterworth, 1971; Cardona and Simmons, 1975:19-40) and books (du Toit and Safa, 1975; Safa and du Toit, 1975) which help bring out both the advances that have been made and the confusing diversity of viewpoints that has prevailed in the field of migration studies.

Demographic studies of migration tend to favor (implicitly or explicitly) the so-called “push-pull” hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, the causes of a specific migration process may be analyzed with respect to two components: (a) the “push” or repelling force from the place of origin, (b) the “pull” or attraction from the place of destination, i.e., the city. The variables most commonly used by demographers in illustrating the process are age, sex, ethnic origin, education, occupation, income, distance to urban centers, and other factors such as attitudes, aspirations, motivations, values, community identity, institutional influences, and other less easily quantifiable variables; the more notable advances in the demographic treatment of migration, however, have probably taken place in the field of mathematical modeling and in the development of statistical techniques (Mangalam and Schwarzweller, 1968:6-7).

Two major approaches to the migration problem have been dominant in the field of sociology, according to Muñoz and Oliveira (1972:32-44): (a) “historical structuralism,” favored by many Latin American scholars, and (b) the “modernization” approach, represented mainly by North American sociologists. Historical structuralism emphasizes aspects of...
social change within a framework of Latin American economic dependence on foreign power centers. Underdevelopment in Third World nations is seen not only as related to the development of the major industrial powers but as actually caused by the rise of these powers to economic and political prominence. Specifically, Latin America is seen as the traditional economic hinterland of the United States and a few other Western powers. Patterns of dependence and domination between power centers and peripheral nations tend to become replicated within each Latin American country; thus, large cities come to represent secondary centers of domination with respect to the countryside. The hegemony of the cities is viewed as a direct cause of the marginalization of the traditional peasantry in its own hinterland. In short, the migration process in Latin America is seen as a symptom of the imbalance that was introduced into the traditional economic structure of the region by the process of industrialization based on foreign power centers.

Against the large-scale backdrop of historical development of the socioeconomic structures, one finds a number of studies that are more concerned with the individual motivations of the migrants, and with the problems of decision-making and of adaptation to the urban environment. These studies, favored by some North American sociologists, have become collectively known in Latin America as the "Modernization School" (see, e.g., Muñoz and Oliveira, 1972; Mangalam and Schwarzweller, 1968; Parra, 1972:221-225). Most of these studies are centered on the individual as the unit of analysis; this approach is reflected in the use of variables such as attitudes, motivations, aspirations, and other psychological concepts. According to critics, there is a tendency to stress aspects of personal decision and "adjustment" at the expense of the elements of social interaction in migration phenomena. On the whole, however, it seems that the two views address themselves to different levels of analysis: while the historical structuralists discuss the macro-social factors involved in the origins of large-scale or global migration processes, the modernizationists study the migration problem at the scale of the individual migrant.

Among the anthropologists the dominant model (again, explicitly or implicitly, as the case may be) has been the so-called "folk-urban" model attributed to Redfield. Basically this model postulates two ideal poles at the extremes of a continuum: (a) folk society, which is characteristically small, homogeneous, traditional, and formal, and (b) urban society, which is described as the exact opposite of the former. While Redfield himself never used this model in discussing migration (his folk-urban continuum was set up merely as a scale of reference in comparing traditional communities within a given culture), some of his followers as well as opponents began to attribute the difficulties of the
acculturation process suffered by peasant migrants in cities to a supposed loss of "folk-type" cultural traits, which the peasants had brought with them from their communities of origin. This extrapolation of Redfield's model has been very widely used.

At present the majority of anthropological studies on migration deal with the degree of adaptation of the migrants to urban culture and refer to the folk-urban model, confirming it in some cases and disproving it in others. For example, Lewis (1957), Butterworth (1962), Munizaga (1961), Kemper (1974), Lomnitz (1969), and others have studied groups of migrants who tend to cluster together according to their place of origin and who manage to maintain most of their family structure and cultural traits without any noticeable symptoms of social disorganization. Such observations would tend to contradict the predictions of the model proposed by Redfield's followers.

Of course, a peasant arriving in a large city does not undergo a traumatically abrupt transition from folk society to urban society. Even prior to migration, peasants are in contact with cities through many aspects of their culture. On the other hand, every large city contains migrant enclaves and these are precisely the areas where rural migrants tend to congregate. Such discrepancies can hardly be charged to Redfield, who never intended his model to apply to individuals. The process of disorganization, secularization, and individuation described by Redfield clearly refers to the culture of the community as a whole. Individual acculturation of migrants is a complicated process that necessarily depends on many factors besides the relative positions of their communities of origin on the folk-urban scale.

AN ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF THE MIGRATION PROCESS

In an earlier study on migration (Lomnitz, 1975a) I proposed to analyze certain intermediate social structures such as groups, quasi-groups, and social networks. This would achieve two kinds of results: (a) provide a better understanding of the social mechanisms that promote and facilitate the migration process; (b) bridge the present gulf between historical structuralists and modernizationists, by providing an intermediate level of analysis. "Individuals do not make decisions in a vacuum or as abstract members of a socio-economic category, but as a result of their interaction with others. . . . The concept of social network . . . represents a microstructure, a middle-range level of abstraction situated between the large-scale social structure and the individual" (Lomnitz, 1975a:289).

I should now like to propose an ecological framework for the migration process. My rationale for such a proposal is the consensus among
migration experts on the following points: (a) the study of internal migration processes requires a unifying viewpoint and a model that is sufficiently general to encompass all aspects of migration; (b) such a model should be interdisciplinary; (c) the folk-urban model used in anthropology has become obsolete; (d) the migration process is caused by the interaction of economic, social, psychological, and environmental factors at various levels (e.g., the macro-history of economic relations between nations and classes, the micro-processes on the individual scale, and the intermediate level of social groups and networks); (e) ecology can be used as a unifying conceptual framework in processes of interaction between society and the environment; (f) a close affinity appears to exist between the holistic approach of anthropology and the concept of an ecological system.

I am not proposing a theory of migration, but rather a conceptual framework that may be useful in describing the migration process through the inclusion of data from different disciplines and analysis at different levels of generality.

Human ecology is a branch of anthropology that deals with the adaptation of human societies to their natural environment. Every population adapts to its physical environment with respect to food, shelter, and clothing, by its attempt to mesh its biological needs with the specific requirements of the ecological niche that it happens to occupy. In addition, a social group is also a culture bearer and must develop adaptive mechanisms, which become incorporated in its set of social relations, to ensure the survival of the group by means of orderly, regular, and predictable patterns of competition and cooperation. Hence the economy, the culture, and the social structure are important parts of the ecological system in a human population (Cohen, 1968:1-2).

The ecological approach, however, treats human societies as merely one of the elements in a complex system that includes the fauna, the flora, and a wide range of geographic and climatic factors. This system is known as the ecosystem. "Anthropologists have found that factors such as geography, the distribution of natural resources, climate, crops, cattle, and relationships with neighboring populations may influence the evolution of society to a considerable degree. These factors are major components of the ecosystem and societies must adapt to them" (Hole, 1968:357).

I propose to describe migration as a process of geographical displacement of human populations from one ecological niche to another. Three stages may be distinguished in this process: (a) Imbalance. This stage includes the process of temporary or permanent saturation of an ecological niche, thus imperiling the survival or the physical safety of some human group. The imbalance may be due to cumulative factors such as popula-
tion increase or the deterioration of cultivable soils; or it may be caused by relatively sudden events such as an accelerated population explosion, an alien invasion, or a natural disaster. There are also cases of intermittent or periodic imbalance due to economic or environmental cycles; these may cause seasonal migrations. (b) Transfer. This stage is composed of all factors related to the migration proper that determine the rate, human composition, and other features of the migration: transfer distance, means of transportation used, time-space coordinates of the migration, and the description of the migrants as to age, family status, ethnic composition, schooling, and so on. The time-space patterns of the migration process obviously depend on the conditions of imbalance in the original niche as well as the expectations of the migrants that they will find a new ecological niche at their selected point of destination. (c) Stabilization. This stage involves a return to a state of ecological balance or adaptation of the migrant group to its new ecological niche. It includes the entire process of social acculturation: institutional change within the group, changes in family structure, and changes in cultural traits such as language, religion, use of leisure, political organization, and so on. The period of stabilization may range from months to decades; it may involve a variety of reactions by social groups from the original ecosystem, ranging from violent rejection through tolerance to total absorption. Some migrations are so massive as to cause fundamental changes in the ecosystem of destination; or the technology of the incoming group may be so advanced as to displace the indigenous cultures, as in the case of the Spanish conquest of the Americas. Other migration processes tend to produce a succession of cultural mergers and fusions, as in the Valley of Mexico during the Chichimec invasions, or in the Latin American cities today.

The stabilization stage may be further subdivided as follows: (c-1) Settlement. Incorporation of migrants into a new ecological niche of an ecosystem triggers a sequence of adaptive processes, which depend largely on the mode of integration (assimilation to rejection) achieved by the migrants in their new milieu. (c-2) Interaction. This refers to the changes produced by the migration process in the new ecological niche: social and ethnic conflict, marginalization, introduction of new technologies, and so on. The changes are not limited to the human component of the ecosystem but may include alterations of the environment: new patterns of land use, changes in residential patterns, or the saturation of services and facilities that may occur in large cities. (c-3) Feedback. Finally, a migration process affects the donor ecological niche, not merely by depleting it of inhabitants but by affecting the imbalance that originates the process. Thus, if the new ecological niche is more satisfactory than the original one from the standpoint of survival and development of the
migrant group, this information may reinforce the incentives for new
groups to migrate. On the other hand, the economic assistance of suc-
cessful migrants may channel new resources into their original ecological
niche and thus help stabilize the situation at least temporarily. Both
phenomena are observed in rural-urban migration.

MIGRATION PROCESSES IN LATIN AMERICA

Rural-urban migration represents but one of the migratory processes
found in history and in prehistory. Migration in its various forms is ex-
tremely common and widespread, and may be cited among the funda-
mental processes of social change. In the present article we are par-
ticularly concerned with the effect of rural migration on Latin American
cities. Butterworth (1971) and Kemper (1970) have reviewed and sum-
marized the available information on this subject; other studies in this
field have appeared since (Kemper, 1974; Uzzell, 1972; Whiteford, 1975;
Roberts, 1973; Lomnitz, 1975a; Balan, Browning, and Jelin, 1973;
Muñoz, Oliveira, and Stern, 1972; Orellana, 1973; Safa and du Toit,

Stage (a): Imbalance. In Latin America there has been a recent
saturation of the ecological niche that for thousands of years had pro-
vided a livelihood to the peasant. This saturation was caused by explosive
growth of the rural population, fragmentation of rural land holdings,
and erosion and impoverishment of soils. The resulting imbalance was
further augmented by the development of primary cities, which are in-
creasingly monopolizing all natural resources. Thus the Latin American
countryside has fallen behind the large cities in vital aspects of modern-
ization (including health and sanitation, welfare, education, and cultural
facilities) and has remained relatively unprotected against the impact of
natural disasters (droughts, floods, earthquakes) as well as against
episodes of political violence.

The classification of these factors in terms of "push" or "pull," as in
the earlier anthropological literature on migrations, is irrelevant. In the
context of the ecological framework proposed here, what matters is the
resulting imbalance between the city and the countryside as bases of
economic survival for large groups of dispossessed peasants. This
imbalance has not been caused exclusively by depressed economic and
social conditions in the countryside, but is also due to improved condi-
tions in the cities: better communications, better political safeguards, bet-
ter educational and social facilities, better protection against violence, ill-
ness, and natural disasters, better economic opportunities, as well as the
opportunity to participate more actively in the socio-cultural movement
of modernization that is propagated through the mass media.
Stage (b): Transfer. In Latin America, "although rural poverty is the factor which pushes the migrants off the land, the exodus is selective and poverty in itself is not a sufficient cause of emigration" (Butterworth, 1971:87). Selective factors are factors that may facilitate or inhibit migration. They include age, sex, and educational level of migrants; distance to the nearest large town; availability of communications (roads, bus service, mass media) linking the city with the countryside; and more importantly, presence in the city of networks of relatives who are willing to extend assistance to the potential migrants (Lomnitz, 1975a, 1975b; Browning and Feindt, 1971; Cornelius, 1975:22; Rollwagen, 1974:47-66; Kemper, 1974).

The factors controlling the transfer stage of the migration process may be of three kinds: space factors, time factors, and selectivity factors. The space factors involve geographical variables pertaining to the routing of the transfer: some migration processes occur in stages, others are direct from the village to the city. Similarly, the time factors govern the duration and temporal pattern of the migration: some migrations occur in waves or streams, some are transgenerational, and so on. Finally, the selective factors control the type of individual who is more likely to migrate, for the migrant group often represents a highly non-random sample of the population of the locality of origin.

Kemper (1970:617) points out that there are two conflicting views on selectivity factors in Latin American migrations: "some hold that the migrants are poorly prepared for urban life . . . while others state that the better prepared elements in each rural community are more likely to abandon it in search of better opportunities." These two views are not altogether incompatible. A report of the United Nations points out that the migration process is not a single movement of peasants towards large cities, nor are the migrants generally among the poorest or least adapted members of their communities of origin. They include representatives of different social strata . . . many of which acquire some prior experience of urban life . . . as a result of compulsory military service. Many migrants are craftsmen or semi-skilled workers; some young men have secondary schooling . . . village craftsmen or non-farmers find it easier to migrate than the peon who may lack any useable urban skill. Again, the semi-literate are more likely to migrate than the illiterate and those having relatives in the city more than those who lack such relatives. (Quoted by Butterworth, 1971:92-93)

In fact, however, several studies have shown that the migrants are certainly not always among the most able or the more highly skilled. According to Butterworth, age is the only universal factor of selectivity; yet I found that this may be true only of the initial or pioneering group of migrants (Lomnitz, 1975a:62). Once the young migrants have established a foothold in the city, they promote the migration of their remaining relatives in family groups, without age selectivity. In this case, the most
“able” will frequently be the individual who is fortunate in having social or kinship ties with the city. Likewise, selectivity on the basis of sex may vary from place to place: in some countries or regions a majority of migrants are women, because of the availability of jobs as housemaids. More often there are compensating factors that tend to even out the distribution of migrants by sex. Perhaps it is safest to say that selectivity factors may vary widely, depending on conditions such as technology, systems of values, and other psycho-social variables in the community of origin.

Stage (c): Stabilization. This stage has been widely studied, because it includes the process of adaptation or acculturation of migrants in the Latin American city. Most published research has been directed towards one or more of the following aspects: changes in family structure, the concept of a “culture of poverty,” development of shantytowns, changes of personality or world image, the cognitive orientation of migrants, and marginality. Most of these studies have referred in one way or another to the bipolar model attributed to Redfield (Kemper, 1970:619-625).

Rather than attempt to summarize the controversy about the folk-urban model, I shall present a brief description of the migration process for a group of twenty-five families who settled in a Mexico City shantytown. The group originated from a village in the State of San Luis Potosí. The majority (70%) of the residents of the shantytown were rural migrants, and the migration patterns were found to be analogous to those now to be described.

The Migration Process: the Case of Villela

In the Mexico City shantytown of Cerrada del Condor we find thirty heads of family or spouses from the State of San Luis Potosí. Twenty-five of these come from the rural community of Villela. In 1971 this group included twenty-two nuclear families, all related through kinship ties. The tangle of kin relations was further reinforced by numerous ties of compadrazgo (fictive kinship). The core of the group is the Fernández kin, which includes sixteen nuclear families.

The Villela migrants were originally landless sharecroppers who survived by occasional agricultural jobs. The reasons they gave for migration were “poverty,” “lack of work,” and “starvation.”

A part of Villela is still a private hacienda. The process of land reform was slow: distribution of land to peasants began under the Cárdenas administration (in the late 1930s); however, population increase soon led to a subdivision into uneconomically small plots. The average size of parcels is 4.7 hectares per peasant family, but the actual arable surface is smaller because of the poor quality of the soil. Rainfall is inadequate and irriga-
tion not generally available. Corn and beans are grown for home consumption, but the yield usually lasts only two or three months for the average family. Therefore “peasants are necessarily forced to look elsewhere for sources of income to complement their subsistence” (Alemán, 1966:135).

Villela belongs to the township of Santa María del Río, whose population was 27,042 in 1960. This population was distributed as follows: 4,841 lived in villages while the rest were scattered among 33 rural communities or farms with less than 1,000 inhabitants each. Villela is one of these: in 1950 the population was recorded as 564, and by 1960 it had decreased to 489, presumably because of the migration process about to be described.

The first attempt at migration to Mexico City took place during the early 1950s when Juan Pérez Fernández decided to try his luck in the city. Together with a brother and a few friends, this young man reached the Federal District without knowing anyone there. After various adventures, the Pérez brothers and one of their original friends found work in the sand pits near Cerrada del Condor; they have been living in Cerrada del Condor ever since. After a few years they were joined by the mother of the Pérez boys and by their nieces Juana and Elvira Fernández with their children. As the kinship group grew, it successively absorbed the mother of the Fernández girls (señora Lupe, sister of the Pérez boys) with her remaining sons and their descendants. The last of the Fernández daughters arrived in 1964 with her seven children; her oldest boy, aged 14, had arrived in advance of his mother and had stayed with his grandmother, señora Lupe. The relatives and descendants of the third original migrant (the friend of the Pérez brothers) have all become related to the Pérez-Fernández group through kinship and compadrazgo.

Thus, while the three initial migrants from Villela were undoubtedly young unattached pioneers (see Balan, Browning, and Jelin, 1973:147-148), the remaining migrants merely used the established core of Villela relatives in Cerrada del Condor as a beachhead to establish a foothold in the city. Though a number of them were also unmarried (particularly young women who found jobs as housemaids), many others were old people or parents with small children. Practically all went directly from Villela to the homes of their kin in Cerrada del Condor, without intermediate stages of any kind.

Juan Pérez Fernández and his young Villela companions had initially taken jobs where they found them: in the sand pits, as bricklayers or hod carriers in the building trade, and so on. Juan eventually found a job as carpet layer. At present, thirteen of nineteen male Villela migrants of working age are in the carpet trade. The initial assistance given to migrants by their city kin was not limited to food and shelter during the
early stage of adaptation to urban life, but included instruction in an urban trade and introductions to employers. Significantly, this service was performed in spite of the fact that it meant sharing scarce jobs and training future competitors. The success of the operation meant that the Villela kin group could migrate in large numbers to Cerrada del Condor, where they now constitute a significant group.

The initial skills of the Villela migrant group were not impressive. Among the twenty-five heads of families and spouses from Villela, fourteen were illiterate in 1969. Another six had managed to teach themselves the elements of reading and writing since they migrated to Mexico City. Only two had any schooling beyond the fourth grade; one of these was but a small child when he reached the Federal District. The rate of illiteracy among Villela migrants is typical of other migrants in Cerrada del Condor, however.

Discussion

The case history of the Villela migration illustrates the process of transfer and stabilization in rural-urban migration in Mexico. The first component of stabilization ("settlement") is largely controlled by the presence of kinship networks. The initial three migrants were young bachelors without contacts in the city; all the others subsequently went directly to the homes of their relatives in the city. An informant describes the process as follows: "My sister sent for us in the country. We got here and stayed with my cousin; we all slept in the same bed. We couldn’t even turn around." Later, the informant found a home in the shantytown and was able to send for her last remaining sister in Villela, with her seven children.

The system of informal job training is described by an informant as follows: "First there was my cousin Pérez who helped my brother get into the carpet trade. Then came another cousin and he got him in, then he got me in and that is the way we all learned and brought the others too." This system of informal education is also effective in teaching new migrants how to cope with the unfamiliar features of city life; such knowledge is necessarily limited since few migrants are acquainted with the city beyond their immediate neighborhood.

Villela migrants uniformly perceive the results of their migration as positive. They maintain an active group and family life, with a great deal of visiting. In the shantytown they have clustered together in five smaller residential networks, which practice intense mutual assistance and economic exchange. The Villela men have formed their own football club. There are no noticeable signs of family disorganization; quite the opposite, family solidarity extends to every aspect of life, from daily
assistance in the petty troubles of shantytown existence to support in the crucial moments of the life cycle including migration, marriage, childbirth, illness, and death. None of the informants has considered the possibility of returning to Villela.

Elsewhere (Lomnitz, 1975a) I have proposed that informal networks of reciprocal exchange may provide the basis for a farflung system of "social security," on which large numbers of Latin Americans depend for their physical and economic survival. These people subsist in an economy that is marginal to the urban-industrial system of production; because of their rural origins and their lack of skills they have no access to steady jobs in industry, trade, or urban services. The successful adaptation and sustained growth of these groups can only be explained through the parallel economic functions performed by these networks.

Interaction

In the ecological framework proposed in this article, it is suggested that analysis of the migration process must consider the interaction of the migrants with their new environment. In Cerrada del Condor the typical migrants are former sharecroppers from depressed agricultural areas, who lack formal education and skills, and who work in the city on a day-to-day basis with intermittent periods of joblessness. The types of labor accessible to migrants are those without job security: brick laying, carpet laying, and various kinds of unskilled or semi-skilled labor including domestic service, restaurant service, trucking, janitorial service, freelance crafts and repair services, and scavenging.

Initially some students of Latin American society assumed that these migrants would eventually be absorbed by the system's need for industrial labor; instead, the creation of new industrial jobs has everywhere lagged behind the influx of migrants from the countryside. As a result there has been a cumulative growth of a new urban social stratum, which is now recognized by most Latin American specialists as "urban marginality." This new phenomenon may be explained as resulting from the imbalance between the rural ecological subsystem and the modern urban subsystem. The imbalance became apparent after the Second World War, as a result of industrialization in the major Latin American cities in response to the wartime needs of the major powers. At the same time modern medical technologies made themselves felt, particularly in the dramatic decreases in infant mortality. As there was no corresponding increase in agricultural productivity (not among the traditional peasantry, at any rate), the new demographic pressures came to bear primarily on the large Latin American cities.

The first waves of rural migrants invaded the decaying old downtown areas of the cities; many of them did eventually obtain access to in-
industrial jobs. This was true for the Tilaltongo migrants studied by Butterworth (1962), and the Tzintzuntzan migrants (Kemper, 1974), as well as for the Peruvian case described by Mangin and Turner (1968). Soon the cities became saturated, however, and the access to industrial jobs was monopolized by the unionized urban proletariat and their descendants. The overflow of migrants from the downtown slums settled in the peripheral shantytowns where migrants could pursue a semi-rural mode of existence at the edge of the great city. These shantytowns represent a new kind of ecological niche, which may be described as interstitial to the urban ecology. The shantytown dwellers or “marginals” live like crabs in the interstices of the urban space and perform functions of scavengers. They recycle urban waste and take jobs that have been devalued by the urban industrial system or are otherwise unwanted. They have no job security and are not covered by any of the Social Security systems; hence they have no credit. They assume the role of “hunters and gatherers” of the modern industrial world.

While the new ecological niche of marginality has so far been tolerated by the urban system, because of the useful services it performs (particularly to the urban middle class), the unrestricted growth of marginal strata is coming to be seen as a threat to the system as a whole. The urban facilities can no longer cope with the burden of marginal population (more than a third of the population of Mexico City is now estimated to be marginal), and its potential for social and political disruption is perceived as a menace. The increasingly serious ecological troubles of large cities are further compounded by the presence of large social strata that remain essentially unincorporated into the urban administrative system. From these factors derive the recent increase in political actions and research programs directed at the “problem” of urban marginality.

Feedback

Finally, we have to consider the relationship between the Villela migrants and their ecological niche of origin. The sustained pattern of migration between Villela and Mexico City is sufficient proof of the existence of continued relationships between the migrants and their place of origin. Since the early 1950s, hardly a year has gone by without the arrival of new Villela migrants in Cerrada del Condor. This steady stream of migrants has also been typical of other rural areas that have fed the shantytown during the same period.

Active relationships with the place of origin are maintained as long as there is a focus of personal interest of the migrant there: a relative, or a piece of property. Many migrants maintain a joint interest with brothers or other relatives in a plot of land back home; they regard it as an element of security to fall back on if their adaptation to the city fails. Even
former sharecroppers maintain close relations with their country relatives in the expectation of going back or sending wives and small children to the countryside when bad times strike. Likewise, the country relatives see their more fortunate city kin as a major resource. Children and adolescents are sent to urban relatives, and daughters are sent to the city to earn an income for themselves and their parents as housemaids. There are indications that this is altering the traditional status of daughters in the peasant household; nowadays the cash remittances of housemaids to their parents in the country account for the subsistence of many a household who would otherwise be unable to obtain the minimal resources for diversification.

In the case of Villela, and in Mexico in general, the process of rural-urban migration has been a successful adaptation from the migrants’ point of view. Their experience is transmitted back to the villages and stimulates others to follow suit. The feedback is especially strong because the migration process depends on social networks, usually based on kinship; the dependence on these networks is mutual, since they provide the base of survival for the marginal group in the cities. Each migrant must build his own network of reciprocal exchange for mutual assistance during the frequent periods of unemployment; this accounts for the persistent motivation of urban migrants to assist their country relatives in migrating. In effect, the new ecological niche in the city is constructed with the social resources of the migrant—the only kind of resources he has.

To summarize, the three moments of the stabilization phase—settlement, interaction, and feedback—are dependent on the preservation and strengthening of reciprocity networks based primarily on kinship. The organization of research material on the basis of an ecological framework is appropriate to bringing out the essential mechanisms that govern the different phases of the migration process.

NOTES

1. For further reference see Kemper (1970:610), and the introduction to this volume.
2. For further details see Lomnitz (1975a).
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