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Harm and Migration

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Introduction

In its most elementary understanding, the concept of migration denotes the movement of people across geographic space. It is an essential capacity of human beings and it has been a constitutive force in the shaping of our evolutionary and cultural history for over 100,000 years (Timmermann and Friedrich 2016). It is only when such movements transgress ethnocultural boundaries or administrative jurisdictions that migration gains its modern political meaning and can become problematised in relation to social harm.

This chapter aims to provide a broad overview of the various different ways in which international migration can be associated with social harms. Its main goal is to introduce the phenomenon of migration in all

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its paradoxical complexity and to relate the findings from recent migration scholarship to the issues raised by the social harm approach (Boukli and Kotzé 2018; Dorling et al. 2008; Hillyard et al. 2004; Pemberton 2015).

The first section of the chapter places contemporary discourses around migration in a historical context, tracing them back to the beginnings of social scientific interest in the topic. Through this conceptual mapping exercise, the section also argues that a holistic understanding of the social harms associated with migratory processes requires a broad and flexible theoretical framework. The second section discusses, in turn, three dimensions of migration-related harms: those associated with the causes of migration, those entailed by migration processes themselves and those stemming from attempts to control the movement of people. In all three dimensions, the analysis will focus on the intentional harms that are nonetheless ‘constituted by either *foreseeable* events or resulting from contexts that are *alterable social relationships*’ (Pemberton 2015: 25, italics in original).

Grasping the great variety of harmful effects tied up with migratory processes is particularly important today, after population movements have significantly diversified and ‘migration has gained increasing political salience over the past decades’ (De Haas et al. 2020: 11). Assessing the consequences of this politicisation is becoming an ever more necessary undertaking in order to understand contemporary societies themselves.

Background

Explicitly zemiological appreciations of migratory phenomena have focused primarily on the exclusionary immigration and asylum policies and control mechanisms that target the most vulnerable of migrants at the borders of powerful states (Canning 2018; Soliman 2019; Webber 2004). These cases, however, represent a small fraction of the various population movements that exist worldwide. While this narrow focus is understandable given the urgency of the processes they describe and the magnitude of the harms they identify, it is also a reflection of the limits

imposed by the inherent ‘value-orientation’ of the social harm approach (Pemberton 2015: 15).

In his groundbreaking book *Harmful societies*, Simon Pemberton (2015: 1; emphasis in original) derives the social harm perspective from Friedrich Engels’s 1845 study of *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, which he considers to be ‘one of the original, if not *the* original, social harm analysis’. What lends it the cornerstone status of the zemiological tradition, in Pemberton’s assessment, is Engels’s structural mode of explanation and his understanding of the harms that had befallen the urban working classes in the course of industrialisation as ‘entirely preventable’.

While the question of migration is not raised in Pemberton’s study, it features prominently in that of Engels, who gives a detailed account of the effects of Irish immigration on the lives of English workers. Engels’s treatment of the topic, however, is one of the weaker elements in his broader structural analysis. While in his sociography the English working class had unquestionably fallen victim to the ‘social murder’ committed against its members by ‘the ruling power of society’ (Engels 2010 [1845]: 393–394), the squalor of Irish immigrants is to a great extent attributed to ‘the Irish character, which, under some circumstances, is comfortable only in the dirt’ (2010 [1845]: 337). In his analysis, Irish immigration was ‘gradually forcing the rate of wages, and with it the Englishman’s level of civilisation, down to the Irishman’s level’ (2010 [1845]: 377), and, ultimately, ‘the degrading position of the English workers, engendered by our modern history [i.e. industry; author’s note], and its immediate consequences, has been still more degraded by the presence of Irish competition’ (2010 [1845]: 392).

Many of the concerns raised by Engels—if not the language itself—still sound strangely familiar today. The phenomena they describe have since been explored in depth. The ‘dual labour market’ theory of Piore (1979), for instance, posited that advanced industrialised labour markets become split into primary and secondary, lower-level, segments, with international migrants becoming ‘downward assimilated’ into the latter (see Portes and Zhou 1993). Neo-Marxist approaches have meanwhile developed more refined structural analyses of the uses and abuses of migration policies by the ruling classes, in which the detrimental effect

of immigration on the bargaining power of labour unions remains an important point of contention (Castles and Kosack 1973; Streeck 2016).

However, Engels described only a limited side of the story of migration and the harms associated with it. Other political economists examining the same phenomena have provided complementary assessments, which are equally foundational to much contemporary migration theory. If Engels can be said to represent a socialist stance, the work of John Stuart Mill and of Max Weber can be taken to describe the liberal and nationalist perspectives accordingly, and they both provide valuable insights for understanding migration today.

Mill is probably best known (and criticised) among zemiologists for his famous liberal conception of freedom, which he defined in his 1859 book *On Liberty* as the absence of outside interference in one's actions as long as those actions do not cause harm to other people's own exercise of freedom. Although this work does not address the question of migration, Mill treats the subject at length in his earlier *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), where he argued for a national policy to support large-scale migration to the farther reaches of the British Empire as a solution to overpopulation and poverty.

He was writing at the height of the Great Irish Famine (1845–1850) which led to unprecedented levels of Irish emigration both to England and across the Atlantic. In a truly structural explanation, he saw this migration as resulting from 'the threefold operation of the potato failure, the poor law, and the general turning-out of tenantry' (Mill 1965: 194). Already in the first edition of *Principles*, he described the 'extraordinary case' of Irish migration as evidence that 'spontaneous emigration may, at a particular crisis, remove greater multitudes than it was ever proposed to remove at once by any national scheme' (1965: 194). This 'unparalleled amount of spontaneous emigration' was 'at once voluntary and self-supporting, the succession of emigrants being kept up by funds contributed from the earnings of their relatives and connexions who had gone before' (1965: 967). By the time of the sixth (1865) edition of the book, this form of migration was no longer a unique case but a 'new fact in modern history' instigated by the 'extraordinary cheapening of the means of transport' and the increase in 'knowledge ... of the condition of the labour market in remote parts of the world', signalling the advent of

an age in which human flourishing will depend ‘so little on governments, and so much on the general disposition of the people’ (1965: 378–379).

Mill’s insights contain the essence of what would later become known as ‘migration network theory’ and the concept of ‘cumulative causation’ (Massey 1990), which explain how migratory patterns become self-perpetuating through cross-national ties and *remittances*, both financial—money sent back home—and social—the flow of information, ideas, identities, social capital and other non-material assets. His strong belief in the emancipatory potential of ‘voluntary’, free migration remains the general attitude among mainstream economists and particularly those promoting the more radical idea of ‘open borders’ (Caplan and Weinersmith 2019). Those who argue that eliminating barriers to labour mobility worldwide would lead to gains in the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of between 50 and 150%, despite such unrestricted mobility having ‘complicated effects’ for non-migrants (Clemens 2011), are effectively following Mill’s guidance that the benefit of migration ‘should be considered in its relation, not to a single country, but to the collective economical interests of the human race’ (1965: 963). For critics, however, this so-called neoliberal ideology supports migration and open borders only with the covert aim of ‘destabilizing protective labour regimes’ (Streeck 2016: 26).

In contrast to Engels and Mill, Weber adopted what he called a “nationalistic” criterion of evaluation’ (1994: 16, emphasis in original) when assessing the *Condition of Farm Labour in Eastern Germany* (1892). In this work, he famously charged the German landowning class with undermining the livelihoods of German farmworkers and replacing their labour with that of Polish migrants. As a solution, he advocated for ‘the closing of the eastern frontier’ and the dismantlement of the landed aristocracy’s large-scale enterprises for the benefit of the ‘nation state’ (Weber 1994: 12–13).

Yet, his analysis of migratory phenomena is more complex and paradoxical than his nationalistic policy recommendation. On the one hand, he echoes Engels—especially his later collaborative works with Marx—in describing unskilled migration as a ‘weapon in the already anticipated

class struggle, directed against the awakening self-confidence of the workers' (Weber 1924: 502). On the other hand, he complements this class-based structural analysis with a cultural one more typical of his later sociological work. This comes to the fore particularly when he examines why *German* day-labourers migrate away to the new industrial towns. The reasons for this migration, he argues, are not material; instead, it represents a reaction to the deeply engrained social structure of the German countryside, which restricts social mobility almost entirely. It is an escape from a world that 'contains only masters and servants', and in which the latter 'will be faced for ever after only with the prospect of toiling away on someone else's land to the tolling of the estate bell' [sic]. The new opportunity structures created by industrialisation give rise to an 'inarticulate, half-conscious urge' calling on a latent 'primitive idealism' reanimated by 'the magic of *freedom*' (Weber 1994: 8, emphasis in original).

There is a fundamental tension between the two theories of migration represented in Weber's work, one which has shaped migration research ever since. His insights underpin the more recently conceptualised 'aspirations–capabilities model' that treats migration 'as a function of capabilities and aspirations to move within a given set of opportunity structures' (De Haas et al. 2020: 63). At the same time, the 'economic nationalist' (Weber 1994: 20) stream of Weber's thought has been kept alive by those who long advocated for a 'principle of nationality' in adjudicating on questions of migration (Miller 1995), and has seen a dramatic resurgence in recent national-populist movements (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018; Goodhart 2017).

Grounding an analysis of social harm associated with migratory phenomena on only one of the broad perspectives outlined above would pose serious limitations. In different ways, all three see migration as tied up in 'relations, processes, flows, practices, discourse, actions and inactions that constitute the fabric of our societies which serve to compromise the fulfilment of human needs and in doing so result in identifiable harms' (Pemberton 2015: 24). Migration can be, simultaneously, a consequence of harmful social structures, an active element of them, or a challenge to their operation. A holistic exploration of migration-related harms would therefore look at all three dimensions: harms associated

with the causes of migration; harms associated with migratory processes themselves; and harms associated with the management of migration.

Migratory Dimensions of Social Harm

Harmful Causes of Migration

According to United Nations population data, there were 272 million international migrants worldwide in 2019 (IOM 2019: 19). Although this number is a small fraction of the global population—which reached 7.7 billion in 2019, it continues an increasing trend showing that the world is becoming more migratory year on year. International migrants choose to move across national borders for various reasons, with those migrating for work accounting for around two-thirds of all migrants (IOM 2019: 33). Other common migration motives relate to family, study or business opportunities.

While many of these migrations are *voluntary*, resulting from decisions made by individuals and their families, differentiating between migratory agency and structural constraints is less than straightforward. It remains the case that most migrants move to richer countries than the ones where they were born, choose to reunite with partners and family members who had already left, study in countries with better education systems and invest where there is a safer business environment and a higher spending power. Thus, while decisions to migrate reflect aspirations to improve one's life, they are very much tied up in international inequalities that could arguably constitute 'alterable social relationships' at a global scale (Pemberton 2015). Often, the reasons for such global inequalities are intertwined with historical patterns of colonial exploitation, political corruption or economic mismanagement. Only careful causal analysis of the complex web of structural mechanisms balanced by an in-depth understanding of the life experiences and aspirations of migrants could estimate the degree to which migration itself should be considered a harmful consequence of structural harms, or rather a privileged opportunity to escape their grip (Schewel 2019).

One can think of the migration-inducing power of symbolic geographies as a case when global inequalities create *voluntary* migrations with ambiguous effects. In his analysis of mental cartographies of world order, Attila Melegh (2006) has shown that in popular and scholarly imaginaries countries are assigned different positions on an East-West civilisational slope. In this dominant discourse, ‘almost all political and social actors ‘East’ and ‘West’ identify themselves on a descending scale from ‘civilization to barbarism’, from ‘developed to non-developed’ status’ (Melegh 2006: 9). This ‘civilisational slope’ ideology is particularly strong in post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, where an idealised vision of the capitalist West underpinned popular support for the transition to a market economy in the 1990s, but can equally represent geopolitical imaginations across the global North-South divide (Slater 1997). It is often this prestige hierarchy that drives migratory phenomena. As a Romanian migrant reflecting on migration from his village to Italy expressed it: ‘for some it is not important whether they earned money or not, or that they slept on the streets; what’s important is that they have been to Italy’ (cited in Anghel 2009: 261). He also observed how ‘some of those who had left returned more cultivated, more civilised, they are learning a new language’ (2009: 261). These words capture the essence of the civilisational slope mentality, which sees migration as a spatial ‘civilising process’ (cf. Elias 2000).

Erind Pajo (2008: 201) has documented similar trends in his ethnographic study of the ‘socioglobal articulations and imaginaries’ driving migration from Albania, a country with one of the highest emigration rates in the world. In 2019, just under 30% of Albanian nationals were estimated to be living in another country, the second-highest rate in Europe—only surpassed by Bosnia and Herzegovina—and twelfth highest in the world (IOM 2019: 27). Examining the emigration wave of the 1990s, Pajo was puzzled by the fact that over half of university graduates had left the country, often undertaking dangerous journeys as undocumented migrants, to take up unskilled low-paid jobs in Greece, Italy and other European countries. The attraction of comparatively higher wages could only partially explain what he saw as ‘the paradox of willed pursuit of social decline through international migration’ (2008: 11). Instead, Pajo (2008: 10) argues, international migration is best

understood as 'driven by the social desire to advance from a location envisioned as low in the international hierarchy towards one envisioned as higher'. However, these aspirations of 'socioglobal mobility', as Pajo called it, often have tragic consequences, leading many to irregular border-crossings that result in death, or being undermined by the late realisation that social status is localised and true 'socioglobal mobility' ultimately a chimera.

The internalised apprehension of a civilisational slope at the heart of the world system and the mirage of socioglobal mobility are manifestations of that dominant ideology which Samir Amin (2009) calls 'Eurocentrism'. For Amin, the Eurocentric vision emerged directly from the Western European colonial experience as a mentality acting to camouflage the colonial centre's material dependency on the periphery with the veil of the periphery's dependency on the centre for its progress towards a specific model of development. Eurocentrism has thus placed the 'civilizing role of colonization' in the foreground, ascribing economic disparities and political deficiencies in the peripheral regions of the global capitalist economy to background 'factors internal to these non-European societies' (Amin 2009: 184–185). As other post-colonial thinkers have also emphasised, the formalisation of the nation-state system of international relations during the first half of the twentieth century was in no way a break with the colonial world order. In the words of Bhambra (2016: 344), 'the nation-state in the comparative historical sociology of nation-state-building is always already a colonial and imperial state'. Contemporary international migrations take place within this formalised nation-state system which has reconfigured colonial imaginaries of civilisation and barbarism as development and underdevelopment at a truly global scale.

The case of post-communist Eastern Europe most poignantly highlights the central role played by mobility rights and opportunities in the post-colonial system of international relations. It also serves as a reminder that it is usually not the poorest people who migrate, but those who can afford the non-negligible costs affiliated with investing in a migration project. Likewise, it is usually not the least economically developed countries that produce the highest emigration rates. This is

explained by the ‘migration transition theory’, which posits that development initially leads to an increase in emigration—both internal (rural to urban mobility) and international migration—and only after a certain threshold of development would emigration reduce and immigration into the country increase (De Haas 2010b; Skeldon 1997, 2012). Development had been a driving force behind large-scale European migration to North America at the turn of the twentieth century (Hatton and Williamson 1998), and it is what drives the increase of emigration from African countries towards Europe today (Clemens and Postel 2018; Schewel 2020). For this reason, many argue that conceiving of development aid as a global migration-reducing mechanism is ill-advised, and it would be more accurate to interpret increases in emigration as a positive side-effect of economic development and reduction in social harm (Clemens and Postel 2018).

The ambiguous relationship between migration, development and global inequalities is also reflected in another increasingly prevalent migration type: environmental migration. The current speed of climate change is commonly considered an example of environmental harm by green criminologists, given that so much of its causing factors can be attributed to potentially alterable human behaviour (Westerhuis et al. 2013; White and Heckenberg 2014). While climate change has been a major cause of human migrations for millennia (Timmermann and Friedrich 2016), some expect human-induced climate change to lead to unprecedented levels of displacement and migration in the coming decades (IOM 2008). Under certain scenarios, climate scientists envisage that up to 200 million people might become displaced by mid-twenty-first century due to rising sea levels, water shortages and declining agricultural yields, many of whom would relocate internationally (IOM 2008). Other research challenges the simplistic assumptions underlying these projections, pointing out at the same time that the harms of climate change could be much worse than displacement and migration (Foresight 2011; Riosmena et al. 2018). Despite increasingly visible environmental shocks—such as hurricanes, floods or wildfires—climate change is a step-wise process, first affecting the livelihoods of rural populations who are pushed towards coastal megacities that carry a much higher level of long-term environmental risk. It is estimated that the number of people living

in floodplains in urban areas around the world could reach between 136 and 211 million by 2060, four to seven times more than in 2000 (Foresight 2011). With further environmental degradation and rising sea levels, migration to geographically safer destinations in richer countries is again more likely to become a real option only for the well-off, with poorer populations becoming ‘trapped’ in risk areas (Foresight 2011).

Migration itself emerges as a harm more clearly when it is experienced as *involuntary* or deemed to be the only viable option for achieving a humane standard of living. Conditions of *direct violence*—such as armed conflicts and life-threatening living conditions—often compel people to seek refuge in a foreign country. At the end of 2018, the number of *refugees* globally was 25.9 million, and a further 3.5 million *asylum seekers* were awaiting the outcome of their application for refugee status (IOM 2019: 39). More than two-thirds of all refugees originated from only five countries—Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia, countries where the most serious conflicts had taken place in the previous year (Iván et al. 2019)—and over half were aged under 18. For this large population of youngsters, migration is a survival opportunity, but not in fact a real choice between equally viable options. Their experience is in many ways more akin to that of *mass displacements* following inter-ethnic conflicts or forceful *deportations* by authoritarian regimes, population movements which could hardly be classified as migration in any useful sense due precisely to the complete absence of decision-making power on the part of the displaced.

Yet, even under extreme circumstances such as the protracted civil war in Syria—which erupted in 2011—there is a rather complex relationship between violence and migration. Empirical data from Syrian refugees in Turkey shows that those who had not experienced violence chose to migrate earlier than those with violent experiences, particularly when they also possessed higher socio-economic capital (Schon 2019). While possessing the means to escape violent conditions is an essential requirement, Schon further explains this phenomenon by arguing that experiences of violence can result not only in negative psychological effects—such as *post-traumatic stress disorder* (PTSD)—but can also trigger more positive outcomes such as *post-traumatic growth* (PTG), involving an increase in resilience, imagination, spirituality and a

better appreciation of life and social relationships (Schon 2019; Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996). Experiences of violence can thus delay migration decisions, especially when community support mechanisms help fit explanations for the violent events into a coherent narrative, thus normalising violence as something that could be countered through alternative methods to migration. This mechanism parallels in some respects the classical distinction made by Albert Hirschman (1970) between exit and voice as possible responses to decline in organisations and states.

While formal wars cause significant refugee movements, *generalised violence* can sometimes reach warlike proportions and serve as a cause of forced migration. Population movements in Latin America are often discussed as examples. In 2019, Mexico was the second largest country of origin in the world—after India—with almost 12 million of its nationals living abroad, and the Mexico–US *migration corridor* has been the world’s largest for several decades, providing a classic example of economic migration (De Haas et al. 2020; IOM 2019: 26). However, economic reasons are not the only factor, and there is evidence that a spike in homicide rates in Mexico has been driving an increase in displacement and asylum seeking in the United States (Lopez 2019; Rubio Díaz-Leal and Albuja 2014). Although violence has for a long time been a part of everyday life in many Mexican towns, it skyrocketed following then incoming President Felipe Calderón’s declaration of war on drugs in 2006 (Lee et al. 2019; Lopez 2019). It is estimated that over the next six years the average homicide rate reached a staggering 1673 killings per month (Lopez 2019: 225). Refocusing the law-enforcement activities of the police force and the army on combating the cross-border drug trade left many civilians unprotected from local drug gangs, inducing many to leave and seek asylum in the United States. However, applications made on the basis of ‘general country conditions’ or ‘indiscriminate violence’ are not considered as legitimate grounds for asylum, and the success rate of applications remained as low as 10% (Lopez 2019: 227).

Many of those fleeing situations of generalised violence become *internally displaced* (Rubio Díaz-Leal and Albuja 2014). Even in 2019, Mexico experienced 11,000 new displacements, the third highest number in Latin America, after El Salvador and Colombia (IOM 2019:

100). At the same time, Mexico itself is becoming a transit and destination country for migrants fleeing violent climates elsewhere, not only in Central and South America, but as far off as Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Solomon 2019). These new trans-Atlantic migratory movements are driven mainly by the difficulty of accessing Europe following the growing securitisation of the Mediterranean border (Neal 2009), but they also speak of changing socio-economic relationships in the regions of origin. Compared to previous decades, more and more women from countries with strong patriarchal social institutions, such as the DRC, engage in 'autonomous' forms of migration independently from male family members (Schoumaker et al. 2018). This new trend can be attributed both to an increase in gender-based violence and a growing experience of autonomy after a harsh economic crisis in Congo had led more women into the labour market (Schoumaker et al. 2018; Vause and Toma 2015). The expanding labour market has also provided broader access to the minimum financial capabilities required for a migration project, allowing poorer and lower educated people to also migrate in higher numbers than before, and to explore new migration routes towards other African and North American destinations (Schoumaker et al. 2018). These migratory movements raise new questions regarding the linkages between economic crisis, development, violence and migration, which are yet to be empirically explored and conceptualised in respect to migration transitions and social harm.

Harms of the Migration Process

While we tend to see migration as only one of many social processes taking place within the broader context of contemporary societies, migration itself can come to constitute a separate sociocultural domain, a complex web of unintentionally harmful 'relations, processes, flows, practices, discourse, actions and inactions' (Pemberton 2015: 24). This can be the case with what is often referred to as a 'culture of migration' (Massey et al. 1993). It has been shown that as 'migration grows in prevalence within a community, it changes values and cultural perceptions in ways that increase the probability of future migration' (Massey

et al. 1993: 452). Regardless of the initial causes of migration, subsequent movements can thus be animated by the unquestioned expectation that migration is the only available and desirable option. Such expectations can help explain the extremely high migration aspiration rates in certain countries of origin. According to Gallup World Poll data, over or almost half of the entire adult population would like to move abroad permanently in countries such as Sierra Leone (71%), Liberia (66%), Haiti (63%), Albania (60%), El Salvador (52%), Congo (50%), Ghana (49%), the Dominican Republic (49%) and Nigeria (48%) (Esipova et al. 2018).

As any other 'culture', the culture of migration establishes its own norms, worldviews, status systems and institutions. A fully developed culture of migration reorients its members' aspirations towards potentially unrealistic ideals and is supported by an extensive 'migration industry' consisting of 'employers, travel agents, recruiters, brokers, smugglers, humanitarian organisations, housing agents, immigration lawyers and other intermediaries who have a strong interest in the continuation of migration' (De Haas et al. 2020: 66). While many intermediaries provide services that empower migrants and help ameliorate the difficulties involved in the migration process—from raising funds for a migration project through navigating restrictive immigration regimes to settling in a new country and finding a livelihood with limited language skills and cultural awareness—these services often come at extremely high financial and human costs.

One of the most harmful effects of the culture of migration has to do with the normalisation of extreme risk, which disproportionately affects vulnerable groups such as women and children (Grabska et al. 2019; Pickering and Cochrane 2013; Zanfrini 2019). Pressures to emigrate can set many on risky journeys that often result in death. According to the International Organization of Migration's *Missing Migrants Project*, which attempts to monitor the number and circumstances of migrant deaths and disappearances worldwide, a total of 19,325 migrants had died and at least 16,235 had gone missing between 2014 and the time of writing (IOM 2020). The overwhelming majority of fatalities and disappearances occurred in the Mediterranean region, with many of the victims being undocumented children (Laczko et al. 2019). Pickering and Cochrane (2013: 28) have also shown that women are more likely

to lose their lives while crossing national borders, and that the reasons for this have to do with ‘gendered social practices within families, and within countries of origin and transit, as well as the practices of smuggling markets’, just as much as with ‘state sponsored border control’.

Early *pioneer migrants*—those who explore a new migration route or destination for the first time—generally lack information about what to expect from a migration journey, and those who return from abroad often mask the harsh realities they had faced in order to appear successful in their home communities. The opportunity and requirement for such transnational negotiation of social status is an essential element of a culture of migration, providing meaning to the so-called ‘3D’—dirty, difficult and dangerous—jobs that many first-generation migrants undertake (Anghel 2013; Goldring 1998; Nieswand 2011). With the development of stable migration networks, however, information about the risks of migration becomes more broadly available, while at the same time, these known risks become increasingly subordinated to the social prestige of a successful migration project. It is often the case that lucrative jobs promised by transnational migration intermediaries are known to involve prostitution under conditions of modern slavery, sex work abroad being facilitated by ‘a trafficking system based on a strong pact’ (Carling 2006: 26). Vulnerable would-be migrants can even be fully aware of the high risk of kidnapping or rape, that a pregnancy can improve one’s treatment in a detention centre, or that a child conceived under such circumstances can have monetary value (Zanfrini 2019: 127). A strongly established culture of migration relativises such risks to the social desirability of emigration, often syncretising the various harmful elements of the migration process with local cultural traditions.

The case of young women trafficked from Nigeria to Europe described by Carling (2006) is a revealing example. Especially in rural areas with limited paid work opportunities, young women face considerable pressures to emigrate even when they have few resources to move. One resource they can draw on, however, is family members and friends who can establish an initial contact with someone involved in the human trafficking business. In the Nigerian context, this first contact is a local ‘madam’ who has a connection with another ‘madam’ in the country of destination. The migration project is sponsored by these intermediaries,

leaving the migrant woman with a debt that takes between one and three years to pay off as a prostitute in Europe. The pact between the migrant and the ‘madam’ is sealed by a local religious leader as part of an official ceremony highly charged in traditional religious symbolism. The ritual turns the pact into a strong bond not only between the trafficked women and their sponsors, but also between the women and their local communities, to the effect that breaking it would bring shame on the entire community (2006: 26–29). In case of a failed journey, trafficked women are often directly blamed by their parents and families, while successful ones where debts are fully paid off often lead to the trafficked women taking on the role of ‘madam’ for other women in their extended family networks. Through this cycle, the trafficking system becomes a self-reinforcing social mechanism, only weakened by the ‘migration-undermining feedback mechanism’ (De Haas 2010a) of the increasing number of returnee women who choose to speak out and warn other women about the conditions they experienced (Carling 2006).

Cultures of migration are thus paradoxical social mechanisms. They reduce the risks of migration by providing a complex infrastructure of networks, institutions and cultural meanings in both the localities of origin and destination, which help navigate transnational travel, work and social life. At the same time, they also enshrine social expectations and practices that can have harmful consequences for the migrants, the communities of origin and the localities of destination. Large-scale emigration can leave whole towns and villages without a working-age population, making these communities entirely reliant on financial *remittances*, the money sent back by migrant workers. It can also result in severe skills shortages due to *brain drain*, the emigration of highly skilled people.

One of the most widely researched harmful effects of large-scale migration on the communities of origin is the condition of ‘left-behind’ vulnerable family members (Kilkey and Palenga-Möllenbeck 2016; Parreñas 2005). It is estimated that the share of children with at least one parent living away from home is as high as 27% in the Philippines, 36% in Ecuador and more than 40% in rural South Africa (Fellmeth et al. 2018). While *remittances* can make an invaluable contribution to the schooling, nourishment and life prospects of children

in poor communities, the long-term absence of parents has simultaneously been linked to psychological and behavioural disorders (Castañeda and Buck 2011; Fellmeth et al. 2018; Ivlevs et al. 2019; Kufakurinani et al. 2014). Castañeda and Buck (2011: 105) capture this double-edged nature of the migration-development nexus very accurately when asserting that ‘the suffering that the children left behind feel is an intrinsic part of the logic of remittance-economies’.

Using Gallup World Poll data for 114 countries, Ivlevs et al. (2019) have found that in general having family members abroad and benefiting from the material advantages brought by remittances increases levels of evaluative wellbeing, while also increasing the likelihood to experience stress and depression. As they conclude, ‘remittances buy “happiness” but do not relieve the pain of separation’ (Ivlevs et al. 2019: 136). The latter, however, can have serious implications for young children. A meta-analysis of 111 studies—the majority focusing on internal migration in China—exploring more closely the health impacts of parental migration on left-behind children and adolescents has found that left-behind children scored higher on depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation than children from non-migrant families, and they were also more likely to show signs of conduct disorder and substance abuse (Fellmeth et al. 2018). The increasing availability of new communication technologies and the emergence of ‘mobile phone parenting’ (Madianou and Miller 2011) have not resolved the emotional issues of family separation (Madianou 2016).

Studies have also highlighted, however, that many of these negative effects are tied together with wider social issues in the localities of origin. Left-behind youngsters can become stigmatised as ‘diaspora orphans’, whose behaviour is characterised by ‘not taking education seriously, getting drunk, wanton expenditure on fashion clothing, lack of discipline, arrogance and promiscuous behaviour’ (Kufakurinani et al. 2014: 125). Such stereotypical representations are often key elements in broader societal debates about emigration, the decline of parental authority and changing gender norms of parenting in traditional societies (Kufakurinani et al. 2014). As Parreñas (2005) has argued, many of the emotional injuries experienced by left-behind children could be partly mitigated by an increased openness to non-traditional gender

roles, which would allow single mothers and fathers with migrant spouses to partake in a wider array of parenting activities. The case of left-behind children thus carries the same paradoxes as other migration-related phenomena. It both highlights the detrimental effect of migration on family life and the inefficiency of traditional patriarchal family structures in the context of an increasingly mobile world.

The paradoxes of migration processes extend also to their effect on the countries of destination. Although migration brings substantial economic benefits to developed economies by filling labour shortages, it also raises concerns about the effect it has on the employment, working conditions and wages of native populations (Borjas 2003; Card 2001; Dustmann et al. 2012; Manacorda et al. 2012; Ottaviano and Peri 2012). A large body of research using complex econometric modelling has highlighted that while these concerns are not substantiated by the empirical data, there are no easy answers to public fears and perceptions. In the case of the UK, it has been shown that migration has both slightly increased the average wage of the UK-born population and decreased wages at the bottom of the income distribution where many migrant workers are concentrated (Dustmann et al. 2012). Wadsworth et al. (2016) have argued that the strain on wages and employment opportunities experienced by UK workers following the opening of the British labour-market to Central and Eastern European nationals after the 2004 enlargement of the European Union is to be attributed to the global financial crisis of 2007–2008 rather than migration itself, although these negative effects were unequally distributed geographically and thus were experienced differently across local communities. Beyond strictly economic effects, there is also evidence that such sudden large-scale migration, especially when freedom of movement is not met with equal opportunities on the labour market, can have a temporary negative impact on housing (Sá 2015) and on property crime rates (Bell et al. 2013). At the same time, even under these conditions, migration has no effect on violent crime (Bell et al. 2013), while longer term migration inflows, such as those experienced by the United States during the 1990s, are actually more likely to reduce crime rates (Sampson 2008; Wadsworth 2010).

Western liberal democracies have long struggled to manage the discrepancy between negative public opinion reactive to local inequalities and the general economic benefits that migration brings to national economies. On the one hand, popular pressures to limit immigration usually clash with states' obligation to uphold the core liberal values of citizenship and universal human rights (Hollifield 1992). On the other hand, states may be limited in their ability to react to popular anti-immigration pressures by vested interests. As Freeman (1995: 885) has argued, 'the concentrated benefits and diffuse costs of immigration mean that the interest group system around immigration issues is dominated by those groups supportive of larger intakes'. The strengthening of national-populist politics in the decade following the 2008 economic crisis can be read as a backlash against these constraints and interests, but the restrictionist measures they propose as the solution to popular grievances are likely to result in harmful outcomes for migrants and citizens alike (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018; Norris and Inglehart 2019).

Migration Management as Social Harm

Attempts by states to 'manage migration'—which is generally a euphemism for migration control and restrictions on entry—can vary in the degree of harm they cause to migrant populations. The harshest 'management techniques' have been widely researched in the zemiological literature and have emphasised the often deadly consequences of border controls and the criminalisation of migrants (Canning 2018; Soliman 2019; Webber 2004). These studies have argued that liberal nation-states have increasingly engaged in forms of 'hybrid governance' that blur the boundaries between criminal law and migration law in order to legitimise the removal and deportation of undesired vulnerable populations (Soliman 2019; van der Woude and van der Leun 2017). In this way, even within a liberal democratic legal framework the emergent 'cimmigration control system can subject non-citizens to ad hoc legal processes that are more likely to result in less favourable outcomes' (Soliman 2019: 3).

Within this ‘crimmigration control system’ migrant and refugee movements are increasingly treated as ‘security threats’ to the integrity of nation-states, and the policing of national borders is often represented as humanitarian work (Andersson 2017; Williams 2016). In Europe, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) oversees the securitisation of the EU’s external borders by conducting search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean and further afield from the European mainland, with the joint aim of preventing the death of irregular migrants and their early interception and institutionalisation (Andersson 2017). At the same time, security narratives are driving an increase in the policing of internal EU borders, slowly eroding the free movement ideals of the European Union (van der Woude and van der Leun 2017). In the United States, the securitisation of migration entails that around 400,000 non-citizens are forcibly removed from the country annually, while ‘humanitarian’ border control cannot prevent around 400 irregular migrants losing their lives each year while attempting to cross the southern border (Buckinx and Filindra 2015; Williams 2016). While the humanitarian-security nexus provides a legal veil to questionable practices of deportation, Buckinx and Filindra (2015: 397) have argued that in democratic states removals should be assessed instead through the normative principle of ‘just noci’, which takes a social harm perspective as its starting point and derives the legitimacy of the removal procedure from an assessment of ‘how removal would affect the deportee’s ability to be free from physical and psychological harm, integrate socially and pursue a livelihood’.

Besides the legal legitimacy provided by ‘hybrid governance’, migration regimes manage to circumvent liberal democratic principles of operation through the elaborate web of actors and institutions at various levels which constitute them. Eule et al. (2019: 188) have emphasised this important aspect of contemporary migration management, arguing that the plethora of actors holding various interests and responsibilities leads to ‘situations where nobody feels either legally or personally responsible for legal outcomes’. Together with the vagueness of many laws and regulations, which leaves migrants in uncertainty regarding their rights and makes decisions arbitrary and incalculable, this general ‘illegibility’

of migration regimes is a feature of the structural violence they perpetrate on vulnerable populations.

Going beyond refined critiques of migration management regimes, proponents of ‘open borders’ and ‘free movement’ have challenged the very idea that international migration should be controlled (Barry and Goodin 1992; Carens 2013; Kukathas 2005). Joseph Carens (2013) has put forward probably the most famous case for free movement across international borders from a liberal egalitarian normative standpoint. He builds his radical argument upon ethical and legal standards that a majority of people in liberal democratic regimes take for granted, such as the principle espoused in Article 13 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights that ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state’. Few would challenge such a right, and state practices that curtail it—like China’s *hukou* system of household registration, which acts as an internal passport and sets limits to relocations from urban to rural areas—are generally condemned as abuses of human rights. The principle of free movement within states, Carens argues, reflects a more basic intuition about human liberty and is thus directly extendable to mobility across national borders. Within this ethical framework, restrictions on freedom of movement are warranted ‘only if and to the extent that these restrictions are necessary to prevent harmful consequences that outweigh the moral claims to freedom of movement’ (2013: 276), such as serious and well-founded threats to national security and public order.

Ethical arguments for open borders are admittedly utopian. As Carens (2013: 276) reminds us, ‘critiques of deeply entrenched injustices’ always are; ‘That is what it means to say the injustices are deeply entrenched’. The purpose of his argument, Carens (2013: 278) emphasises, ‘is not to put forward a policy proposal but to make visible the deep injustice of existing global arrangements and to say what justice would require in principle’. By contrast, libertarian economist Bryan Caplan (2019) argues that the harms caused by migration restrictions are not of an ethical nature, but emerge from the missed opportunities to capitalise on the potential of free migration to achieve universal economic emancipation. He admits that ‘immigration has downsides’, yet, ‘when we patiently quantify the downsides, the trillions of dollars of gains of

open borders dwarf any credible estimate of the harms' (2019: n.p.). To the contrary, '[d]enying human beings the right to rent an apartment from a willing landlord or accept a job offer from a willing employer is a serious harm' (Caplan 2019: n.p.). Based on calculations made by Michael Clemens (2011), who has attempted to estimate the financial gains achievable from reducing barriers to migration, Caplan (2019: n.p.) argues that 'open borders would ultimately double humanity's wealth production'.

Both the liberal egalitarian arguments of Carens and the libertarian economic proposals of Caplan, however, rely on certain assumptions that pose empirical challenges. For instance, they work under the assumption that open borders would not lead in practice to mass migration either because global inequalities are assumed to be 'as limited as justice requires' (Carens 2013: 287) or because migrants are expected to make rational choices based on calculations about supply and demand mechanisms in distant labour markets. Also, as Kukathas (2005) has highlighted, '[o]ne of the reasons why open immigration is not possible is that it is not compatible with the modern welfare state'. One possible answer to this challenge is, of course, that 'the welfare state is what needs rethinking' (Kukathas 2005: 219). Such an enterprise, however, would require a very careful approach from a zemiological point of view, as it carries serious risks of unintended harmful consequences for the lives of many citizens.

Analyses of empirical cases of 'free movement' have also challenged the emancipatory potential of open borders. As Brad Blitz (2014) has argued, a distinction should be made between merely 'open borders' and 'free movement' regimes that require state or supra-state actors to actively promote access to more substantial rights and freedoms. Free movement rights within the European Union are the closest empirical approximation of the latter, yet intra-EU movers often face severe difficulties in the enjoyment of their rights to equal treatment and protection from discrimination. Often, it is precisely the ease of moving across open borders without contact with state authorities that leads to difficulties in establishing oneself more permanently at a later stage. The so-called Windrush scandal provides a good example of the dangers involved. In the wake of the 'hostile environment' policy introduced by the UK

government in 2012, thousands of UK residents who had arrived decades before from the Colonies as British subjects with full citizenship rights saw their legal status questioned and many were forcibly removed from the country for failing to hold documentation attesting to their British citizenship (Gentleman 2019). With the UK's exit from the European Union in 2020, many citizenship rights activists fear that resident EU nationals may one day end up in a similar situation, particularly given the deficiencies contained from the very beginning in the 'Settled status' scheme designed by the UK government (Read 2019). If, as Pemberton (2015: 26) acknowledged, the social harm perspective is constrained by the fact that estimating 'foreseeable consequences' of actions and policies and assessing the degree to which their harmful effects could have been avoided is ultimately a function of empirical investigation, then the outcomes of post-Brexit immigration and settlement policy in the UK will provide a uniquely suitable empirical anchor for a social harm analysis.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a broad overview of migratory processes, demonstrating that migration is a phenomenon rife with paradoxes and this often allows it to become a vehicle for wider social harms that can affect migrants and their families, the communities of origin and the countries of destination. The topic was approached from a social harm perspective whose primary aim is to shift the focus away from the analysis of 'intentional' harms and towards those that, while may be unintentional, are nonetheless 'foreseeable' and therefore 'preventable' (Pemberton 2015: 25). The chapter addressed three different dimensions of harm: those that cause migration, those that are associated with migration itself, and those that emerge from state actions to restrict the movement of people. It was argued that the question of agency is an important one to address in respect to all types of migration, but that decisions and consequences are always mediated by broader structural opportunities and constraints. The chapter also showed how migration itself can evolve into a total social and cultural 'fact' that engenders social harms. At the

same time, attempts to manage migration by Western liberal democracies have developed into sophisticated ‘control systems’ with very visible harmful consequences, while proposals to abolish all control mechanisms and allow the free movement of people across the world are both more viable than we might think and potentially more harmful than we could imagine.

Further Reading

- De Haas, H., Castles, S., & Miller, M. J. (2020). *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (6th Ed., 464 p.).

The latest edition of one of the most popular textbooks on migration. Written in a simple and engaging language by an international team of co-authors, it charts the contemporary politics of migration, including the latest statistical data, summary of policy developments and shifts towards anti-immigrant politics and Islamophobia. The 6th edition has an expanded focus on the topic of international development, a better global coverage of themes and case studies, and a very useful ‘Migration Policy Toolbox’ for those interested in gaining a comprehensive overview of different types of migration policies. The detailed glossary also highly benefits readers new to ‘migration studies’.

- IOM. (2019). *World Migration Report 2020* (496 p.). Geneva: International Organization for Migration.

The latest annual report on global migration trends produced by the International Office for Migration provides very useful data on the most recent migratory phenomena and developments. The first part of the report provides key information on migration and migrants, while the second part provides evidence-based analyses of complex and emerging migration issues. IOM reports are freely available to download at: <https://publications.iom.int/about-iom-publications>.

- Caplan, B., & Weinersmith, Z. (2019). *Open Borders: The Science and Ethics of Immigration* (256 p.). New York: First Second.

This is a highly unusual book, approaching the topic of migration and making a strong argument for ‘open borders’ and free movement

in the genre of graphic nonfiction. A collaborative work between an economist and a cartoonist, it is specifically targeted at those who prefer information in a graphic format, but even readers who are not accustomed to reading graphic novels will be surprised at how memorable it makes the immense amount of information contained in it. Plus, it turns migrants into superheroes who could save the world, if only allowed.

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