

Chapter 1

Placing the Geographies of Migration

1.1 Introduction

Our world is, and always has been, shaped by migration. Think about what this means for your everyday life. Is the food that you eat influenced by migration? In the United Kingdom, for example, the dish fish and chips consists of two components that were introduced by different migration patterns: Jewish migrants to London introduced fried fish, and colonizers brought back potatoes from the Americas. Similarly, contemporary pizza has its origins in Naples, Italy, but Italian immigrants to the United States helped its global popularity and spread. How might the music that you listen to be connected to migration? Migration has influenced, and continues to influence, jazz, blues, and bluegrass music, as well as punk, rap, reggae, ska, and a range of traditional music genres. How does the built environment where you live show traces of migration? Are there buildings funded by remittances, used by migrants for different purposes, marked with multiple languages, or abandoned because people have left? What about your local graveyards? Gravestones or memorial plaques might show the distances that people have travelled during their lifetimes and their relationship with their final resting place. These everyday impacts of migration stretch back over years, generations, and even decades.

Yet, if we are to believe many contemporary commentators, there is something different about migration today. We are surrounded by people who describe migration as a “crisis” – the “migration crisis,” the “migrant crisis,” and the “refugee crisis.” People blame migrants for a whole host of issues, from housing and jobs shortages and lower wages to increased crime rates. We witness political groups mobilize around the threat(s) posed by migrants. In this context, migrants “most readily serve as scapegoats for *all* that is newly unfamiliar, for *everything* and *every relation* that is newly different, newly understood, or newly unappreciated” (Pred 2000: 31).

At the same time, and in the same places where migration and migrants are being described as crises, there are other perspectives and other actions. States and corporations seek out particular kinds of migrants – whether they are international students or talented sportspeople or people with skills and training in healthcare. Organizations adapt to changing populations, for example, by providing information about their services in different languages. Local communities and groups engage in practices of welcome, inclusion, and sanctuary. Festivals celebrate people’s different backgrounds and cultural practices, and schools respond to new students.

The stories of migration are indeed complex and often contradictory. In this book, we introduce you to the different types of stories that are told, by whom, and to what ends. Those stories reflect on what is a fundamental part of human experience: what is sometimes called movement or mobility. Sonia Shah shows us that people, animals, insects, and even flora all move or

migrate: sometimes for growth, sometimes for survival, sometimes for adventure, and sometimes for safety (Shah 2020). In her book, she poses an important question for us to consider: what would happen if we could “accept migration as integral to life on a dynamic planet with shifting and unevenly distributed resources” (Shah 2020: 316)? We would like you to keep this question in mind as you navigate your way through this book.

To help you consider Shah’s question, we give you some tools to make sense of migration stories. First, we introduce you to key terms in relation to migration, highlighting official definitions and their consequences. Second, we show you different ways that people have sought to make sense of migration, including explaining patterns of movement and showing the impacts of migration. Third, we discuss our critical approach to migration. We explain what this means, how it links to and differs from other stories about migration, and how it will unfold throughout the book. This chapter will enable you to begin your journey of thinking and writing critically about migration.

1.2 Migration and Migrants: Introducing Key Terms

Wei grew up in rural China. He now works in Shenzhen, but his family remain in the rural area where he grew up. He visits them regularly and sends money to pay for his parents’ medical care.

Anna is from the UK and works as a senior engineer for a petrochemical company in Qatar. Her husband and children live in the UK, and she visits them every 2 months. Anna has worked in Qatar for the last 5 months; her contract is for 9 months, but she is not sure how long she will stay.

Luisa is from Venezuela. She left the country in 2016 to study in the US. When she graduated, she married her Dutch girlfriend who she met on her university course. They will move to the Netherlands later this year.

Armando is from Mozambique and works on a farm in Mpumalanga province, South Africa. He is not registered by his employer, so he is not covered by social insurance. His employer provides on-farm accommodation, but only during the harvest season. When it ends, Armando returns to Mozambique and comes back to South Africa when he is needed again on the farm.

Marwa is from Damascus, Syria. She has lived in the UN Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan for the last 10 years. She is 14 years old.

Lawrence is a retired university professor who spends 6 months of every year in Alberta, Canada, and the other 6 months in Florida, USA.

The complexity of migration, and the challenges in how to define migration and migrants, is evident when we consider these six vignettes. In what follows, we bring you through the different complexities, highlighting the spatial, temporal, and legal dimensions to migration.

Migration is a spatial act. It involves moving from one place to another. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), a United Nations (UN) body, defines migration as “the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a State” (Sironi et al. 2019: 137). IOM’s definition distinguishes between movement within a state (i.e. internal migration) and movement between nation-states (international migration). If we use IOM’s definition, all six vignettes detailed earlier can be classified as migration.

The European Union (EU) definition of migration is more complicated. It specifies that “In the *global* context, movement of a person either across an international border (international migration), or within a state (internal migration) for more than one year irrespective of the causes, voluntary or involuntary, and the means, regular or irregular, used to migrate” (European Migration Network [EMN] 2022). While the EU definition includes space (international or

Table 1.1 Types of migration defined by the IOM and the EU, by category.^a

Spatial	Temporal	Legal	Reason/form
Circular	<i>Long-term</i>	Assisted	<i>Chain</i>
Internal	<i>Short-term</i>	Facilitated	Climate
International	Temporary	Illegal	Economic
Return		Irregular	Environmental
Rural–rural		<i>Legal</i>	Family
Rural–urban		<i>Managed</i>	Forced
Secondary		Regular	Labor
Urban–rural		Safe, orderly and regular	Mixed
Urban–urban			<i>Spontaneous</i>

^a Terms in bold are defined in both sources. Terms in italics are defined by EMN only; other terms are defined by IOM only.

Sources: Adapted from EMN (2022) and Sironi et al. (2019).

internal), it also defines migration as having a temporal component: it must be for more than a year. It also introduces (legal) status (“regular/irregular”) and “cause” (“voluntary/involuntary”) of migration.

If we use the EU definition to consider the six vignettes, then the movements of Anna and Lawrence would not be considered migration. Wei and Armando may not have their movements described as migration either. Elsewhere in the document, the EU introduces the concept of “short-term migration,” involving a change of residence for between 3 and 12 months. Yet, according to the EU, “recreation, holiday, visits to friends or relatives, business, medical treatment or religious pilgrimage” (EMN 2022) do not qualify as short-term migration. Perhaps Anna and Lawrence could be considered migrants under this definition, but perhaps not.

Table 1.1 includes the full range of terms used by IOM and the EU to define migration. We have categorized the types of migration in four ways – spatial, temporal, legal, and reasons and/or form of migration – depending on what the definition prioritizes. Using Table 1.1, we can begin to see the complex ways that the six vignettes may be understood. Let us take a closer look at the examples of Wei and Luisa. In Wei’s case, we can see internal, rural–urban, potentially circular, economic/labor migration. It is potentially long-term and legal and managed, but this could change if Chinese state policy changes. It may be chain migration, depending on whether or not Wei was following people he knew. In Luisa’s case, her first move is international, temporary, and legal migration, which will become secondary, legal, and family migration when she moves to the Netherlands. However, Luisa’s original move from Venezuela may not be fully captured by these definitions: where does migration for the purposes of studying fit?

Exercise 1.1

Using Table 1.1, try to identify what types of migration are shown by the examples of Anna, Armando, Marwa, and Lawrence.

We have considered the various definitions of migration, but how do we define a migrant? The IOM defines a migrant as “a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence” (Sironi et al. 2019: 132), either within a country (internal migrant) or across an international border (international migrant). You might have heard the terms emigrant and immigrant, both of which refer to international migrants. An emigrant is a person who leaves a country; an immigrant is a person who arrives in a country. While this seems straightforward, the IOM then provides 27 different categories of migrants, most of which refer to either legal status or a migrant’s relationship with work (Table 1.2). The EU defines a migrant as “a person who is outside the territory of the State of which they are nationals or citizens and who has resided in a foreign country for more than one year” (EMN 2022). While it includes fewer categories of migrants than the IOM, these definitions also focus on a person’s legal status and work.

Exercise 1.2

Table 1.2 lists all of the different IOM definitions of migrants that refer to work and/or legal status. Using this framework, what types of migrants are Wei, Anna, Luisa, Armando, Lawrence, and Marwa?

Table 1.2 Types of migrants defined by the IOM that reference work and legal status.

Work only	Legal status only	Work and legal status
Frontier worker	Alien	Documented migrant worker
Guest worker	Asylum seeker	Irregular migrant worker
Highly skilled migrant worker	Documented migrant	Non-documented migrant worker
Itinerant worker	Illegal alien	Undocumented migrant worker
Labor migrant	Illegal migrant	
Low-skilled migrant worker	Irregular migrant	
Migrant worker	Migrant in an irregular situation	
Project-tied worker	Migrant in a regular situation	
Qualified national	Migrants in vulnerable situations	
Seafarer	Permanent resident	
Seasonal migrant worker	Refugee – mandate	
Self-employment worker	Refugee – <i>prima facie</i>	
Skilled migrant worker	Refugee – 1951 Convention	
Specified-employment worker	Refugee sur place	
Worker on an offshore installation	Regular	
	Smuggled migrant	
	Stateless person	
	Stranded migrant	
	Undocumented migrant	
	Victim of trafficking in human beings	

Source: Adapted from Sironi et al. (2019).

In this book, we argue that these many definitions of migration and classifications of migrants develop hierarchies of people with differential access to mobility. Critical scholars of migration have suggested that the term “migrant” is increasingly used to describe certain types of mobile people, specifically those whose mobility is considered a threat and needs to be managed, controlled, or restricted. This perceived threat could be posed by people who are poorer or racialized or irregularized, and it varies across space and time. In the earlier examples, Marwa, Armando, Wei, and Luisa all face restrictions on their mobility. In contrast, other mobile people, such as elite, lifestyle, or retirement migrants, are not considered a threat. This is shown by Lawrence and Anna, who legally and easily move across international borders. Indeed, it is very likely that Anna does not even think of herself as a migrant, but instead describes herself as an “expat” (see also Box 7.2). Expat, lifestyle, and retirement migrants are just some of the categories that are not included in the IOM list (Table 1.2). When some types of mobile people are described as migrants, and others are not, it leads to differences in how they are treated. This way of thinking leads to those who are called migrants being considered as strangers or Others, and makes them more vulnerable to exploitation, exclusion, or deportation.

In contrast to these formal definitions of migration and migrants, in this book we define **migration** more broadly as the movement of people between places, and **the migrant** as a person who moves from one place to another. This critical approach challenges the way in which the terms “migration” and “migrant” are widely used to indicate just some types of human mobility. Furthermore, we use the term **migration regime** to refer to the many institutions, laws, policies, and practices that seek to define, regulate, and control migration and migrants (see also Box 3.2). IOM and the EU are just two of the many institutions that make up the migration regime. As mentioned earlier, these institutions seek to classify and categorize migrants, including migrants who do not hold an authorized legal status, also referred to as “illegal,” “irregular,” and/or “undocumented” migrants.¹ Various actors use these terms for political purposes, marking certain people as out of place. In contrast, we use the terms “migrant in an irregular situation” and “irregularized migrant” because we want to highlight the structures that produce the legal and political conditions of migration, rather than targeting migrants themselves. For example, even though Armando has entered South Africa legally, the state has not given him permission to work there. Because of this, he is a migrant in an irregular situation, a situation that has been created by the South African state and enabled by his employer.

We hope that you can now start to recognize the complexities and politics of defining migration and migrants. Next, we highlight some important migration patterns and show you how geographers and others have made sense of migration.

Exercise 1.3

Where you live, what or who does the term “migrant” refer to? What types of migration and/or migrants are either welcomed or not discussed? What types of migration and/or migrants are seen as a threat? What does this information tell you about the migration regime where you live?

1.3 Making Sense of Migration

In this section, we introduce you to some important migration patterns that have shaped, and that continue to shape, the world we live in. We then introduce you to how different mainstream scholars explain these migration patterns and theorize migration. Following this, we provide a brief account of the ways that scholars have addressed the impacts of migration on places and people.

1.3.1 Migration Patterns: Past, Present, and Future

Our story of migration that has shaped the contemporary world begins with the Atlantic slave trade.² Scholars estimate that around 9.5 million African slaves were forcibly moved to the Americas in the period from 1441 to 1886, four-fifths of whom were moved between 1701 and 1850 (Rawley and Behrendt 2005: 16). More died *en route*, in the notorious middle passage. The Atlantic slave trade overlapped with the period of extensive European colonialism and imperialism that is also significant for understanding our world. While colonialization originally referred to “the transfer of communities who sought to maintain their allegiance to their own original culture” (Young 2001: 20), both colonialism and imperialism became ultimately concerned with relationships of domination: economic, political, demographic, social, and cultural (Young 2001: 16–43).

Why do colonialism, imperialism, and slavery matter for understanding migration? The first reason is because of the significant numbers of people who were moved around the world under these systems. This included people who were forcibly moved under slavery; those who were moved involuntarily, like convicts who were transported; as well as voluntary mobility, such as that of explorers, entrepreneurs, missionaries, or government officials. The second reason is the social and spatial hierarchies that slavery and colonialism created and perpetuated. Race is one such social hierarchy (Box 1.1). Race works to create categories of people who are understood as more, or less, human. For this reason, it helped to legitimize both slavery and colonialism, and “shaped the geographical and historical patterns of who was colonized and how people were treated and brought into colonial projects, for example as labourers, slaves or populations to be

Box 1.1 Race and Racialization

While people often assume that race is based on biological characteristics, this is not the case. Rather, **race** is best understood as “a concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (Omi and Winant 2014: 110). For this reason, it is important to highlight the process by which race and racial identities are created, perpetuated, and transformed. This is known as **racialization**, defined as “the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group” (Omi and Winant 2014: 111). Racialization occurs across a range of scales, from the local to the global. It (re)produces hierarchies and structures of domination that are based on racial identities. Race and racialization are inherently connected with questions of power hierarchy (of superiority and inferiority) and structural violence and space (see also Gilmore 2007; Wolfe 2016).

eradicated” (Mayblin and Turner 2021: 52). Spatial hierarchies were also created that persist today in the delineation of developed/developing countries, or in the construction of the Global North/Global South. Those spatial hierarchies are material, with clear differences in wealth based on the relationships particular places have to slavery and colonization. These hierarchies have ongoing implications for who gets to migrate and under what conditions.

The end of the Atlantic slave trade and direct colonial rule led to new patterns of global migration. From 1846 to 1940, an estimated 55 million people migrated from Europe to the Americas. Around two-thirds migrated to the United States, while the rest mainly went to Canada, Argentina, Brazil, and Cuba (McKeown 2004: 157). In the same period, around 30 million migrants moved from India to other British colonies, and around 20 million (mostly southern) Chinese moved to British territories such as the Straits Settlements and elsewhere in the Pacific and Indian oceans (McKeown 2004: 157–158). Additionally, Adam McKeown points out a significant migration, of up to 50 million people, to Manchuria, Siberia, and Central Asia in the same period (McKeown 2004: 159).

In the period after World War II, some migration patterns continued, while new migratory patterns also emerged. For example, the partition of South Asia in 1947 displaced more than 20 million people who moved between the newly created states of India and Pakistan, while the breakup of the Soviet Union in the late twentieth century meant that many people who did not move were newly identified as migrants based on their place of birth and/or ethnic origin (Moya and McKeown 2010: 33). The United States, the EU, and former British colonies (e.g. Canada, Australia and New Zealand) continued as important immigrant destinations. The Gulf States and former countries of emigration, such as Ireland or Italy, became new immigrant destinations. Furthermore, so-called South-to-South migration became a dominant part of contemporary migration. For instance, in 2020, a third of all international migration was between countries in the Global South, which was higher than levels of migration from the Global South to the Global North (Schewel and Debray 2024: 153). Figure 1.1 shows the top five corridors for international migration within the Global South (e.g. from South Asia to the Middle East; or within regions such as sub-Saharan Africa) and the numbers of migrants from each region of origin present in the destination. The fourth is the growing diversification of source countries for migration and the proliferation of migration destinations for people from the same source countries (De Haas et al. 2020: 9–11).

In 2024, the IOM estimated that 281 million people – 3.6% of the world’s population – were international migrants. This is an increase from 173 million, or 2.8%, in 2000. They also estimated that there were 35.3 million refugees, 5.4 million asylum seekers, and 71.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) globally (McAuliffe and Oucho 2024: 4–5) (Boxes 1.2 and 1.3). The top five destination countries for international migrants were the United States, Germany, Saudi Arabia, the Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom, while the top five countries of origin were India, Mexico, the Russian Federation, China, and the Syrian Arab Republic (McAuliffe and Oucho 2024: 25). The IOM report focuses primarily on international migration. Estimates of the number of internal migrants are rarer: the IOM writes that the most recent estimate comes from 2009 and is around 740 million (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou 2021: 21). In China alone, it is estimated that there were over 375 million internal migrants in 2022 (Haugen and Speelman 2022), while the 2011 Indian Census estimated 450 million internal migrants (De 2019), suggesting that the 2009 figure is considerably lower than the current reality.

Just as there are underlying trends that are consistent, such as the persistence of certain destination countries, the twenty-first century has also shown us just how unpredictable migration movements are. All kinds of situations give rise to rapid changes in migration, such as the war between

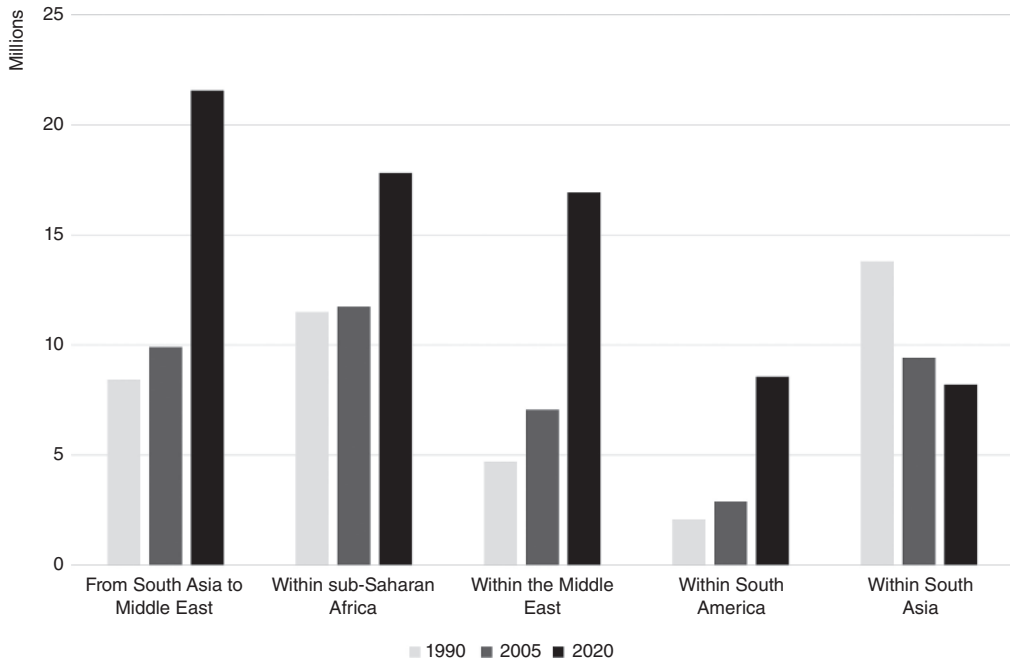


Figure 1.1 International migrant stock present in each of the top five destinations for regional migration in the Global South, 1990, 2005, 2020. *Source:* Adapted from Schewel and Debray (2024: 160).

Box 1.2 Refugee and Asylum Seeker

The legal definition of a **refugee** is contained in the 1951 Refugee Convention, which was agreed following World War II. It is legally binding for the 149 countries that have signed either the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol. Under the Convention, a refugee is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of their former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. An **asylum seeker** has crossed an international border and is seeking to be recognized as a refugee.

Source: Adapted from UNHCR (2010: 14).

Russia and Ukraine, which resulted in millions displaced within and beyond Ukraine; the conflict between Israel and Palestine that led to close to 2 million people being internally displaced since October 2023; and the forced immobility of many internal and international migrants due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, though the form of migration might change, with different and unexpected migration patterns, the presence of migration as “integral to life on a dynamic planet” remains. In the next section, we look at how scholars have sought to explain this.

Box 1.3 Internally Displaced Person

An IDP is a person, or people, “forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border.” The definition includes “disasters” as a reason for fleeing; this is not the case in the definition of “refugee” (see also Chapter 8).

Source: Adapted from Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2024).

1.3.2 Mainstream Theories of Migration

The first significant attempt to explain migration came from the work of a geographer, E.G. Ravenstein. In 1885, he published an article called “The Laws of Migration” that reported on where people were living in the United Kingdom when the 1881 Census was recorded and where they had been born. This information provided him with patterns of migration that he developed into a series of wide-ranging laws (Ravenstein 1885: 199). Many of Ravenstein’s laws have become “common-sense” understandings of migration. These include the idea that people are more likely to migrate to cities, that people are more likely to migrate for economic opportunities, and that migrants are more likely to go to nearby places, though it took longer for Ravenstein’s observations about women being more migratory than men to gain general acceptance. Ravenstein’s empirically based laws continue to be significant as a starting point for theorizing contemporary migration. Here, we briefly introduce you to some of the mainstream theories of migration, which attempt to explain, and in some instances predict, why, how, where, and when people migrate.

Deterministic theories of migration have often been dominant in academic and popular understandings of migration. Many of these emphasize economics. For example, neoclassical migration theory effectively sees migration as an inevitable response to differences in employment levels and wages: it is assumed that people will move to access work and money. A similar belief underpins dual labor market theory, which sees migration – and the experiences of migrants – as the consequence of the need for workers in advanced capitalist economies. Mobility transition theories suggest that the levels of immigration and emigration in a particular country follow a particular pattern based on how developed that country is. Dependency and world systems theories explain migration from poorer areas to wealthier areas as a consequence of how core (wealthier) economies, for example, the United Kingdom and the United States, systematically exploited peripheral (poorer) economies. New economics of labor migration theory, while attempting to challenge some of the assumptions of neoclassical migration theory, ultimately sees migration as a household’s rational response to relative poverty. The push–pull theory explains migration as the consequence of the interplay between so-called push factors in one place (e.g. unemployment) and pull factors in another place (e.g. the availability of jobs) and is most often used to explain migration from poorer areas to wealthier areas.

In contrast, **agentic** theories of migration emphasize individual(s) as independent decision-maker(s). Human capital theories see migration as a decision made by an individual migrant in order to enhance their human capital, which could include education, skills, or experience.

Sjaastad described it in terms of an “investment” (1962: 92). More recently, the aspirations-capabilities theory focuses on migration as a person’s ability to choose where they want to live (De Haas 2021), while a focus on desire highlights “what migrants want” (Carling and Collins 2018). Migration network theories emphasize the importance of social relations – or networks – in the development and persistence of migration patterns, as well as in the decisions of individual migrants. While not described as a migration theory, life course frameworks consider the impact stage of life and links to others have on decisions to migrate.

These different theorizations of migration underpin the broad ways that migration and migrants are discussed in contemporary society. In particular, they posit that there is usually a key reason for, or driver of, migration, which in turn provides the basis for how migration, and migrants, should be understood. The consequence of this is evident in Table 1.1, with different categories of migration/migrants distinguished by the perceived reason for migration, for example, economic, labor, and family migration. Furthermore, we also see how these mainstream theories have led to the idea that migrants and migration can be controlled and managed, an issue we will return to in Chapter 5.

However, the reduction of migration to these reasons or drivers has consequences. Within broader public discourses, it serves to diminish the complexity of migration decisions, such as in the vignettes that opened Section 1.2. Theorizations of migration – particularly those that emphasize economic factors – can easily be exploited by those who want to portray migrants as seeking their own economic maximization at the expense of others. Because of this, critical scholars call for the need to consider migration not as a stand-alone act, but as a component of contemporary society. For example, Stephen Castles explicitly says that “a general theory of migration is neither possible nor desirable” (2010: 1565), and instead calls for a focus on social transformation more generally, of which migration is one aspect. Following Castles, this book does not attempt to provide a general theory of migration. Rather, our focus is on how migration is experienced, embodied, and negotiated within broader structures of power.

1.3.3 Impacts of Migration

As geographers, we are particularly interested in the relationship between migration and space/place. The social transformation that Castles referred to goes hand in hand with spatial transformation; places are changed by migration. Those changes can happen to the places people leave, the places they move to, and the places they travel through. The map included in Ravenstein’s laws of migration, called “Currents of Migration,” captures the diversity of places and routes that are affected by migration (Figure 1.2). As he wrote, “with each main stream or current of migrants there runs a counter-current” (1885: 187), even if the current is more significant in one direction at a particular point in time.

Places that experience significant levels of out-migration, whether to other parts of the same country or internationally, can be changed in a variety of ways. Often, younger people migrate because of study, work, or adventure. The demographic profile of the place they leave can change as a consequence, and the movement away of young people can act as an impetus for their friends to also leave. There is a tendency to label places that have experienced significant out-migration as “left behind” because of the assumption that those who leave are more adventurous, more skilled, and more able (Pike et al. 2023). We see this in the discussion of rural areas in China, for example. Of course, these places are often also materially transformed by migration, specifically through remittances that are used to enhance built or social infrastructure. Many people migrate with the intention of eventually returning to their place of origin, so they

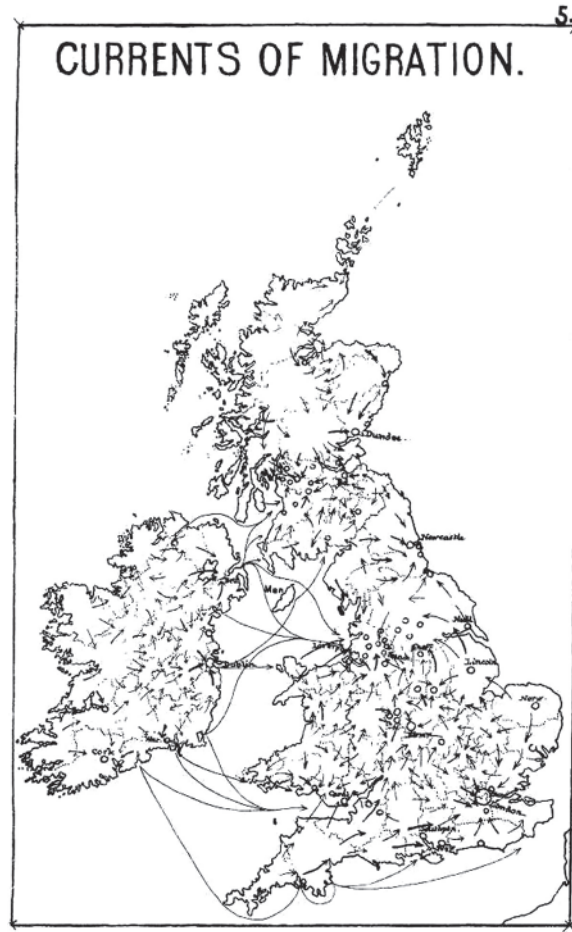


Figure 1.2 Ravenstein's currents of migration. *Source:* Ravenstein (1885)/John Wiley & Sons.

maintain tangible links through regular visits, through investing in businesses, or by building homes that they intend to use at a later stage. Places with outward migration get connected to the world through the transnational networks that emerge. They may also become more attractive to new inward migration – the currents shown in Figure 1.2 – with people seeking quieter or alternative or more affordable ways of life (Goodwin-Hawkins and Dafydd Jones 2022). We discuss these issues in more detail in Chapter 10.

The places that people travel through as part of their migration journeys are also transformed. The obvious example is borders and border zones. As you will see in Chapter 5, borders in the contemporary world are increasingly designed to restrict the movement of certain migrants. As a consequence, they are being managed and reinforced both physically and also through the use of technology. As borders become more difficult to cross, people end up waiting *en route* and near to borders. For example, informal migrant camps have developed at the external borders of the EU (Greece–Macedonia); within the EU where mobility is curtailed (e.g. between Italy and France) (Figure 1.3); around railway stations, train tracks, and bridges, or near port towns (e.g. Calais, France) (Davies et al. 2019). Migrant routes also change in response to enhancing bordering practices. We discuss this through the concept of migrant trajectories in Chapter 4.

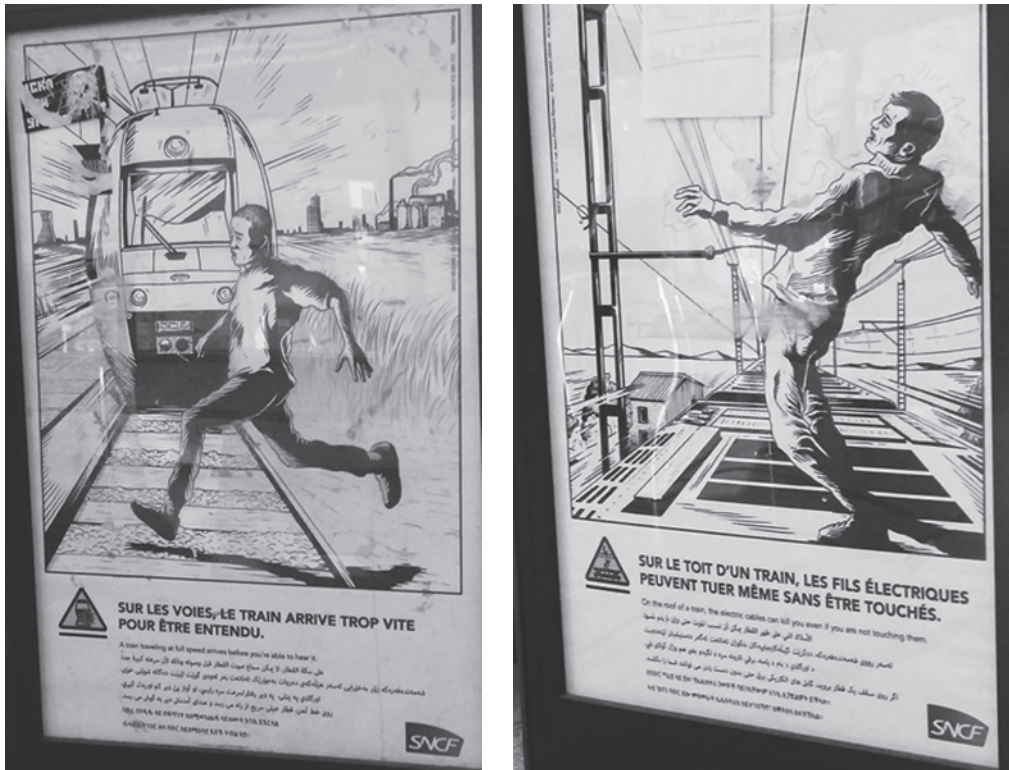


Figure 1.3 Border-crossing warnings, Ventimiglia, Italy (2018). *Source:* Courtesy of Sinéad Kelly.

Scholars have paid attention to how places are transformed by migration. There is a substantial body of research on migrant residential patterns, on the economic impact of migrants, and on changing everyday geographies. Beginning with the work of the Chicago School urban scholars, in the early twentieth century, social scientists identified that recently arrived migrants were likely to cluster in particular parts of the city, such as the different Chinatowns that emerged in North American cities (Anderson 1991). This body of research describes patterns of residential clustering as they emerge in different places, primarily cities, and explains them with reference to social, cultural, and economic factors, such as cheaper accommodation or a desire to live close to other migrants. This has also given rise to normative work, for example, the measurement of residential segregation through indices of segregation or dissimilarity, which in turn leads to the description of areas of migrant concentrations in pejorative terms. The terms used to describe these areas are often conflated with minority ethnic status: they include ghetto, ethnic enclave, and ethnoburb.

The economic impact of migrants on places can be seen in research on ethnic economies, which highlights the types of new economic activities that develop in tandem with migration, as well as the new economic profiles that emerge. The activities could include, for example, food and leisure, legal or employment services, money transfer, or travel services. The new economic profiles could include ethnic entrepreneurship or particular forms of sectoral concentration (Kaplan and Li 2006). In addition to changes in where people live and the economic activities they engage in, changing everyday geographies could also relate to language or religion, to new friendships in the neighborhood or at work, or to the types of everyday interactions that emerge

in a place that becomes home to migrants. This is increasingly described as “encounters,” with cities in particular described as spaces of encounter where people are able to negotiate difference (Wilson 2017). Encounters take on a new significance in an era of superdiversity, where migrants from an increasingly diverse range of backgrounds are brought together in new ways in local areas (Vertovec 2007). We discuss encounters in more detail in Chapter 9.

1.4 Migration: A Critical Perspective

In this chapter, we have introduced you to the proliferation of ways that migration and migrants are categorized. We have outlined historical and contemporary patterns of migration, provided a brief account of how mainstream scholars have theorized migration, and given some insight into the impacts of migration. Together these accounts illustrate how migration and migrants are often approached as problems that need to be known and managed, whether this is through practices of defining, explaining, or controlling.

But what happens if we take a more critical approach to the study of migration? What happens if we return to Shah’s question and “accept migration as integral to life on a dynamic planet with shifting and unevenly distributed resources” (Shah 2020: 316)? We argue that this forces us to ask a different set of questions, including: Why is migration construed as a problem? Why does migration need to be managed? Who gets to decide why some people are welcome as migrants and some people are not? Who gets to define what is “good” about the “good migrant”? If we start to explore these and related questions, we suggest that other kinds of geographies and stories about migration become visible.

In this book, we put forward a critical approach to migration that centers three interlinked components: (1) knowledge production, (2) power relations, and (3) the spatiality and temporality of migration. Together, these components will provide you with key insights for engaging with the chapters to come.

The first aspect to our critical approach centers on knowledge production. By this, we want you to consider “common-sense” knowledge about migration. Who creates this knowledge, and how? For example, what are the official narratives about migration, told by politicians or policy makers or in courts? When is migration described as a crisis or a threat, and by whom? What effect does this type of narrative about migration have on migrants, the communities they are part of, and/or on people who have little or no interaction with migrants? How do we assess conflicting information, like when opposing groups take different positions on the impacts of migration on particular places? As we explain in more detail in Chapter 2, we believe that we shape the world through stories. Our critical approach pays attention to the kinds of worlds that are shaped by the telling of particular stories and illuminates other forms of knowledge that become visible through different stories and different storytellers. We consider the untold stories and the silences about migration, while also recognizing that making certain knowledge about migration visible can potentially do harm.

The second aspect to our critical approach centers on power relations. Broadly, we understand power as the ability to affect people, places, environments, and knowledge. Often, there is a tendency to think about power as working hierarchically. You may have heard about power working in “top-down” or “bottom-up” ways: the first sees power operating through imposition by those who have the ability to enforce their will; the second sees power as a form of resistance against this imposition. This hierarchical juxtaposition of power (top-down) and resistance (bottom-up) makes it difficult to think critically about power. In contrast, our understanding of power is relational. That is, power is always a political struggle, rather than an imposition from

the top. When we think about migration more broadly, power relations are evident in the struggle over who does – and does not – get to be mobile and under what conditions. They are also evident in the different strategies people use to circumvent restrictions on their ability to move or stay. Because it is relational, power is always being negotiated. Though it may seem that certain groups or individuals are more powerful in particular places and times, a relational understanding recognizes that being powerful demands effort and energy and ongoing struggle and has consequences that need to be made visible. Some of the dominant stories about migration focus on displays of power, such as reinforced border walls, detention, and deportation. Yet, all these displays of power are negotiated and challenged, for example, by people who establish new border-crossing routes or people who seek to stop the forcible removal of migrants. These challenges are just one aspect of the stories of people who strive to be understood as more than their official migrant status.

The third important component to our critical approach centers on space and time. Stephen Castles has argued that we need approach migration as a component of social change, rather than a separate phenomenon (Castles 2010). Similarly, Janine Dahinden suggests that we need to “demigrantize” our understanding of migration by focusing on society as a whole, rather than on migrants as inevitably different (Dahinden 2016). For us, this requires placing migration within broader spatial and temporal contexts as well as addressing the spatiality and temporality of migration. Spatiality refers to the ways that space is connected to social life and how space and society mutually influence each other. This mutual relationship is also known as socio-spatial. Temporality refers to how time is socially constructed and experienced, which is also connected to space. Centering space and time helps us to place migration in broader structural contexts.

When Shah tells us that migration will happen because we live on “a dynamic planet with shifting and unevenly distributed resources” (Shah 2020: 316), our approach allows us to ask *how* and *why* this unequal distribution has occurred and *what* we might do to challenge it. This requires us to engage with the impacts of broader structures such as colonialism, capitalism, and geopolitics, which reproduce inequalities between different places and across different times. Though these structures affect all of us, their effects are grounded and embodied differently. We can see this clearly in relation to migration, where particular migrant bodies – for example, Global North, white, wealthy – have more access to mobility than others do. These bodies can move more easily and more quickly through space, as they experience fewer spatial frictions than other migrant bodies do. A critical approach that centers spatiality and temporality seeks to understand the crucial role of space and time in the stories we tell and in the struggles we experience.

In this book, we bring you on a critical journey, keeping issues of knowledge production, power relations, and space and time to the forefront. While knowledge production is embedded in all the chapters of our book, it is a particular focus of this introductory chapter and Chapter 2, where we introduce you to the different ways in which stories about migration are told. The idea of storytelling is central to a critical perspective: interrogating different stories about migration and mobility helps you to understand why certain dominant stories are told and why it is important to tell and listen to counterstories. We also return to knowledge production in Chapter 12, where we discuss the ethics of conducting migration research and provide ideas for your telling of a migration story. We provide several options for how you can begin to research and recount your own migration journey or the migration experiences of other people, places, and communities.

Section II introduces you to three key spatial analytics that help you to understand the different scales and power relations in migration. We begin with a discussion of bodies in Chapter 3, which asks you to think about migration as an embodied experience. We show how migrant bodies are differentiated and governed, and we also argue that by taking the body seriously, we can better understand how migrants live and thrive, despite efforts to manage and control them.

In Chapter 4, we discuss migration routes and journeys. We follow migrant trajectories and examine infrastructures of migration to illuminate the power relations that make mobility easier for some and more difficult and risky for most. In Chapter 5, which focuses on borders and bordering, we highlight the power relations evident in the use of physical, biometric, and moving borders to manage migration. We also show power relations at work in debordering, which disrupts and challenges the normalization of borders. Across the three chapters, we show how these spatial analytics are present in all forms of migration, and we demonstrate how they operate, are imagined, and are experienced.

In Section III, we explore three different spatial and temporal contexts for making sense of migration. In Chapter 6, we focus on homes and belonging. We look at the everyday practices of making homes and creating and maintaining ties of belonging across space and time. We also challenge the belief that migrants are not at home. We discuss work in detail in Chapter 7. We highlight how mainstream theories often present work as the reason for migration. We also show how the state plays an important role in enabling different types of labor migration to particular places, with consequences for the experiences of migrants. We emphasize the workplace as a site of solidarity that enables the creation of new connections across space and time. In Chapter 8, our emphasis is on climate and environment. Instead of reiterating the dominant story of climate migration scaremongering, we show how the long reach of colonialism, capitalism, and racialization affects contemporary migration related to the environment. While these chapters emphasize different spatial and temporal contexts, they also provide important insights into knowledge production and power relations.

In Section IV, we center migrant experiences and futures. In Chapter 9, we discuss migrant encounters: with people and groups, with institutions, and with nation-states. Many stories about encounters focus on their potential negativity, but we argue that encounters also have the potential to enhance solidarity. In Chapter 10, our focus is on how migrants maintain and develop connections with people and places across space and time and the challenges they face in doing so. Chapter 11 takes a slightly different approach. Here, we speculate on migrant and migration futures and advance our critical perspective on how we could imagine and craft different migration stories, filled with hope, compassion, and solidarity.

In Section V (Chapter 12), we turn the book over to you and ask you to think about how you could tell a migration story. To help you get started with your own project, we have provided several tools for you throughout the book. Each chapter in this book has concept boxes that provide definitions of the important concepts related to the theme of the chapter. Throughout the book, we have included exercises that can be used as homework or as a starting point for reflection. At the end of each chapter, we have provided suggestions for further readings if you are interested in learning more about the topic. We have also compiled an appendix for you. This contains a list of books, academic journals and articles, movies, short films and TV series, novels and short stories, online art exhibitions, and archives related to migration that we ourselves have found useful. We hope this will provide you with further guidance and inspiration as you embark on your journey to learn more about migration.

Notes

1. The term “irregular” is more widely used in the EU, while the term “illegal” or “undocumented” is more widely used in the United States. These terms may be unfamiliar in other contexts with different migration regimes, e.g. where migration is not regulated or criminalized.

2. There is, of course, a much longer history of both migration and slavery. We begin here because of the scale and scope of this particular form of slavery and because of its lasting impact on racial and spatial hierarchies.

Further Reading

- Mayblin, L. and Turner, J. (2021) *Migration Studies and Colonialism*, Polity Press.
- McAuliffe, M. and Oucho, L.A. (eds) (2024) *World Migration Report 2024*, International Organization for Migration (IOM).
- McKeown, A. (2004) Global migration, 1846–1940. *Journal of World History*, 15(2), 155–189.
- Mitchell, K., Jones, R. and Fluri, J.L. (eds) (2019) *Handbook on Critical Geographies of Migration*, Edward Elgar.