

A review of contemporary international migration theories with special references to the Nepalese case



*Workshop Migrations,
Porquerolles,
2007 5-7 September*



**Milleux, Sociétés et Cultures en Himalaya
UPR 299**

**Tristan Bruslé
Phd geographer**

Introduction



- Global worldwide migrants 191M (2005) (3% of world population), remittances \$232 billion (2005).
- International migration theory focus mainly on five patterns
 - causes of migrant flows
 - factors that account to their stability and perpetuation
 - labor market insertion patterns
 - adaptation of immigrants in the receiving countries (assimilation/ integration ; ethnic studies or community studies)
 - effects of migration in origin countries by the study of remittances (scarce theories)
- Three different levels of analysis (Faist 1997) : structural (political, economical, cultural : state level), meso (social relationships, networks), individual (values and forms of capital)
- Nowadays: focus on the migrant as an actor.
- Nepal: a growing worldwide manpower exporter. Question: how to use migration theories to explain labor migration from Nepal ?

Section I

International migration theories



An overview



Milieux, Sociétés et Cultures en Himalaya
UPR 299

Tristan Bruslé
Phd geographer



Neo –classical approach

- Push and pull factors (Lewis 1954):
 - Push factors drive people out of their country while pull factors attract them.
- Macro economic factors (*i.e.* differences between labor supply and demand) explain flows of migrants attracted by wage differentials; in the long run, equilibrium is reached.
- Well functioning markets.
- Micro-economic level: rational individuals expect a positive return after having calculated the costs and benefits of migration. The aim is maximisation of expected income.
- Decision made by the individual (not the household)
- Absolute deprivation feeling.

New Economics of Labor Migration



- Stark (1991)
- Micro-level decision model
- Migration decision is made at the household level.
- Relative deprivation feeling.
- The aim: minimizing risks by diversifying sources of income.
- Overall market failures: no crop insurance, no unemployment insurance, no retirement insurance, limited access to capital and credit markets.



World system theories

- Castells (1975)
- Historical causes of international migrations; major role of states; minor role of individuals; macro-economic analysis
- International migrations are the consequences of the disruptions the penetration of capitalism induces in pre-capitalist regions (development of capitalist farmers and mechanization)
- The penetration of market economy in the periphery creates migration towards the centre
- International migrations are encouraged by ties between former colonies and colonisers and by the globalisation of the market economy.



Social capital theory

- Bourdieu (1992)
- The importance of social capital and migrant networks (« sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin » Massey et al. 1993)
- Convertibility of social capital
- Networks as means to reduce the psychological and economical costs of migration; they enables further migrations; declining risks
- Migrant supporting institutions : another form of social capital



Cumulative causation

- Massey et al. (1993): « each act of migration alters the social context within subsequent decisions are made, typically in ways that make additional movement more likely ».
- Expansion of networks enables the self perpetuation of migration and thus changes occur in the region : distribution of land and of income, organisation of farm production
- A culture of migration is being created and it influences individual aspirations and behaviours. Migration as a rite of passage
- In receiving countries, immigrant niches perpetuate due to “social labelling”

Section II

International labor migrations from Nepal



Case study



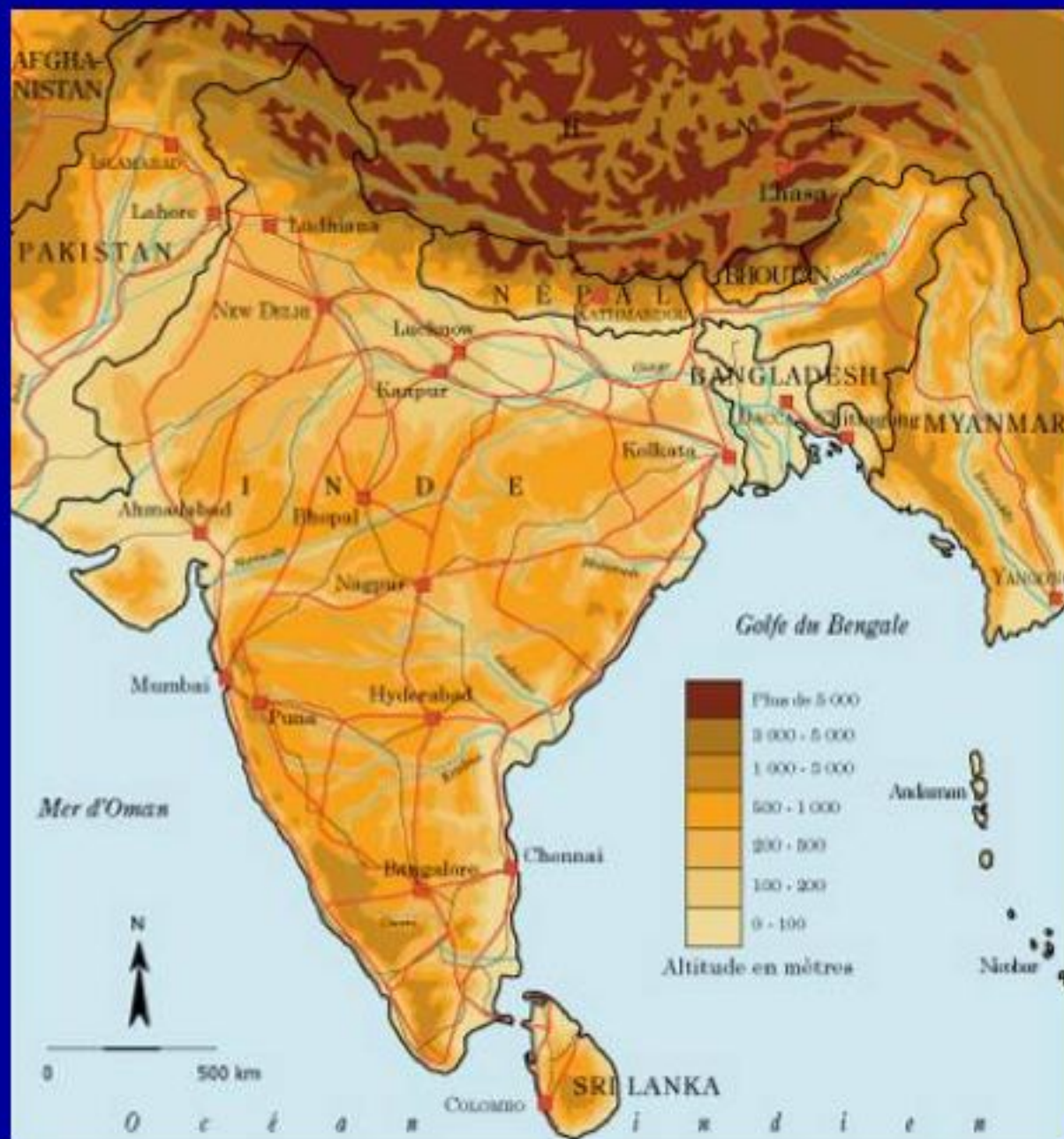
Milleux, Sociétés et Cultures en Himalaya
UPR 299

Tristan Bruslé
Phd geographer



Labor migrations from Nepal

- Nepal: 27 M inhabitants. Official migration rate (2001): 3,3 %
- Temporary and permanent migrations
- Growing number of destination countries : Malaysia to the Gulf countries
- Growing number of would-be migrants (300 000 newcomers on the Nepalese labor market each year) migrants and of remittances
- July 2006 – July 2007 : 204 000 migrants to Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates; + non counted migrants to India
- Stock of migrants unknown: 2 to 5 Millions.
- Official remittances: \$1.6 billion + unofficial = 12 % to 25 % of GDP
- Applying migration theories to the Nepalese case. One theory in particular is not effective at all levels: each theory fits in with a particular level of analysis (Cf. Massey and al. 1993).



Nepal and South Asia



International Level

- Neo-classical analysis: wage differential explain migrations to the Gulf countries but equal access to information does not exist
- World system theories: flows of migrants from the periphery to the (would-be) centers; movements of people between countries at different stage of capitalism
- But international migrations did not start with the spread of capitalism in India: seasonal, temporary, commercial, playing on the complementarity of ecological belts in the Himalayas and the Ganga plain
- Cumulative causation: « social labeling » particularly effective in India where Nepalese are synonymous with watchmen and coolie.
- Social capital theory: the importance of networks to explain migration to India and to Gulf countries: networks bring security in huge Indian towns but are less necessary in small towns.



Regional and village level

- Failures in the local job market (300 000 newcomers yearly)
- Migration culture (Cf. Cumulative causation theory) as ways to explain the dynamics of migration. Nepalese themselves explain migration as a habit, a tradition.
- Tradition of young males escaping their village at the age of 13-15.
- Liberal migratory politics: legal barriers to migration are minimal (Cf. Neo-classical approach).



Household/individual level

- Neo-classical approach: wage differential does not explain migration from Nepal.
- New Economics of Labor Migration
 - Migration decisions are taken at the household level
 - Migration is considered as a resource among others (agriculture, employment in the village)
 - Minimizing risks are the objectives
 - Example: scattering of family members (in Nepal and India)
- Overall: labor migrations to Europe or United States as ways to change one's life (new aspirations, psychological factors)



The coolie as an immigrant labour niche. Uttarakhand, India, 2003



Nepalese construction workers. Doha, Qatar, 2006



Nepalese cooks in Doha, Qatar, 2006

Reading Nepali newspaper
in a Nepali bookshop.



Doha, Qatar, 2006



Bibliography

- Castells M., 1975, Immigrant Workers and Class Stuggle in Advanced Capitalism : The Western European Experience, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1975, pp. 33-66
- Massey D.S., Arango J., Graeme H., Kouaouci A., Pellegrino A., Taylor J.E., 1993, « Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal », Population and development review 19, n°3
- Faist T., 1997, The Crucial Meso-Level, in Hammar T., Brochmann G., Tomas K., Faist T., International Migration, Immobility and Development. Multidisciplinary perspectives, Oxford, New York: Berg
- Stark, 1991, The migration of labor, Oxford: Basil Blackwell