BOOK REVIEWS

So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico: Middle Eastern Immigrants in Modern Mexico *by Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp*
(2007) University of Texas Press, Austin, TX,USA, 272 pp.

Contemporary Mexico is, for most, the home to the majority of migrants (and mostly undocumented migrants) living in the US. Those migrants are often portrayed as young, poor Mestizo (Spanish speaking, non-indigenous) men seeking wage work and sharing an unproblematic history of movement that is rooted in the bracero program and Mexico's economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. But this image of Mexico and the Mexican migrant fails to capture the vibrant complexity of contemporary Mexican society and the multifaceted history of Mexican migration. In fact, throughout its history, Mexico has not only produced migrants, but the nation has also attracted immigrants and not only those from the Iberian Peninsula. Thus, filling an important gap in our understanding of Mexican migration and identity is Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp's new history of Middle Eastern migration to Mexico, "So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico" published in 2007 by the University of Texas Press.

Alfaro-Velcamp's motivation is personal, to understand her own family's movement from Lebanon to Mexico and finally to the US. Nevertheless, the results are far from one family's story. The author uses resources from Mexico and the US, from governmental programs, private libraries, universities in Mexico and the US as well as all important family stories, and creates a highly readable narrative that explores the rapid growth of Mexico's Middle Eastern community; from the turcos who arrived during the Porfiriato (1880-1910) through the Mexican Revolution, Mexico's growth and development as a nation (post revolution through the 1970s) to the economic crisis of the 1980s and the contemporary period. More than a story of immigration and settlement, the author also investigates how Middle Eastern immigrants become Mexican.

Chapters one and two set the stage for the book. In chapter one, the author explores the complicated meaning of Mexicanidad for Middle Eastern immigrants. She shows how Middle Eastern immigrants adopt, integrate and redefine what it means to be Mexican. Alfaro-Velcamp also points out that it is critical to understand the region of origin of the immigrant (whether Lebanon

or Syria for example) the economic status of the mover (is the immigrant an elite or member of the working class) and destination and regionalism in Mexico itself that often colors outcomes. Chapter two is a broader introduction to the movement of Middle Eastern immigrants to Mexico as well as the meaning of their movements in the contemporary discussion of transnational space. Critical in this chapter is the discussion of health and Mexican as well as US regulations on tuberculosis and trachoma. Many Middle Eastern immigrants who viewed Mexico as a stepping stone to entrance into the US found that due to US health codes (not to mention Mexican sanitary codes) entry was impossible.

The next six chapters (3-6) explore specific periods of movement and begin with the arrival of turcos (any Middle Easterner) during the Porfiriato (1880-1910). Alfaro-Velcamp notes that Middle Eastern migrants were largely welcomed by Mexico and the Mexican government and did not encounter the prejudices that often greeted Chinese and other foreigners. This may be in part because the majority of these immigrants were, or at least stated they were, Catholic. Nevertheless, the question of why and how Middle Eastern immigrants integrated into Mexico (ethnically and in terms of their religions) is a critical theme throughout the book. In this chapter on early sojourners the author focuses largely on the Middle Eastern community in the states of Coahuila and Durango throughout this book (a city she calls La Laguna), she also notes the importance of other points of destination (Ciudad Juárez and Nuevo Laredo in the north and Progreso in the south). Of real interest is her discussion of the ways in which turcos moved into business, settled throughout the country and integrated through marriage.

These themes are repeated and our understanding of Middle Eastern immigration grows as the author moves through the Mexican Revolution (chapter 4), post-revolutionary Mexico (chapter 5) and contemporary history (chapter 6). Alfaro-Velcamp notes that discrimination against Middle Eastern immigrants rose during Mexico's post-revolutionary history. In parallel, there was an interesting increase in what, for lack of a better term, is putative nativism. Middle Eastern immigrants identified with Middle Eastern countries in ways that had not occurred in the past. Alfaro-Velcamp points out that in the 1930s and beyond most immigrants (whether it was true or not) described themselves as Syrian or Lebanese born Catholics (and this practice was likely linked to the Maronite traditions of Lebanon and a pro-European identity). This

accomplished several goals, not the least of which was allowing non-Catholics freer movement as they integrated into Mexican society and as the author points out a way at the same time to distance themselves from Mexico's working class. The success of Middle Eastern immigrants to Mexico is clear in the accomplishments and achievements of the children and grandchildren of early immigrants in business and politics within Mexico (see chapter 6). Alfaro-Velcamp notes the history of these successes, including roles in government (such as the governor of several states) and business (such as Carlos Slim Helú) but also the difficulties that Middle Easterners and their children (and grandchildren) encountered as they integrate to Mexico.

Building a Mexican identity was not and is not easy for the descendants of Mexico's Middle Eastern immigrants. And the author ends this interesting study by making the point that scholars too often ignore the diversity (both ethnic and cultural) that is at the heart of Mexico. It is not simply a Mestizo state mixing Spanish and indigenous traditions, rather as Alfaro-Velcamp shows, Mexico can only be understood as multiethnic. The author's point isn't to use this diversity as an excuse; rather, her goal is to ask us as readers to rethink just what it means to be Mexican in the contemporary world. Having asked that question, she moves on to several others that suggest we must challenge the very integration of Mexico and the US and rethink what immigration means in the contemporary world and for those who come across the US border.

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Global regionalisation, Core Peripheral Trends *by Hermanus S. Geyer (eds.), (2006) Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, 193 pp.*

The book has a strong economic-demographic focus on the recent developments in the global core and periphery regions. It has been contributed by 22 experts mainly in the fields of economics, urban planning, migration and geography presented in three sections. First section explains and discusses the trends in globalisation. In the second part, the global core regions are examined. Thirdly, the global periphery is discussed. The authors have quite a task to fulfil the numerous objectives set for the book. In general these

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endeavours are well achieved. However, the level and depth of analysis in different chapters vary somewhat. Also the economic aspects of globalisation are slightly emphasised over the demographic elements.

In the opening chapter Geyer analyses the changing global economic landscape. He explains the history of globalisation and changes in the global economy and the blurring of national boundaries. Also the link between economic developments, migration and social transformations are established in Geyer's analysis on globalisation. Moreover, he discusses the globalisation and the urban hierarchy and block formation.

Next three chapters of the book are dedicated to the analysis of the world's core regions. In the first of these chapters, North America is discussed. It is stated that North America is a region of core-periphery extremes. Seven Geography and planning experts H.W. Richardson, L.S. Bourne, P. Gordon, C.J. Henrie, D. Plane, J. Simmons and B. Lee elaborated the issue. The authors examine both economical trends and demographic variations in order to build a coherent picture of the core-periphery relationship of the area. The pros and cons of agglomeration and dispersion are discussed in relation to core-periphery relationships. Also the development and transformation of the core-periphery model are explained in detail. Migration is also dealt with within this framework.

The third chapter is about enlarged Europe as examined by E. Heikkilä, P. Nijkamp, I. Traistaru and S. Yousfi. The main economic and demographic trends in Europe are presented with an emphasis on the latter. Special attention is paid to the European Union (EU) enlargement. After main demographic trends and changes are analysed, agglomeration and economic performance patterns are examined. Both emigration and immigration in Europe are discussed. Comparison at geographical levels is an asset in this chapter, as for the most of the contributions in the volume.

The last chapter on the core regions is written by C.H.C. Bae and K.M. Chan. They explain the latest changes and developments in the extended Pacific Rim. The authors start their research by highlighting the fact that globalisation's enormous impact on Pacific Rim. They also formulate Pacific Rim as a flexible term with an emphasis on South Korea, China and Japan in their analysis. Several other Asian countries are also briefly discussed. These short country reports are quite basic mainly reflecting on population and economy. The chapter concludes with an in-depth analy-

sis of the region as whole. Remaining four chapters are on the global periphery. In the fifth chapter, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is analysed. B.A. Portnov, R. Shechter and Y. Gradus all come from different disciplines with different academic interests.

The aim of the chapter is to discuss contemporary patterns of economic transformation in the MENA area with an emphasis on internal, regional and international developments.

Drawing comparisons between MENA and Western Europe, the authors group the 20 countries in the region into three categories: significant oil exporters, non- or small oil exporters and states that resist open market economy for political reasons. The effects of globalisation and the meaning of democratisation are also discussed. Finally, Israel in the global world is analysed as a case study.

Sub-Saharan Africa is discussed by H.S. Geyer and I.J. van der Merwe from an economic-oriented perspective. At the beginning of the chapter the fundamental question of why Sub-Saharan Africa is economically lagging behind the rest of the world, is asked. Then they propose several explanations to this question and make a list of changes for an economically successful Sub-Saharan Africa. The history of development strategies and trends in Sub-Saharan Africa is also discussed. The core-periphery framework and the demographic trends are part of the discussion.

The penultimate chapter of the book is looking at the effects of globalisation in Latin America. A.G. Aguilar and B. Graizbord delineate the industrialisation patterns of the region as well as analysing the more recent societal changes and urbanisation and economic developments. The link between the urban concentration and trade is visited along with the metropolitan growth. This comprehensive chapter has also examined migration flows.

The last chapter by O.P. Mathur and D. Mookherjee, specialists in urban economics and geography looks at the 14 states in the southern and central region of Asia which are mainly characterised by the lack of competitive economy, but currently part of the globalisation. The authors have selected India as an example of the region's globalisation process.

However, concentrating too strongly only on India makes the overall chapter on Central Asia rather weak given the vast populations and geography it covers. It begins with spatial policies in India. Then, it moves onto the process of globalisation in India, briefly. Drawing from a survey conducted by the authors, this

chapter concludes with an analysis of Indian cities and city-level policies.

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The Future of International Migration Governance *by Arno Tanner, (2006) East West Books, Helsinki, Finland, 173 pp.*

Tanner proposes a typology based on three attributes of international organisations: type of membership, whether state or non-state, the scope of agenda, and power over members. He thus creates a model of nine types of organisations borrowing names from the animal kingdom. His typology is elaborated in a survey of 21 experts and leading scholars in the field of international migration studies. Identifying possible cooperation areas using the feedback from these experts he draws conclusions on the need for cooperation.

His creative typology identifies *multilateral specialized agency* characterised by a large agenda but with little power and actor diversity and calls it "snake" while another type with maximum diversity is called "whale" and a *global migration regime* is characterized by maximum diversity ad power but narrow agenda is called "bear". Valuable the typology nevertheless the parade of animals from snake to bear through cheetah, lion, dear and so on seems a bit too naturist. In the first two thirds of the book, Tanner goes into details of each typology and elaborates those regarding agenda, diversity and power characteristics which are also supported by examples. In the second part, he briefly introduces the methodology and presents the results of the survey with experts.

Tanner argues that existing organisations should deepen and intensify their work and underlines the need for a common language of international migration on causes and consequences of migration and integration issues. He calls for more cooperation for practical and moral reasons which will reduce economic and political problems and downturn the human rights challenges. His survey indicates that not the illegal migration but emigration and development top the table of priorities for those experts interviewed. He also warns about the incapability of organisations with too large agendas and recommends more focused, specialist and well-defined organisations.

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Tanner's conceptual framework can be enhanced by the inclusion of transnationalism and some of the conflict literature and also by human security/insecurity debates.

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