

### **Manuel Gamio's Ideas and Reflections on Return Migrants (1925-1930)**

#### **Ideas y reflexiones de Manuel Gamio acerca de los migrantes de retorno (1925-1930)**

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#### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to analyze the central ideas developed by Manuel Gamio about return migrants in a project conducted by the Mexican scholar in 1925 and in his classic work, published in 1930. These views are the first instances of academic reflection concerning return migrants in Mexico, the influence of American society on this social group, and the social and economic consequences of their return to Mexico.

*Keywords:* 1. migration, 2. return, 3. project, 4. Mexico, 5. The United States.

#### RESUMEN

El artículo analiza las ideas centrales que desarrolló Manuel Gamio acerca de los migrantes de retorno en un proyecto que redactó en 1925 y en su obra principal publicada en 1930. La relevancia de este trabajo radica en que examina las primeras ideas que surgieron en el medio académico mexicano acerca del migrante de retorno, la influencia que la sociedad estadounidense tenía en ellos y las consecuencias sociales y económicas de su llegada a México.

*Palabras clave:* 1. migración, 2. retorno, 3. proyecto, 4. México, 5. Estados Unidos.

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## INTRODUCTION

Manuel Gamio's (1883-1960) works on Mexican migration to the United States are widely known and cited by scholars in the field, although his central ideas have been little examined. No systematic analyses have focused on his observations and ideas on the migrant's profile, place of origin, destination, and the cultural, social, and economic aspects that he studied, as well as his sources and quantitative estimations. Different studies relay Gamio's vision on return migrants (Walsh, 2005, pp. 53-73; Walsh, 2004, pp. 118-145, among others), but no attention has been paid to his ideas on their characteristics, the literature used by the author to base his analyses, his hypotheses about the role of these migrants on the most relevant social and economic aspects taking place during the early twentieth century, and the reasons behind his proposed repatriation project.

The purpose of the present study was to analyze Gamio's central ideas about returning migrants, that is, men<sup>2</sup> who left Mexico to work in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century and then returned to their places of origin; the author referred to these people as returnees, repatriated immigrants, or 'reimmigrants.' For that purpose, we examined the characteristics ascribed by the author to these returnees based on their migration experiences and the items that they brought back to Mexico, the role that they played in the Mexican Revolution, the labor movement, and the agrarian reform, and the reasons why he proposed a repatriation project.

We also discuss Gamio's frequent assertions that migrants were transformed as a result of their contact with American culture in terms of employment skills, culture, education, and physical appearance and that they were thus significantly changed when they returned to Mexico. We also highlight an insistent claim by the father of Mexican anthropology: that returning migrants were significantly influenced by the American "material culture." The present study demonstrates the author's constant exaggeration and overestimation of the qualities and skills acquired by migrants in the United States, as well as the social and economic impact of their return to Mexico.

Gamio stated that the men who returned in the first decades of the twentieth century were precursors of the Mexican Revolution, the labor movement, and the Agrarian Reform. He also thought that, given such outstanding qualities, the Mexican government should promote their return by means of a special program with the purpose of building agricultural colonies to take advantage of their acquired capabilities so that they contributed to economic and cultural development in Mexico. These idealistic views were also due to his disappointment that the agricultural and cultural capabilities supposedly

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<sup>2</sup>In accordance with the composition of migration in his time, Gamio's studies usually focus on men and rarely on women, children, or families.

acquired by return migrants in the United States had not been exploited during the first three decades of the century. This study is an approach to the first ideas on return migrants that emerged in Mexican academic circles, including the influence of American society on migrants and the social and economic consequences of their return to Mexico.

Our analysis focuses on the period from late 1925 to 1930. In 1925, Gamio conducted a research project on Mexican migration to the United States, where he outlined some ideas around the topic of interest in the present study, and in 1930, he described his central ideas on returning migrants in his most important work: *Mexican Immigration to the United States; A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment*.

### THE PATH TO MIGRATION STUDIES

In the mid-1920s, Gamio began to study Mexican migration in the United States due to a request by American foundations interested in the matter. In early December 1925, Lawrence K. Frank, director of The Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial (1923-1929), met with Gamio in Washington. The purpose of this meeting was to request a research project centered on Mexican population in the United States. In addition to Lawrence Frank, Dr. Charles E. Merriam, director of the Social Research Council, considered Gamio the most qualified person for the job given his remarkable academic career.<sup>3</sup>

Gamio received a master's degree in anthropology from Columbia University (United States) in 1912. He met important anthropologists in the institution, for instance, Franz Boas, considered the father of cultural anthropology, who had a worldwide influence on the formation of distinguished academics in the United States and Latin America. Gamio's doctoral degree was also from Columbia University, and he had published a study on the population in the valley of Teotihuacán (1924). This study earned him the recognition of American anthropologists and prompted invitations to various conferences, especially in Washington and New York, on indigenous groups in Mexico, their art, customs, clothing, and especially their culture. By the early 1920s, his reputation in the United States and Latin America were consolidated, and he was considered the most important anthropologist in Latin America (González Gamio, 1987, p.67; Gamio & Vasconcelos, 1926).

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<sup>3</sup>Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC), Collection The Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial (LSRM), series 3, subseries 6, Box 56, folder 603. New York. December 4, 1925. RAC, LSRM, series 3, subseries, 6, Box 56, folder 603. Lawrence K. Frank, memorandum of interview with Dr. Manuel Gamio, New York, December 3, 1925.

Lawrence K. Frank's invitation was part of the interest of American academia in the impact of Mexican migration on the society of their country. In those days, Paul S. Taylor (1895-1984) and Emory S. Bogardus (1882-1973) described some of the effects of immigration in cities such as Chicago, an increasingly important destination for immigrants (Arredondo, 1999; Kerr, 1976; Jones & Wilson, 1931; Taylor, 1932). Taylor, a doctor in economy from the University of California at Berkeley, formed a group of students from local universities, government agencies, and housing developers that became the first generation of researchers to conduct studies on the Mexican community in Chicago, during the second half of the 1920s. Bogardus, a prominent American sociologist, carried out research on the social and cultural impact of Mexican migration during that period and his work was published in the early 1930s (Bogardus, 1933, pp. 169-176; Bogardus, 1934).

Gamio accepted Frank's invitation because he had recently resigned the position of undersecretary of public education due to differences with the secretary, José M. Puig Casauranc. He was also about to complete a study on the relationship between the Archaic and Maya cultures in Guatemala, as requested by officials from the Archaeological Society of Washington (González, 1987, pp. 84-86; Alanís, 2003, pp. 979-1020). Thus, in the mid-1920s, and thanks to the invitation of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Foundation and the Social Research Council, Gamio began working on his project on Mexican migration to the United States.

#### *Early Ideas for the Study on Return Migration*

In 1925, Gamio wrote a document entitled "Preliminary Survey of the Antecedents and Conditions of the Mexican Population in the United States, and the Formation of a Program for a Definite and Scientific Study of the Problem." The phenomenon of return migration is absent from the study. The main purpose was to analyze the migrants' places of origin, the conditions that motivated their migration, their places of destination in the United States, and the reasons why they chose those places, in other words, their migratory background.<sup>4</sup>

Afterward, Gamio wrote a "definitive program" consisting of five sections: Neo-Mexicans, Mexican immigrants in their regions of provenance, Mexican immigrants in the United States, Future research, and a closing summary. In the second section, he points out that one of his goals is to respond to the following question: What are the organic,

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<sup>4</sup>Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles (APEC), drawer 33, exp. 38, leg. 1/6, inventory 2210. Documents by Manuel Gamio. Study of Mexican immigration in the United States and its background.

economic, cultural, and educational circumstances of Mexicans when they return to Mexico after living in the United States?<sup>5</sup> This is the first time that Gamio refers to return migrants, and his intention was to analyze the physical appearance and economic and cultural situations of some men who had returned to Mexico after working for some time in the United States.

The third section of the program received most of his attention. It was divided into six parts, and it described the circumstances and socioeconomic position of Mexicans living outside the country. Gamio points out that one of his goals was to study their saving habits and whether they had acquired property, furniture, clothing, food, and jewelry, in addition to general expenses. He was also interested in analyzing the influence of the “scientific methods” and machinery used in the United States on Mexican workers, among other topics,<sup>6</sup> and he intended to explore the “classification of abilities” for agricultural and industrial activities developed by these migrants, which once again indicates his interest in the social, economic, and cultural conditions of migrants before leaving for the United States and when they returned.

#### *Further Development of Ideas on Repatriation and Return*

The final product of the Preliminary Survey and the “definitive program” was the book *Mexican immigration to the United States: A study of human migration and adjustment*, published in 1930 by the University of Chicago. In this work, Gamio developed his ideas about return migrants more broadly. The wording used in the title denotes his main areas of interest: on the one hand, how Mexican migrants adapted to the American social, labor, economic, and cultural environment, and on the other, how they readjusted to Mexico after living and working for some time in the United States.

In the introduction, Gamio wrote that, in order to accomplish the goals of the study, it had been necessary to consider migrants before leaving for the United States, during their residence in that country, and also as Mexican returnees or reimmigrants (Gamio, 1930a, p. viii). Gamio was aware of this contemporary notion, which was included in the Mexican Migration Act of 1930 and used by the official agencies responsible for quantifying migration flows to refer to Mexicans returning to the country (Dirección General de Estadística, 1934, p. 48).

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<sup>5</sup>APEC, drawer 33, exp. 38, leg. 1/6, inventory 2210. Documents by *Manuel Gamio*. *Study of Mexican immigration in the United States and its background. Definite Program*, n.d., n.l.

<sup>6</sup>APEC, drawer 33, exp. 38, leg. 1/6, inventory 2210. Documents by Manuel Gamio.

In the introduction to *Mexican immigration to the United States*, Gamio pointed out that he had taken into account three different phases of the migratory process: the place of origin, the destination, and the return of the immigrants, although the majority of his work is focused on migrants in the United States rather than on their places of origin and their life when they returned to Mexico. Repatriation and repatriated immigrants are scarcely discussed in the book, and no definition of these terms is provided.

Occasionally, Gamio refers to return migrants as people who had returned to Mexico from the United States after some time. He made no distinction between the wide range of possible types of returnee: children, women, men deported by city, county, or state authorities, or a combination involving all three levels, and he did not use data from the Bureau of Immigration because these offices required Mexicans to register when they entered into the United States but not required when they left the country.

Instead, the anthropologist used figures compiled by the Mexican Immigration Department since the migration offices in this country did require Mexicans and foreigners to report both their entry and their exit. Therefore, Gamio considered that the data from the Department of Immigration were more comprehensive than the data from the Bureau of Immigration, which included information concerning voluntary returnees, induced or coerced returnees, unemployment rates, and cases of xenophobia and violence, as well as repatriations organized by Mexican and international private and civil charitable agencies and by the Mexican government, among other actors.

His definition of returnees was very general, in tune with his time and the agencies in charge of migratory flows, which defined returnees as Mexicans who had lived in a foreign country and returned to Mexico with the purpose of establishing themselves, regardless of whether they returned on their own will or were deported by foreign authorities (Bogardus, 1934, pp. 90-95).

## MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF RETURN MIGRANTS

Gamio had a clear-cut idea about the characteristics of people who returned to Mexico after having lived and worked for a period of time in the United States. However, the attributes acquired by these people were overly exalted by such an idea—he believed that most migrant workers underwent an occupational, cultural, material, and even physical transformation that granted them special qualities.

He classified the United States braceros into three large groups: unskilled workers, specialized workers, and tenant farmers. The third group was the central focus of Gamio's attention. He pointed out that they represented the vast majority of migrants; some of the changes that they experienced were associated with their acquired specializations and skills

for working in close cooperation and distributing individual activity. He also believed that they experienced ‘the discipline of modern work’ and ‘good working habits,’ and that, according to him, these men had raised their cultural level and learned to temper their character and save money. In addition, they became specialized and learned to operate industrial and agricultural machinery (called ‘modern tools’ by the author), and many of them acquired significant experience in these areas. Similarly, in his point of view, they were enlightened by ‘intensive scientific agriculture’ and the processes used to transform raw materials into industrial products (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 33, 42, 49-50, 236).

According to Gamio, a high percentage of Mexican migrants who had worked in the United States had used machinery that was still unavailable in Mexico, and they learned new ways to work that differed from the prevalent practices in their country of origin, experiencing other schemes and patterns to organize work. If that were not enough, they had assimilated and experienced the industrial advances of the United States. Oppositely, Gamio regarded Mexican workers as ‘backward,’ disorderly, unskilled, and unable to collaborate with one another.

Nevertheless, migrants had ‘removed’ these bad traits from themselves. Migration had made them avant-garde citizens, better workers who were ‘technologically and culturally progressive’; that is, they transformed themselves into workers ‘of the modern type, much more efficient than before’ (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 49-50); therefore, they brought many desirable qualities with them when they returned to Mexico.

He concluded that their contact with ‘the social elements of American civilization’ changed them in various ways. In Gamio’s opinion, their main influence was the material culture: housing, clothing, food, hygiene, and ‘agricultural and industrial education’; clothing, in particular, was the ‘great change’ (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 146, 172- 173). Many of them assumed ‘American characteristics’ to the extent that, in some cases, the ‘Mexican material culture’ was lost and replaced by American culture.

Overall, Gamio considered that migrants underwent remarkable changes, both qualitatively and quantitatively. He believed that they were ‘improved in the United States in different ways’, and American civilization was beneficial because they adopted some of its traits: they dressed better, they worked more efficiently, their diet was excellent, and some had even learned to read and write, notions of organization, and they had also become more disciplined (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 67-69, 144, 172-173).

Therefore, migrants acquired remarkable cultural, occupational, physical, economic, ‘moral and intellectual’ qualities in their life in the United States. This idea was shared by some journalists and politicians from that time, such as Alfonso Fabila Montes de Oca, who was in charge of a repatriation office in 1932 (Fabila, 1991 [1928], p. 38)–. The American environment had thus awakened them to a new life in which they emerged as a

sort of supermen; therefore, their return to Mexico would be desirable because these virtues could be leveraged and exploited.

The background of Gamio's points of view were the ideas of his mentor Franz Boas concerning the powerful influence of the environment not only on the cultural development of men but also on their physical development (Gamio, 1942, pp. 36-37). Reflecting on immigration from Europe to the United States, Boas considered that 'migrants are transformed due to the influence of their new environment in both their bodily form and their mental behavior.' In addition, the author stated that the social and mental behavior of descendants of immigrants had been proven to assimilate into American types in all surveyed traits (Boas, 1964, p. 263).

*The Evidence of American Influence*

To demonstrate that migrants were in fact under the influence of the 'American material culture,' Manuel Gamio carried out an investigation based on objects 'brought to Mexico free of customs duty' by 2 104 migrants returning to the country in 1927. These objects had been acquired and used in the United States, and the data had been collected by customs officials in the most important border cities at the time: Ciudad Juárez, Laredo, Agua Prieta, Piedras Negras, Matamoros, Reynosa, Ojinaga, Sásabe, and Ciudad Guerrero (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 67-69).

Items included agricultural and industrial tools, automobiles and light trucks, domestic animals, household implements, furniture, household utensils, and musical instruments. Based on this information, Gamio concluded that most returnees had developed new needs during their time in the United States. 'The most remarkable thing,' according to the anthropologist, was their desire to increase their degree of domestic comfort, since these migrants had never used toilets, refrigerators, stoves, sewing machines, or typewriters in Mexico before migrating. Many of them brought these types of items when they came back (Table 1) (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 67-69).

Table 1. Percentage of Reported Items per 100 Registered Immigrants

Items	Percentage
Bathtubs	38.19
Metal or wooden toilets	12.73
Refrigerators	3.8
Metal kitchenware	77.99

Washing machines	0.38
Stoves	27.58
Beds	82.88
Mattresses	70.53
Chairs	134.58
Sewing machines	16.57
Typewriters	1.42

Source: Gamio (1930a, p. 68). The original table is indicated as ‘Table IX.’

Clothing represented a high percentage of the items; therefore, Gamio concluded that these garments reflected the ‘American cultural influence’ because it showed the ‘collective taste’ acquired by migrants in the ‘American environment’ (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 67-69). Considering that 3,753 packages, suitcases, and bags contained various types of garments, Gamio estimated the number of separate items to be in the in tens of thousands. A third conclusion was related to the possession of automobiles, something he considered to be ‘absolutely unheard of’ among people from the ‘humble social background’ shared by most migrants, since 37.69 percent of the return migrants in the sample owned a car when they returned to Mexico. Approximately 28 percent were passenger cars and 9.88 percent were trucks (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 67-69).

The fourth conclusion referred to livestock. He observed that the migrants brought few horses, donkeys, cows, and goats, and highlighted the number of chickens. In this regard, he expressed regret that the number of animals and livestock, in general, had been so scarce: he considered it insufficient to improve ‘the native races.’ Similarly, the number of agricultural and industrial tools was moderate; 13.72 percent of the packages contained this type of items. Migrants also brought plows (8.64%), harvesters (0.95%), and dibbles (1.04%). He probably also regretted that the number of tools was scarce because, as will be discussed below, Gamio expected returnees to exert a significant influence on the national agricultural economy.

His fifth conclusion concerned ‘the musical and artistic tendencies of migrants;’ according to the author, such culture could be inferred from the 21.82 percent of reimmigrants who had brought American phonographs with them. He was struck by the ‘remarkable’ number of pianos, which were probably quite expensive musical instruments.

The last conclusion had to do with books. Considering that the vast majority of immigrants were illiterate when they migrated to the United States, their ‘intellectual

progress could be expressed' by the number of books that they brought back with them. According to the author's estimations, each box contained an average of 40 books, or a total of 2 600: at least one book per individual in the study group (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 67-69). This interpretation is associated with the idea that migrants developed literacy skills and aspirations as a result of their experiences in the United States. According to Gamio's vision, many of them had an 'educational experience' that inspired them to become literate.

The most significant results of Gamio's analyses were: a) the 'cultural influence' reflected by clothing, b) the number of cars brought by reimmigrants, and c) the educational progress achieved by these people thanks to books. Thus, from his point of view, these men were better dressed and more literate than their countrymen who had stayed in the country.

Gamio's analyses of the data obtained from the customs offices in the border were limited; for instance, he failed to examine in detail each of the sources from whence he obtained information. In the present study, we examined each of the categories more closely for a finer analysis focused on the most representative items, i.e., the most numerous items, introduced into Mexico mainly via Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and Laredo. The information on automobiles and trucks shows that they were carrying a large number of spare tires (792), possibly because they were not easily available in Mexico. They also brought different kinds of pipes with them (549) that could be used as spare parts if their vehicles broke. According to the data, most of these vehicles were Ford models (Gamio, 1930a, p. 225).

Phonographs, beds (1,745), mattresses (1,484), and bedsheets (807) stood out among the household implements, which suggests a certain adoption of the comfort standards of American life. The degree to which returning migrants had become accustomed to such standards was confirmed by the numerous new needs that they had developed (Gamio, 1930a, p. 225). The number of chairs (2,156) and kitchen utensils (1,642) was also worthy of notice, perhaps because their materials and designs were uncommon and original in Mexico. A less important category includes bedding, included in 634 packages (same number of beds included in the list of household items), tables (596), stoves (581), and picture frames; these were items intended to increase comfort in kitchens and bedrooms (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 226-228).

Data on domestic animals show the predominant presence of chickens (2,247), followed by goats (333) and, to a lesser extent, roosters (131) and mules (111). As Gamio pointed out, the number of cattle brought back by the 'immigrants who came back' in 1927 was low. The amount of imported agricultural and industrial tools was also very limited in comparison with other items such as beds, mattresses, or clothing, except for only a few

sets of tools (289), plows (182), and axes (156). In general terms, reimmigrants brought few tools with them (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 224-225).

Therefore, in 1927, most of the items brought into Mexico by returnees were chairs, beds, mattresses, phonographs, chickens, and some cars. At this point, Gamio's forceful attempt to support his conclusions on the significance of the effect of the 'American material culture' on immigrants begins to emerge. This influence could, of course, have been a reality in some cases, but none is expressly indicated and conclusions are generalized. His opinions concerning the cultural impact are also exaggerated, especially in regard to his association between books and the literacy level acquired by some migrants. Again, this could have happened in some cases, but Gamio generalized their significance. Overall, the evidence provided by the scholar is not convincing enough as an account of the influence of the American culture on the majority of migrants who returned to Mexico.

Gamio's information had additional shortfalls that should be discussed in order to determine their scope. In the first place, it is not clear who the information came from, in other words, who were the people who provided it. It is unknown whether they were single, married, how large were their families if they had any, as well as the length of their stay in the United States and the reasons why they returned, among other data. In other words, the information on the profile of the 'returning immigrants' is missing. The documented information suggests that they were people who returned to the country after many years in the United States carrying numerous items, that most of them were married, and that women and children were among them. The sample was very general and, unfortunately, no contemporary studies have attempted to quantify systematically the information analyzed by Gamio in this study. There is a sporadic record in certain newspapers from the border on the things brought by Mexicans when they returned to their country, and they sometimes indicated whether they were single people or families. Data on the characteristics of returnees and on the items that they brought back with them are available from consulates in Mexico and the United States. However, in both cases, the information lacked a systematic analysis, which is why the study lacks a more rigorous statistical apparatus.

Another limitation of Gamio's study is associated with the lack of significant events affecting migratory flows in 1927, such as exceptionally high emigration or migrant return caused by recession or large-scale deportation. Numbers of migrant returns larger than those registered in 1927 (69,125) were observed in several other years between 1920 and 1927 (1923, 85,825; 1924, 105,834; 1925, 77,056).

Therefore, the information from 1927 is a biased sample of such number, of the characteristics of the returnees, and of the things they brought back with them.

Gamio himself acknowledged that his plan to study the 'cultural condition' of Mexicans who returned to their homes after living for some time in the United States failed to accomplish its expected goals completely. This was due to the fact that, at the time of the study (1927-1928), the flow of returnees to the regions that he visited (in Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán) had decreased considerably as a result of religious conflicts (namely the Cristero War, a violent clash between the Church and the State that took place from 1926 to 1929). Instead of returning to their states, returnees often headed to less troubled states.

To fill this gap, the anthropologist analyzed the items brought back to Mexico from the United States by the returnees through different points along the border in 1927 (Gamio, 1930b, p. 21). However, we consider that the material associated with cultural influences of an intellectual nature used by Gamio was insufficient and allowed for partial conclusions only.

#### *What People Who Came from the United States Did in Mexico*

Gamio believed that returnees had played an important role in the Revolution, the labor movement, and the Agrarian Reform. This belief was based on the hypothesis that the experience of living in another country had made a deep impression on these people—a better way of life in terms of wages, work, and, in general, social well-being, that is, both occupationally and ideologically. Therefore, they demanded better conditions and attempted to implement some of the forms of organization that they learned in the United States when they returned to Mexico. In Gamio's vision, migrants brought with them the desire to improve the conditions in their homeland and demanded the government to provide better working and living conditions, which was reflected by their role in the civil war, labor organizations, and the agrarian struggles.

Concerning the Revolution, he believed that migrants returned to their country bearing ideas and memories of a better way of life; these ideas spread and developed among the masses, especially among peasants, the most frequent 'class' among migrants. He considered that migration had increased during the Porfirio Díaz administration due to the federal government initiative of building railroads to the American border. The yearnings of the 'Mexican masses' were embodied by the returnee, who represented a different kind of existence that highlighted the contrast between the 'advantages and liberties of the American worker with the terrible misery of the Mexican' (Gamio, 1930a, p. 160). Demands of better living conditions would follow, and given that officials were 'eternally unaware of social phenomena' and failed to meet these demands, 'the revolutions that have torn Mexico since the beginning of this century' broke out (Gamio, 1930a, p. 160).

The influence of return migrants on the Revolution was evident to Gamio from the fact that, since the Francisco I. Madero administration and until the late 1920s, ‘the pathway of the Revolution’ had run from north to south, meaning that presidents and many of the ministers and senior military officers had been born in the border states. Additionally, some of them had been educated or had lived in the United States. This idea that the Revolution had been driven by ‘men from the border or by former migrants’ was shared by other scholars (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 160-161).

Gamio considered the Mexican labor movement as another ‘example of revolution based not on weapons but on economic factors’ where the influence of return migrants could be observed. Many of its leaders had been migrants, and according to Gamio, their main organizations were directly inspired by the American Federation of Labor (AFL), one of the first major union federations in the United States, founded in 1886 by Samuel Gompers. Gamio wrote that this influence ‘of American labor ideas’ was to be expected, especially among Mexican workers who worked in the ‘border states, in misery and ignorance,’ while their American counterparts were ‘organized and developed’ (Gamio, 1930a, p.161).

Gamio also suggested that ‘repatriated immigrants’ from the early twentieth century had ‘probably’ imported the agrarian movement from the United States to Mexico because the circumstances of American social life would have impressed the Mexican immigrants. A supporting argument for this hypothesis was, according to Gamio, that the Mexican revolutionary movement began in 1910 had acquired a social, economic, and political nature, in addition to its agrarian basis, only after migration to the United States began to take place at a large scale, which naturally increased the number of returnees in Mexico (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 161-162).

Gamio’s perspective on the relevance of the men who returned from the United States during the Revolution, the labor movement, and the Agrarian Reform is most alluring; however, its accuracy is challenged due to the lack of enough evidence to support it. Gamio failed to present data and information to support this hypothesis, except for occasional examples. He was also based on the behavior of two-way migration flows.

To corroborate Gamio’s hypothesis, people from the migrants’ communities of origin would need to be asked how influential their returnees were in the struggle to improve local conditions when they came back from the United States. Subsequently, an analysis would have to be carried out at the regional, state, and even national levels. Only then would it be possible to present a conclusion concerning the degree of importance of returnees during the Revolution. Currently, available information makes Gamio’s hypothesis downright dubious because there is little evidence in its support.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Paul S. Taylor conducted a study in Arandas, Jalisco, a community characterized by its large proportion of migrants; the author fails to indicate whether migrants who returned from the United States had any role in the promotion of revolutionary ideas (Taylor, 1933). Other communities in the north, center, and south of the country and their social and economic conditions should be analyzed in order to differentiate between the possible influence of returnees from the United States and the local circumstances of each community as motivations for their involvement in the Civil War.

There are also a number of questions that have not yet been raised, for example: Which among the returnees were determined to fight for a better way of life based on the standards they had experienced in the United States? How many of them were so? In which municipalities or states were they active? Was the number of migrants who returned 'with revolutionary ideas' at the beginning of the twentieth century a key factor in the Mexican Revolution? What were the differences between the life aspirations of migrants who returned to communities in the north (Chihuahua, Coahuila, Tamaulipas, Sonora) and those of people who returned to the center (Michoacán, Guanajuato, Jalisco)? Are there any accounts of returnees who pointed out the differences between the living conditions in the United States and in Mexico to local or federal authorities? This would be a 'bottom-up' analysis.

An 'up-bottom' analysis poses additional questions. A thorough analysis would need to be focused on each of the cases of important characters who participated in the revolution and were educated in the United States or lived near the border (e.g., Venustiano Carranza, Álvaro Obregón, Francisco Villa, Pascual Orozco) to determine the extent to which their experiences near the border, their migration, or the social and economic conditions of their places of origin motivated their participation in the struggle. For the time being, Gamio's proposal remains an unsolved hypothesis.

As for the influence of returnees on the labor movement, documented cases describe how 'repatriated migrants' played active roles in labor unions. One of them was Ricardo Treviño, who was a member of Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, a labor organization founded in 1905, open to all workers) during his residence in the United States; back in Mexico, in 1924, he was appointed secretary of foreign affairs in the newly created Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (CROM) (Álvarez, 1995, p. 54).

Práxedes Guerrero was also a migrant; he was a miner in Colorado and in Morenci, Arizona, and afterward, he became a worker leader in mining areas in different Mexican-American border states (Torres, 2014, p. 139). For his part, Fernando Palomárez was a Mayo Indian from Sinaloa who migrated to the United States in 1905 and quickly became involved in the organization of mineworkers from the IWW Arizona chapter; afterward, he

went to the Mexican mines in Cananea, Sonora, with the purpose of leading Yaqui and Mayo Indian workers (Weber, 2012, p. 219). Recent research has revealed the active participation of migrants (from Sonora, Chihuahua, and Durango) in different labor organizations while working in the United States mining and railway industries, as well as their role in strikes; many of them became involved in union and labor rights activities as returnees (Torres, 2014, pp. 134-135).

The Mexican Liberal Party (PLM) was a political organization founded at the beginning of the twentieth century, by Enrique and Ricardo Flores Magón, among others. The Magón brothers fled Mexico due to the persecution of the Porfirio Díaz administration. They began their activities in the United States in 1904. PLM members were mainly industrial workers, and the organization had a strong presence in California, Texas, and New Mexico.

By 1905, the PLM had attracted a social base of workers composed of migrants who traversed the southern United States and northern Mexico in search of employment. These circumstances facilitated a close relationship between the PLM and the IWW in some parts of the United States, as well as a constant relationship between these organizations and the Mexican labor movement (Torres, 2014, p. 137). Under these circumstances, some migrants were undoubtedly in contact with PLM leaders and participated in labor and union movements in the United States, and they replicated these activities as return migrants in Mexico.

This was especially true for certain areas along the border, for example, the mining centers of Chihuahua, where workers were often in contact with their counterparts in Arizona and Texas (Friedrich, 1981, p. 33). A finer interpretation should consider other cases in which exclusively national conditions were more significant, namely the rise of the labor movement in the rest of the country, the unrest of the Mexican labor environment driven by the overthrow of Porfirio Díaz, and the emergence new labor unions and confederations in response to the country's internal conditions (Carr, 1991; Ruiz, 1978; Torres, 2014, pp. 57-58, 148).

Gamio also thought that returnees had represented an important force in the Agrarian Reform, and he found direct relationships among increased migration, migrant return, and the demands of the Mexican agrarian sector. He points out that they took place at the same time, which is accurate to a certain degree because these demands were expressed almost at the same time as an increase in emigration and reimmigration rates between 1917 and 1929. However, this hypothesis requires further demonstration or evidence, which Gamio failed to provide—it would be necessary to analyze the social and economic conditions in the returnees' places of origin and to determine how much weight their experiences as migrants could have had on the agrarian movement.

Ann L. Craig (1983) agreed with Gamio's hypothesis that the work experience acquired by some migrants in the United States contributed to 'agrarian activism' upon their return to their communities of origin. In search of evidence, she conducted a study on the first agrarian activists in Lagos de Moreno, Jalisco, and described the case of several migrants who migrated to the United States in the first years of the twentieth century, returned to Mexico in the 1920s, and played active roles in the agrarian reform (Craig, 1983, pp. 154, 189-193, 195-215).

Some other cases presented by the author evince that both the work experience and the political ideas acquired by migrants in the United States were essential for their activities in their original communities; such is the case of Víctor Reyes, who lived in the United States from 1923 to 1928, and by 1930 had become an important figure in the agrarian movement. In other cases, there were no traces of work experience or activism north of the border that could be deemed crucial for their participation in the movement. For example, Juan Oliva and Arcadio Amézquita, who had migrated before 1920, but became acquainted with the agrarian reform until their return, in the early 1930s. In some cases, the activists had participated in political activities before migrating. In other words, they were already aware of the social problems in their communities and were interested in collaborating and participating in an organized manner to change the situation before migrating to the United States.

The case of Primo Tapia (1885-1926)—a Purépecha migrant from the early twentieth century who was a worker leader in the United States with the IWW and was acquainted with PLM leaders—has been cited as an example of a migrant who, upon returning to his community (Naranja, Michoacán), became the leader in the struggle for communal lands. However, certain nuances should be noted.

Tapia was influenced by the Magón brothers in the United States and became an ardent supporter of agrarian anarchism when he met them; therefore, his ideas were not directly concerned with his contact with American society but with perception of countrymen who had taken the revolutionary struggle to the exile (Friedrich, 1981, pp. 18, 81-159).

In the case of Arandas, Jalisco, there are no indications of returnees who had any role in the agrarian struggles. Paul S. Taylor considered that returnees had had very little effect on the attitudes and ways to live and work of their original communities (Taylor, 1933, pp. 36, 48, 55-63); similarly, Enrique Santibáñez, Mexican consul in San Antonio, considered that most Mexican *braceros* carried out agricultural work in the United States, and therefore, the bulk of return migrants could hardly bring elements of progress to their places of origin (Santibáñez, 1991 [1930], p. 123).

We have described a number of personal and local situations in which Gamio's proposals can only be partially corroborated. Gamio's hypotheses concerning the role of

return migrants in the great social processes in Mexico at the beginning of the twentieth century are quite alluring because, although these processes were indeed simultaneous with increased migratory flows to and from the United States, there is little available evidence to confirm any of them.

The historical and anthropological studies presented thus far analyzed the conditions of some communities during the 1920s and 1930s; therefore, they can be used to examine each of the hypotheses. They also shed light on the different possible levels of analysis concerning the impact of returnees on their original communities.

Gamio presents an inflated account of the qualities acquired by the migrants and their impact on their country of origin. Therefore, they were not only the men who had become *Übermenschen* in the United States and returned to Mexico endowed with outstanding qualities, but they were also key factors in decisive social and economic processes occurring in Mexico at the beginning of the twentieth century.

#### THE REPATRIATION PROJECT

The repatriation project is another central proposal in Gamio's work on return migration. He envisioned the project as a special program aimed at establishing small groups of repatriated farmers in one or more colonies isolated from other communities; the government would support these population centers by providing land and moderate investment for transportation and settlement (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 238-240).

There are four main reasons why Gamio proposed this plan. Firstly, different circles of the Mexican society had already proposed migrant return initiatives similar to Gamio's—the proposal was not new. Secretaries of state, worker leaders, and demographers expressed their support for the idea of forming agricultural colonies composed of returnees, especially farmers; this initiative was also expected to be conducted in such a way that official funding was minimal. Some of the supporters of this idea were Andrés Landa y Piña, head of the Secretariat of the Interior Migration Department in the late 1920s; Gilberto Loyo, one of the most important demographers of the time, who took part in the elaboration of population policy during the 1930s, and Vicente Lombardo Toledano, general secretary of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) and top leader of the organized labor movement, among others. The ideologues of irrigation in the mid-1920s shared similar ideas, and they insisted that this should be done in irrigated regions in northern Mexico (Alanís, 2007, pp.101, 114; Aboites, 1987).

The second reason lay in Gamio's concerns that returning migrants lost much of their potential when they returned to their places of origin and that wasting their

attitudes and skills was disadvantageous for the country. Therefore, a colony of returnees would prevent these 'new customs and knowledge, much more advanced than those prevalent in their places of origin' from being lost, rendering no benefit to 'our country' (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 236-237; Gamio, 1935, pp. 60-61, 58-60).

The virtues of returnees would be seized upon by establishing the colonies; the reason why these settlements had to be relatively far from existing towns or communities was to avoid the 'retrogression' of cultural habits and the 'physical decadence' of regular settlements, since according to Gamio, returnees returned to their old way of life when they established themselves in existing communities, forced by tradition and the social environment (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 236-237; Gamio, 1935, pp. 60-61, 58-60). As pointed out above, Gamio was concerned that returnees would 'lose' their skills when they returned to their communities, 'wasting' them for the country.

The third main purpose of the repatriation project was to exploit the 'potential of returned countrymen.' For Gamio, the 'culture of production' acquired by migrants had to be leveraged by the state to promote development since repatriation could function as an 'enormous educational system' in which returnees would be 'teachers on life in general.' In other words, returnees would contribute to the education of the Mexican people, considered underdeveloped by Gamio, and influence the national culture (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 160, 184, 236-241).

Gamio claimed that individuals endowed with so many virtues and abilities could return to the country to live and work fruitfully, helping each other, as they did in the United States, by means of these 'progressive nuclei' (agricultural colonies). He considered that a repatriation campaign supported by the government, in particular by the Secretariat of Public Education, would be feasible at an affordable cost and would allow the State to disseminate the integral education 'amassed' by the returnees among millions of uncultured Mexicans.

Gamio also believed that returning migrants would contribute to making Mexico 'a great industrial and agricultural country,' that is, their return would have a positive impact on the national economy (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 49-50, 236-241; Gamio, 1935, pp. 54-73). Like many of his contemporaries, he had high expectations of the men who had returned from the United States. He dreamed of a special colony where they could establish themselves and spill the amazing qualities that they had brought with them. This colonization model would make the country and the regions flourish, not anymore the nineteenth-century project aimed at promoting immigration from Europe.

The background of these proposals—which can be regarded as normative or moral—had to do with concerns that Gamio had had in mind since the beginning of the century about the idea of a ‘dispersed and heterogeneous Mexico’ conforming itself as a nation per the ‘Western’ model ‘of racial, cultural, and linguistic unity.’ This project needed to improve the conditions of misery and exploitation experienced by indigenous groups (the majority of the Mexican population), which would facilitate the task of integrating them into ‘national progress.’ Therefore, it was necessary that the program improved their diet, clothing, education, and leisure activities, and they would also ‘embrace contemporary culture’ (Valdovinos, 2011, pp. 233-234). It was precisely in this context that, for Gamio, migrants could contribute to the nation-building project that the political elites yearned for after the Revolution.

The last of Gamio’s reasons to propose the repatriation project was to avoid the failures observed in a case of 300 people who returned from La Laguna, California, to establish a colony. From April to August 1927, Gamio conducted a detailed analysis of the living conditions and circumstances in Acámbaro, Guanajuato, where they had settled. People lacked information on geography, agriculture, land conditions, roads, topography, and local products throughout the campaign. The land was insufficient, and hygiene conditions were poor, so many of the colonists left for different parts of the country or sought work at the *La Encarnación* ranch, in the state of Guanajuato (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 235-241).

The returnees’ failed attempt to colonize Acámbaro led Gamio to state that government support would be necessary for the future and should include transportation, land supply, and the right to settle the lands without monetary cost. He also suggested to create a commission to organize repatriation and colonization whose goals would be, first, to determine the characteristics of the land, available transportation, and markets, and second, to visit locations in the United States where the Mexican community was sizeable—especially in regions where Mexicans worked in agriculture, such as Texas, Arizona, California, Colorado, and New Mexico—to promote and organize the return of these farmers. A third goal would be to provide supplementary verbal information and data (Gamio, 1930a, pp. 238-240).

Gamio’s plan could have been realized exactly as proposed at the beginning of 1939, when General Lázaro Cárdenas’s government, on its own initiative (but spurred by criticism regarding its support for the arrival of Spanish exiles and seeking internal support for another official initiative) decided to carry out a small-scale repatriation project with limited support, which was promoted among migrants in Texas. As head of the Demographic and Repatriation Department, Gamio was directly involved.

Gamio suggested the place where the settlement should be located (the Lower Valley of Rio Grande, Tamaulipas) and traveled across the United States as part of the committee in charge of promoting repatriation. The project was ordered mostly due to national and international political factors rather than the situation of Mexican migrants in the United States or Gamio's ideal of building upon the returnees' capabilities to develop regions. The project caught the attention of the government only months after 1939, when Cardenas's reforms were in decline and, most importantly, it never was a priority for the government's agrarian or colonization policies (Alanís, 2007, pp. 289-293).

## CONCLUSIONS

Manuel Gamio's study on Mexican migration to the United States, as well as the best part of his work, focused on emigration, as requested by the director of The Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial and expected by the director of the Social Research Council. Nevertheless, as he delved deeper into the matter, the anthropologist saw the necessity of incorporating reflections around migrant return in his studies. He was perhaps the first scholar to study the phenomenon, and he began to create a profile of return migrants. His methodological basis for the profile were papers written in the United States.

The author stated the importance of visiting the communities of origin for a complete analysis of the phenomenon (he claimed that this was inviable due to Mexico's internal conflicts). He also analyzed the influences migrants had been exposed to in the United States and made proposals on how to take advantage of their return. Finally, he established hypotheses about their alleged impact on Mexico's major social and economic processes at the beginning of the twentieth century. His overall contribution was a commendable effort to introduce the first ideas on migrant return into the academic world, hence its transcendence.

Gamio showed that there was indeed an influence of American culture on returnees, which could be observed in the clothing worn by some of them and in the items they brought back to Mexico, which hinted at their assimilation of comfort standards while in the United States. He also proposed that the Mexican labor movement had been strongly influenced by the American labor movement, which can be confirmed by evidence. His attention was focused on a largely idealized profile of the returnees: they were men endowed with 'special capabilities' and 'good physique,' 'literate,' 'well-fed,' and they developed purchasing power. Therefore, it is possible that his

observations were overly centered on middle-class returnees.

He failed to account for return migrants who carried very few items and resources and might have faced adverse conditions during their life in the United States (i.e., deportation); upper-class returnees were also overlooked.

Gamio's assessment of the impact of return migration in Mexico was somewhat contradictory: on the one hand, he believed that it had been fundamental in certain social and economic processes in Mexico, and on the other hand, he stressed that the 'great qualities' acquired by returnees had been lost upon their return to their communities of origin, hence his insistence on the importance of the repatriation plan.

In general, Gamio exalted the qualities and virtues of return migrants based on the idea that their contact with the American material, social, economic, and cultural environment had made a deep impression on these people. Many of his contemporaries shared this idealization of the education and training acquired by emigrants in the United States and the advantages of their contribution to the country—it was a frequent topic in the national press.

Gamio seldom speaks of return migration as an unfavorable phenomenon. There are only a few lines where he points out that 'many did not return to their lands' but went to the capital of the country or other large cities; as a consequence, men who 'could have been excellent farmers' became 'mediocre' urban workers who competed with national workers and joined the ranks of the unemployed. He also thought that 'harmful elements' among the returnees resorted to crime in the cities or became bandits, and often, rebels.

Another group consisted of people who 'had failed' when they returned to Mexico and returned to the United States to never come back to their communities of origin; they condemned and criticized repatriation initiatives and presented their experience as a negative test, which demotivated other migrants to participate (Gamio, 1930a, p. 238). In this regard, Gamio gave more thought to the alleged 'benefits' of return migration, including its future benefits, than to its possible negative effects on the Mexican society of that time.

Translator: Miguel Ángel Ríos

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