

**Riesgos de la fuga de cerebros en México:
construcción mediática, posturas gubernamentales
y expectativas de los migrantes**

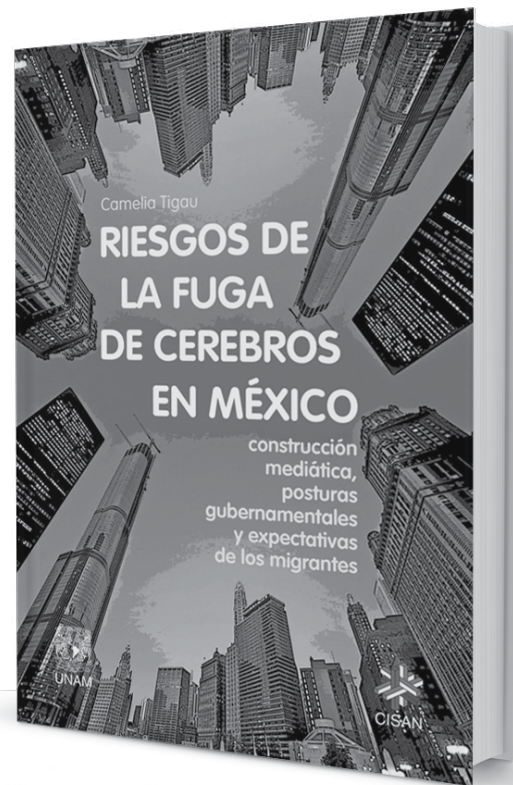
(Risks of Brain Drain in Mexico: Media Construction,
Government Positions, and Migrants' Expectations)

Camelia Nicoleta Tigau

CISAN, UNAM

Mexico City, 2013, 172 pp.

International migration is a dynamic and complex phenomenon that is undergoing sweeping changes, linked to the increase of its volume, new directions (now from developing to advanced countries), the levels of participation of women, and more and more highly skilled migrants. It is precisely the last phenomenon that occupies Camelia Nicoleta Tigau in a work whose very title invites us to think about whether it limits national development (brain drain) or can push it forward (mobility of talent).



The book contains a valuable, intriguing analysis of international migration of highly-skilled Mexicans based on a questionnaire answered on line by 148 migrants. It also uses 60 in-depth interviews with talented Mexicans in the

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United States, Canada, Europe, and Japan, plus an analysis of 141 articles published between 2009 and 2012 in three Mexican national newspapers (*La Jornada*, *El Universal*, and *Reforma*) about government programs and the opinions of some high-level public officials.

In the first chapter, Tigau offers a theoretical reflection about the phenomenon in light of its international dimension. It is worthy of note that she considers this kind of migrants part of an international elite linked to the world market of competencies, not to any particular country, and members of a new social group emerging with global capitalism. This analytic perspective situates her far from the old understanding of the phenomenon as something bad for national development (brain drain) and brings her closer to recent approaches that argue that this constant movement of highly-skilled individuals is a game that in the end benefits both the countries of origin and of destination. However, it is important to mention that the book does not gloss over the asymmetries in development among nations and posits that, given the absence of active policies in the less backward countries, it can become a drain of resources or make for disappointing results; therefore, the notion of “risks” in the title.

In the rest of the chapters, Tigau looks at the voice of the migrants and offers fascinating opinions that enrich our hypotheses about the causes of migration, the conditions in which migrants have integrated into their destination societies, the different opportunities for men and women, their opinions about our country’s current situation, their desires to return, and what could be done to improve national development. In addition, this book has the merit that the interviewees live in different countries, not just the United States. While the latter is the main destination, experiences in other countries offer new possibilities for analysis and the construction of expectations.

The book shows that highly-skilled Mexicans’ international migration is an issue on which both the migrants and the media have reasoned opinions. The author offers a provocative analysis of the media, reviewing the three aforemen-

tioned national dailies, about how a traditional vision that stigmatizes migrants (“brain drain,” a view that did recognize the government as being responsible for the lack of a clear, effective policy) morphs into one in which informed reporting and analysis prevail, at the same time noting the risks of brain drain and recognizing the potential benefits for Mexico if it became part of the global circulation of talent.

The responses to the questionnaire and the in-depth interviews contribute important information about how migrants are perceived and their assessment of their home and destination countries. Let us concentrate only on a few aspects of the rich information and the diligent analysis offered by the author. It is very important to note that highly-skilled Mexicans living abroad do not consider themselves “brains” and much less “drained” from Mexico: only nine percent accept the use of the term “brain drain.” They do, on the other hand, claim their right to look for conditions for professional development and a better quality of life abroad. Among those conditions, they cite infrastructure and equipment in scientific and technological research centers, and security and peace. They put the latter at the top of the list of the reasons for deciding to migrate, which is understandable given the ratcheting up of violence in the last decade.

In *Riesgos de la fuga de cerebros en México*, Camelia Nicoleta Tigau interviews Mexican government officials, noting the transition from the previous “the-best-policy-is-no-policy” position to another that makes explicit both the interests of Mexico *vis-à-vis* the United States and the commitment of all levels of government to migrants. She even reproduces a statement by a former Mexican ambassador to the United States who optimistically expresses his agreement with the circulation-of-talent approach. However, both the migrants and the author are right in thinking that this is a change in the sensibilities of a governing elite more than in effective policies. This is because we are still far from having a comprehensive policy that attacks the different sides of the issue, from the stigmatization of migrants to an effective attack on the risks that skilled migration brings with it for the development of science, technology, and innovative capabilities in Mexico, the underpinnings of all nations’ international competitiveness.

And in this regard, I would like to draw the reader’s attention to two issues: the first is the need to broaden Tigau’s research to include both institutions of higher learning and research centers and business circles in Mexico. This would create the widest possible panorama of the positions and practices of the relevant actors in the area of highly-skilled Mex-

icans' international migration and would assess the possible alternatives for a national policy in this field.

Specifically, it would be important to know the perceptions and practices of Mexico's scientific community, as well as its strategies for connecting with the international circulation of talent. It is also extremely important to sound out Mexico's business elite about the risks they see in highly-skilled migration and their opinions about how to deal with them. This is where doubts might arise about the value businessmen place on growth strategies and the internationalization of their companies, as well as whether in the future they are going to venture into areas of greater value added in the knowledge economy or they are going to limit their actions to incorporating innovations made elsewhere.

This issue is related to the second concern motivating the book: the need to place value on our national capacity to apply policies and programs suggested by the migrants themselves for returning or linking up to the innovation needs of Mexico's productive apparatus.

With regard to this, Tigau systematizes four broad lines of action for proposals that migrants think could help suc-

cessfully deal with brain drain and firmly place the country in the international circulation of talent. The first is to "link up current programs for the return of, liaison work with, and scholarships for Mexicans abroad, as well as scholarships for foreigners." The second consists of forging "unity in the Diaspora," promoting the image of Mexico in that community—the book makes it clear that many migrants are resentful of and disappointed with the government—, and creating policies to attract talent from abroad. A third line of action involves creating a national system of science, technology, and innovation, and lastly, a fourth is to activate the international mobility of researchers and graduate students.

The issue, focus, and conclusions of *Riesgos de la fuga de cerebros en México* are undoubtedly transcendent for national development. We hope that the Special Migration Program (PEM) 2014-2018, the first of its kind, soon to be unveiled by the federal government, has a policy on skilled international migration that is up to the challenges Mexico faces. ■■

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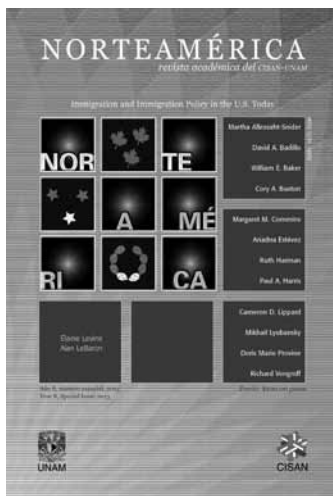
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