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## Latin American migration to Canada: new linkages in the hemispheric migration and refugee flow system

The flow of migrants from Latin America to Canada, although recent, is now quite large. Approximately 200,000 Latin Americans have moved to Canada since 1966, and the general trend over time has been upward. How did this movement start? What sustains it? What are its future prospects?

Latin Americans have moved to Canada in waves, each wave responding to a crisis in a particular sending country or group of countries<sup>1</sup> and to related international circumstances favouring entry to Canada. The largest waves – from Chile in the 1970s and from El Salvador in the 1980s – were initiated and sustained largely by flight from dictatorship, state terror, civil war, and violence.<sup>2</sup> Other, smaller, flows – such as those from Argentina, Guatemala, and Peru – also arose in periods of internal strife approaching civil war. These violent beginnings to the flows of

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- 1 Fernando Mata, 'Latin American immigration to Canada: some reflections on the statistics,' *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 10(1985), 27-42.
- 2 Tanya Basok, 'Latin American refugee movements and the Canadian response,' and Alan Simmons, 'Trends and underlying forces in Latin American immigration to Canada,' in A.R.M. Ritter, ed, *Prospects for Latin America and the Caribbean in the Year 2000* (Ottawa: Canadian Association of Latin American and Caribbean Studies 1989), at 391-40 and 403-17 respectively.

Latin American migrants to Canada contrast with the more straightforward economic motivation for migration to Canada from the Commonwealth Caribbean (the other major source of Canadian immigrants in the Americas). Chilean and Salvadoran migrants to Canada also stand out as individuals who were fleeing right-wing and military dictatorships, which were backed or encouraged by the United States government, in the context of the suppression of leftist politics. In other cases which involved Cold War issues, Canada followed the lead of the United States and other Western nations in showing an almost exclusive preference for refugees fleeing from communist regimes.<sup>3</sup>

Not all Latin American immigrants to Canada are refugees from violence; many other migrants from the region have moved principally in search of economic opportunity and social mobility. Some of these 'economic' migrants are skilled workers and professionals who may not have been exposed to personal threat or exceptional danger. Yet even economic migrants from Latin America are more likely to come to Canada during periods of generalized political turmoil and violence in their home countries. Violence and problems of security clearly play a role in their decision to move.

The emergence in Canada of sizeable communities of Latin Americans with their own newspapers, radio programmes, and social clubs cannot be explained entirely by the violence and economic conditions which motivated them to emigrate. One must also examine what led them to choose Canada rather than other possible destinations and how Canadian policies affected this choice. Prior to 1970 there was virtually no history of Latin American migration to Canada, and in consequence particular attention needs to be given to the special conditions which sparked the first flows. Once the pioneering flows have been

<sup>3</sup> Reginald Whitaker, *Double Standard: The Secret History of Canadian Immigration* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys 1987); Tanya Basok and Alan Simmons, 'A review of the politics of Canadian refugee selection,' in V. Robinson, ed, *The International Refugee Crisis: British and Canadian Responses* (London: Macmillan 1993), chap 9.

explained, one can then ask whether new migrants have been motivated to move to Canada largely by their links to earlier migrants, and whether the chain of migration thus established will continue.

The analysis of the migration links between Latin America and Canada must be seen and understood as part of a hemispheric migration system. Within this system, migrant and refugee flows from Latin America to Canada depend on four main factors: (1) social, economic, and political conditions in the sending countries; (2) social, economic, and political conditions in the various potential destination countries in the system, including Canada; (3) Canada's immigration and refugee policies; and (4) migrant social and kin networks.<sup>4</sup> Causality within the system is complex and reciprocal. For example, changes which were made in Canadian policies in the 1960s and 1970s clearly opened the door to Latin American refugees and migrants. Yet Canadian public awareness of violence and repression in countries (such as Chile in 1973-4 just after the Pinochet coup) also had a role in shaping these very policies, particularly the new policies on refugees implemented in 1978. Similarly, the plight of Salvadorean refugee claimants in the 1980s had an impact on the internal refugee determination procedures adopted by Canada over this decade. The inter-American system and its migration dynamic are both evolving in ways which suggest continuing flows of Latin Americans to Canada over the proximate future at least.

#### THE INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM

The timing of Latin American migration to Canada, the major source countries of this flow, and the characteristics of the migrants themselves were influenced by the historical coincidence of several factors. These factors may be viewed as loosely

<sup>4</sup> This is an abbreviated view of the inter-American migration system. A more complete view would examine the relationship between conditions in Latin America (economic and political crisis) and conditions in North America (relative affluence and political stability), giving explicit attention to the net flow of profits from the South to the North.

articulated – that is, partly related to one another – within the hemispheric system. There are four major elements.

- 1 Widespread economic and social-political crisis throughout Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>5</sup> This generalized crisis clearly sets the context for rising emigration from the region. Over these two decades, significant economic downturn, periodic dictatorship and political repression, and spreading violence in the region stimulated large numbers of Latin Americans to seek safety and economic security elsewhere, and particularly in the United States. Yet many Latin American nations had previously undergone periods of economic turmoil and political violence which had not provoked such movement to the United States. In addition, Latin American migrants from some countries, particularly Mexico but also elsewhere, had been arriving in the United States for many years, even during periods of relative stability and economic growth in the region. Much of the emigration from 1970 to 1990 must then be explained by changes in the overall system which operated along with the turmoil and violence in migrants' countries of origin. Of particular importance was the spread of diverse institutional, cultural, social, and economic connections linking Latin America more fully to the United States and (to a much lesser extent) to Canada.
- 2 Canadian refugee and immigration policies. Changes in Canadian immigration and refugee policies were of fundamental importance in connecting Canada more fully to this larger system. Profound policy changes after the mid-1960s led to major changes in the countries of origin of migrants and refugees. Initial changes opened the door to Third World *immigrants*; later changes opened the door to Third World *refugees*.
- 3 Some Latin American migrants in the 1970s and 1980s – specifically, refugees fleeing American-backed military governments in the region – knew they would not be officially

<sup>5</sup> *Economic and Social Progress in Latin America* (Washington: Inter-American Development Bank 1988).

welcome in the United States. Consequently, they sought refuge in secondary destinations, such as Canada, Europe, and even Australia, where individuals and lobby groups sympathetic to their case welcomed them. The favoured alternative destinations were those which combined a safe haven and economic opportunity.

- 4 Information on Canada as a possible destination flowed back to Latin America from those who originally came and led to the movement of relatives and other migrants, including those from other Latin American countries who had not yet established a migration path to Canada. Migrant networks in the inter-American system as elsewhere are facilitated by the greater ease and declining costs of travel and telecommunications.

These circumstances may all be interpreted as consistent with a more general model of the recent functioning of a regional social, economic, and political system. The United States, as the dominant and wealthiest actor, has established varied and expanding cultural, economic, and political links to other nations in the system. The system is much like a wheel, with the United States at the hub and all other nations connected to it via spokes. The system has served to benefit the hub country, but countries at the ends of the spokes have also profited, although in a more variable pattern. Canada, as a closely aligned intermediate power, gains enormous advantages from its very close proximity and strong ties to the United States. Correspondingly, Canada and the nations in Latin America have not in general felt the need to establish many links with one another, even though there is a long history of Canadian trade with and investment in certain Latin American countries.<sup>6</sup> The other nations in the system are linked in diverse but less privileged ways to the United States, and their economic and political conditions reflect these circumstances.

<sup>6</sup> J.C.M. Ogelsby, *Gringos from the Far North: Essays on the History of Canadian-Latin American Relations 1866-1968* (Toronto: Macmillan 1976).

Canada's privileged position has created a curious mix of dependency on the United States and limited but important policy independence from it. Understanding this mix is crucial to understanding Canadian immigration policies and trends. In the geopolitical arena, Canada tends to follow major American policies fairly closely. At the same time, rising levels of income and different historical traditions have led Canada (under both Liberal and Conservative governments) to develop distinctive social policies in areas such as immigration and asylum. On a per capita basis, Canada accepts far more immigrants than the United States, and refugees in recent years have formed a higher proportion of the inflow of international migrants to Canada. Canada has also shown a greater openness to refugees from right-wing dictatorships and repression. These distinctive features of Canada's policy are essential in explaining the country's emerging role in the hemispheric migration system.

As noted earlier, Latin Americans have reacted to economic crisis and political turmoil and violence at home by increasingly seeking jobs and security in the United States. They have also moved to Canada, as a 'next best' North American destination, particularly if access to the United States has been perceived to be difficult or insecure, as has been the case for refugees fleeing dictatorships and military regimes backed or viewed favourably by the United States. Other Latin American migration flows to Canada – such as those involving family reunification and the movement of skilled professionals from countries where they face poor economic prospects – are important as well, but they also reflect broader dynamics in the hemispheric system, including limited access to the United States and 'spillover' opportunities in Canada.

Taking into account all these factors, it seems fair to say that the migration stream from Latin America to Canada arose on the foundation of a combination of special circumstances: violence in sending countries; variable barriers to migrant entry to the United States; an independent Canadian immigration and refugee policy; and relatively high income and employment

opportunities in Canada. This is, therefore, a system subject to change when circumstances shift, as they seem to be doing at the present time. Let us look more closely at these forces influencing migration flows in the inter-American system and on the implications of current trends for Canada.

### *Crisis and exodus*

The crisis of the late 1970s and the 1980s in Latin America was a mixture of severe economic downturn and associated political and social turmoil. In some countries the crisis was associated with authoritarian government, armed conflict, or insurgency. While these dimensions of the crisis were independent of one another, they often coincided in specific countries and years. With the economic, political, and social aspects of crisis so intertwined, it is often difficult to assess which dimension is most responsible for the rising migrant exodus from the region. Two hypotheses seem generally congruent with the evidence.

First, economic crisis has provided a general background for population exodus. Certain groups, particularly professionals and skilled workers, have moved internationally largely for economic reasons. The economic factor by itself, however, accounts for very little Latin American migration to Canada (although it undoubtedly accounts for a good deal of Latin American migration to the United States). Second, large flows of Latin American workers and peasants to Canada have emerged primarily from countries where civil war and repression are taking a major toll on life and freedom. In such cases, the relative advantages of Canada with regard to jobs, income, and social services become important supporting features in directing the initial migration flow to Canada, and in sustaining a later trailing flow of relatives and other migrants. However, the most decisive attraction of Canada for them was its independent policy with respect to refugees: those fleeing right-wing dictatorships in Chile, El Salvador, and other Latin American countries found a relatively welcoming environment in Canada.

The emerging migration bridge from Latin America to Canada can best be understood from the perspective of the major international population movements in the Americas, and of how Canada, which was not a part of this system before 1965, has recently become an increasingly important player in it. Three points define some major features of international population flows in the Americas. Stated briefly, these are: (1) the United States is by far the most important migrant destination; (2) the largest flows in the hemisphere, such as the movement of Mexicans to the United States and the movement of Colombians to Venezuela, are between contiguous nations; and (3) the migration bridge from Latin America to Canada has emerged in exceptional circumstances where local violence and international politics combined to make Canada an important secondary destination in the system.

Considering all Latin American sources, the United States is by far the most important single destination for inter-American migrants. For those in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico, it is virtually the sole destination. Data from censuses taken around 1980 indicate, for example, that more than 90 per cent of all people who had emigrated from these three countries to another country in the hemisphere were living in the United States (table 1). For many other countries, the percentage of its emigrants in the United States reached 80 per cent or more. In the few cases where the United States was not the main destination, it was the second most important destination. Corresponding figures from the 1990 round of censuses are not yet available but will likely show a similar pattern, with one important shift: large numbers of migrants fleeing violence in Central America have gone to neighbouring countries in the region in the 1980s, even though the United States remains the major destination (table 2). In sum, while the reasons for leaving home vary from one country to another, the preferred destination is the same: generally, those who can gain admission to the United States seek to do so.



**Table 1 Emigrants from Latin American countries registered in other countries in the Americas, circa 1980**

Country of origin	Emigrants in other countries (thousands)	Principal destination	Secondary destination
Mexico	2,218	USA (98%)	—
Colombia	673	Ven (75%)	USA (21%)
Chile	304	Arg (68%)	USA (12%)
Paraguay	283	Arg (98%)	Braz (6%)
Brazil	214	Para (46%)	Arg (19%)
Argentina	210	USA (33%)	Para (21%)
Bolivia	156	Arg (74%)	USA (9%)
Uruguay	155	Arg (70%)	Braz (13%)
El Salvador	123	USA (76%)	Guat (14%)
Ecuador	114	USA (75%)	Ven (19%)
Peru	100	USA (55%)	Ven (21%)
Nicaragua	98	C.R. (47%)	—
Panama	68	USA (88%)	C.R. (7%)
Guatemala	68	USA (96%)	—
Honduras	47	USA (82%)	Guat (11%)
Venezuela	39	USA (85%)	Arg (4%)
Costa Rica	36	USA (81%)	Pan (9%)

SOURCE: CELADE, 'Investigación de la migración internacional en Latinoamérica,' *Boletín Demográfico* 19, no 37 adjusted with data from the 1981 census of Canada (Statistics Canada, 1981 Census of Canada, place of birth, citizenship, period of immigration, Ottawa 1984).

Among the major flows between contiguous nations, that from Mexico to the United States is by far the largest international movement of people in the Americas. During the 1970s and 1980s Mexicans continued to move to the United States in large numbers. A rise in the number of undocumented Mexican migrants apprehended in the United States was reported for the period immediately after a major currency devaluation and the clear onset of economic crisis in Mexico in 1982.<sup>7</sup> Yet it is not clear whether total emigration from Mexico to the United States over the period 1980-90 (a time of prolonged and deep economic crisis in Mexico) was any greater than one would expect based

<sup>7</sup> Frank Bean, Georges Vernez, and Charles B. Keely, *Opening and Closing the Doors: Evaluating Immigration Reform and Control* (Santa Monica CA and Washington: RAND and the Urban Institute 1989).

**Table 2 Refugees and displaced persons from and in Central America, circa 1987**

Country of residence	Nationality			Totals
	Salvadorean	Guatemalan	Nicaraguan	
<i>Refugees</i>				
United States	500,000 to 850,000	100,000 to 200,000	40,000 to 80,000	640,000 to 1,130,000
Mexico	120,000 to 250,000	45,000 to 150,000	N/A	165,000 to 400,000
Canada	22,283	7,326	7,081	36,690
Central America	51,700	7,700	67,700 to 163,700	127,100 to 223,100
<i>Total refugees</i>	693,983 to 1,173,983	160,026 to 365,026	114,781 to 250,781	968,790 to 1,789,790
<i>Displaced persons</i>	500,000	100,000 to 250,000	250,000	850,000 to 1,000,000

SOURCE: Estimates for Central American refugees in the United States, Mexico, and neighbouring countries in their own region from Liisa North and CAPA, eds, *Between War and Peace in Central America* (Toronto: Between the Lines 1990), table VII. Estimates for Central American refugees in Canada from special tabulations of immigrants arriving in the Refugee Class and Refugee Claimants provided by Employment and Immigration Canada.

NOTE: Refugees are defined as emigrants (living abroad) who have claimed or would wish to claim political asylum. Displaced persons are those who have fled their home due to war or violence, but who remain in their own countries.

on the historical trend line.<sup>8</sup> It may be that Mexican migration to the United States functions primarily on the basis of long-term historical differences in employment opportunity combined with established social networks which link Mexican workers to friends, relatives, and jobs in the United States. Short-term downturns in the Mexican economy, even when they are as dramatic as that in the period after 1982, may have some impact,

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the data on legal migrants presented by Percy Kraly and Warren: Ellen Percy Kraly and Robert Warren, 'Demographic dimensions of southern migration to and from the United States since the 1970s,' in *Proceedings of the Conference on the Peopling of the Americas* (Liege, Belgium: International Union for the Scientific Study of Population 1992), vol 2, chap 17.

but it is largely an acceleration of the growth in an already large flow.

The second largest international population movement in the Americas is the flow from Colombia to Venezuela. Economic crisis in the 1970s played an important role in stimulating this movement. Most migrants were agricultural workers who left regions of rural unemployment in eastern Colombia to go to more abundant and better paid agricultural jobs in Venezuela, following a long established pattern.<sup>9</sup> The movement was undoubtedly accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s by widespread economic crisis in Colombia, particularly the combination of falling agricultural employment and a decline in construction and other alternative urban employment for surplus rural workers. Rising armed conflict between the army and both insurgents and illicit drug traders in the context of widespread terrorism instigated by the latter groups seems to have had little impact on this international movement. In fact, internal population movements in Colombia are often paradoxically directed towards zones of conflict and violence because they are also areas of lucrative drug trade and spin-off commerce.<sup>10</sup>

Beginning in the mid-1970s and continuing into the early 1980s there was a very large flow of Uruguayans into Argentina and Brazil. Indeed, following the onset of rising unemployment, inflation, falling incomes, and a military takeover of the state in 1973, Uruguayans left in such large numbers that the population of the country actually shrank and the age structure shifted dramatically because most of those who left were young workers.<sup>11</sup>

9 Gabriel Murillo, *Migrant Workers in the Americas: A Comparative Study of Migration between Colombia and Venezuela and between Mexico and the United States*, monograph 13 (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California at San Diego, 1984); Adela Pellegrino, *Migración internacional de Latinoamericanos en Las Américas* (Santiago, Chile: Centro Latinoamericano de Demografía, circa 1987), 97-9).

10 Gabriel Murillo and Marta Herrera, *Violence and Migration in Colombia*, Policy Brief 5 (Washington: Hemispheric Migration Project, Center for Immigration Policy and Refugee Assistance, Georgetown University, 1991).

11 Juan Carlos Fortuna, Nelly Niedworok, and Adela Pellegrino, *Emigración de Uruguayos, Colonias en el Exterior y Perspectivas de Retorno*, Documento de

This movement has been ascribed primarily to the onset of a dramatic economic crisis at home in the context of substantially greater economic opportunity across the border in Argentina and Brazil, two countries with whom Uruguay had close migratory and commercial linkages. Uruguay had achieved levels of social development and the benefits of an advanced welfare state, and the system began to unravel with falling exports and economic stagnation. The rise of a military government was a key factor in the timing. The jailing of large numbers of dissidents and the repression of political activities led directly to significant out-movement of dissidents and others. Yet, the majority of emigrants were not members of any particular repressed political movement, but rather people who had lost employment and income.

Large-scale migrations between other contiguous countries, such as those between Cuba and the United States, Paraguay and Argentina, and Brazil and Paraguay, have also been documented. All follow historically established migration and commercial linkages. These may all be contrasted with the new bridges between Latin America and Canada. Previously there were no migration links and only weak commercial ties between Latin America and Canada. The migration linkages when they emerged seemed to have little to do with pre-existing or developing commercial ties. Rather they were formed by flows of refugees fleeing violence and, to a lesser degree, by economic migrants fleeing declining employment prospects. This movement took place in a context in which opportunities to go to the United States were restricted in some way while opportunities to go to Canada were expanding. Migration bridges formed to Canada from several Latin American countries, particularly Chile, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Yet such a bridge to Canada did not emerge so clearly from Guatemala. These migrant linkages are instructive.

The exodus from *Chile* – to the United States, Europe, Canada, and many other countries (Venezuela, Australia) – followed the Pinochet coup in 1973 and was composed primarily of migrants who were victims of the political change. While many Chilean self-exiles and refugees went to the United States, others could not do so because individuals who had supported a Marxist government were not welcome and still others were reluctant to go to there because of American support for the coup. It was at this point, in 1974-5, that humanitarian groups in Canada brought pressure to bear that induced shifts in Canadian policy which led many Chileans to migrate to Canada (table 3).

A large flight of refugees from *El Salvador* – to neighbouring countries but also to the United States and to Canada – arose immediately after a surge of repression, assassinations, and the outbreak of civil war in 1979. Those who left the country included individuals targeted by death squads, yet most were simply passive victims of the conflict and violence in their communities. Regardless of their reasons for leaving, the migrants were not generally viewed by the United States as bona fide refugees because they were fleeing a country whose government was supported by the United States government.<sup>12</sup> The implementation (in 1978) of Canada's new immigration legislation (passed in 1976) opened the way for Salvadorean refugees. Starting from a trickle of only 108 individuals in 1979, the flow to Canada had become a sizeable stream of 2,567 migrants by 1983. The numbers continued to rise annually through the 1980s to reach 4,290 migrants in 1990 (table 5). In total, some 26,000 Salvadoreans moved to Canada between January 1973 and December 1990, slightly more than the number of Chileans migrating to Canada between 1973 and 1990 (table 4).

A near civil war has been under way in *Guatemala* for more than a decade. Guatemalans have moved to Canada, but the

<sup>12</sup> T.A. Aleinikoff, 'United States refugee policy: past, present and future,' paper presented at the conference, 'Migration, Human Rights and Economic Integration,' York University, Toronto, November 1992.

**Table 3 Latin American migrant landings and refugee claimant registrations in Canada, by year**

Country of birth	1966-73	1974-80	1981-5	1986-90	Total
<i>Immigrants*</i>					
Argentina	2,990	4,517	1,727	2,614	11,848
Brazil	2,343	1,733	809	2,286	7,171
Chile		14,846	4,203	5,352	24,401
Colombia		4,418	1,424	2,091	7,933
Ecuador		6,168	950	1,688	8,806
El Salvador		1,059	9,122	16,414	26,595
Guatemala		1,115	2,168	4,834	8,117
Mexico	3,048	4,233	2,381	4,656	14,318
Nicaragua		148	735	4,153	5,036
Peru		2,497	1,742	5,706	9,945
Other countries	30,774	5,340	2,269	4,924	43,307
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39,155</b>	<b>46,074</b>	<b>27,530</b>	<b>54,718</b>	<b>167,477</b>
<i>Refugee claimants†</i>					
Argentina			84	2,443	2,527
Brazil			29	2,121	2,150
Chile			372	2,660	3,032
Colombia			22	251	273
Ecuador			19	298	317
El Salvador			897	9,585	10,482
Guatemala			198	3,143	3,341
Mexico			12	676	688
Nicaragua			68	4,933	5,001
Peru			261	901	1,162
Other countries			363	6,509	6,872
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>2,325</b>	<b>33,520</b>	<b>35,845</b>
<b>Immigrants plus claimants</b>	<b>39,155</b>	<b>46,074</b>	<b>29,855</b>	<b>88,238</b>	<b>203,322</b>

SOURCE: Special tabulations provided by Employment and Immigration Canada.

\* Includes refugees officially selected outside Canada. Prior to 1974 the data on landings from many Latin American countries were classified together in a "other Latin American countries" category.

† Refugee claimants are migrants who arrive in Canada as visitors and claim asylum from within the country. These data began to be collected in 1984.

numbers are relatively small compared with those for Chile and El Salvador (table 3). Why? The Guatemalan military, within the context of its repression of civil and political rights and its fight against insurgents, slaughtered thousands of civilians in indigenous communities in the 1970s and 1980s. This violence sparked the flight of thousands of people to neighbouring countries, principally to Mexico.<sup>13</sup> The majority of the refugees were members of indigenous communities, with very strong ties to their ancestral lands, and with cultural and linguistic ties to their home regions. They stayed in southern Mexico, close to Guatemala, because they had every expectation of returning home.

Other migration flows to Canada from Latin America since 1966 reflect in varying degrees the circumstances which led people to leave their homes, and the alternative destinations open to them. Middle-class and élite Nicaraguans who went into exile to fight against the Sandinista government mostly went to the United States, where they were welcomed. Those Nicaraguans who later came to Canada, in contrast, were primarily individuals fleeing violence and the attendant economic collapse of the country brought about by warfare and the American trade embargo. These individuals included people fleeing the Contra war (or in the case of young men, individuals who did not want to be conscripted into the Nicaraguan army for a war in which they did not believe). Smaller flows to Canada from Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru in the 1970s and 1980s may be viewed as a spillover into Canada of larger flows to the United States in periods of turmoil in these countries (table 3).

### *Canadian policies*

The migration bridges from Latin America to Canada cannot be understood without taking into account changes in Canadian policy since the mid-1960s. The initial turning point was in 1965 when the ethnocentric and implicitly racist policies of the

<sup>13</sup> Liisa North and CAPA, eds, *Between War and Peace in Central America: Choices for Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines 1990).

national preference system were dropped, a policy approach which had given high priority to admitting Europeans while virtually excluding Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans. A second related change was the establishment, in 1968, of a points system to select immigrants who best meet 'adaptability criteria' defined largely in terms of their knowledge of French or English, job skills, age, and schooling. Race, religion, and national origin were no longer considerations in selection.<sup>14</sup> These changes opened the door to a massive shift in Canadian immigration patterns: migrants from the Third World soon became the dominant group.<sup>15</sup>

The third policy change was the revised Immigration Act of 1976 (implemented fully in 1978) which introduced, for the first time, the distinct category 'refugee' into the classification of immigrants and clarified Canadian obligations with respect to refugees.<sup>16</sup> Historically, Canada had given little attention to refugees as such.<sup>17</sup> Those fleeing persecution abroad or seeking asylum in Canada were admitted if they were also seen to fit immigration criteria with respect to their work skills and perceived social adaptability. Thus, during the expansion of the West when Canada sought to settle agricultural lands, Doukhobors and Mennonites were admitted not so much because they were seeking asylum from religious persecution but because they were farmers and because they were white, Christian, and European. Conversely, Jews who needed asylum in the late 1930s were excluded regardless of their refugee status primarily because of religious intolerance in Canada<sup>18</sup> and also because immigrants of

14 Freda Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Compared* (2nd ed; Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 1991).

15 Alan Simmons, 'The origin and characteristics of "new wave" Canadian immigrants,' in S.S. Halli, F. Trovato, and L. Driedger, eds, *Ethnic Demography: Canadian Immigrant, Racial and Cultural Variations* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press 1990), 141-60.

16 Basok and Simmons, 'A review of the politics of Canadian refugee selection.'

17 Gerald E. Dirks, *Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism?* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 1977).

18 Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys 1982).



any kind were unwelcome to Canada in the Depression. Hungarian forestry experts and students fleeing the 1956 Soviet invasion were welcomed because Canada wanted skilled workers, because they were Europeans, and because they were fleeing from a country perceived as 'the enemy' in a Cold War context.

Changes in Canadian refugee practices and policies emerged gradually, in a somewhat piecemeal fashion at first. A significant shift took place when Canada began to admit refugees from outside Europe on the basis of criteria which were independent of Cold War politics. This first took place in the case of some 7,000 Ugandans of Asian descent who came to Canada beginning in 1972 after their expulsion by Idi Amin. They were admitted because Britain asked for the assistance of other Commonwealth nations in accommodating this group.<sup>19</sup> That the migrants spoke English, had relatively high levels of schooling, and possessed useful commercial and work skills did not hurt their cause or require any reversal of Canada's historically established policy of favouring such people.

Chilean refugees provided the second major case in which Canada responded to Third World asylum seekers. This case was exceptional in many respects. In contrast to the case of the Ugandan Asians, where Canada essentially responded to external encouragement from a major international partner, the Chileans were accepted largely because of pressure from domestic labour and human rights groups.<sup>20</sup> The Liberal government of the time, following the lead of the United States, had been antagonistic to the socialist government of Salvador Allende, and both Canada's ambassador to Chile and its secretary of state for external affairs were reported to have been pleased by the Pinochet coup. There was therefore little official sympathy for Chileans seeking asylum at the level of the cabinet or senior bureaucrats. Adoption of a policy favourable to Chilean asylum seekers arose months later as evidence emerged of the brutality of the Pinochet dictatorship

<sup>19</sup> Dirks, *Canada's Refugee Policy*; Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration*.

<sup>20</sup> Basok, 'Latin American refugee movements and the Canadian response'; Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration*, 169.

**Table 4 Annual arrivals of Chilean immigrants and refugee claimants to Canada**

Year	Immigrants (including refugees)	Refugee claimants from within Canada	Total
1974	2,104		2,104
1975	3,127		3,127
1976	2,776		2,776
1977	2,249		2,249
1978	2,023		2,023
1979	1,310		1,310
1980	1,257		1,257
1981	1,081		1,081
1982	1,108		1,108
1983	790		790
1984	683	139	822
1985	541	233	774
1986	640	708	1,348
1987	1,461	1,348	2,809
1988	955	181	1,136
1989	1,006	191	1,197
1990	1,290	232	1,522
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24,401</b>	<b>3,032</b>	<b>27,433</b>

SOURCE: Special tabulations provided by Employment and Immigration Canada.

NOTE: Refugees are migrants who arrive in Canada with an official immigration authorization based on their claim for asylum. Refugee claimants arrive in Canada as visitors and then claim asylum. Such claims are subjected to an official review to determine their legitimacy. Data on refugee claimants were not systematically recorded prior to 1984. Arrival dates shown for claimants are in fact the year in which they registered their claim.

and as various concerned groups in Canada put pressure on the government. The total flow of migrants from Chile to Canada was significant in 1974, peaked in 1975, remained large until 1978, then declined gradually until 1985, after which it rose somewhat again (table 4). In the early years, the flow consisted mostly of refugees but in later years many were family class migrants sponsored by those earlier arrivals.

Chilean asylum seekers had not been expelled (as were the

Ugandan Asians), nor were they to be found in refugee camps (as were, later, the Vietnamese). Canada had therefore to establish criteria to identify which of the Chileans who wished to emigrate fell into the category of refugee. The selection was made, as far as can be determined, purely on criteria related to justifiable fear of persecution, with little or no reference to labour force skills. This may have been the first instance in which Canada accepted refugees without any implied or overt economic calculus or any encouragement from a major international ally.

The Chilean experience was followed in 1975 by a special programme to admit Vietnamese refugees. Canada, responding to a call to solidarity among Western nations after the fall of Saigon, offered to take a share of the Vietnamese refugees. As in the case of the Chilean refugees, economic considerations appear to have been irrelevant to the overall decision to admit the Vietnamese. Yet, unlike the Chilean case, the Vietnamese who came to Canada were in the end selected by Canadian officials, using social adaptability criteria (including work skills) from a larger population of refugees living in camps in Thailand or elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Thus, a high proportion of the Vietnamese who were admitted to Canada were young males with better levels of schooling, while those who remained behind were disproportionately female and less well educated.<sup>21</sup>

Following this piecemeal response to refugees from Chile and Vietnam, Canada passed a revised Immigration Act in which for the first time 'refugees' were defined as a separate class of immigrants. Based on the new legislation, Canada was increasingly open to considering the claims of individual refugees on the merits of the specific case. Programmes to select refugees abroad were gradually established in countries such as El Salvador and Guatemala where individuals were under threat.

The early 1980s brought new challenges to Canadian refugee policy. Reflecting a world-wide rise in refugee flows, large numbers of individuals began to arrive in Europe and North America

<sup>21</sup> Bazok and Simmons, 'A review of the politics of Canadian refugee selection.'

from various parts of the world, claiming refugee status. Canadian procedures to determine the merits of the many diverse claims were cumbersome, disputed, and potentially unfair. Uncertainty and lack of processing capacity led to a large backlog of claimants whose cases had not been reviewed. Efforts to reduce that backlog resulted in general amnesties (called 'administrative reviews') for large numbers of undocumented foreign migrants. After much rancorous public and parliamentary debate on how to deal fairly with refugee claimants already in Canada, a new refugee determination system was implemented in January 1989.<sup>22</sup> In the early period of its operation, the new system sought to avoid tragic errors by admitting most claimants.<sup>23</sup>

Salvadoreans were one of a number of refugee groups which became important in the debate leading up to the new procedures for dealing with claimants, largely because they arrived in two streams: one composed of individuals selected abroad by Canadian officials, and the other of individuals who arrived to make an asylum claim from within the country (table 5). The latter flow was spurred in 1986 when the United States enacted a new Immigration Reform and Control Act, which included a provision to sanction employers of undocumented alien workers and strengthened provisions to repatriate 'illegal' migrants. Salvadoreans fleeing war and repression from their own military government which was broadly supported by the United States were not welcome. The policy debate in Canada in the 1980s over refugee claimants was influenced by the Salvadorean case, among others, because this case supported the arguments of those who felt that pushing for tighter controls to ensure that all refugees would be selected abroad was unrealistic and, more importantly, that such procedures created grave risks for those

<sup>22</sup> Alan Simmons and Kieran Keohane, 'Canadian immigration policy: state strategies and the quest for legitimacy,' *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 29(November 1992), 421-52.

<sup>23</sup> Alan Simmons, 'Immigration: pressures on the system,' *Human Rights Forum* (fall 1990), 4-5.

**Table 5 Annual arrivals of Salvadorean immigrants and refugee claimants to Canada**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Immigrants (including refugees)</b>	<b>Refugee claimants from within Canada</b>	<b>Total</b>
1974	238		238
1975	179		179
1976	192		192
1977	127		127
1978	105		105
1979	108		108
1980	110		110
1981	292		292
1982	891		891
1983	2,567		2,567
1984	2,638	478	3,116
1985	2,734	419	3,153
1986	3,060	142	3,202
1987	3,493	4,510	8,003
1988	2,714	1,617	4,331
1989	2,857	1,136	3,993
1990	4,290	2,180	6,470
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>26,595</b>	<b>10,482</b>	<b>37,077</b>

**SOURCE:** Special tabulations provided by Employment and Immigration Canada.

**NOTE:** Refugees are migrants who arrive in Canada with an official immigration authorization based on their claim for asylum. Refugee claimants arrive in Canada as visitors and then claim asylum. Such claims are subjected to an official review to determine their legitimacy. Data on refugee claimants were not systematically recorded prior to 1984. Arrival dates shown for claimants are in fact the year in which they registered their claim.

legitimately fleeing violence and persecution in cases where other countries were not sympathetic to their plight.

An important issue in the refugee claimant debate was the evidence that Canada was faced with 'bogus claims' – that is, requests for asylum from visitors who claimed persecution on the basis of spurious if not false considerations. The most celebrated case was perhaps that of Portuguese visitors requesting asylum based on the argument that Portugal persecuted Jehovah's Wit-

nesses. Several planeloads of Brazilian asylum seekers were also detained and sent home.

Migrants to Canada from Peru are not officially recognized by Canadian authorities as refugees, but they are surely 'refugee-like,' given the rising violence and insecurity in their home country which contributes to the desire of Peruvians to emigrate. Not surprisingly, many of those coming from Peru see themselves as refugees, but under Canadian policy these migrants are generally admitted only if they meet the criteria for becoming an independent (economic) migrant or if they have close relatives in Canada who can sponsor them under the family reunification provisions of immigration law. Even under these restrictions, however, the number of Peruvians moving to Canada since the mid-1980s has been rising (table 3).

#### *Alternative destinations*

As noted above, Canada is at best a tertiary destination for Latin American emigrants, even among those who have come in large numbers. Latin Americans have come to Canada in substantial numbers when access to the United States, the preferred place of destination, has been difficult or problematic. Thus, more Chilean emigrants went to the United States after the Pinochet coup than to any other single destination, but lack of receptivity on the part of the American government combined with resentment of the United States among Chilean refugees for its complicity in the economic collapse of the Allende government and allegations that the Central Intelligence Agency had participated actively in planning the coup itself led those seeking refuge abroad to be wary of the United States. They therefore took advantage of asylum offers from other countries, such as Canada (but also many countries in Europe), where there was organized sympathy for their plight.

Similarly, while large numbers of Salvadoreans went to neighbouring countries, those who have sought refuge farther afield have gone primarily to the United States: in 1987, it is estimated that between 500,000 and 850,000 Salvadoreans were resident in the United States. The 37,000 Salvadoreans who have

come to Canada since 1979 is a significant number, but small relative to those who have stayed in neighbouring countries or gone to the United States (tables 1 and 2). Probably few Salvadoreans would have come to Canada at all, had the United States been more open to accepting their claims for asylum. Indeed, many of those who did come to Canada had been living clandestinely in the United States and moved north only when the new American immigration policies introduced in 1986 increased the risk of them being deported to El Salvador. Table 5 shows a very large jump in Canadian refugee claimants from El Salvador in 1987 as the new policy came into effect.

### *Migrant networks*

Once a migration stream has been established by a few trail-blazing pioneers, other relatives, friends, and members of the same cultural community will tend to follow. The migrant chain will normally continue until conditions in the home country improve or those in the receiving country decline, relatively speaking. Many of those who follow come as sponsored kin while others come as independent (economic) migrants, not as refugees.

Consider, for example, the initial Chilean refugee stream and the trail of migration which ensued (table 4). The movement from Chile to Canada surged in the period 1975-8 when Canadian policy finally shifted to accept the refugee status of asylum seekers from that country. The surge reflected a backlog of jailed and other threatened individuals who had not found an alternative destination. During the early 1980s, the number of Chileans migrating to Canada – more of whom were sponsored kin of previous refugees – declined to less than one-fifth the peak inflow achieved in 1975, suggesting that the stream was gradually becoming exhausted. Then, surprisingly, numbers began to rise again during the late 1980s, returning to nearly 1,300 arrivals in 1990. This recent rise in Chilean migration to Canada is somewhat surprising as it coincides with the return to democratic government in Chile and with a period in which Chilean economic growth had become solidly positive. Yet, on reflection, it may be

quite consistent with the evolution of the inter-American system. Unemployment and a very uneven distribution of income is evident in Chile during its recent recovery. As the events in postwar Europe showed, the early stages of a return to political stability and to economic growth can also generate pressures for high levels of emigration.

One might also note that the smaller stream of migrants from Argentina to Canada shows a similar unexpected continuity and recent revival. Argentineans came to Canada in small but significant numbers (around 1,000 per year) in 1973-4 during a period of emerging domestic violence and repression (between Tupamaros and the military) and deepening economic crisis just after the military government took over in 1976.<sup>24</sup> Subsequently, the flow of emigrants from Argentina to Canada dropped to lower levels, with fewer than 200 immigrants in 1985, the year that democratic government was reinstated. In 1990, a year in which Argentina was again facing a major economic crisis, the figure rose again, to 850 migrants. Various Latin American countries show small increases in the number of emigrants to Canada in the late 1980s; together these countries account for a total annual inflow of something over 10,000 migrants.

#### DISCUSSION

How will the inter-American system shape future migration patterns, and where will Canada fit within the system? Among the factors which will influence the answers to those questions are five important ones: the North American Free Trade Agreement; the state of peace and democracy in Central America; the potential for new insurgency and violence; changes in Canadian immigration and refugee policy; and the general trend towards globalization.

#### *The North American Free Trade Agreement*

Optimistic scenarios of the future impact of the proposed agreement on North American Free Trade (NAFTA) suggest that the

<sup>24</sup> Adriana Marshall, 'Emigration of Argentineans to the United States,' in Patricia R. Pessar, ed, *When Borders Don't Divide: Labor Migration and Refugee Movements in the Americas* (New York: Center for Migration Studies 1988), 129-41.



effects on employment and economic growth may be slightly positive in the United States and Canada, and sharply positive in Mexico, leading to rising opportunities in Mexico for Central American migrants. In contrast, pessimistic assessments suggest a deterioration in labour conditions and rising unemployment in Canada and the United States, with an expansion of low-wage labour in Mexico as international capital comes to dominate labour in the entire bloc. It is also apparent that the NAFTA will force an end to Mexican agricultural subsidies (particularly those benefiting small-scale farmers) and lead to a rising tide of unemployed agricultural workers in Mexico, who will in turn force down national wages for unskilled workers and perhaps accelerate the emigration of farm workers into the United States. These hypothetical scenarios cannot yet be tested, so the possible impact of the NAFTA on migration in the inter-American system must for the moment remain a speculative question.

#### *Peace and democracy in Central America*

The prospects for a lasting return to peace and democracy in Central America are positive but still uncertain. The war in Nicaragua is over and a democratic government is in place; yet there are increasing signs that the social and political conflicts which led to violence in the first place are not being resolved and may lead to renewed armed struggle. The country's economy was virtually destroyed by the war, and few exiles seem eager to return because of the uncertainty regarding both economic and political conditions. The recent truce and greater democracy in El Salvador are also heartening, but the economic and political future of the country remains unclear. Out-migration continues and refugees in Honduras show little eagerness to return. Large numbers of Guatemalan refugees who have been living across the border in Mexico are preparing to return home, however, because international assistance for them is drying up and because they have been able, with the help of various international organizations, to extract guarantees of safety from the Guatemalan state. They are returning to communities which are as poor, if not poorer, as

when they left. They have no indication that there will be significant economic aid or that the conflict between the military and dissidents which was associated with their previous persecution has been settled. Most importantly, the issue of the restricted access of small farmers to land has not been resolved. In sum, even if matters improve somewhat, Central America does not seem to be a region which will draw many exiles back from North America; it is also a zone from which a stream of emigrants may continue to depart to the United States and Canada.

#### *New insurgency and violence*

While the general trend in Latin America over the past decade has been towards a net reduction in authoritarian government and violence, there are counter-trends. Peru is still a democratic country, but one operating under a suspension of certain features of the constitution while facing terrorism by the Sendero Luminoso and a rising armed struggle between drug producers and the military in eastern Peru. These political circumstances and the severe economic crisis in that country over the past decade together create a situation from which many Peruvians would like to depart. While Canada does not recognize those departing as refugees, migration from Peru to Canada is nevertheless increasing, although the numbers are still small.

#### *Changing Canadian policy*

Canadian immigration and refugee policy continues to evolve. Bill c-84, implemented in the winter of 1989, contained various provisions intended to curtail the inflow of refugee claimants. Subsequently, the refugee processing procedures in this bill were strengthened through a greater budget allocation to the institutions responsible, and rates of rejection have been climbing for claimants from certain countries. However, few of those whose claims have been rejected have been deported: most are appealing, and in the end many may be able to stay because they have children born in Canada or jobs and other ties which will allow them to remain. The most recent legislation, bill c-86, passed in

the autumn of 1992, may have serious implications for Latin American refugee claimants in North America. It allows the Canadian government to negotiate agreements with other countries which will prevent claimants who have been refused entry in one country to apply in the other. Such an agreement between Canada and the United States, for example, could severely restrict the options of Central American refugee claimants. If rejected in Canada or the United States, the claimants would have no basis for a second chance in the other country. These restrictive efforts are intended to reduce claimant inflow and backlogs. They form part of an emerging immigration policy which will seek to admit migrants selectively, on the basis of needed (higher level) job skills, and to reduce the inflow of sponsored kin and claimants, that is, migrants who are less likely to meet economic criteria.

### *Globalization*

All these factors must be set within the current global transformation of international trade, travel, communications, and commerce which will itself probably have profound independent effects on international population movements. The precise nature of these impacts is just beginning to be discerned, and only some are apparent in Canada. One trend is towards a rapid expansion of work-related travel, short-term business visits (usually in the service or sales areas), and short-term work visas, both in low skilled jobs (agricultural workers from Mexico and the Caribbean in British Columbia and southern Ontario) and in skilled jobs (engineers, executives, and technicians from Japan, the United States, and Europe, working in Canadian subsidiaries of international organizations).<sup>25</sup> Another is an increase in the number of undocumented migrants who do not plan to claim asylum because their claims would probably fail. There is little data on undocumented migrants in Canada, but preliminary

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Michalowski, 'Visitors and visa workers: old wine in new bottles,' paper presented at the conference, 'Migration, Human Rights and Economic Integration,' York University, Toronto, November 1992.

observation suggests that there are modest but increasing numbers in cities like Toronto, and that Latin Americans, particularly Brazilians and other nationalities who have little basis for refugee claims, are well represented among them. Many arrived on visitor's visas but have overstayed the authorized length of stay and, by working, have broken a key provision of their visa. Others have arrived clandestinely by land through the United States.

These various trends bearing on future migration from Latin America to Canada suggest that the future will indeed be different from the past, yet it will be influenced by the past. The migration bridges established from Latin America to Canada in the 1970s and 1980s may not expand dramatically, but neither are they likely to disappear.