

BOOK REVIEW**Transit Migration: The Missing Link
between Emigration and Settlement**by *Aspasia Papadopoulou-Kourkoulou*

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008

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REVIEWED BY

ÖSTEN WAHLBECK*

This book deals with a key feature of contemporary migration movements. Migration is frequently not a straightforward process where people simply move from one country to another. Instead, many migrants are in transit for a considerable length of time, sometimes several years. In Europe, different measures have been introduced to regulate migration into the countries of the European Union. Rather than preventing people from migrating, many restrictive policies have left a large number of people in precarious situations either inside or outside of the borders of the “Fortress Europe”. This book strives to describe the phenomenon of contemporary transit migration in Europe from different perspectives. It describes how transit migration is a much more complex issue than only a question of restricted mobility. Thus, the book deals with topical and important questions and it will be valuable for anybody who has an interest in contemporary migration patterns in Europe, and for researchers of global migration developments.

Transit migration is not easy to identify, although it is a very common aspect of migration processes. In the book, transit migration is understood as a situation between emigration and settlement that is characterized by indefinite migrant stay, legal or illegal, and a situation that may or may not develop into further migration. The duration of stay in a country is something we can only know retrospectively. Regardless of the intentions of migrants, their journey might be halted or travel plans might change over time. What was planned to be the final destination might turn out to be only one step in much larger journey, or a short stopover might develop into permanent settlement. The book presents some of the earlier attempts to theorize transit migration, but argues that it is not possible to clearly distinguish between transit migration and non-transit migration, since one type of migration easily develops into another type. Thus, the author argues that transit migration has to be connected to the broader migration process. Consequently, the author argues, transit migration is not a migrant category, it is “a phase that cuts across various migrant categories: irregular migrants, asylum seekers, refugees granted asylum, regularized migrants, students, trafficked persons may all find themselves in the condition of transit at some point” (p. 5). According to the author, “irregular migration” and transit migration are not synonyms, although the two often overlap. Thus, the phenomenon of transit migration is not very easy to study and the book uses a number of different perspectives and case studies to describe this particular migration phase.

To describe transit migration the book uses three examples from the fringes of Europe: Greece, the North African countries, and Eastern Europe. Through these different case studies we get a good insight into the dynamics and processes behind contemporary transit migration in Europe. The arguments are based on extensive

* Helsinki University, Finland.

background research of the three areas as well as fieldwork in Greece during the period 2001-2003. The larger political context is also described in a separate chapter outlining European Union asylum and migration policy. The structural and political context is in the book combined with a discussion of the actual migration developments in the regions as well as with the experiences of the migrants themselves. Especially in the case of Greece, the author provides personal narratives of people experiencing transit migration. The interviews with Kurdish asylum seekers living in Greece give a good insight into the experiences and intentions of transit migrants. The description of the situation in North Africa is partly based on the author's own experience of living in the region and working with the UNHCR. Thus, the book uses both a top-down and a bottom-up perspective to discuss the issues under study. It is very valuable that the book does not only provide a theoretical discussion of transit migration, instead the analysis is related to the real experiences of people in transit. This gives the book a valuable depth.

Some readers might wish to find more detailed information and data of the different cases and regions in question. However, the strength of the book is perhaps not in the description of actual migration patterns in the three regions, but in the balanced and insightful description of transit migration as a general phenomenon. The descriptions of the three regions provide examples, which illustrate more general developments. Transit migration is clearly difficult to delimit, but this book has done a very good job in describing this increasingly important aspect of contemporary migration patterns. The detailed notes, references and an index also give the book an added value.

In conclusion, the book provides a very good introduction to the phenomena of transit migration. A particular strength of the book is the combination of a top-down and a bottom-up perspective. The book describes how transit migration is created and sustained by political decisions and opportunity structures, as well as how the intentions of migrants influence the developments. The outcome depends as much on the social and political structures as it is by social networks and other individual factors. Contrary to popular belief, few migrants heading for Europe have specific plans before leaving their homeland. As the book describes, it is while in transit that the migration plans take shape. Clearly, the author's extensive practical and theoretical knowledge of the phenomenon has contributed to a balanced book on a difficult subject. The complexity and urgency of transit migration is very well described in this valuable book.



*excellent resource for migration researchers
practitioners and students*

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