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MIGRATION AND LABOUR IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION: THE CASE OF MIGRATION FROM MEXICO TO THE USA.

ALEJANDRO I. CANALES
UNIVERSIDAD DE GUADALAJARA
cca00790@cucea.udg.mx

INTRODUCTION

Recent changes in the economic structures of Mexico and the United States have had similar effects on the migration dynamic. The neoliberal policy implemented in Mexico has caused greater job insecurity, a reduction in the number of occupational posts, and low wages, and has had other adverse effects on the labour force. In the United States on the other hand, a polarization strategy combined with various flexibility strategies has led to growing differentiation and segmentation in the structure of labour markets, especially in major cities.

Recognition of these effects allows us to point out two of the most important changes in the dynamics of Mexico-US migration. First, the new components and modality of the migration process. And second, the new demand for Mexican immigrant labour and the "mexicanization" of certain jobs and of local labour markets (Sassen, 1998; Cornelius, 1990). Both of these changes have contributed to an erosion of the stereotype of Mexican migration.

For decades, Mexican immigration was mostly undertaken by young, single, undocumented and temporary migrants, who came from small towns and rural areas of the western states of Mexico, and worked in U.S. seasonal agriculture (in California, mostly). Recent evidence shows a much more heterogeneous flow of migrants over the last few years. They come from more diverse regions and states of Mexico, and consist increasingly of female and urban citizens, who tend to find work in urban areas in various low skill jobs (Sassen and Smith, 1992; Fernández-Kelly, 1991). Finally, there has also been a change in the typical Mexican immigrant profile, from that of a temporary population (of *sojourners*) to a more permanent Mexican immigrant population (of *settlers*) (Smith, 2000; Cornelius, 1992).

The new profile of the migrants, and the new components and modalities of migration and employment, are directly related to processes of globalization and to the economic and commercial integration of the two nations. It definitely has to do with changes in the social structure of employment and with the occupations that spring up as an industrial society changes to an information society; and these changes look different on either side of the border (Canales, 2000).

As regards Mexico, for example, entry into the globalization age has been based on labour flexibility and contractual deregulation, which have led to the impoverishment of large sections of the population, and to increased insecurity of employment. It is these structural changes which define the new social and economic conditions that impel new contingents of the population to migrate.

Whereas in the United States, the transition to an information society has diversified the demand for low skill employees, and this has given Mexican emigrants new job options. To be more specific, the new economy has polarized the structure of employment, especially with regard to levels of pay, qualifications and forms of contract regulation (Sassen, 1998). This polarization underpins the current policy of segmenting labour in terms of ethnic origin and the migration status of the work force.

The intention of this paper will be to document the new modalities of migration that can be associated with these new social and economic polarizations, which derive from the globalization processes. We shall emphasize both the new modalities and the new groups incorporated into the migration flow, and the conditions of insecurity and vulnerability that mark their entry into the job market of the United States. Social segmentation and ethnic differentiation are outstanding characteristics of the new economy in the U.S. and these have a particularly strong effect on immigrants of Mexican and Latin American origin.

To this end the paper has been organized into three main parts. The first provides an account of the structural transformations of the Mexican economy from the start of the eighties onwards, and describes the changes these have generated in the dynamics of migration, with regard especially to its size, its modalities and the incorporation into it of new regions and demographic groups. The second part reviews the bases of what is called the *New Economy* of the United States, with particular emphasis on the processes of labour flexibility and the polarization of the structure of occupations and activities. The final part presents a number of facts about the entry of Mexican immigrants into the labour market, in order to illustrate the segmentation of labour and the differentiation of occupations that have occurred at this time of transition to an information society.

RESTRUCTURING PRODUCTION IN MEXICO. NEW CONDITIONS FOR EMIGRATION

The 1982 crisis in Mexico marked the end of the industrialization model based on import substitution, the greatest weakness of which may be identified as its inability to face up to the new rules of oligopolistic competition in a context of economic globalization (Vuskovic, 1990). As in other Latin American countries, Mexico responded to this crisis with a policy of structural adjustment and changes in the field of production, a policy which

was basically sustained by three pillars (Lustig, 1994).

- First, greater *liberalization* of the economy, that is, the displacement of State action, opening up room for the “free” play of markets in resource allocation (investment, employment, trade, etc.).
- Second, a major change in the functioning of the labour market, brought about by introducing flexible rules on hiring, firing, employment, wages and industrial relations.
- Third, under a policy of openness to the outside, the encouragement of *export substitution* and the promotion of various forms of international subcontracting, which finds its best expression in the *maquiladora* export-processing industry along the country’s northern border.

One of the effects of this economic policy has been to spur the growth of exports of manufactured goods, directly based on the booming export-processing industry, and another is the modernization (in some cases, after privatization) of certain traditional, but potentially competitive, sectors in the semi state institutional system, such as telecommunications (Telmex) and energy (Cía de Luz and Fuerza del Centro) (Bizberg, 1993).

However, this strategy of economic liberalization has had adverse effects on much of the traditional manufacturing sector, which lacked the conditions of productivity to cope with growing competition from imported products, or with the increasing number of transnational corporations setting up business in Mexico. Much of the private sector was therefore in a dilemma as to whether it should embark on a costly process of modernization in the context of a structural crisis and an uncertain future, or devise other strategies to survive in an increasingly competitive market.

In some exceptional cases, firms opted for a modernization strategy. This was the case mainly in major industries linked to important economic groups (some firms of the Monterrey group, for example), which implemented a model of transition from corporate dynamism to a mode of operation based on productivity. In other cases, as it was impossible to sustain a process of industrial modernization, many small and medium-sized producers became suppliers to the export-processing industry. To do so, they implemented a policy of shifting their emphasis (relocating, in some instances, from the centre of the country) to the export-processing which predominated in the northern region (De la O, 1997).

In most cases, however, instead of a modernization strategy, they introduced labour flexibility and deregulation. If not, plants were simply shut down or, in the para-state sector, privatized¹. The cost of maintaining specific levels of competitiveness was thus

¹ Between 1980 and 1988, industrial output fell by 10%, which led to substantial job losses as a result of plant closures following the 1982 crisis.

largely transferred to the labour market, leading to major job losses, wage cutbacks and labour instability (Dussel, 1997).

Lipietz (1997) called this strategy of industrialization *peripheral Fordism*, which means that current changes would permit convergence on a techno-economic paradigm that combines Taylorist and Fordist principles of production without the corresponding social conditions that would make it possible to regulate labour relations, and without a Keynesian economic arrangement that would link workers' earnings to actual demand. This strategy is therefore called *peripheral* since it is Fordist in terms of production but flexible in terms of labour².

This strategy also establishes a new context for the polarization and differentiation of the machinery of production in depressed sectors geared to the domestic market on the one hand and, on the other, in sectors like the *maquiladora* export-processing sector, which have increased their productivity rates and their share of total exports (Bizberg, 1993). In this context, the export-processing industry has become the pillar of the new industrialization strategy which has put Mexico back into the world market and, in particular, into the economy of the North American trade bloc. The boom in the export-processing industry is no doubt sustained, *inter alia*, by advantages arising from its location close to the United States and the availability of a low-wage, low-skilled workforce with practically no independent trade union experience.

Similarly, although the tendency in the 1980s was to set up a new type of *maquiladora* export-processing plant involving huge investments in high technology (Gereffi, 1993), the traditional export-processing plant, characterized by labour-intensive assembly and subassembly operations, minimum wages and piece work, is still generally predominant. In sum, it is the typical form of specialization in export processing, and thus has little impact on local economies apart from direct low-wage job creation.

This strategy of flexibility and industrial restructuring implemented by both the State and the private sector does not therefore appear to constitute a scenario for great prosperity in the world of work, especially as regards employment stability, occupational structure and wage levels. Such a flexibility drive implies substantial modifications to labour contracts, remuneration systems and the working day, new forms of organization and new management strategies, as well as modifications to aspects concerning the State and the practice of labour and social security law (De la Garza, 1999).

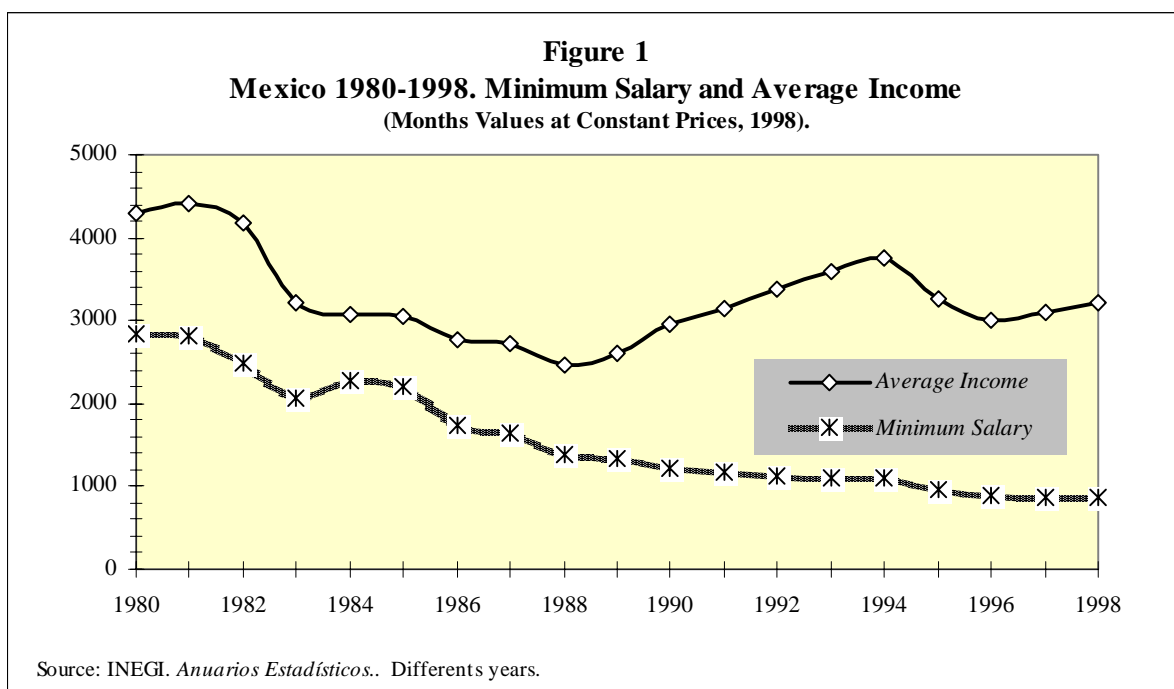
Such industrial restructuring and such changes in industrial and labour relations have the advantage of enabling us to understand the new character of Mexican migration to the

² It must be pointed out, however, that this strategy is not unique, since there is also leeway for post-Fordist strategies proper. In these cases, firms generally apply hybrid strategies that combine external flexibility in some fields and departments with strategies of technological change and flexible administration in others. These strategies are associated with some export-processing plants that were set up in Mexico from the second half of the 1980s onwards and marked a significant break with the character of industrial and labour relations that had traditionally prevailed in this economic sector. On this point, see De la O, 1997, and Gereffi, 1993.

United States, as well as its dynamics, its composition and its forms. In fact, while the current industrialization strategy is fostering a boom in exports of manufactured goods, its cost is to be measured in terms of polarization and the growing inequality that it creates. The strategy of external flexibility and labour deregulation followed in Mexico has led to a rise in job insecurity, cutbacks in real wages, the polarization of industrial employment, more underemployment and informal employment, and has had other adverse effects on labour market dynamics (Smith, 2000).

Levels of income which were already low in 1980 declined even further in the next few years. For example, the minimum wage shows an uninterrupted tendency to fall steadily over the last twenty years, and by 1998 it was worth only 31% of its 1980 value. Average of working incomes have also gone been hard hit and have continued to go down during the period. In the first half of the nineties there was some improvement in average incomes but not enough to restore the values they had in the early eighties. The crisis of December 1994 reduced salaries again, and this state of affairs has continued pretty much up until now. The current value of average of working incomes is still about 25% less than it was at the start of the eighties.

There is no disputing these figures. Not only have the crises of 1982 and 1994 reduced the levels of salaries and working incomes; on top of that, the ensuing neoliberal and structural adjustment policies have forced the work force into a position of insecurity and reduced their wages over a period lasting for more than two decades (Aguilar, 2000).



As for the population earning less than one minimum wage, their number has increased, from 27.7% of the working population in 1990, to 32.5% in 1995 and 37.5% in 1997. The proportion of those receiving between 2 and 5 minimum wages has remained stable over the decade. Those who gain more than 5 minimum wages are in the curious position of having increased in number in 1995 only to go back to representing the same proportion of the work force as in 1990.

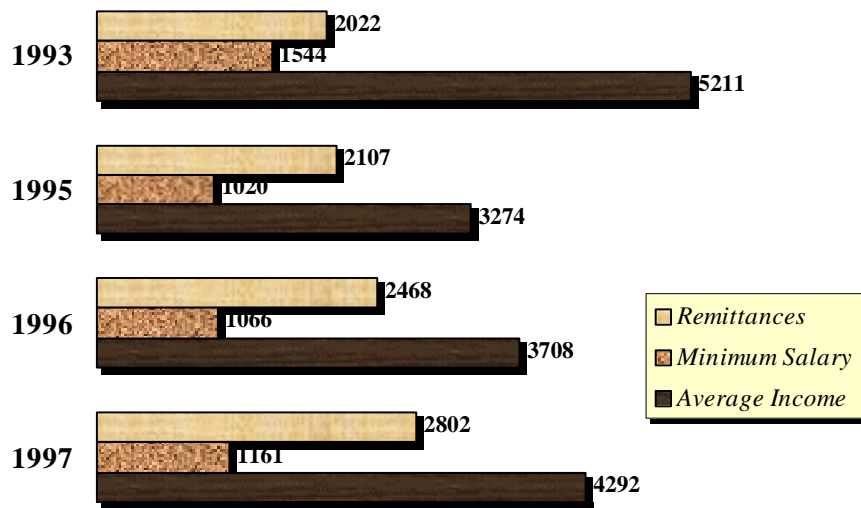
In spite of which, the most important fact to emerge from the figures is that for the whole decade of the nineties a third of the working population earned less than the minimum salary established by law, which is itself pretty meager and has never been enough to cover even the basic necessities of a normal family. Another third of the working population can be seen to have been earning something between 1 and 2 minimum wages. This means over 67% of the work force have been exposed without a break to a situation in which their income has been permanently uncertain, and the only constant movement of the remunerations for their work that they receive, has been downwards.

TABLE 1			
MEXICO 1990-1997.			
LABOUR FORCE BY INCOME LEVELS (%)			
	1990	1995	1997
Total	100	100	100
Less than 1 Minimum Salary	27.7	32.5	37.5
From 1 to 2 Minimum Salaries.	38.3	31.0	30.5
From 2 to 5 Minimum Salaries	26.1	26.5	24.4
More than 5 Minimum Salaries	7.9	10.0	7.6

Source: INEGI. *Anuario Estadístico de México*. Selected Years.

The persistence for over twenty years of this pattern of inequity and insecurity of income, has made it possible to think emigration to the United States in order to work is a real alternative. And international migration, with the remittances that can be obtained from working abroad, have become a more attractive option even than working in new industrial zones or cities, not to mention that these are far superior to the limited options offered elsewhere in the country. As the next figure shows, the average amount sent back in remittances to Mexico by each migrant worker from 1995 onwards are 2.4 times the official minimum wage, or two thirds of the average of working income in Mexico. In other words, the average migrant worker was able to bring to the family income more money than two thirds of the resident population were able to. Without including anything the migrant worker may have been able to save in the United States.

Figure 2
Mexico 1993-1997. Average Remittances, Minimum Salary
and Average Income (Annuals Values in US Dollars)



Source: *Encuesta de Migración a la Frontera Norte*, and INEGI, *Anuarios Estadísticos*. Years selected.

It is worth highlighting two recent tendencies that can be observed in the migration process. Firstly, that there has been both an absolute and a relative increase in the flow of migrants, and secondly that new demographic groups and new regions of the country have got involved in a process that traditionally they had stayed out of.

+ Firstly, then, there is the sheer magnitude of the constant and sustained increase in the number of Mexicans who have established their usual place of residence in the United States. Up until 1970, permanent emigration to the United States involved some 45,000 people annually. From 1970 onwards, this part of the migration process goes into a phase where there is a sustained increase in the numbers settling and the speed at which it happens, stabilizing in the nineties. Thus the number of permanent Mexican immigrants went up from 45,000 in 1970 to 110,000 in 1980, and by 1990 it stood at 220,000; then, during the nineties it rose to 343,000 (see table 2). So the number of Mexicans settling in the United States in the last ten years (1990-2000) is as many as settled in the previous three decades (1960-1990).

Furthermore, the number of Mexican residents of the United States until 1960 amounted to less than 2% of the population of Mexico. But by 1990 the proportion of Mexican citizens settled in the U.S. came to 5.5% , and this increased to 8.1% by the year 2000. These figures suggest that the process of Mexican immigrants settling in the United States has become increasingly important in recent years. According to the latest estimates (see table 2), there are now over 8 million Mexican citizens living in the United States as

permanent residents, which is a greater number than the population of any state in the Mexican republic apart from the Federal District and the State of Mexico³.

TABLE 2			
MEXICAN RESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES. 1950-1996.			
Year	Mexican Residents of the USA (thousands)	Share of Mexican Population	Net Migration (thousands)
1950	391	1.7	-----
1960	620	1.8	22.9
1970	1074	2.2	45.4
1980	2199	3.2	112.5
1990	4460	5.5	226.1
2000	7897	8.1	343.7

Sources: 1950, 1960 y 1970; Gelbard y Carter, 1997.
1980 y 1990. Bureau of the Census, 1991;
2000. Bureau of the Census, 2000.

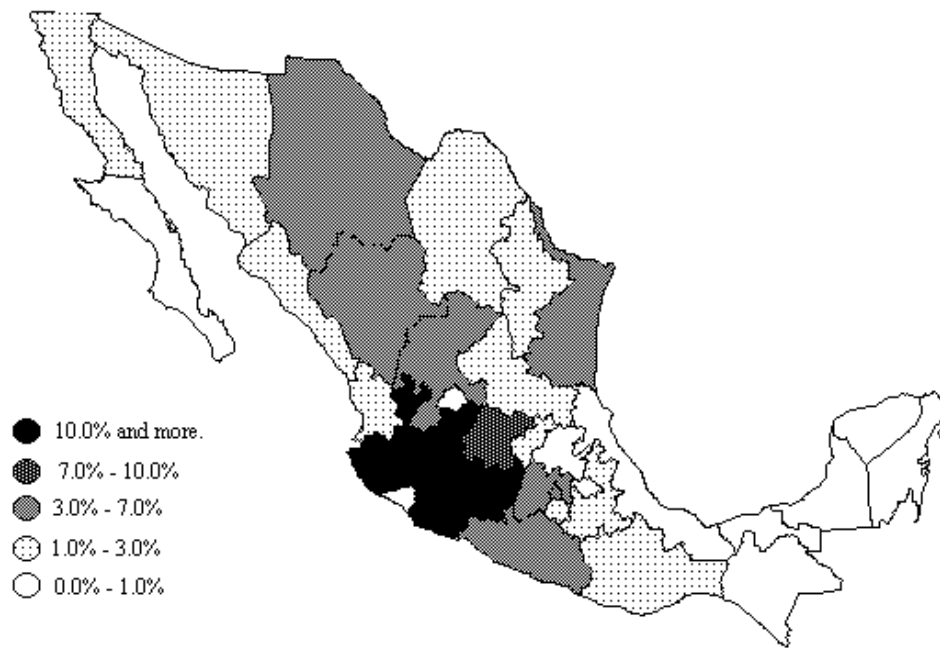
+ Apart from the relative and absolute increases in migration to the United States, there is a second outstanding tendency in this period which is for new groups of the population to be incorporated into the migratory flow. Women, who had traditionally stayed out of the migration process, now form an important part of it, as they represent 46% of all Mexicans residing in the United States. And whereas migration used to be undertaken fundamentally by members of the rural population, 40% of those migrating from Mexico now come from cities and larger towns, mostly of more than 100,000 inhabitants.

The most important fact shown by recent figures is that new regions and states of the federation are getting involved in the migratory process. As the following maps will demonstrate, the origin of the migratory flow has tended to recede to lower down in the country, from the west and north to the center and the south. Oaxaca and Puebla in particular, which used to contribute very little to the flow, now feature prominently. And Veracruz is of special interest because large scale emigration to the United States does not really start from there until the nineties⁴. Also noteworthy are the Federal District and the State of Mexico, which stand mainly for those who are migrating from the Metropolitan Zone of Mexico City.

³ Along with the increased number of people permanently emigrating to the United States, there has also been a substantial increase in the number involved in circular or temporary migration. According to ENADID (*Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica*, National Demographic Survey) between 1991 and 1992, there were nearly 930,000 Mexicans who emigrated temporarily to the United States, and this figure rose by more than 21% for the 1996-1997 period.

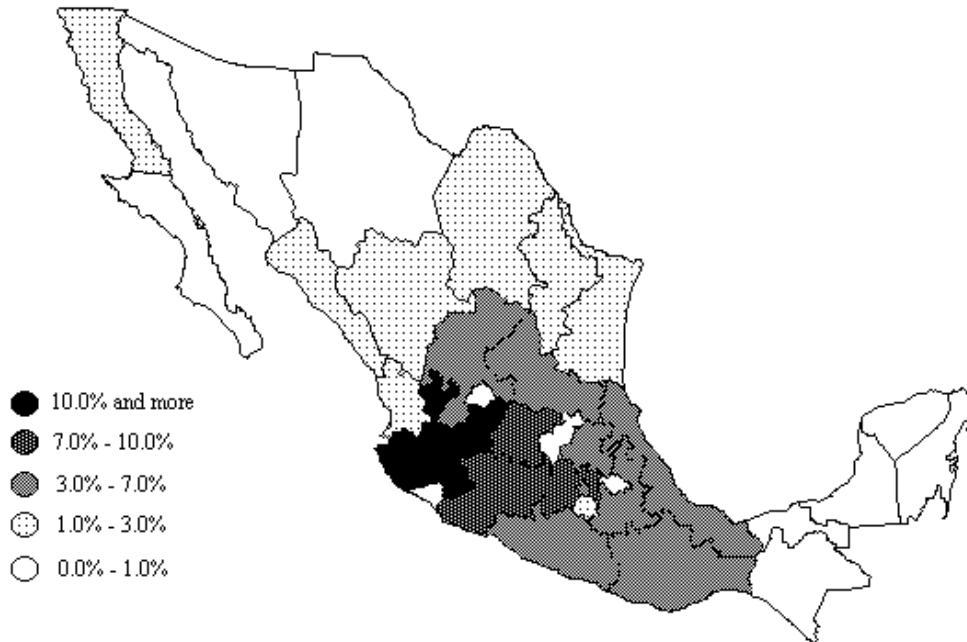
⁴ In 1987-1992 period this state contributed with less than 0.8% of total migration. In 1995-2000 period, however, 5% of total emigrants were native from Veracruz.

FIGURE 3
MEXICO 1987 - 1992. EMIGRANTS TO USA BY STATE OF ORIGIN.



Source: ENADID, 1992.

FIGURE 4
MEXICO 1995 - 2000. EMIGRANTS TO USA BY STATE OF ORIGIN



Source: Muestra Censal, XII Censo de Población. 2000.

INDUSTRIAL CHANGE AND MIGRATION IN THE UNITED STATES

In the 1970s, the United States economy began to show clear signs of stagnation and crisis, expressed *inter alia* by a growing decline in competitiveness in world trade. For example, whereas in the 1960s the United States accounted for more than 17% of world exports and just 13% of world imports, by 1990 these percentages were practically reversed. Such a loss of competitiveness in world trade was indicative of the productivity crisis that affected (and still affects) many American corporations. This crisis is a direct reflection of the demise of the Fordist paradigm which had predominated all over the world as the linchpin of the system of production, the method of regulation of capital-labour relations and the model of capitalist accumulation since the crisis of the 1930s (Lipietz, 1997).

Faced with this situation, United States firms and corporations implemented various strategies to recover their levels of competitiveness in the world. In particular, and as distinct from Europe where a strategy of introducing flexibility based on major changes in technology, administrative and human resource management predominated, the situation in the United States has been more varied, with technological innovation strategies designed to improve labour productivity levels (internal flexibility) apparently coexisting with strategies to deregulate contractual relations (external flexibility) (Araujo, 1996). Together, these strategies constitute the new model of post-industrial growth and account for recent changes in labour market dynamics, labour relations and occupational structure.

(i) As regards the first strategy, Araujo (1996) has identified four policies that tend to predominate in the American context: first, a human resources policy in terms of incentives, motivation drives, bonuses and compensation, worker involvement and training and retraining programmes; second, the reorganization of work based on the formation of work teams; third, a strategy of flexible management based on the introduction of new measurement and productivity systems to put principles of total quality into practice; and lastly, a new policy on the configuration of industrial relations, especially in terms of the formation of joint decision-making committees consisting of managers and workers.

A representative survey of major American firms⁵ has shown that in the mid-1980s 25% of these companies had restructured their work organization practices by including various post-Fordist principles in the configuration of industrial relations. Yet, less than 10% of the workforces of these firms were then affected by these new forms of organization of production (Lawler et al., 1989). By 1992, however, more than 40% of the firms interviewed had already set up quality circles. Moreover, in 37% of these firms, more than half of the workers were involved in at least one of the following practices: self-managed teams, task rotation, quality circles or total quality management programmes (Osterman, 1993).

These new labour organization practices are to be found not only in manufacturing plants but also in the service sector and in the public sector, which have been pressurized into making their human resource management practices more flexible in order to cope with financial problems arising from the fact that high labour costs were no longer linked to productivity growth rates and also to deal with the fiscal crisis and the privatization of State companies.

Other authors, however, consider that these practices are rather marginal because, on the one hand, they do not appear to affect the power structure of the major United States firms and, on the other hand, internal flexibility strategies of this kind tend to be adopted partially and disjointedly. It is also reported that these strategies actually go so far as to represent a production model proper in only a few cases, such as that of Xerox, or Federal Express, for example (Applebaum and Batt, 1994).

The partial application of these internal flexibility practices also leads to greater variety, especially in terms of the coexistence in one and the same plant of different practices and principles for the organization of production. Thus, Zlotniski (1998) states that, in some Silicon Valley firms, new departments that have introduced various forms of worker involvement, quality circles and major technological innovations, and have qualified workers in stable jobs, seem to coexist with other departments in the same firm, that depend on forms of subcontracting, part-time work, low-skilled migrant workers, etc.

(ii) As regards the second strategy of external flexibility, there seems to be greater agreement. It is clear, for a start, that the processes of change in the forms of organization of production create new requirements that the workforce must meet in order to obtain employment. And so, far from being an exception, segmentation and differentiation within the labour market seem to have become common practice in industrialized countries. In this

context, the prevalent trend in the United States economy is towards an expansion of low-wage, low-skilled, highly unstable, part-time jobs (Klaugsbrunn, 1996). The consequences of industrial restructuring are therefore de-industrialization and plant closures, while bad relations have been established between employers and workers, characterized by the erosion of trade union power, the contraction of stable jobs and occupations, along with cutbacks in wages and social benefits (Fernández-Kelly, 1991).

The loss of competitiveness has also forced many firms to launch in-depth changes in production. This has led to an increase in small-scale production, involving high product differentiation and rapid changes in product design and marketing. These industrial changes, which are based in quite a few cases on subcontracting and the use of flexible forms of labour organization, ranging from highly flexible to very primitive forms, may be found in technologically very advanced and modernized industries as well as in more traditional and technologically backward sectors. In this context, economic restructuring has led to the decline of the industrial complex that had predominated since the post-War period, and it now provides the general setting for the new trends in occupational structure and labour market dynamics⁵.

One of the new trends is a tendency to polarize the structure of occupations with regard to wage levels, qualifications and training, as well as types of contract (part time, piecework, etcetera). This means that there is a new pattern of post-industrial growth, which allows one to observe recent transformations in the dynamic of labour markets, employment relations and occupational structure.

The central component of the new dynamic of the work process in information societies is the tendency to polarize its social and occupational structure (Bauman, 1998). The jobs and occupations that are booming are not only the “richest” in information or incorporated knowledge, but there is also a sustained increase in the number of occupations in services and in the number of low skill jobs. There is a quantitative boom in “*non-information*” jobs, and like their counterparts they form part of the new social structure of the information society (Zlolski, 1994). It is not only a question of “residual” occupations or left-overs from the pre-information societies. Nor is it a matter of marginal employments, “excluded” from the circles of production and reproduction in the information society. It is really the opposite: most of these jobs and occupations are created by the modern information economy. There are certain tasks and occupations which have been exposed to extreme forms of flexibility in terms of salary, and of deregulation in drawing up contracts, with the result that the jobs are socially and economically depreciated, although they are important pieces in the process of reproducing the information society.

All in all, this is a situation of labour market polarization in which stable, high-income jobs exist alongside others marked by their informal and occasional character. Sassen and Smith (1992) have used the term *casualization* to highlight the insecure

⁵ It is estimated, for example, that part-time work grew from 22% in 1977 to more than 33% in 1986. Similarly, some 80% of these workers (around 50 million people) earned less than US \$11,000 per annum (Sassen and Smith, 1992).

framework in which this process occurs. According to these authors, the most extreme expression of casualization is the recent expansion of the informal economy in many major United States cities, which involves forms of temporary, part-time and occasional work and a rise in subcontracting. In New York City, for example, the informal economy is present in a wide range of industrial sectors, albeit to varying degrees. It is found especially in the garments industry and in accessories, among building contractors, in footwear and sports goods, furniture, electronic components, packing and transport and, to a lesser extent, in other activities (including flowers and the manufacturing of explosives). Fernández-Kelly (1991) found that informal activity in Southern California was equally diverse.

Although various types of jobs are to be found in the informal economy, most of them are unskilled jobs with no training opportunities and involving repetitive tasks. In quite a few cases, they are also “occasional” jobs in industries that are still governed by Fordist forms of work organization. Here casualization, or informalization, is really a strategy that such firms adopt to cope with the challenges of competition without having to bear the costs of technological innovation. The informal economy is thus not only a survival strategy for families impoverished by industrial restructuring but is also, basically, the result of patterns of change in formal economies and in advanced sectors of the United States economy (Sassen, 1990).

Now, in these “casualized”, or informalized, markets, there tends to be a high degree of selectivity as to the origin of the employed workforce. Thus Fernández-Kelly (1991) found that in the counties of Southern California and in New York, Hispanics and other ethnic minorities are strongly represented in this type of activity, especially in manufacturing sectors. They are employed as operators, in assembly tasks and other low-skilled, low-income jobs. She also reports that in most cases there are no trade unions, subcontracting is spreading and the workforce is predominantly feminine.

In this context therefore, such a strategy of labour flexibility and deregulation seems to be the basis of a fresh supply of jobs for the migrant population and this situation has therefore had direct effects on migration dynamics and changes therein during the last decade (Zolniski, 1998). We can thus account for the rise in migration, as well as its new forms and socio-demographic profiles, as being partly the result of these changes in labour demand in the main United States cities.

MEXICAN MIGRANTS AND SEGMENTATION PROCESS IN THE U.S.A. LABOUR MARKET.

In recent decades, the United States economy has been going through a process of structural change, marked by the renewal of its productive base and of its technology, and its re-insertion into the current movement towards globalization. In the labour market, a new structure of employment has been put together, and it has two distinct, complementary features. The first is a change in the structure of employment as such, and the other is the polarization and segmentation of employment within the new structure.

The new structure of employment shows in general that professional services (whether in production or of a social nature) have assumed greater importance, and

activities of extraction and transformation are relatively less important than before (Castells, 1998; Kumar, 1995; Sassen, 1998). The latter are the sections of the economy most closely linked to the industrial society, while the former are those economic activities which are commonly held to form part of the information society.

For many writers, these activities are identified as the “winners” in the globalization process and therefore represent the new profile of the employee in the coming information society. Nevertheless it should be noted that these “professional” services are still serving and feeding other productive processes, especially in some branches of the transformation industry (microelectronics, technology, energy, automobiles, and others). So it is not really surprising that the transformation industry still accounts for over 22% of the total number of people in employment.

As the structure of employment changes, so a second process can be seen to operate, which is that of inserting Mexican immigrants, and immigrants in general, into the United States labour market. This is the process of polarization and segmentation of employment, which are characteristic of the new structure of the labour market. To illustrate how this process functions we shall use a comparative analysis of the profile of Mexican workers, measured against other ethnic groups⁶.

The first thing we learn from this study is that the structure and the composition of employment, by sector of the activity and categories of occupations, is markedly different for each ethnic group. For example, the Mexican population tend to concentrate on productive activities as such, rather than tertiary activities, except for personal services (see table 3). In fact, 12.2% of the Mexican immigrant workers are employed in agriculture and other extraction activities, while 34% work in the transformation and construction industries. Of the Anglo-americans, on the other hand, only 3.1% work in extraction activities and less than 23% are employed in the transformation industries.

Only 7% of the Mexicans are contracted to work in the sector of services to production, and the same number work in professional social services. In either case the number of people employed is far less than that of other ethnic groups, such as immigrants of Asian origin and the Anglo-american population. We may finally note that in the sector of commerce and distribution, each ethnic group taken into account has approximately the same share of employment. But this aggregate figure hides a basic fact, which is that the proportion of Mexican workers occupying such positions is not nearly as great as that of Anglo-americans in the same jobs, nor as much as that of immigrants of Asian origin employed in that area.

⁶ The statistical information comes from the Current Population Survey conducted in March 1998 by the Census Bureau of the United States in conjunction with the Bureau of Labour Statistics. Their enquiry records the ethnic origin and migratory status of the individuals consulted, their socio-demographic character, and, what is of special interest, information about occupation, conditions of employment, and other social-labour variables. Although the information is on cross-level, the high level of separation recorded between the type of activity and the usual occupation of the actively employed population, allows us to make a detailed comparison between the insertion of Mexican rather than other ethnic groups into the labour market, and in this way identify certain features of the process of segmentation and polarization in the labour market already referred to.

TABLE 3				
UNITED STATES 1998.				
EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE BY ETHNIC ORIGIN				
	Total Labour Force	Mexicans Immigrants	Asians Immigrants	Anglo- Americans
Total	100	100	100	100
Extractives	3.0	12.2	1.7	3.1
Manufacturing	22.4	33.9	21.3	22.7
Distribution	27.7	29.0	30.9	27.1
Producer Services	15.6	6.9	14.9	16.2
Social Services	24.0	7.2	21.3	24.1
Personal Services	7.4	10.8	10.0	6.8
Total	100	3.3	3.5	69.7
Extractives	100	13.7	1.9	71.6
Manufacturing	100	5.1	3.3	70.8
Distribution	100	3.5	3.9	68.3
Producer Services	100	1.5	3.3	72.2
Social Services	100	1.0	3.1	70.1
Personal Services	100	4.9	4.7	64.5

Source: *Current Population Survey*, 1998.

With regard to the relative importance of the Mexican work force's contribution to each sector of activity, it is interesting to note where their work tends to be. Mexican workers provide around 14% of all the labour in activities of extraction (mainly agriculture). This means that there is one Mexican worker for every six workers of other ethnic origin. The figure is much higher than in the American economy as a whole, where the Mexican work force provides only 3.3% of all those employed. So in this one sector, the Mexican presence is more than 4 times greater than it is, on average, in other economic activities.

The Mexican work force also provides 5% of the people employed in industrial activities and the same percentage of those in personal services. In both cases, the proportion of Mexicans employed in these sectors is much greater than their presence in the United States economy as a whole. These figures show that to some extent the Mexican work force is specialized in the extraction activities where they are most wanted, and to a lesser extent in industrial activities such as construction and the provision of personal services.

From these figures it can also be proved that agriculture is no longer the main sector of activity to which Mexican workers direct their steps⁷. This is important because it makes it possible to defend the thesis of changes in the dynamics of the Mexican migrant population's labour activities, traceable from the late sixties and early seventies. It is also significant that industry and construction should be the areas where most Mexican workers in the United States are employed, because this would demystify the argument that

⁷ In fact as early as the end of the sixties agriculture had been replaced by the transformation industry as the principal source of employment for Mexican immigrants. See Celade, 2000.

Mexican migrants tend to drift into low skill personal services. These figures show on the contrary that the Mexican population plays an important part in productive activity as such, as well as participating in tertiary activities.

These figures prove that Mexican immigrants tend to be concentrated in those economic sectors which are farthest off from the changes and associated benefits of the modern information economy. That is, in sectors that can be thought of as “traditional”, where Fordist and Taylorian types of productive organization still rule. These forms are internally rigid, but highly flexible with regard to drawing up contracts, conditions of employment and salary agreements. The jobs taken by Mexicans in these sectors tend to be low skill and the jobs provide little training of “human capital”. In many cases they are activities requiring little in the way of information or knowledge for their execution. So they are a long way off being top jobs in the new information economy. On the contrary, they are jobs and occupations of a “traditional” kind, or else they have come into being as part of the new model of employment, but are situated at the bottom of the labour and social scales.

These observations are confirmed by an analysis of the structure of employment grouped by principal occupations, which can show the position on the labour ladder of the employee. Only 7.3% of the Mexicans immigrants are occupied in executive, professional or other positions at the level of directing or managing companies and businesses. Also, only 13% worked as administrative or technical support staff. Their situation contrasts with that of other ethnic groups, such as the Anglo-americans and Asian immigrants, of whom some 35% work in management and another 30% in technical or administrative tasks (see Table 4).

TABLE 4				
UNITED STATES 1998.				
OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE BY ETHNIC ORIGIN				
Occupation Groups	Total Labour Force	Mexicans Immigrants	Asians Immigrants	Anglo- Americans
Total	100	100	100	100
Executives and Professionals	32.4	7.3	38.6	35.8
Managers and Qualified Services	32.3	13.1	30.0	32.3
Not Qualified Services.	8.4	19.8	9.2	6.8
Manual Semi-Qualified	15.1	21.8	10.4	15.3
Manual Not Qualified	10.2	25.7	10.5	8.6
Agricultural Workers	1.6	12.1	1.3	1.3
Total	100	3.3	3.4	69.8
Executives and Professionals	100	0.7	4.1	77.0
Managers and Qualified Services	100	1.3	3.2	69.9
Not Qualified Services.	100	7.8	3.8	56.6
Manual Semi-Qualified	100	4.8	2.4	70.8
Manual Not Qualified	100	8.4	3.5	58.7
Agricultural Workers	100	24.8	2.8	54.5

Fuente: *Current Population Survey, 1998..*

Lower down the job ladder, however, the opposite applies. Here as many as 26% of the Mexican immigrant are employed in unqualified manual occupations, and other 20% in uncertificated services. Whereas only 10% or less of the Anglo-american or immigrant Asian work forces are employed in uncertificated manual occupations and less than 9% are in services not requiring paper qualifications.

These figures illustrate the relative importance of the Mexican contribution to each occupational sector in the United States job market. In agriculture, for example, Mexican labour accounts for 25% of all day labourers in the country, and 8% of those employed in occupations not requiring paper qualifications; but their presence higher up the scale is almost negligible, especially at management and professional levels, where their contribution amounts to less than 1% of those employed in that kind of position.

This differentiation with regard to occupation provides an important example of the kind of segmentation that appears to prevail in the American labour market. It is clear that those jobs and economic activities which form the basis of the modernizing process of the information society, tend to be mainly in the hands of the Anglo-american population, though they are frequently also held by immigrants from Asia. Which contrasts with the situation of the Mexican work force, who tend to be relegated to such jobs and economic activities as are either part of that segment of the economy which has been left behind by the new information technologies and their new dynamic centers (such as important transformation industries, and agriculture, to name but two), or else that are called into play by the new globalization process, but require little or no information or knowledge of an abstract nature for them to be carried out (for example certain service jobs or manual labour jobs that do not need paper qualifications).

An even greater differentiation with regard to the occupations of Mexicans and Anglo-americans (and other ethnic groups, of course) can be seen by comparing those occupations in which the Mexican contribution is significant with those where their contribution is minimal. In the first group we have the day labourers in agriculture, textile workers, cooks, building workers, domestic service, machine operators, cleaning and maintenance, manual labourers and assistants. But the Mexican contribution to the labour market of professionals, technicians, protection services, management and administration is very small. The Mexican work force represents under 1% of those employed in these positions (see table 5).

These figures show the great importance of Mexican workers to agriculture, where one of every four day labourers is a Mexican immigrant. They show the size of the Mexican contribution to various jobs and labour markets in the United States and also reveal that the Mexican immigrant tends to find work more in some productive occupations and activities than others, namely in those farthest off from the benefits of globalization, though not necessarily excluded from the globalization process itself. These activities are low skill jobs, without qualifications, insecure, deregulated, exposed to forms of extreme flexibility, with subcontracting systems and other forms of precariousness and “casualized” employment. But they are not necessarily marginalized activities or occupations left behind by technological change or excluded from the globalization process.

TABLE 5 UNITED STATES 1998. MEXICANS LABOUR FORCE BY OCCUPATIONS			
Occupations Where Mexican Immigrants are Very Important	Share of Total Labour Force	Occupations Where Mexican Immigrants Are Insignificant.	Share of Total Labour Force
Agricultural Workers	24.8 %	Professionals	0.5 %
Textile Workers	15.7 %	Technicians	0.9 %
Cookers	11.9 %	Protection Services	0.9 %
Building Workers	11.2 %	Executives	1.0 %
Domestic Services	10.2 %	Managers	1.1 %
Machine Operators	8.8 %		
Cleaning and Maintenance	7.1 %		
Manual Workers and Assistants	6.5 %		

Source: *Current Population Survey*, 1998.

For example, no one could say that agricultural activity in California is technologically backward. It is known that in that state the greatest intensive use is made of the latest technology, applications of biotechnology, and the incorporation of various information components into the productive process⁸. Nevertheless, the modernized agricultural production, which is becoming part of the information age, rests upon an important pre-information base. It does not consist of Mexican day labourers who are excluded from the information age, and marginalized by globalization, but of people who come into it from below, from a position of insecurity and instability, having no qualifications and doing non-information type jobs.

According to Bauman's theory (Bauman, 1999), the agricultural day labourers of California (of whom more than 50% are Mexican immigrants) are the "local" workers in a "global" agricultural economy. The globalization of California agriculture has turned the Mexican immigrants into local workers rather than the globe trotting workers which their migratory status might otherwise have made them. They have become global workers in the Californian agro business, without however being globalized. They are part of the globalization process but only as "localized" workers.

CONCLUSIONS

In recent years the American economy has been put through an important process of transforming production, in which a combination of various kinds of flexibility in employment and production has tended to create increased differentiation and segmentation in the structure of labour markets, especially in big cities (Sassen, 1999). In a lot of cases, the means of raising levels of international competitiveness have been based on certain kinds of flexibility applied to labour which have had a direct effect on the structure of

⁸ For example, automatic systems of watering, the use of modern technologies to forestall climate change, the use of computer systems to regulate processes of greenhouse produce and other ways of controlling natural conditions through the use of technology.

employment in the country, on the level of employment and of wages, and on the system of labour relations, and have not always favoured the worker (De la O and Gonzalez, 1994).

The sense of these economic-productive transformations, and their main effects on the dynamics of the labour market, would seem to require seeing their relation to the kinds of strategy that are being pursued in all the productive restructuring. In some cases – admittedly the smallest number – the emphasis is on internal flexibility, which relies on greater involvement by the employee in the transformations. In others, the choice is for technological change, around which a new set of occupations is built up, that favours the best qualified workers, who can adapt flexibly to the requirements of the new technology, and can rotate from one job to another (polyvalent workers). However, by its very nature, this strategy implies differentiating the work force, and reducing the options for the majority in employment.

In other cases, the option is for external forms of flexibility, especially deregulating the labour market through flexible hiring and firing, and a reduction in wages. The structure of employment changes, and part time work is favoured, along with working at home and other forms of subcontracting. This results necessarily in making employment less secure and making the employee more vulnerable in the new conditions of working of the labour market.

These transformations are not mutually exclusive, and there tends to be quite a wide range of combinations of both kinds of flexibility. As we see it, the resulting heterogeneity forms the basis of the new forms of polarization and segmentation of the labour markets, and the foundation upon which various forms of exclusion, discrimination and social segregation are constructed, affecting, amongst others, the migrant working population.

Hence we can say that this strategy of flexibility and deregulation of labour forms the structural basis for the new offers of work to the migrant population, and therefore has direct implications for the dynamics of migration and the changes it has seen in the last ten years (Zlolinsky, 1998). This makes it possible to explain the increased number of people emigrating, as well as the new modalities of the process and the changing socio-demographic profile of those involved, as being partly the result of the changes in demand for labour in the main United States cities, and as being something that favours the insertion of Mexican and Spanish speaking immigrants in general into the labour market, though in conditions of great vulnerability and precariousness

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