

Unravelling Europe's 'Migration Crisis': Journeys Over Land and Sea

Heaven Crawley, Franck Düvell, Katharine Jones, Simon McMahon & Nando Sigona, *Unravelling Europe's 'Migration Crisis': Journeys Over Land and Sea* Bristol: Policy Press, 2018. 200 pp. £12.99 (pbk). ISBN 9781447343219

The main focus of this accessible, short book is on guiding the reader through the processes and experiences of people involved in the 2015 Mediterranean crisis. It successfully blends personal stories with a well organised breakdown of complex and diverse processes: 'the decision to leave', smuggling, experiences on the journey, crossing the sea, and arriving in Europe. The book is rooted in evidence from interviews with 500 refugees and migrants conducted in late 2015, mostly in Italy and Greece. Long quotes from respondents are used very effectively throughout, but not overdone. The findings may not be surprising to many *Critical Social Policy* readers, but they do challenge populist distortions and misconceptions transmitted by mainstream media and politicians. The respondents had lengthy and fractured journeys to Europe, motivated by the perceived necessity of escape and thence survival at the mercy of smugglers, border guards, police and very insecure jobs along the way. Any notion that these are 'economic migrants' with conscious and purposeful migration strategies is very wide of the mark. Obviously 'the decision to leave' is multi-faceted, but the great majority of respondents were fleeing war, persecution for political activism, threats from armed Islamist groups and/or forced conscription.

The book makes clear the contrast between the Central Mediterranean (CM) and Eastern Mediterranean (EM) routes. The former generally starts in Libya and ends in Italy, the latter in Turkey ending in Greece. Those on the CM route were predominantly of West African origin, while for the EM route they were mostly of Middle Eastern origin, and much more numerous overall, reflecting the huge numbers exiled by war and conflict in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. This is hardly surprising in terms of simple geography but reminds us of long established and growing pressures to escape from sub-Saharan Africa. Every respondent had made use of a smuggler at some point in their journey, but the stereotype of smugglers as simply unscrupulous and exploitative is not accurate: they are servicing a demand where there is no formal access to safety and protection for the journey. Risk of drowning was much higher on the CM route, but their treatment by the Italian authorities was more organised and effective. In Italy the process was mostly managed by the state, whereas in Greece it was left more to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and locals to give support. Of course, the overall numbers arriving in Italy were much less, and public services in Greece have been severely depleted as a result of the post-2011 fiscal restraints imposed by the European Union (EU). The authors do a superb job in conveying many complex aspects of the

crisis as experienced by individuals, and in challenging some of the myths surrounding it.

The book's approach is largely descriptive, so that sociological differentiation of people involved in the crisis or in the sample is not explored either in terms of class or gender, with just a few remarks about children. Nor does it dwell too much on analysing the policy or political context. The final chapter discusses 'Europe's response', opening with a striking bullet point list of 15 crises relevant to the topic and ongoing at national, regional and global levels in 2015. The focus here is almost entirely on the EU's role with lots of useful detail on the timeline of EU policy making, including the agreement with Turkey. The argument is that EU policy is based on misconceptions about the realities of the process, supported by the research data summarised above. This is, of course, entirely valid, but these are not really misconceptions, they are distortions shaped by the dominant political discourse and, specifically, by the Fortress Europe hegemony. It is noted on p. 136 that six EU member states including the UK and Ireland effectively did not participate in the scheme to relocate people from Greece and Italy in 2015. Unfortunately Merkel's efforts to shift the dominant discourse in the summer of 2015 were not successful in the long term and came at great political cost domestically. All member states have tightened their borders and adopted more restrictive policies on refugees; Fortress Europe policy has been strengthened by the crisis, despite the challenges in implementation. The authors do not find space to mention this more than fleetingly, but perhaps might have indicated more explicitly how readers could follow up on such aspects of the crisis.

Although the EU is logically where policy should reside in this area, it is the individual member states who have taken back more power over refugee and migration policies in the context of the crisis. The final chapter ends with a call for a new approach based in human rights to protection, safe and legal entry routes and an end to indefinite containment in camps and centres. This is absolutely right, but, sadly, unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future.