

Introduction

While migration has been a constant feature of human history, since the second half of the twentieth century the rate of migration has increased to unprecedented levels, largely owing to processes connected to globalization and its effects on flows of capital and, with it, labour (Castles, 2000). Despite perceptions often inflamed by politically alarmist agendas, international migration actually accounts for a small proportion of the world's population. Today, around 3% of the world population lives outside their country of birth—roughly 200 million people, largely made up of voluntary migrants (Czaika & de Haas, 2013; de Haas, 2006: 7; Pellegrino, 2003; Stalker, 2001; UNFPA, 2006: 6). Data forecasted by the World Bank expects to record 250 million international migrants in 2016 (World Bank, 2016). Recent decades have witnessed a dramatic change in the migration landscape as transport and communications have made traveling and migrating far easier within an increasingly globalized world. Research indicates that most people who migrate voluntarily do so for labour, family reunification, or for reasons associated with marriage (UNFPA, 2006: 5).¹ The demand for labour migrants (i.e., those searching for better economic opportunities abroad) has been a major contributing factor in the rising levels of migration from low- income to high-income countries (Castles, 2000; Lozano-Ascencio & Gandini, 2012).

The study of migration² is significant for a number of reasons. There are now more international migrants than ever before, with their number certain to increase in the foreseeable future; they also exemplify a dynamic and important aspect of the

¹The situation for involuntary migrants is significant and deserves detailed attention beyond the scope of this research and the content of this book. According to the report entitled *Global Trends*, a total of 65.3 million people were forced to flee and were displaced at the end of 2015, a historical record high. This figure includes internal and international involuntary migrants alike (UNHCR, 2016).

²Aware of the complexity and diversity in contemporary people's movements, I acknowledge the use of the words 'migration' and 'mobility' to reflect this phenomenon. For simplicity, I have chosen mainly to use the word 'migration' throughout this book.

modern world. Migrants³ are distinguished for the economic, political, and cultural enriching qualities that they afford to societies (Bhugra & Becker, 2005; Koser, 2007). From the standpoint of migrant recipient countries, Australia offers an interesting case of analysis. From the standpoint of migrant sending countries, Mexico is unquestionably an interesting case for analysis.

Mexico's migration to the USA has a long history but has become increasingly significant as a percentage of migrants across the world, occupying since 2000 the second place of migrant population by country of origin after India (Delgado Wise et al., 2016). This migration has largely consisted of non-qualified labourers in search of job opportunities in the agricultural and services sector in the USA, and it has received considerable attention in both scholarly and non-scholarly circles (Cornelius, FitzGerald, Lewin, & Muse-Orlinoff, 2009; Corwin, 1978; Escobar & Martin, 2009; FitzGerald & Alarcón, 2013; Gonzales, 2009; Lozano-Ascencio & Gandini, 2012; Lozano-Ascencio, 2004; Reisler, 1976; Tuirán, 2000).

However, in the last three decades, there have been some changes in migration patterns in Mexico. First, as part of a world trend in which the proportion of highly educated people in the total migration population has increased⁴ so has the proportion of migrant Mexicans with undergraduate and graduate degrees in the total Mexican migration population. Some studies have mainly focused on the so-called brain drain effects (Castaños-Lomnitz, 2004; Martuscelli & Leyva, 2007). An exception to this has been the work conducted by Lozano-Ascencio and Gandini (2012) on Mexican skilled migrants in the USA who reject the binary position of either the 'loss' or 'gain' approach. Yet there is much left to study.

Since the mid-1990s, Mexico has experienced a substantial and continuing outflow of people to 'new' destinations; countries with skilled-based immigration programmes, particularly Canada and Australia, have attracted middle-class Mexicans (Atondo Guzmán, 2011; Barba Ponce, 2013). Mexican migration to Australia is a new phenomenon and belongs to this new category. The study of Mexican migration to Australia may seem surprising given the distance between both countries and the fact that the number of Mexicans, although increasing,⁵ may be small compared to other migrant groups in Australia. Nevertheless, it offers an interesting opportunity to enhance our understanding of the new type of migration flows. In recent decades, this new group of migrants—strikingly different from earlier groups, more evenly distributed across gender, and relatively small compared to most previous migrations—can be identified among professional and

³Throughout this book, I will mainly be referring to people who engage in processes of migration as 'migrants'. Although the words 'emigrants' and 'immigrants'—which reflect the outward and inward moves, respectively—are widely used in the literature, 'migrant' encompasses both 'emigrants' and 'immigrants'.

⁴Following Delgado Wise et al. (2016) in the last two decades, the average growth rate per annum of migrants with tertiary education has increased 1.5 times more than that of overall migration.

⁵The Australian Bureau of Statistics shows a significant increase in the number of Mexicans in Australia over the last 15 years. In 1996, the census recorded 881 Mexicans living in Australia; in 2011, that number had reached 3,255 (ABS, 2008a, 2011a).

highly skilled individuals (Lozano-Ascencio & Gandini, 2011, 2012). Mexican migrants in Australia conform to this group. They are almost all middle-class migrants who hold university qualifications (or the equivalent), strive for white-collar jobs, and seek to blend into the mainstream of their host society.

My aims are to examine why Mexicans move to Australia; how they are incorporated into their host society in the spheres of family, work, leisure, and social networks; and why some migrants may return to their country of origin, move to another destination, and/or continue to some degree or form to be engaged with their country of origin. My study will also explore the way Mexicans experience, on a human, personal and cultural level, and the act of leaving one place—Mexico—and relocating elsewhere—Australia.

In Australia, a shortage of tertiary-educated workers (particularly since the 1990s) has opened new markets and opportunities for skilled migrants from new originating countries to explore their options in Australia. In this context, the number of middle-class Mexicans arriving in Australia has increased sharply, albeit from a small base.

Despite a great accumulation of theoretical and empirical information on migration, researchers to date have commonly examined migrants in terms of their skills, often ignoring issues of class which have a considerable bearing on any sociological study of Latin Americans, most especially Mexicans. More research needs to be conducted on the complex processes driving the migration of the middle classes. Studies by Scott (2006) and Tzeng (2010), which take a class perspective, are a rare exception in international migration studies. Both argue that the under-researched group of middle-class job-seekers needs attention, however, both focus on intra-European flows. These movements have long-standing historical connections and, moreover, they represent moves between countries with a similar degree of development. The vast majority of Mexicans in Australia can be categorized as belonging to the middle and upper-middle class in their country of origin—not only for the type of jobs they hold, their income level and the tertiary-education levels they mainly have, but also as they have been carefully filtered for skills and English proficiency through the immigration ‘points test.’⁶

Thus, the case of contemporary Mexicans in Australia is unique since only a few decades ago there were virtually no social, economic, political, or cultural connections between these two countries,⁷ and because it represents a flow of a different class, from developing to developed nations. Although there was a low level of Mexican migration to Australia throughout the twentieth century, it has only been since the 1990s, when the effects of globalization became palpable, that the number of migrants became a point of enquiry. This followed the sudden

⁶A points test is applied to skilled migrants in Australia and is administered by the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). The test takes into account various characteristics such as: applicants’ age, skills, English language abilities, specific work experience, occupation demand/job offer, and Australian qualification, among others.

⁷For recent connections between Australia and Latin America, and specific studies of Mexican–Australian connections, see Kath (2016).

devaluation of the Mexican peso in 1994 and the ensuing economic crisis, and the Olympic Games in 2000, a year that Australia commanded worldwide attention (Slade, 1999). Following Slade on Australian images and knowledge within Mexico, 'With the Olympics, the focus on Australia has sharpened' (Slade, 1999: 53). Certainly, the legacy of hosting the Olympic Games takes a variety of forms, including sporting and non-sporting benefits, urban infrastructure, national and international tourism, and the attraction of migrants (Veal, 2012). Media appearance is an opportunity to develop powerful tourism marketing campaigns globally and to improve or change the image of the host city to an attractive destination. Australia certainly made the most out of these opportunities and turned Sydney into a global city (Martín, 2010; Valiente, 2014).

Although Australian literature is rich with studies on immigrants (Baldassar, 2001; Colic-Peisker, 2010; Kim, Ehrich, & Ficorilli, 2010; Migration Institute of Australia, 2011; Richards, 2008), no attention has been paid to Mexican migration. One obvious reason may be that the Mexican population in Australia is still very small. Another less obvious reason is the 'invisibility' of the Mexican population due to its socioeconomic characteristics and cosmopolitan middle-class identity. These individuals have options, termed by Weber as 'life chances,' and they tend to adapt to the circumstances in order to fit in more effectively. In that sense, the identity of these middle-class transnationals is not totally fixed; it is an identity that is less likely to be essentialist but more likely to be performative, and thus susceptible to change (Bhabha, 1994). Given the recent increase of Mexican immigration to Australia, the lack of information on this group represents a serious gap in our knowledge.

The importance of studying Mexicans in Australia is underscored for three reasons. Firstly, it is a new phenomenon about which we have no knowledge, thus it is pioneering. Secondly, this study addresses a very significant gap in the study of middle-class migration. The book aims to provide comprehensive explanations as to what makes the migration of middle classes a distinct phenomenon and the ways in which middle classes respond to immigration. Thirdly, it addresses important and complex questions of identity. The middle-class identity of Mexicans, which has been shaped by the social structures of their home country and their continuous quest for quality of life, makes Australia an attractive place for these Mexicans to settle. Middle-class Mexicans use their professional belonging to give meaning to their identity. Their professional identities are de-territorialized and mobile (Colic-Peisker, 2000). Also, the likelihood that their middle-class identity provides a natural medium for becoming cross-cultural and cosmopolitan gives them the means to associate with a range of different groupings regardless of nationality. Mexicans in Australia seem to develop a cosmopolitan identity—a Western, capitalist, English-speaking version of it—that originated in Mexico but is reinforced and strengthened when migrating to Australia through using their resources of economic, social, and cultural capital. A better understanding of the contemporary experiences of the small but growing Mexican population in Australia over the 1990s and 2000s helps to explain their positioning in the social class hierarchy, both in their country of origin and their destination, by detailing how Mexicans shift

their identity to integrate locally into Australian mainstream society and adhere globally to the identity of ‘citizens of the world.’

The book draws upon mixed-method research, combining quantitative (survey-based) methods and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) methods. The research was divided into two phases approached integratively, wherein the findings of the first phase (survey) influenced the design aspects of the second phase. First, an online nationwide quantitative survey was designed and administered to gather background demographic data about respondents and their general migration experiences. Surveys were distributed in 2010 through the Mexican Embassy and various Mexican community associations in Australia. Phase 1 survey respondents could volunteer for phase 2, which was semi-structured interviewing. The scope of the study and survey was limited to adults either born or raised in Mexico who were residing in Australia at the time of data collection.⁸ The survey sample included 282 migrants, which accounted for nearly 20% of all adult Mexican residents in Australia.⁹

The second stage of data collection involved 30 semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews. The technique of recruiting interviewees at the end of the online survey proved very effective as, out of 282 survey respondents, 195 volunteered to participate in the semi-structured interviews section of the study, leaving their name and details to be contacted. In order to maximize representation of a range of perspectives on the experience of Mexican migrants in Australia, a maximum variation sampling strategy was used to select interviewees (Fossey et al., 2002). This strategy involved interviewing Mexicans over time and in different situations (e.g., variety of lengths of stay in Australia, various marital statuses, with and without children, variety of place of residence, etc.).¹⁰ The purpose of interviewing was mainly to fill in the gaps on those topics that had not been fully explored in the survey phase of the research. NVivo software was used for coding data in order to identify patterns in the responses from interviews.¹¹

The book has the following structure. Chapter 1 lays the ground for the book by providing a brief contextual explanation for Mexico’s conditions for emigration and

⁸Full-time students with intentions of returning to Mexico and no strong social connections to Mexican networks in Australia were excluded given the transient and purpose-specific nature of their residency in Australia.

⁹Data was imported into SPSS for analysis and its normality was verified. Also, reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, and Pearson chi-square tests were calculated as part of the data analysis.

¹⁰With regard to year of arrival, the earliest arrived in 1975 and the latest in 2010. Four interviewees arrived in the 1990s, and the remaining 25 arrived throughout the 2000s. The age of participants at the time of the interviews ranged from 24 to 57 years of age, and the average age was 35. Interviews were conducted during 2010 and 2011 in Melbourne, Canberra, Geelong, Sydney, and regional NSW following a general interview guide that drew topics directly from the survey questionnaire.

¹¹Informed consent was obtained to record interviews and transcribes them for analysis. All names of interviewees have been coded. Ethics approval was granted by the University of New South Wales’s human ethics research committee to carry out the data collection for this study.

then by discussing who are the middle class, why they migrate—including a review of traditional migration theories—and how the current globalization process plays a role in shaping this type of mobility. Because research has mainly concentrated on the economic aspects of migration, the majority of the populations which have been studied belong to societal hierarchy's lower-end. However, this book's contribution is to the field of middle class and professional migration, an area which has been underexplored.

Chapter 2 is the first of two chapters on the reasons Mexicans in Australia choose to migrate and their reasons for choosing Australia. Given that a central focus of the book is a better understanding of why Mexicans move to Australia, findings are spread across Chaps. 2 and 3. Chapter 2 specifically looks at respondents' reasons for migration. I explore in detail the four most important reasons given by respondents for choosing to migrate: quality of life, security, adventure, and joining a partner. The desire for a better quality of life emerged clearly as the key reason for migrating and for choosing Australia. In this chapter, (and in the remainder of the book) what is emphasized is that many of the reasons for emigrating are primarily associated with a middle-class identity that affords migrants the sufficient agency and capital not only to migrate, but also to choose a destination far from home, with few previous contacts and knowledge (migrant networks) in order to migrate independently. If the reader is interested in the demographic profile of the research, Appendix 1 contains all relevant demographical information of Mexicans in Australia, with information gathered through the online survey.¹²

Chapter 2 specifically focuses on the migration intentions of respondents as it was identified that a significant proportion of Mexicans in Australia came with no initial intention of settling permanently. The chapter is structured following respondents' original migration intentions: permanent, temporary with an open mind, temporary with a view to return, or temporary but hoping to settle. Professional migrants' intentions of settlement are explored in this chapter. It is shown that the majority of these migrants initially intended to settle temporarily in their destination when they made the decision to migrate and only a minority had clear intentions of settling permanently. What is suggested is that their middle-class location allows them to be flexible with regard to important life-changing decisions such as migration.

In Chap. 4 the employment, income, and the class location of professionals in Australia who migrated from Mexico are explored. First, the chapter presents a profile of respondents' occupational structure and income. It is shown that overall, and particularly in terms of employment, Mexicans in Australia are a successful group compared to similar Latin American migrants in Australia. Of course, not all respondents were doing well and many had struggled initially. Three areas in which respondents and interviewees found difficulties in the area of work are also

¹²Given that there are no prior studies into Mexicans in Australia and that the information provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on this migrant group is very limited, this section aims to provide the missing information by presenting a demographic profile of this grouping.

identified, namely needing Australian experience to find their first job in Australia, not getting their skills recognized and the barriers associated with not having English as their mother tongue. The study accords with a growing body of research which has found that the main barriers to employment for skilled migrants are lack of local work experience, skill and qualification recognition, and language proficiency.

The social and cultural life of Mexican migrants in Australia is the central concern of Chap. 5. This chapter is divided into three main subsections: identity; gender roles; and leisure and friendship. Perceptions of national identity among Mexican migrants are discussed. Mexican visibility in Australia is firstly explored, followed by a discussion of various forms and issues associated with cultural representations, such as events and traditions, food, and language. This chapter will demonstrate that, for many of these migrants, their professional and middle-class identity means that they are able to ‘fit in’ and have ‘something to offer.’ The second subsection of Chap. 5 examines gender roles of professional migrants. The third and last subsection of this chapter examines the patterns of leisure and friendship among professional migrants. Most of those interviewed perceived friendships and spending time with their friends as an important part of their leisure. This trait seems to be particular to Mexicans and perhaps different from other types of migrant, particularly those from Anglo and Germanic backgrounds. It is particularly noteworthy that a significant number of respondents believed that socializing with people from various backgrounds was integral to considering their migration experience successful.

The last chapter of this book, entitled ‘What will the future bring?’, discusses the current status of migration policies and conditions in in-migration countries and contrasts those conditions against out-migration countries. The chapter makes some suggestions as to what the future for professional migrants will look like.

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Mobility Patterns and Experiences of the Middle Classes
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