

# Observations on Migration in the Twenty-First Century: Where to from Here?

Written by Marianna Karakoulaki, Laura Southgate and Jakob Steiner

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<https://www.e-ir.info/2018/08/29/observations-on-migration-in-the-twenty-first-century-where-to-from-here/>

MARIANNA KARAKOULAKI, LAURA SOUTHGATE AND JAKOB STEINER, AUG 29 2018

**This is an excerpt from *Critical Perspectives on Migration in the Twenty-First Century*. Download your free copy here.**

Migration studies is an incredibly wide field, with multiple strains of research associated with a number of different research fields, from Anthropology and Sociology to International Relations and Development. Jorgen Carling (2017) recently compiled a list of 36 different nexuses between migration and other topics found in academic literature. A list that is likely to expand in the future, it showcases the way different fields of study interconnect and intersect with migration studies. This makes compiling a collection that explores migration a challenging task, and it results in many aspects being left uncovered. This is no less true for this book and it should be kept in mind when assessing the book's scope.

Migration is trapped in the triangle between controversial scholarly, popular and political debate, with decisions affecting the lives of thousands directly and often immediately. Peter Scholten, Han Entzinger and Rinus Penninckx (2015) note how the field of migration studies has fragmented increasingly in recent years. They hypothesise that its politicisation has played an important role in that. They also find that while the number of studies has mushroomed, this has not translated into more evidence-based policies being implemented on the ground at the European level. In the same book, Ann Singleton (2015) frames it even more starkly, stating that academic research commissioned by governments or government related institutions is used as a justification for certain pre-ordained policies or 'policy-based evidence making'. Mired in this web of controversy, scholars must ask themselves how their work affects and is affected by the two remaining corners of the triangle – media coverage and popular perception, as well as policy and political decisions. What is missing from the current scholarly debate on migration? Is research shaping narratives, and are they helpful? Can research better inform popular opinion and policy approaches, and if so, how? While data driven research on migration is still undeniably important, these questions ask for critical reflections on migration on a number of levels beyond numerical data.

In an attempt to address these questions, we sought chapters from scholars and practitioners from different fields of study, in order to give a more critical and interdisciplinary overview of migration in the twenty-first century. Influenced by our own work in the field, as well as coverage of what has been dubbed 'the migration crisis', we wanted to create something that provides and explores a variety of aspects so that readers of this book can see migration from different perspectives. The book therefore connects migration to political and social theory, security and critical security studies, human rights and legal studies, criminology and media studies, with anthropological and sociological notions.

At the very root of these reflections sits the migrant. As highlighted in the introduction, the terminology to address this topic still remains an unresolved issue. Nando Sigona (2017) argues that the way we categorise the migrant or the refugee has important legal and political implications. Michael Collyer, Franck Düvell, and Hein de Haas (2012), note that terminology relating to migrants has often been used to mean what is politically desirable, rather than represent an actual state of affairs. And while the importance of the inclusion of civil society in the development of policies and narratives has been emphasised here and elsewhere (Singleton 2015; Banulescu-Bogdan 2011), migrants

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themselves, as part of civil society, should also be involved – in public discourse as well as academia. Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson and Vassilis Tsianos (2008, 202–221) discuss the centrality of the migrant in political and public discourse in their development of the notion of the autonomy of migration. They argue that contrary to popular belief of the invisibility of the migrant, the migrant actually has a role in the formation of sovereignty, as they form a variety of activities and realities while they are on the move, despite their lack of papers. If we consider the migrant as a politically active subject, then those voices within the migrant community currently prevented from being heard need special attention.

Although it is only partly accounted for in the current volume, migration is quickly equated with what is currently framed as a 'crisis' in Europe. This includes refugees and migrants moving towards Australia, which is often used in European policy debates as an example. Other migrations and their associated drivers, motivations and narratives, including movements within the African continent without Europe as the final target (de Haas 2008), migration between Central Asia and Russia (Marat 2009) or migration of Chinese migrants abroad and internally (Mallee and Pieke 2013), remain largely side-lined. This makes it easier to frame the current 'migration crisis' as a singular event that can be dealt with, detached from a larger context.

This book is published at a time when migration still dominates our media headlines. The exodus of Rohingya from Myanmar, the deaths in the Mediterranean and the ordeal of refugees stranded on its islands, as well as a US president who has vowed to build a wall to keep migrants out, are just a few stark examples. A critical debate on migration will therefore need to be sustained. At the same time, we need to consider that with migration comes integration, and a strong impact on a country's social structure, economy and relations between home and host countries. This has been dealt with in literature before, especially for the case of migrants from Turkey to Germany (Oestergaard-Nielsen 2003), and less so for migrants from Pakistan to the UK (Shaw 2000). What was regarded as a brief influx of 'foreigners' then turned into something that changed the social fabric and history of – among other regions – the two largest cities of Western Europe. What is discussed as an imminent 'crisis' today for Europe will eventually be seen through the lens of a long lasting process of change.

Exemplified by the many questions arisen here, this book also remains a first step towards different pathways of critical approaches towards migration. As such, for the time being, it is effectively without conclusion. We hope instead that it will be the beginning of a fruitful debate.

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### About the author:

**Marianna Karakoulaki** is Articles Editor and a Director of E-International Relations. She is an award winning journalist and foreign correspondent. She regularly reports as a freelance foreign correspondent for Deutsche Welle and has worked with IRIN, The Telegraph, Middle East Eye, CBC Radio, Voice of America, BBC Radio, Channel 4 News, Radio Television Suisse, Human Rights Watch and Refugees International among others.

**Laura Southgate** is a Lecturer in Politics and International Relations at Aston University. She is a regular contributor for Global Risk Insights and a Senior Commissioning Editor for E-International Relations. Her research focuses on regional intervention and state resistance to sovereignty violation in Southeast Asia. Her work has been published in *International Politics*, *Intelligence and National Security*, and *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*.

**Jakob Steiner** is a PhD student at the Department of Physical Geography at Universiteit Utrecht, the Netherlands and a Senior Commissioning Editor for E-International Relations. He has conducted field research on drivers of local migration and rural development in rural Pakistan and on the paths of Pakistani men leaving along the common refugee routes for Europe.