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## Migranhood: Youth in a New Era of Deportation

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## BOOK REVIEW

### **Migranthood: Youth in a New Era of Deportation**

Lauren Heidbrink  
Stanford University Press, 2020. 240p.

**Reviewed by James Loucky**  
Western Washington University.

Featherless bipeds that we are, mobility is as fundamental a capacity and reality of human beings as anything else. Extensive research in anthropology, as well as in other disciplines, has long focused on migration, generating broad insights into its prevalence and paths, along with the paradoxes and problems it entails. We now know not only that people most everywhere have some story or history of uprooting or movement, but also that migration remains central to many of the most pressing political disputes and economic uncertainties today. A book about “migranthood,” then, is particularly welcome for probing intriguing new directions.

“Migranthood: Youth in a New Era of Deportation” is a meticulously researched and readable book examining how migration is both learned and practiced, and also how being a migrant when migration is so securitized, as it now is in the United States, implies far-reaching fears of deportability and harms of trauma, separation and pathologizing. The first emphasis leads anthropologist Lauren Heidbrink to explore how roles and relationships may be as significant as institutional structures and global politics for shaping destinies as well as destinations. Through long involvement and relational methods, or “walking ethnography,” the author finds that children and youth from indigenous communities across Guatemala continue to be invaluable to the functioning and vitality of families as they become increasingly drawn into northward cross-border migration.

The book begins by addressing the multiple challenges of documenting today’s mobilized realities, as well as simplifications that occur if individuals are not considered notable figures in migration. Like other migrants, youth are also subject to stereotypes, such as simply being victims or members of gangs. The author then provides a brief account of historical and regional context, to situate the prominence of young people in migration within a political economy of Central America characterized by continuing inequalities and dominance of a powerful country to the north.

Building on methodological insights and contextualization, focus then shifts to addressing the diverse trajectories and perspectives of youth. Activities of caregiving, brokering, and various other flexible roles are shown to prevail before, during and after movement. The author argues persuasively that children are fundamental co-providers, however dependent they may also be, especially when younger. If essential to family wellbeing, by virtue of the multiplicity of household tasks and the multigenerational nature of families, children are also certain to be valuable when movement is either required or advantageous.

This holistic and kinship perspective is applicable as well for addressing the “crisis” in the numbers of young people on the move in the second decade of the 21st century. Pairing youths’ own accounts of motives and responsibilities, along with quantitative evidence, the author argues persuasively that so-called “unaccompanied minors” are in fact rarely wholly “on their own,” much less motivated solely by individualized concerns.

Throughout the book, evocative vignettes and eloquent interview excerpts not only humanize young people, but also confirm what studies worldwide are now also showing: that the frequency with which youth participate in migration makes it impossible to ignore their voices, as well as the conditions and impacts of their experiences. Youths’ own accounts of violence in Mexico and of intensive border securitization faced when crossing into the United States convey depths of danger and trauma that statistics alone cannot provide. The richness and nuances of their words are powerful in revealing deep commitment to caring and determination to overcome whatever challenges they face. The exceptional aspirations and wisdom through which indigenous youth reclaim identities, deepen connectivity, and extend inspiration stand out not only as possibilities for themselves, but also as contributions to places and people in new surroundings.

“Migranthood: Youth in a New Era of Deportation” will be appreciated by anyone wanting a deeper understanding contemporary human migration, and especially of the challenges inherent in growing connectedness across North America. Migration is an “act of love,” says one youth. This captures a fundamental reality. However overlooked or undervalued young migrants may be, they are key to interconnectivity and resilience within families, communities, and across borders. In centering youth, the book encourages empathy. Intergenerational and youthful dynamics can animate humane perspective and prospects in all-too-contentious current debates about agency, rights, and policies. They also promote possibilities for inclusion of people who, rather than being *olvidados* (forgotten ones), are now unquestionably becoming ever more the future of countries as well as planet.