1. Introduction

Largely due to the exponential growth of worldwide migrant remittance flows in the 2000s, the so-called ‘migration-development nexus’, or the issue of the impacts of (international) migration upon the development of the migrants’ territories of origin, has been the object of much renewed attention over the last few years. The latest wave of research and advocacy has largely been an enthusiastic one, but the topic has traditionally been marred by a controversy that refuses to go away – otherwise known, to quote Papademetriou and Martin’s (1991) expression, as “the unsettled relationship”.

On one side of this debate, we have the migration-development enthusiasts, who have typically highlighted the beneficial role of outmigration in disposing of “surplus labour” and in giving rise to subsequent reverse flows of money and know-how; on the other, the migration-development pessimists, who have instead emphasised the consequences of the exodus of scarce skilled workers for developing countries (the ‘brain drain’); argued that remittances lead to distortion and dependence; or maintained, in a more neo-Marxist formulation, that international migration constitutes yet another way of transferring value from the ‘periphery’ to the ‘core’.

Most mainstream attempts to settle the unsettled in this regard have usually assumed one of two forms: theoretical propositions based on the hypothetical-deductive method; or econometric cross-country investigations, either of the overall impact of migration or of the impact of one of the various ‘sub-nexa’. Inevitably, however, and despite the fact that development is one of the two poles in the causal relationship under scrutiny, the treatment and understanding of development itself in these attempts are usually at worst inexistent and at best unsatisfactory. More specifically, it is generally assumed explicitly or implicitly by both neoclassical and neo-Marxist authors that ‘development’ is but a simple function of the stock of the various production factors available in an economy, regardless of the prevalent social relations of production – what Brenner (1977) has called the “neo-Smithian” fallacy.
In this presentation, it is suggested that overcoming this fundamental weakness of the literature requires a more sophisticated theoretical understanding of development itself. With this in mind, it is further suggested, in the historical materialist tradition and following in particular Marxist author P. P. Rey, that, in the current historical stage of humankind, development be conceptualised first and foremost as a disruptive and deeply ambiguous process of transition to capitalism, characterised in its early stages by specific forms of articulation between the capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production prevalent in a social formation. While mass outmigration is usually a by-product of the ‘Luxemburgian’ encroachment of the capitalist mode of production, it may occur in the context of social formations at different stages of that transition and with different ‘types’ of articulation, and accordingly feed back upon development (thus understood) in different ways. As a consequence, it is argued that research on the ‘migration-development nexus’ has little to gain from simplistic a priori deductivism or from the search for cross-country regularities within what is effectively an heterogeneous universe; instead, recourse to the case-study method with a strong political economy orientation is likely to yield the most promising results.

In order to put forth these arguments, this presentation is structured as follows: after this Introduction, section 2 provides a brief overview of the main issues to do with the interrelationship between migration and development, as well as of the existing literature. This is followed, in section 3, by the argument that an adequate appreciation of the constraining effect of the social relations of production upon the development of the forces of production is lacking in the existing literature, of both neoclassical and neo-Marxist inspiration, on the migration-development nexus. As a way of overcoming this deficiency of the literature and research on this topic, section 4 argues in favour of a more sophisticated – as well as more classically Marxist – understanding of development in the context: one that is based on some of Marx’s and Luxemburg’s basic ideas on the encroachment of the capitalist mode of production upon the pre-capitalist modes, as well as on P.P. Rey’s elaborations on the protracted, complex and phased character of that encroachment. Section 5 then draws some theoretical and methodological implications, arguing in particular in favour of intensive case-study analysis drawing extensively on political economy as the most promising way forward in this respect. Finally, the main arguments and ideas are summed up in the Conclusions.

2. Migration and development: overview of the issues and the literature
That migration and development are fundamentally related is more or less obvious to more or less everyone. Exactly what that relationship consists of, however, is not quite as unanimous. The three main theoretical accounts of the causes of migration all postulate that migration is, in one way or another, a consequence of either development or underdevelopment. Thus, in exceedingly brief terms, the neoclassical ‘macro’ theory of migration portrays migration as a consequence of development differentials (or, which is basically synonymous in this theoretical context, income differentials) between geographical areas; migration is brought about by relative underdevelopment as condition and serves as a factor-price equalisation mechanism (Harris and Todaro 1970). Another theoretical account of migration, the New Economics of Labour Migration or NELM (Stark and Bloom 1985) – which, incidentally, I have argued elsewhere (Abreu, forthcoming) to be little more than an information-theoretic avatar of the neoclassical theory –, also implicitly regards migration as a consequence of underdevelopment as condition: migration allegedly constitutes a way for optimising households to access “capital” and self-insure against risk in contexts characterised by market incompleteness (namely with respect to credit, futures and insurance markets); at the macro level and ceteris paribus, the greater the degree of market incompleteness, the greater the expected rate of outmigration. Finally, in contrast to these two theoretical accounts, the historical-structural approach – of Marxist content or at least inspiration, depending on the authors –, portrays outmigration primarily as a consequence of development as a disruptive process – one that involves “the substitution of capital for labour, the privatisation and consolidation of land-holding and the creation of markets” (Massey 1988:391), thereby uprooting large segments of the population from their traditional forms of livelihood and places of residence. Thus, while development is conceived of in very different ways in each of these theoretical frameworks – and while the ways in which it impinges upon migration are accordingly viewed differently as well –, development or the lack thereof are nonetheless regarded by all as a prime – indeed, as the prime – determinant of migration.

However, migration and development are not just related: rather, they are interrelated. This is because (under)development, for all its polysemy, may be thought of as not just a cause, but also a consequence, of migration. The causal nexa running in this direction and accounting for this theoretical linkage are numerous and diverse. Restricting our attention to those impacts upon the areas of origin of the migrants that have a clearly economic dimension, they may be usefully grouped under three headings – corresponding respectively to those associated with the migrants’ exit, transnational activities and return. The following subsections list the main ones and discuss the literature around them in a rather summarised
fashion (given that this plays a subordinate role with regard to the main argument being put forth here).

2.1 Impacts of exit

The impacts associated with exit/oumtigration begin with the fact that the latter reduces the labour supply in the migrants’ areas of origin. This may be (and be deemed) more or less deleterious depending on how scarce labour is (or is deemed to be) in those areas. Most typically, however, and largely building on Arthur Lewis’ (1954) ideas on “development with unlimited supplies of labour”, there is a fairly broad presumption that it is capital that is the scarce production factor in the context of developing countries, and that migration is therefore clearly positive in that it enables those countries to rid themselves of surplus population, reduce unemployment and/or increase their levels of per capita capital intensity.

Once we introduce the elementary consideration that labour as a production factor is not homogeneous, however, this universally optimistic conclusion is brought into question. The strategic role played in production by certain types of workers, for example, or the existence of regional bottlenecks in terms of labour availability (Lucas 2004) may mean that even otherwise plentiful labour is in some cases scarce – and that, in those cases, the emigration of those workers may not have the zero marginal cost assumed in Lewis’ and other models. The specific category that has been the object of closest attention in the literature and given rise to the greatest concerns is of course that of highly-skilled workers, given their assumed importance in the process of development (for example, in the context of the endogenous growth approach), their relative scarcity in the context of developing countries and the fact that, due to the selectivity and self-selectivity of migration, they tend to be highly over-represented among the migrant population. A vast ‘pessimistic’ literature on the impact of migration upon development has thus flourished around this particular issue above all others, featuring such notable contributions as Bhagwati’s (1976) writings on this subject, which included the suggested levying of a tax on emigration by the countries of origin themselves.

More recently, this pessimistic view of the ‘brain drain’ has itself been brought into question by the variously-called “brain gain”/“optimal brain drain”/“revisionist approach to the brain drain” literature, put forth most prominently by one of the figureheads of the NELM, Oded Stark (2002, 2005). The crux of this argument is that: i) the possibility of future international migration increases the expected returns to education in the countries of origin, thus fostering “human capital formation”; ii) for various reasons, a significant proportion of
those who thus acquire additional knowledge and skills end up remaining in the country; and iii) for this reason, the country in question may end up with higher average educational levels and/or a greater pool of skills than would have been the case in the absence of emigration.

2.2 Impacts of migrant transnationalism

Of course, the effects of migration upon economic development identified in the literature do not end with those associated with the moment of exit, such as the ones mentioned above. Indeed, the impacts associated with the transnational actions of migrants play as central a role in the ‘optimistic’ literature on the migration-development nexus as the ‘brain drain’ in the ‘pessimistic’ one. These transnational actions are usually deemed to have a development impact upon the areas and countries of origin to the extent that something – e.g. money, technology and know-how, or habits and attitudes – is remitted to the countries of origins.

Money remittances have received the greatest attention, particularly from the inception of their phase of exponential growth from the 1990s onwards. Although much of the enthusiasm around remittances lacks clearly specified theoretical underpinnings, it seems to be most influenced by some of the ideas of such early development economists as Chenery and Bruno (1962), particularly the argument that developing countries are constrained in their growth and development trajectories by two gaps – one of internal savings vis-à-vis investment requirements and one of foreign exchange vis-à-vis imports requirements. Much as the logical consequence of these early models was that international development assistance would fill in these two gaps and jump-start development, so have remittances been posited and expected to perform a similar role (Glytsos 2002). Indeed, with two additional advantages: first, the fact that, unlike what has been the case with official development assistance, they have not (yet?) been persistently afflicted by the seemingly puzzling lack of a ‘macro’ empirical correlation between the inflows and the rate of economic growth; second, the fact that their process of transfer and use is not subject to any form of coordinated planning, thus rendering them more savoury to those for whom government failures and corruption are key in explaining the failure of development to occur. It is thus of little wonder that remittances have in some quarters become “the new development mantra”, as per Kapur’s (2004) fortunate expression.

The optimism around remittances has been faced with its own ‘revisionist’ take, however, which in this case has revolved around the ideas that remittances often do not have a “productive” character and may breed distortion and dependency (Ellerman 2003). Methodologically, much of this literature has been based on empirical remittance-use studies
across a variety of contexts, which have often come to the conclusion that remittances are typically used to fulfil immediate consumption needs, pay for health and education expenses, as well as dowries, celebrations and other sumptuous uses, and only marginally invested. This entire approach is of course flawed in that it restricts its attention to the spending behaviour of the immediate recipients (first-round spenders) of remittances, but it does raise the important point that flows of money do not amount to flows of investment (to which, incidentally, we might add that flows of investment do not amount to flows of capital – but more on that later). The distortion/dependency argument is closely related to this and postulates that remittances create a disincentive to work amongst recipient families, which may lock those families (as well as their respective areas or countries, provided that migration is sufficiently widespread) in a situation of systematic dependence upon resources with an exogenous character.

The increasing attention and emphasis on remittances has been part of a broader shift from regarding migration as a fairly permanent process involving the gradual severing of the ties that bind the migrants to their origins to an approach that instead emphasises dual identities and belongings, as well as actions that straddle different countries – the so-called “transnational turn” in migration studies (Levitt and Nyberg-Sorensen 2004). Money remittances constitute the most relevant and visible form of transnationalism, but some migration scholars and researchers have also looked at other types of flows originated by migrants. These include transfers of technology and know-how, most typically in the case of the so-called diaspora knowledge networks (Mayer and Wattiaux 2006), as well as the more vaguely defined “social remittances” made up of beliefs, values and attitudes (Levitt 1998).

2.3 Impacts of return migration

The last “group” of development impacts postulated as being brought about by migration consists of those that are associated with the return of the migrants to their areas of origin. To a certain extent, the effects of this process are deemed symmetrical with respect to the original outmigration – adding to the labour supply to a varying extent and with varying consequences, depending, among other things, on the age and skills profile of the return migrants. The literature on the economic consequences of return migration has thus typically sought either to empirically identify the specific characteristics of return migration in terms of (self-)selectivity, or to put forth typologies and a priori assertions with regard to those characteristics (Cerase 1974, Cassarino 2004). This has occasionally been complemented by the ‘optimistic’ consideration that many return migrants bring along their savings and know-
how (which may be used to start businesses); but also two ‘pessimistic’ caveats: that many migrants return to their countries with a view to retiring; and that the skills and know-how that they have acquired abroad are often location-specific and/or complementary to specific forms of fixed capital, and therefore cannot be put to productive use in a different context from that in which they were acquired.

This cursory overview of the main channels identified in the literature makes it at once obvious that this is deemed an “unsettled relationship” because migration seems to facilitate ‘development’ in some ways and hinder it in others, it being far from clear which will tend to predominate in what circumstances. In addition, the literature has tended to address the various ‘causal channels’, e.g. the ‘brain drain’ or remittances, in isolated fashion, thereby missing or failing to convey the bigger picture of which each of those channels are a part. Generally speaking, it has tended to do this in one of two ways: theoretical propositions based on the hypothetical-deductive method or empirical cross-country estimations of the impacts. The former, abstract method is exemplified by Stark’s (2002) “brain gain” argument, whereby the conditions are formally deducted under which emigration will indeed give rise to an increase in the average educational level of the population. The latter method is exemplified by Gupta et al’s (2009) econometric estimation of the impact of remittances on poverty alleviation and financial development.

Crucially, however, whether in its abstract-deductive or empirical-inductive variants, the literature has tended to regard “developing countries” or even “countries of origin of migration” as a homogeneous universe, for which the impacts of migration (or of one or more of its associated flows) may be formally deducted or empirically estimated across the board. Moreover, it has virtually always equated the development impacts of migration with the extent to which it gives rise to increases or decreases in the stocks of the various production factors available in the economies of origin of the migrants (or occasionally in the level of output or income more directly). This refers in particular to “labour”, “capital” and “human capital”, all defined in the usual ‘unproblematic’ way of mainstream economics: labour as the ‘stock’ of any actual or potential workers, capital as a loosely defined aggregate of means of production and money wealth, and human capital as the quality of labour (usually proxied by the average educational level). And herein lies the problem.
3. The migration-development literature and the neo-Smithian fallacy

Consistent with an overarching theoretical framework that has no time or place for the concept of mode of production or, in fact, for development itself as anything other than the increase in per capita income, economists and other theorists working along neoclassical lines have explicitly or implicitly analysed the various nexa through a production function lens – assuming that migration (and the indirect effects that it gives rise to) affect “development” insofar as they co-determine the stock of the various factors of production in the economy of origin of the migrants. Now, agreement at this ‘meta-theoretical’ level does not preclude theoretical disagreement: these economists and other migration scholars may, and often do, disagree as to whether the ‘negative’ effects will tend to outweigh the ‘positive’ ones, or as to the specificities of each of the various impacts. This notwithstanding, they all fall prey to what, to quote Robert Brenner (1977), we can call the “neo-Smithian” fallacy: a lack of consideration for the constraining effect of the prevailing social relations of production upon the development of the forces of production, such that, for example, an inflow of income or wealth is implicitly equated with an inflow of capital.

Simply put, this implicitly assumes that all labour-power and means of production can be freely bought and sold in all contexts (social formations), and that competition acts in such a way as to ensure that they are put to an ‘optimal’, ‘rational’, capitalist use. That is not the case, however: the geographical and social expansion of the law of value has doubtless proceeded apace since the inception of capitalism, but the “melting into air” (Marx and Engels 1848) of the “antiquated” modes of production has been faced with far greater resilience on the part of the latter than might have been expected, or than as envisaged in the Manifesto. The acknowledgement of this has given rise to a debate within Marxist circles on the issue of the “articulation of modes of production”, whereby attempts have been made to theorise the dynamics of the interrelationship between the capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production (see Section 4 for a lengthier discussion).

In any case, central to the argument here is the fact that the assumptions of (i) generalised ‘freedom’ of labour and of the means of production (initially through the dispossession of the direct producers); and (ii) generalised competition in commodity production, do not hold except in social formations where the capitalist mode of production is predominant. This predominance must refer not only to dynamics (i.e. in the sense of the capitalist mode of production overdetermining the functioning of the other modes and being in the process of an inexorable expansion) but also to structure (in the sense of capitalist
relations of property and production being dominant at present). Under the logics of primitive-communal production for self-consumption, of the tributary modes of production or of simple commodity production (which on aggregate remain quantitatively dominant in many social formations today), accumulation remains stifled by the lack of both competition and freely available productive forces. Surplus extraction is intensified primarily by increasing absolute, rather than relative, surplus value, and there is no tendency for a ‘virtuous’ dynamic of innovation and accumulation to occur. It is therefore worth quoting Brenner (1977:30) at length to stress that:

(...) [C]apitalism differs from all pre-capitalist modes of production in its systematic tendency to unprecedented, though neither continuous nor unlimited, economic Development – in particular through the expansion of what might be called (after Marx’s terminology) relative as opposed to absolute surplus labour. That is, under capitalism, surplus is systematically achieved for the first time through increases of labour productivity, leading to the cheapening of goods and a greater total output from a given labour force (with a given working day, intensity of labour and real wage). This makes it possible for the capitalist class to increase its surplus, without necessarily having to resort to methods of increasing absolute surplus labour which dominated pre-capitalist modes—i.e. the extension of the working day, the intensification of work, and the decrease in the standard of living of the labour force.

Hence (id ibid: 26-7),

Whatever Marx thought about the origins of capitalist social productive relations, he was quite clear that their establishment was indispensable for the development of the productive forces, i.e. for capitalist economic development. If expansion through trade and investment did not bring with it the transition to capitalist social productive relations—manifested in the full emergence of labour power as a commodity—there could be no capital accumulation on an extended scale. In consequence, the analysis of capitalist economic development requires an understanding, in the first place, of the manner in which the capitalist social-productive relations underpinning the accumulation of capital on an extended scale originated.
The ascription of capitalist laws of motion to pre-capitalist (or not fully capitalist) contexts, with the misunderstandings that it entails, is what is meant here by “the neo-Smithian fallacy” – a fallacy that pervades the migration-development literature (as well as arguably the development literature more generally). That that should be so in the case of mainstream economics-driven theory is hardly surprising, given the latter’s fundamental ideological concern with legitimising capitalist rationality as trans-historical. What is perhaps more surprising is that the historical-structural approach to migration, which in its theorising of the causes of migration affords such a pivotal role to development regarded as structural change (namely in terms of the prevailing modes of production), should largely fail to afford it a similar role in its analysis of the development consequences of migration.

Those researchers and theoreticians working along these theoretical lines that have addressed the migration-development nexus have thus sought to confront the ‘mainstream economics’ account at a ‘lower’ theoretical level, but not at a ‘higher’ one. Petras (1981), a seminal representative of the world-systems account of labour migration, is quite typical in this respect, by arguing that labour migration, especially in its skilled form, constitutes yet another form of value transfer from the periphery to the core, which further deepens the gap between the two. What we have here is the same presumption that value, in whatever form, can and will be put to an ‘optimal’ use from the point of view of accumulation regardless of political-economic context, and that therefore the impacts of a given social process upon development simply concern their ‘net impact’ in terms of value, rather than how they contribute to the progress, stagnation or even retrogress of that political-economic context in structural terms.

We would argue that certainly in the case of Petras, but arguably for the historical-structural approach more generally, this is a consequence of the neo-Marxist – as distinct from classical Marxist – underpinnings of their theory of development. The point remains, however, that neoclassical and historical-structural researchers into the development consequences of migration have succumbed to an equal extent to the ‘neo-Smithian fallacy’, and that this has proven a central obstacle to “settling the unsettled” in this respect. The next section outlines an alternative understanding of development as a way of overcoming this obstacle.

4. Modes of production and development: a classical Marxist view
In line with the historical-materialist tradition, the previous section has stressed the constraining role of the *mode of production* for the historical development of societies. This is defined, following Poulantzas (1973, cit. in Wolpe 1980:9) as a specific “combination of the system of productive forces with the system of relations of production”. It is an abstract notion that crystallises in ‘hybrid’ and ‘impure’ concrete forms, such that elements from different modes of production may coexist and overlap in a given social formation. While this applies even to the case of ‘advanced’ capitalist social formations, it is especially so in the case of the more ‘backward’ ones, where capitalist social-productive relations have not made as much progress.

The recourse to such teleological terminology as “advanced”, “backward” or “progress” is justified by the fact that, since its inception, the capitalist mode of production has proved capable of relentlessly expanding its sphere of influence – both socially and geographically. Thus have Marx and Engels (1848) argued that the bourgeoisie “creates a world after its own image [and] compels all nations to adopt the bourgeois mode of production”, and Rosa Luxemburg (1951) that capitalism “tends to engulf the whole globe and stamp out all other economies, tolerating no rival at its side, yet at the same time it is also the first mode of economy which is unable to exist by itself, which needs other economic systems as a medium and soil”. And indeed, the dispossession of the direct producers and the subordination of ever-more social relations to the law of value are historically observable tendencies. However, this is a historically huge process that is not without its ambiguities and counter-tendencies. Proletarianisation and the dissolution of the pre-capitalist modes of production, especially in the more peripheral areas of the world system, have in fact proved protracted and turbulent processes – much more so than the simpler and more unilinear accounts would have it. In later writings than the Manifesto, Marx himself hinted at this possibility, as exemplified by this passage from Volume III of Capital (Marx 1894:328) on the impact of British colonialism in India and China:

*English commerce exerted a revolutionary influence on these communities and tore them apart only insofar as the low prices of its goods served to destroy the spinning and weaving industries, which were an ancient integrating element of this unity of industrial and agricultural production. And even so this work of dissolution proceeds very gradually. [emphasis added]*

As the historical development of capitalism proceeded beyond Marx’s time alongside the seeming failure of endogenous dynamics of capital accumulation to take hold in many
Peripheral social formations, Marxist explanations of underdevelopment thus understood have divided into two opposing camps: the neo-Marxist, dependentista emphasis on the external determinants of underdevelopment and on international super-exploitation in the sphere of circulation; and the classical Marxist emphasis on the internal determinants of underdevelopment and the failure, or at least protractedness, of the process of transition to capitalism. While in our view the excessive opposition between the two views is harmful to a more comprehensive understanding of the processes in question, it remains true that the former have largely disregarded social relations of production as a cornerstone of historical-materialist analysis, and thereby largely remained Marxist in inspiration but not in method.

Among those that have remained true to this basic tenet of Marxist analysis, on the other hand, a debate gradually arose out of the wish to understand and theorise the articulation between the capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production, particularly in the case of significantly pre-capitalist (i.e. “developing”) social formations, in order to understand the laws of motion of these social formations more generally. The reader is referred to Paper Banaji (1977), Foster-Carter (1978) and Wolpe (1980) for comprehensive overviews and discussions of this debate, which cannot be satisfactorily addressed here. However, suffice it to say that the crux of it has consisted of what the conditions are under which the capitalist mode of production exerts a conservative or dissolutive effect upon the pre-capitalist modes of production. Thus has Bettelheim (1972, cit. in Wolpe 1980:17) argued that:

*Inside social formations in which the capitalist mode of production is ‘predominant’ this domination mainly tends to expanded reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, that is, to dissolution of the other modes of production and subsumption of their agents to capitalist production relations [whereas] inside social formations in which the capitalist mode of production is not directly predominant, that is, in social formations that are capitalist social formations because they are subordinated to the capitalist mode of production through the world market (but in which other modes of production predominate), the main tendency is not to dissolution of the non-capitalist modes of production but to their conservation-dissolution.*

In perhaps the most sophisticated (or maybe daring) contribution to the debate, Pierre-Philippe Rey (1973) went one step further by introducing *dynamics* into the analysis and insisting that the articulation of modes of production be viewed as a process rather than a static condition. He did this by putting forth a hypothetical periodisation, specifying three
stages of the articulation: “1. an initial link in the sphere of exchange, where interaction with capitalism reinforces the pre-capitalist mode; 2. capitalism ‘takes root’, subordinating the pre-capitalist mode but still making use of it; 3. (not yet reached in the Third World) the total disappearance of the pre-capitalist mode, even in agriculture” (Foster-Carter 1978:56).

Now, these theoretical contributions are not without their problems and inconsistencies, indeed discussed at length by Foster-Carter (ibid). However, they make it clear that the scientific analysis of development cannot do without engaging with the concept of mode of production and its concrete manifestations, given their centrality in explaining actual economic and political outcomes. This applies equally to the analysis of “development” in general and to that of the “development consequences” of a given process. Rather than assuming capitalist social-productive relations as trans-historical and deducing the consequences of that process in such a context, the task should first and foremost consist of enquiring into the role played by the process in question in the context of the transition to capitalism. The next section briefly discusses some of the theoretical and methodological implications of this for the specific case of the migration-development nexus.

5. Implications: towards a renewed political economy of the migration-development nexus

The historical-structural approach to migration has constituted a huge theoretical advance with respect to the alternative, methodologically-individualist theories, not least by explicitly portraying it in relation to the development of capitalism as a world system: on the receiving end of the migration flows, as a necessary way of ensuring the existence and regulation of an industrial reserve army and making it easier to divide the working class along ethnic or national lines in the homelands of capitalism (Castles and Kosack 1973, Piore 1979); in the areas of origin of the flows, as a consequence of proletarianisation and, more generally, of the disruption of livelihoods brought about by the encroachment of capitalism (Massey 1988).

What has been largely missing among the historical-structural school, however, is an analysis of the development consequences of migration consistent with the historical-materialist view of its determinants. Indeed, the whole idea of searching for an ultimate assessment of migration as universally positive or detrimental misses the fact that migration and its associated flows can and does occur in the context of social formations at different stages of the transition to capitalism, with distinct forms of articulation of modes of production and where expanded capitalist development is faced with different obstacles.
The direct effect of subtracting from the labour supply, in a context where workers may be plentiful but free labourers less so, is in principle always detrimental to capitalist development, either because capitalists lack the workers to exploit or the reserve army to discipline their employees. Additionally, the emigration of skilled workers embodying past labour in the form of acquired skills does indeed usually constitute a form of value transfer. However, a lot hinges on the extent to which the workers have been dispossessed in the past and on how serious a constraint is posed by the availability of labour and complex labour. As a hypothetical example, the emigration of a sufficient share of the working population in a context of e.g. communal production at the village level can decisively undermine the viability of that production arrangement, but this can either enhance capitalist development (e.g. by freeing some of the non-migrant workers for capitalist production) or constrain it (e.g. if the existence of that production arrangement ensured the maintenance and reproduction of the workers and their families during part of the year and contributed to the viability of seasonal wage-labour).

Remittances can have especially ambiguous consequences: in the context of more fully capitalist social formations unconstrained by the issue of labour supplies and with sufficiently developed financial systems in place, they can indeed assume the role of money capital and serve to expand the internal market, thus fostering the emergence of capitalist enterprises and the accumulation of capital on their part. As hinted at by both the NELM and the “remittance-use” literature, however, remittances may also enable the viability of non-capitalist relations in contexts in which that would otherwise not have been the case. Such is the case, for example, of peasant households whose migrant members remit enough to enable the household to remain as part of the peasantry; or of the use of remittances and/or savings brought along by return migrants in order to engage in simple commodity production.

It is particularly difficult, and probably rather useless, to identify further possible linkages between migration and development thus understood in the abstract. A priori reasoning of the sort identified above seems to suggest that migration has more of a dissolving role and less of a conserving one with respect to the non-capitalist modes of production, the further in the transition to capitalism a social formation is (because labour supplies are less of a constraint and money remittances are more likely to assume the role of money capital). However, attempting such simplistic deductive conclusions in the absence of systematic empirical evidence collected from this theoretical perspective is spurious. Much more useful is the conduction of case-study research across social formations at different stages of their
transition to capitalism that can illuminate the tendencies and counter-tendencies at work in each case and eventually allow for more general tentative conclusions.

This requires an acknowledgement that knowledge of the migration-development nexus is still deeply unsatisfactory, but also the assertion that the way forward does not consist of universalistic and trans-historical deductive exercises, nor of the statistical estimation of parameters within the effectively heterogeneous universe of “developing countries” or “countries of origin of migration”. Rather, what is required at this stage is the collection of case-study evidence from a political economy perspective, drawing on a more satisfactory understanding of development itself. This involves a three-step exercise: 1) a political-economic assessment of the social formation in question, namely with respect to its prevalent class structure and social-productive relations; 2) an assessment of the migration flows in terms of their origins, composition and the subsequent flows that they give rise to; and 3) an analysis of the interplay between 1) and 2). This is a methodological rather than theoretical contribution – but one that is deemed necessary for further theoretical progress to be possible.

6. Conclusions

The theoretical treatment of the determinants of migration has already reached a quite sophisticated level of development with the historical-structural insights on its fundamental relationship with the geographically uneven requirements of capital and with the disruptive character of the transition to capitalism. Arguably, however, the same level of sophistication has not been present in this school’s treatment of the development consequences of migration (not to mention in those of alternative theories). This presentation has argued that this is largely due to lack of attention to the specific ways in which migration can either enhance or hinder the progression of the social formations of origin of the migrants through the various stages of the transition to capitalism.

As opposed to the simplistic, neo-Smithian understanding of development implicit in past exercises, it is important that the latter be understood first and foremost as the establishment of the conditions required for capitalist accumulation – and that research on the migration-development nexus focuses on the role played by migration in this context. Given that “developing” social formations are inherently heterogeneous as regards the extent to which they have completed their transition to capitalism (and, if we follow Rey’s periodisation,
with respect to the very stage of the articulation in which they find themselves), it makes little sense to assume that these causal linkages can be universally deducted or empirically estimated across the board. Instead, case-study analyses drawing on the insights and method of Marxist political economy constitute the most promising way forward.

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