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The role of aspirations in migration

Determinants of International Migration,
International Migration Institute, University
of Oxford, 23–25 September 2014



The role of aspirations in migration

Jørgen Carling, Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)
Paper presented at Determinants of International Migration, International Migration Institute, University of Oxford, 23-25 September 2014. Comments are welcome: jorgen@prio.no.

Abstract This conceptual paper seeks to engage with migration theory by examining the nature and functions of aspirations in migration processes. I argue that aspirations play a pivotal role in all migration, but in different ways. Aspirations are elusive, however, both theoretically and empirically. People's general aspirations in life form part of form part of the background to migration desires; such desires can also be described as migration aspirations, which are the focus of this paper. This conviction that migration is preferable to staying can be understood as an attitude, which helps us raise several epistemological issues. Is the desire to migrate an enduring state of mind, or a context-specific speech act? Do migration aspirations, conceived of as attitudes, comparatively evaluate places, or culturally constructed projects? Does migration have intrinsic value, or is it simply a means to an end? Addressing such questions and relating them to the factors that inhibit or facilitate actual migration can shed new light on how we conceptualize and empirically analyse the determinants of migration. It can also help understand the relationships between force, choice and mobility. In conclusion, I propose an aspirations-centred model of migration, in which observable outcomes—in the form of mobility and immobility—are interpreted as products of three interlinked processes.

Introduction

This paper is a half-way product of an ongoing research process, written with the aim of raising questions and reflecting on key issues rather than providing answers. It identifies a number of conceptual themes that all might be important, but which do not fit neatly together as a well-structured piece of prose.
I start by addressing a few basic aspects of the links between migration and aspirations, accounting for my own background and approach, and describing how my previous research feeds into this paper. In the subsequent section I discuss a number of epistemological issues related to migration aspirations, based on the premise that such aspirations can be studied a form of attitudes. I then consider the role of force and choice in migration, and the distinction between the intrinsic and instrumental value of migration. Finally, I very tentatively assemble different points from the paper into a conceptual framework.

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Paper presented at *Determinants of International Migration*, International Migration Institute, University of Oxford, 23–25 September 2014. Comments are welcome: jorgen@prio.no.

This paper seeks to engage with migration theory by exploring the role and functions of aspirations in migration processes. I argue that aspirations play a pivotal role in all migration, but in different ways. Aspirations are explored both theoretically and empirically. People's general aspirations are seen as part of the background to migration desires; such desires are seen as migration aspirations, which are the focus of this paper. I argue that migration is preferable to staying can be understood as an answer to several epistemological issues. Is the desire to migrate a rational choice, or a context-specific speech act? Do migration aspirations raise several epistemological issues? Do migration aspirations raise questions about how we comparatively evaluate places, or culturally different attitudes, and relating them to the factors that inhibit or determine migration? Can we shed new light on how we conceptualize and understand the determinants of migration. It can also help understand the role of force, choice and mobility. In conclusion, I propose an alternative model of migration, in which observable outcomes—in the form of migration—mobility—are interpreted as products of three interlinked

This paper is the product of an ongoing research process, written with the aim of exploring key issues rather than providing answers. It identifies several issues that all might be important, but which do not fit neatly into a single piece of prose.

The paper explores a few basic aspects of the links between migration and aspirations. It discusses the background and approach, and describing how my previous work has shaped migration aspirations, based on the premise that such aspirations are shaped by the intrinsic and instrumental value of migration. I then consider the role of force and choice in migration, and how these different points from the paper into a conceptual framework.

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Future
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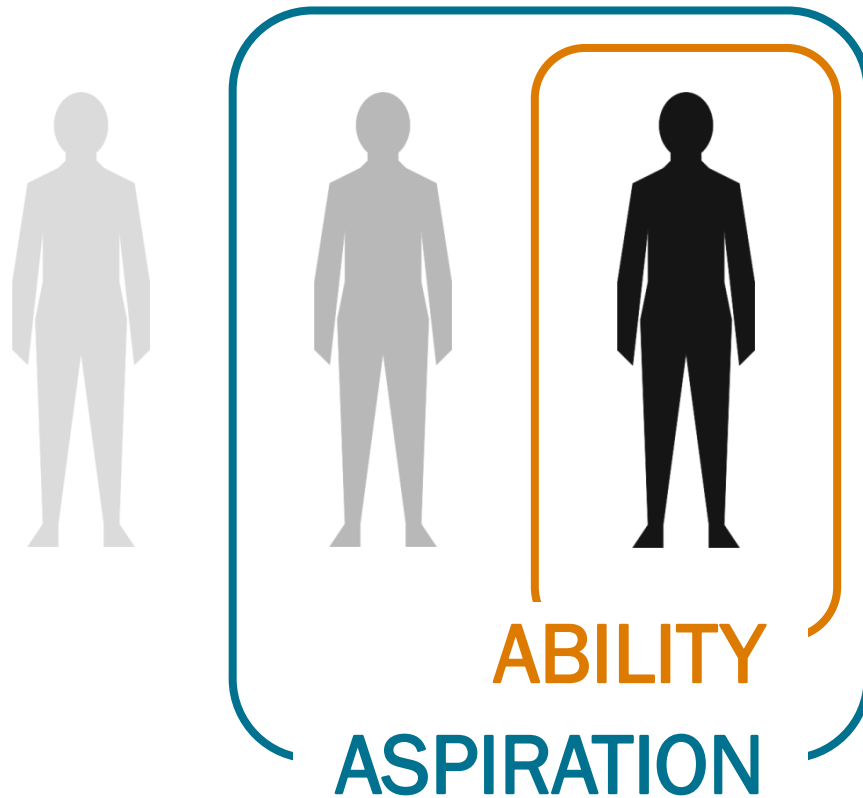


Aspiration/ability model

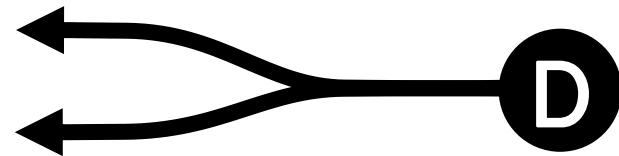


Carling, J. (2002)
'Migration in the age of
involuntary immobility'
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Migration Studies*,
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Aspiration/ability model



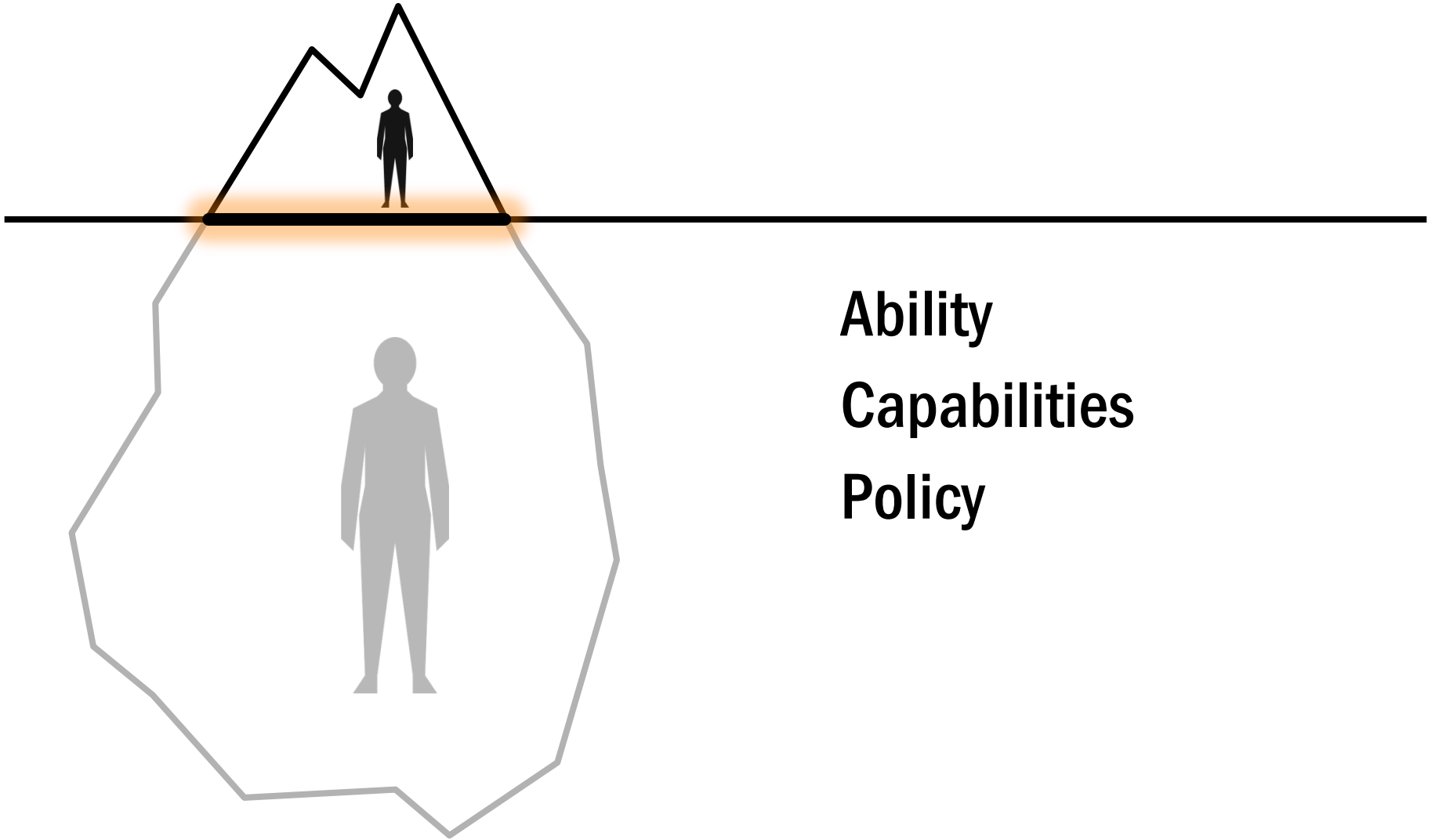
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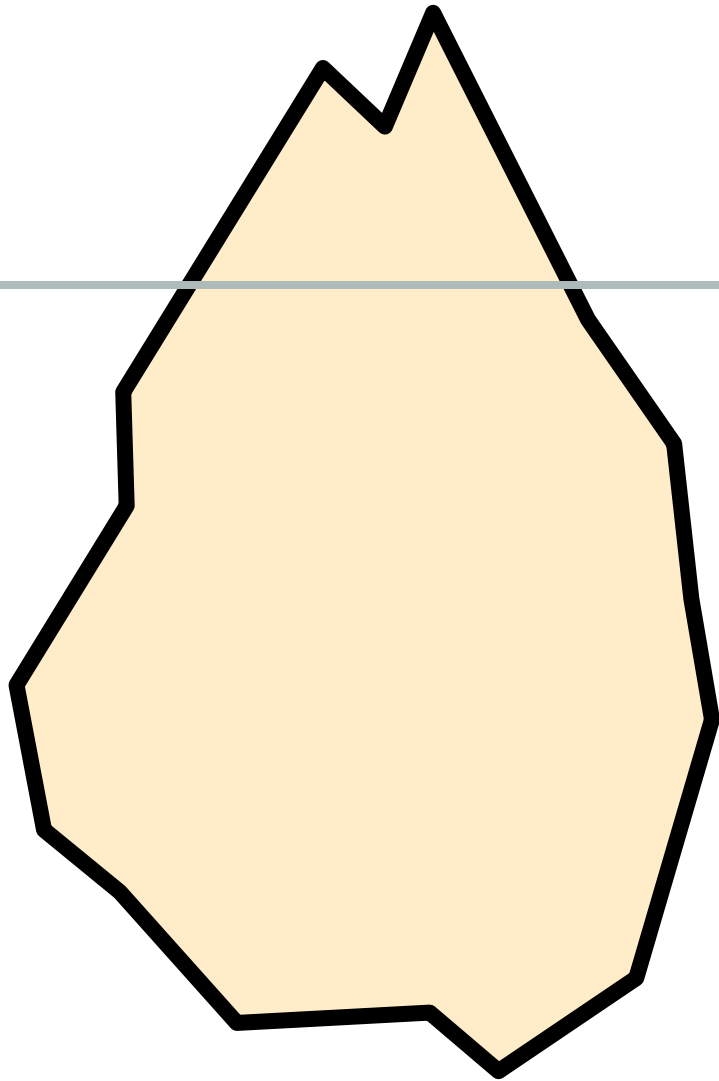
**Observed
migration**

**Carling, J. (2002)
'Migration in the age of
involuntary immobility'
*Journal of Ethnic and
Migration Studies*,
28(1):5-42.**

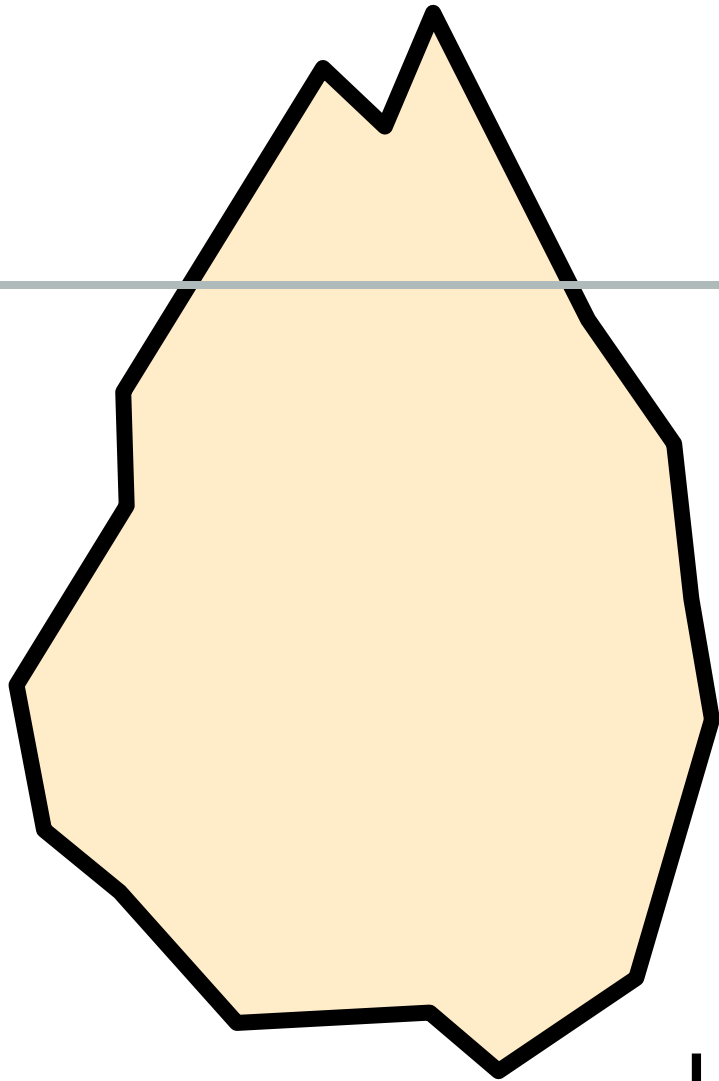
**Involuntary
immobility**



Ability
Capabilities
Policy



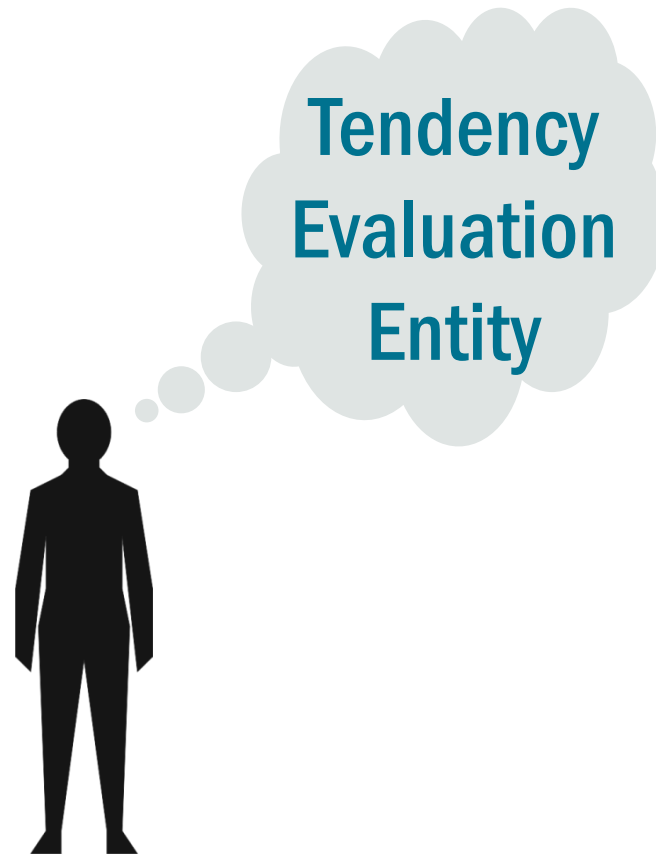
**What does it mean
to have migration
aspirations?**



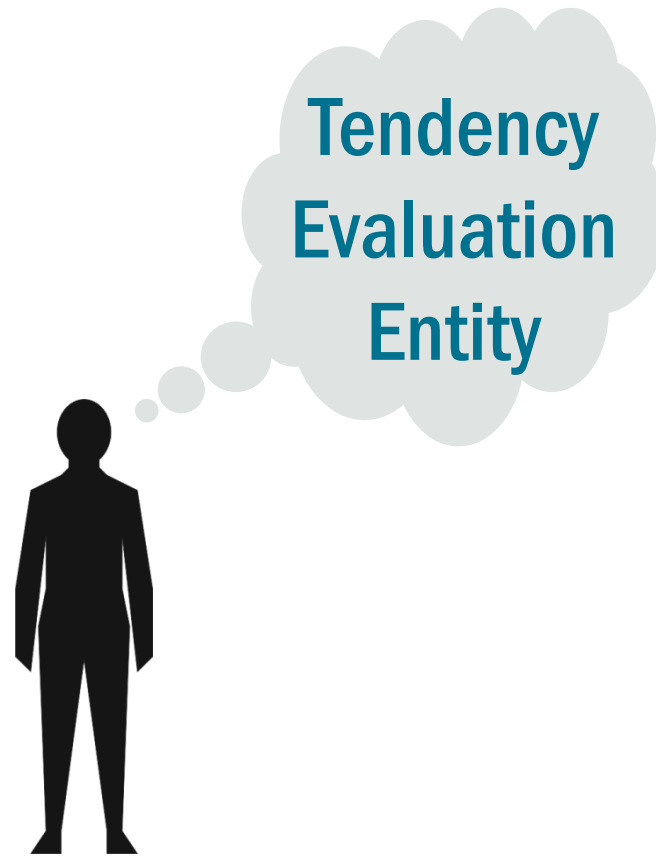
Afghanistan
Morocco
Somalia
Tanzania
United Kingdom



Migration aspirations as a form of attitude



Migration aspirations as a form of attitude



Migration aspirations as a form of attitude

Tendency
Evaluation
Entity

Elusiveness
Sensitivity
Variability



James Hill for the New York Times

Migration aspirations as a form of attitude

Tendency
Evaluation
Entity

Favour / disfavour
Strength

No wish to
migrate

Strong wish
to migrate

Migration aspirations as a form of attitude

Tendency
Evaluation
Entity

Favour / disfavour
Strength

Strong wish
to stay

No wish
either way

Strong wish
to migrate

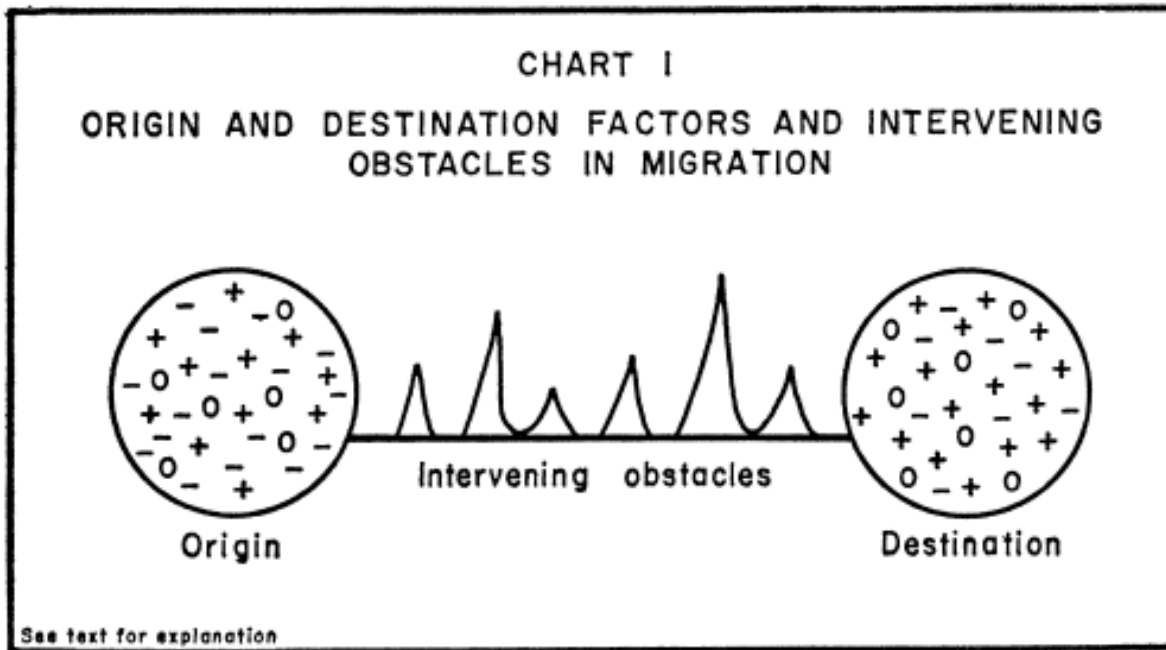
Migration aspirations as a form of attitude

Tendency
Evaluation
Entity

Places

Migration aspirations as a form of attitude

Tendency
Evaluation



A THEORY OF MIGRATION*
EVERETT S. LEE
University of Pennsylvania

RESUMEN

serie de factores sobre lugar de origen y de destino, obstáculos
 s.
 leado con el fin de formular una serie de hipótesis acerca del
 is condiciones, el desarrollo de corrientes y contracorrientes
 migrantes. Siempre que ha sido posible, las hipótesis se presentan
 con datos anexos. Para otras hipótesis los datos no son dis-
 querer reestructuración en términos de datos disponibles.
 migración están relacionadas con la diversidad de las regiones y
 do de dificultad de los obstáculos intervinientes y con las fluctua-
 tracorrientes migratorias es analizada en base a la similitud o
 al tipo de obstáculos intervinientes y a las condiciones económicas.
 iva y el grado de selectividad depende de un número de factores los
 do una selección bimodal.

to the effect
 go on without
 Ravenstein to
 r on the laws of
 l Statistical So-
 15.¹ This paper
 ritish Census of
 stein returned to
 more than
 1881, but in 1901
 the subject with data from more than
 twenty countries.² Finding corroboration
 in this broader investi-
 gation, in a second paper,
 I stated that "After carefully reading Mr.
 Ravenstein's former paper, and listening
 to the present one, [I arrived] at the con-
 clusion that migration was rather disti-
 guished for its lawlessness than for hav-
 ing any definite law."³ Mr. Stephen Bour-
 ne's criticism was less devastating but logic-
 ally more serious: "that although Mr. Ra-
 venstein had spoken of 'Laws of Migra-
 tion' he had not formulated them in su-
 perior categorical order that they could be
 applied." Nevertheless, Ravenstein's
 paper has stood the test of time and
 is a starting point for work in

Migration aspirations as a form of attitude

Tendency
Evaluation
Entity

Places

Migration aspirations as a form of attitude

Tendency
Evaluation
Entity

Places

Space

**‘Experiences of mobility
bestow authority on the
moving subjects’**
(Sørensen & Stepputat 2001)

**‘Mobility has become the
most powerful and most
coveted stratifying factor’**
(Bauman 1998)

Migration aspirations as a form of attitude

Tendency
Evaluation
Entity

Places

Space

Projects

strategies, paths, scripts,

**Context-specific social
constructions**

Conclusions

Conclusions



**Two-step approach:
successful and necessary**

Conclusions



What does it mean
to have migration
aspirations?

Conclusions



Way forward:

**Diverse literatures
and methodologies**

**Theoretical
explorations**

**Empirical
applications**



Thank you!



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