

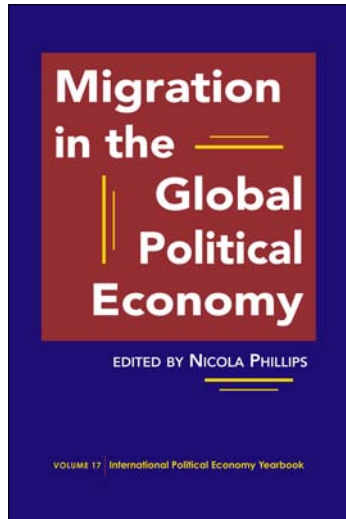
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Migration in the Global Political Economy

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Nicola Phillips

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1

Migration in the Global Political Economy

Nicola Phillips

We live, unquestionably, in an “age of migration” (Castles and Miller, 2009). In the middle of the 2000s, widely cited estimates from the United Nations indicated a total number of migrants worldwide of 191 million. But this figure refers only to documented migrants and increases very significantly if we add to it the huge numbers of “undocumented” migrants across the world. Equally, it refers only to migrants moving across international borders, and leaves aside the vast movements of people within countries. The scale and speed of internal migration from rural to urban areas in China, in particular, is without historical precedent. Of course, mobility has underpinned the very history of humanity. But the contemporary era is qualitatively distinct inasmuch as these movements are now genuinely global. Whether as movements of refugees or of workers, contemporary migration shapes all regions and countries of the world. More to the point, it is fundamental to the continuing evolution of the global economy and all its constituent parts. It is not possible to understand the myriad processes we tend to sum up in the term “globalization”—and indeed its many tensions, contradictions, and consequences—without understanding the dynamics of global migration.

It is therefore both striking and curious that the field of international political economy (IPE) should have so neglected the study of global migration. Despite its core agenda of understanding the nature, functioning, and evolution of the global political economy, migration has consistently made only a minor showing in the universe of what is generally classified as IPE scholarship. Even the substantial debates on labor in the global political economy are only rarely enriched by perspectives and approaches drawn from the study of global labor migration. At the same time, the study of migration has too infrequently been approached

through the lens of the theoretical constructs and core debates of IPE. More usually, migration has been the preoccupation of social scientists working within such disciplinary fields as sociology or anthropology, as well as the more discrete field of migration studies. Not surprisingly, the most developed theoretical pillars of migration scholarship reflect this profile. The immediate aims of this contribution to the *International Political Economy Yearbook* series are therefore to do something about this state of affairs—that is, to push further the integration of global migration into the core concerns of IPE and equally to advance the study of the global political economy of migration.

Of course, all these claims constitute rather large generalizations about the state of both IPE and migration studies and overlook a number of very honorable exceptions in each instance, including the work of the authors of the contributions to this volume and that of other scholars acknowledged abundantly in it. Despite their accuracy as generalizations, they also become rather problematic inasmuch as what one has to say about IPE depends on how one defines IPE, and which kind of IPE one engages with. This is not the place to rehearse the vigorous, ongoing debates about what IPE is and should be (Cohen, 2008; Phillips and Weaver, 2010). Rather, it is pertinent simply to point out that “IPE” means many things to many people and that what an IPE perspective on migration would look like is not at all self-evident; it is a question that would attract a huge number of different responses from all sides. I will therefore use this introduction to outline briefly what kind of IPE perspective is being put to work in this volume and how it informs the substance and contribution of the chapters that follow.

The first point to make is that the controversies around IPE take their cue from the wide variety of theoretical and methodological approaches that cluster together, often uncomfortably and at times fractiously, within the field. Yet part of the strength of an IPE approach, as least as it is desirably conceived, is that it opens up much more space than many other approaches do for engagement between diverse perspectives and for a consciously cross- or interdisciplinary mode of inquiry. Admittedly, this potential has not yet been fully realized: one of the perhaps unfortunate characteristics of the field of IPE is that, despite its initial promise to reach across the terrain of the social sciences in the spirit of earlier traditions of political economy, it has in fact remained largely rooted in the discipline of international relations, and its core theoretical, methodological, and empirical concerns reflect this ongoing association. This is particularly the case in the more orthodox strands of IPE associated with what some have called the “American school” of

the field (Murphy and Nelson, 2001; Phillips, 2005a; Cohen, 2008; Phillips and Weaver, 2010). But it is to some extent also the case in those parts of IPE that identify themselves with critical scholarship and purport to retain more loyalty to the traditions of political economy. Thus it is fair to say that a good deal of the interdisciplinary openness envisaged for the field at its inception has failed to materialize.

Yet the potential for such openness remains, and we seek to realize it in this study of the global political economy of migration, which in turn reflects what we consider to be the requirements for the effective study of the complex processes and patterns of migration in the contemporary world. Indeed, it has often been noted that migration studies are necessarily interdisciplinary in character; thus framing the key political economy questions about migration in this way pays considerable dividends. The chapters in this volume show that a great deal can be gained in the study of the global political economy of migration by bringing together theoretical, conceptual, and empirical perspectives from geography, sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, and development studies.

Second, our approach is inspired by the core prospectus for what has come to be termed a “new” or “critical” political economy. This hinges on striking a conceptual balance and integration between analysis that concentrates on the nature and influence of “structures,” on the one hand, and that which emphasizes the “agency” of key economic, political, and social actors, on the other, in shaping the global political economy (see Cox, 1987; Gamble, 1995; Payne, 1998). IPE and the field of migration studies have often diverged on this terrain. Much of the field of IPE has reflected the structuralist inclination that has always permeated the enterprise of political economy—that is to say, as summarized by Andrew Gamble, that “a proper understanding of the politics [in political economy] requires giving special explanatory weight to economic structures and processes” (1995: 517). The result has often been either to give little attention to agency or to presume that little *intrinsic* interest needs to be afforded to politics and agency in understanding the global political economy (Phillips, 2005b: 254). Conversely, it could reasonably be said that a good part of the field of migration studies has operated on the opposite assumption—that is, it has maintained a focus on agency and politics at the expense of the big political economy picture associated with the functioning of the global economy and the political-economic structures that propel and shape particular kinds of labor migration.

As a corrective, the metatheoretical principle of integrating structure and agency has come to underpin the more critical variants of the

contemporary IPE project, and our contention here is that such an approach becomes especially important and instructive in the study of the global political economy of migration. On the one hand, it allows due attention to the structural context within which contemporary migration takes place and in turn to the implications of migration for the evolution of these structures. On the other hand, it calls for appropriate analysis of the forms of agency that constitute and shape migration processes, along with the politics generated by those processes and the manner in which migration is governed at the global, regional, national, and local levels. Specifically, it facilitates an approach to understanding the social foundations of the global political economy, which, as Marcus Taylor astutely observes, have been consistently obscured by the “somewhat fanciful vision of the economy perpetuated in mainstream economics” and replicated in large parts of the field of IPE (2008: 2). This vision essentially defines the “global economy” as the global marketplace in which individuals and firms behave according to the principles of rationality, liberty, stable preferences, and perfect foresight. The result is the concealment of the “everyday power relationships”—that is, the forms of power, politics, and contestation that are inseparable from “everyday material life”—that constitute the social foundations of the global economy (Taylor, 2008: 2). The dynamics of migration and the evolving manner in which migrant labor is embedded in the global political economy represent a pivotal dimension of these social foundations and offer arresting insights into the everyday power relationships to which Taylor refers. For this reason, the neglect of migration dynamics in IPE, even in those analyses concerned with the social foundations of the global economy and issues of labor, is particularly curious and unfortunate.

A focus on migration similarly reinforces a critique of dominant conceptions of agency in IPE and helps to refine our approach to the structure-agency dynamic. It is striking that dominant understandings of agency in IPE, and indeed in other areas of the social sciences, refer in the main to formal, often organized forms of agency with a strong transnational articulation. But, as the chapters in this volume reveal, the relationship between structure and agency looks very different when the focus is on informal, unorganized, and/or disenfranchised actors who have few or no possibilities for influence or participation, face a very different set of political realities, and operate in local and “private” (including domestic) contexts (Phillips, 2005b: 256–257)—characteristics that apply to large parts of the global migrant labor force. A focus on migration thus injects issues of informality forcefully into our analyses of

global political economy and invites us fruitfully to reconsider how we understand agency and politics.

The final core dimension of the approach that informs this volume relates to geographical reach. Here again, the perspective is one that draws on the potential of IPE to develop a genuinely global political economy of migration, based on valuable insights into the spatial organization of the global political economy and the ways in which particular spatial dynamics arise from, and in turn condition, particular political economies. Conversely, a much greater focus in IPE on migration offers insights of considerable pertinence into the ways in which we understand and theorize these spatial dynamics: how particular parts of the world are drawn together in complex transnational markets and social networks; how the spatial and the social intersect and mesh with one another; and how increasingly globalized networks of production and trade rest equally on a global labor force, large parts of which are highly mobile. In this spirit, the authors of this volume explore migration as it manifests itself geographically across the structures of the global economy and across the conditions and processes of global development, bringing together perspectives on migration and development in some of the poorer regions of the world with explorations of the political economy of immigration in some of the richer countries. Equally, attention to international and south-north forms of migration is complemented by analysis of migration within countries and regions, including the patterns of south-south migration that are often given rather less attention than those kinds of movement that raise issues of immigration for the core countries of the global political economy.

These three dimensions of our approach—interdisciplinary openness, the integration of structure- and agency-centered analysis, and a wide geographical/spatial reach—inform the ways in which this volume has been organized as well as the substance of its contents.

Part 1: Migration and Global Capitalism

Part 1 addresses dimensions of global migration in the context of the dynamics of global capitalism. It offers four chapters that are linked together by a preoccupation with changing forms of stratification, segmentation, and segregation in global labor markets, and with the complex ways in which the evolution of contemporary labor markets relies on and is facilitated by migration, and in turn shapes the everyday experiences of migrant and nonmigrant workers. The chapters reveal that

new and changing forms of labor market segmentation and social stratification operate along a variety of axes relating variously to skill, “cultural capital” (to use Pierre Bourdieu’s term), citizenship and migration status, race, ethnicity, and gender.

In Chapter 2, Carl-Ulrik Schierup and Stephen Castles initiate this discussion by focusing on the forms of stratification and polarization that result from what they call “racialized ethnicity.” They identify this particular hierarchy as operating alongside the other hierarchies that shape the neoliberalization of contemporary societies, and specifically feed into the ongoing changes in the form of contemporary welfare states in western Europe and the United States—namely those of gender, class, and geography. Concretely, Schierup and Castles argue that the construction of a social hierarchy associated with racialized ethnicity is crucial in the ongoing shift toward the “recommodification” of labor under neoliberalism—that is, a shift away from welfare universalism and social redistribution as a means of (re-)connecting the welfare of people with their value as workers in a supposedly free market for labor. Schierup and Castles’ analysis shows that the resulting trend toward “increasingly brutalized approaches to the governance of welfare and race” is most pronounced and furthest advanced in the United States, but is also progressively emulated in Europe. Significantly, migrant workers are among the main victims of the retraction of welfare states and the deregulation of labor markets, and the expansion of migrant labor forces and the dynamics of “racialization” constitute crucial strategies by which labor can be recommodified according to the logic of neoliberalization. Thus we see the dual dynamic by which migrant labor is affected by the restructuring of the global political economy even as it embodies one of the pivotal means by which this restructuring is enabled and entrenched.

Harald Bauder complements this discussion in Chapter 3 by exploring the ways in which forms of legal and cultural regulation act to segment and polarize labor markets. Using the cases of Canada and Germany as the empirical reference points, Bauder echoes Schierup and Castles’s emphasis on neoliberalism as the overarching context as he demonstrates how legal and cultural mechanisms of regulation are different in the upper and lower segments of the labor market, producing manifestly different outcomes for migrant workers in each segment. In other words, he is interested in how privileged and underprivileged migrant labor operates in different legal and cultural fields, and explores in each case how their variable attributes of citizenship, cultural capital, and gender act to determine their positioning within labor markets and

to entrench the distinctions between these categories. Yet Bauder is quick to highlight the relative nature of this privilege. He cautions against an excessively simplistic view of privileged labor as being able easily to construct what he calls “transnational cultural competences” that ease the conditions of migration and the process of integration into labor markets and societies. Rather, he argues, even in the case of privileged labor, mobility is “risky and typically a problematic and painful accumulation strategy.” The difference is that privileged labor is better equipped to navigate the legal and cultural obstacles that affect all migrants’ ability to move their various forms of capital—human and cultural—across borders.

In Chapter 4, Nicola Piper takes up the consideration of gender hierarchies in global labor markets, an issue mentioned in both of the preceding chapters, and the forms of social and labor market stratification that emerge along these lines. She takes as her starting point the key process of “feminization” that has characterized both the dynamics of global migration and the nature of global labor markets more broadly as a consequence of the informalization, casualization, and increased precariousness of work across the global economy. She innovatively seeks to draw a link between various dimensions of feminization—namely, the feminizations of work, migration, and poverty—and explores how a focus on global productive and care chains can help us to construct a “gendered political economy of migration.” In this way, Piper throws the spotlight onto what she calls “the global division of productive and reproductive labor” which is structured by hierarchies associated with gender alongside social class, ethnicity, and race, thereby picking up on the themes addressed by Schierup and Castles and Bauder. The construction of a more consciously gendered political economy of migration in turn proffers valuable contributions to the development of IPE itself, particularly in highlighting the social foundations of material life, to which we alluded earlier, and the everyday aspects of political economy that are often obscured by the focus on global markets and debates over how they function.

Complementing Bauder’s emphasis on citizenship as a key mechanism by which labor markets and societies are stratified and segmented, in Chapter 5 H. Richard Friman throws into the mix a focus on migration status, considering the ways in which informal, illicit, and illegal forms of migration both function within the global political economy and consolidate an axis of differentiation between different groups of (migrant) workers. Friman usefully points out that illegal and informal migration has generally been addressed with reference to the lucrative

illegal migration business or industry associated with smuggling and trafficking operations, but that the ways in which structures and politics intersect to shape this industry, and the phenomena to which it responds, have been strikingly underexplored. Friman thus argues both for more attention within IPE to informal and illegal movements of people, and for a more sustained IPE analysis of this dimension of the global political economy of migration. He suggests that this involves analyzing and theorizing the conditioning role of the interplay of states and markets, on the one hand, and the post-Fordist intersection of the licit and illicit global economies, on the other. What emerges very clearly from Friman's chapter is a challenge to conventional and orthodox currents in IPE which, as we noted, focus heavily on the formal markets that make up the global economy. Instead, Friman reveals the very blurred lines between the formal, informal, and illicit criminal economies and invites us to think much more carefully about the social foundations of the global political economy in this light.

Part 2: The Migration-Development Nexus

It is only since the mid-1990s that questions about the relationship between migration and development have found a central place in scholarly and policy debates about both global migration and global development (Skeldon, 2008). In both cases, they have been framed preponderantly in terms of south-north migration, specifically in relation to the potential connections between migration from poorer to richer countries and development in the countries of origin. The chapters collected in Part 2 of the book engage with these established debates, but equally seek to go beyond them by challenging many of the conventional theoretical assumptions about the nature of the relationship between migration and development, and by exploring empirically the diverse forms that the "migration-development nexus" takes in different parts of the world.

Ronald Skeldon sets the tone in Chapter 6 by extending his long-standing argument that development and migration cannot be seen as separate phenomena. Whereas the task as conventionally conceived is to explore how these two processes relate to one another, Skeldon suggests that development and migration are "inextricably linked in a matrix of change." In so doing, he emphasizes the shortcomings of much of the debate—especially in policy circles but also in scholarly ones—about

how theoretically we should understand migration and development in the global political economy. The emphasis on understanding a migration-development nexus in this spirit is echoed through the other chapters in this section. Skeldon's second key point is that attempts to identify a single relationship between migration and development are misdirected, inasmuch as the dynamic nature of the migration process, changing as it does across space and time, generates divergent and necessarily fluid interpretations of the migration-development nexus. His third key argument considers the issue of structure and agency, taking issue with the trend in recent discussions of migration and development to shift the responsibility for development (and development failures) away from political-economic structures and toward the individual migrant—that is, to cast the migrant worker as the agent of development. Again, this theme is echoed in the other chapters in Part 2. Skeldon argues that the debate thus suffers from a situation in which, as he puts it pithily, “the migration tail is beginning to wag the development dog,” and makes the persuasive case that explanations for development failures are appropriately rooted in broader economic and social structures rather than in the agency of migrant workers.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 explore some of these debates in the regional contexts of sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Here it is interesting to see both the commonalities in the contemporary migration-development nexuses that obtain in each setting and the key differences among the political economies of the three regions. All three chapters combine rich empirical detail with reflections on the core debates about how we should conceive of and theorize the relationship between migration and development. In Chapter 7, Oliver Bakewell picks up on many of the themes introduced by Skeldon and sets out particularly to challenge the prevailing assumption that migration is both a symptom of development failure and a development problem that stands in need of remedy. He highlights the ways in which the notion of development has historically been (and remains) inextricably linked in sub-Saharan Africa to the control of mobility; as he puts it, the assumption driving the debate is that development is a “sedentary” condition in which people would not migrate unless driven by necessity. To the contrary, Bakewell shows that in the sub-Saharan African context migration is at least as much the result of development as the result of development failure, and that the two cannot be separated from one another in understanding the political economy of the region. At the same time, the contradictory attempts to turn migration into a policy lever are misplaced

and inappropriate, based as they are on what Bakewell calls the “chimera” and “impossible fantasy” of a virtuous circle in which migration stimulates development processes and in turn reduces migration.

With Ken Young’s chapter, we turn our attention to one of the major regional arenas of global migration, Asia. Young captures the complexity of the political economy of migration in this region through a detailed exploration of the varieties and patterns of movement, and he shows—in a manner that intersects nicely with the findings of Bauder and Piper—how the processes and consequences of migration among different groups of people diverge significantly. He also shows clearly how migration is intrinsic to the changing political economy of the region and specifically to the transformation of Asian economies into high-growth centers of the global economy; migration across the region is clearly associated with national growth and the expansion of globalization. Yet Young concurs with other contributors in questioning the extent to which these trends should be seen, let alone celebrated, as unambiguous manifestations of development.

In the chapter that concludes this part of the book, I turn to Latin America and the Caribbean and frame the discussion around the theoretical and conceptual debates about the nature of the migration-development nexus. I argue that our understanding of this nexus is necessarily conditioned by the definition of development that we choose to adopt: the nexus looks very different when approached from a position that emphasizes development as a process of national growth, as opposed to one that rests on a notion of “human” development. In this chapter, I locate migration within the regional political economy of development by exploring the restructuring of labor markets, the dynamics of inequality, and the framing of migration increasingly as a core national development strategy in large parts of the region. On this basis, I go on to explore the divergent perspectives offered by the two approaches to development as a means to understand the political economy of migration both from and within the region. The discussion suggests that many of the debates around the migration-development nexus—and certainly the more optimistic accounts thereof—rest not on notions of human development connected with the material and social conditions in which people (including migrant workers) live, but instead on a conception of development as a national phenomenon associated with the growth of national economies. Thus many of the necessary questions about how migration both arises from and puts in place diverse forms of unequal development are too often obscured from view.

Part 3: The Governance of Migration

The chapters in Part 3 of this volume explore a different dimension of the global political economy of migration, namely the manner in which political actors seek to govern migration processes. The chapters collectively focus on those contexts that are characterized by high levels of immigration, complementing the focus in other parts of the volume on contexts in which the challenges stem primarily from high levels of internal migration and/or out-migration. The chapters offer further interesting insights into the core issue of the relationship between structures and agency in shaping the global political economy of migration.

In Chapter 10, Andrew Geddes takes the European Union (EU) as his focus, inquiring into the role of borders in shaping both the structures and politics that govern migration in this context. He frames the issue insightfully by conceptualizing borders as the sites at which migration “acquires meaning as a distinct social process” and innovatively conceives of borders not just in the conventional sense, as markers of territory, but also as organizational in character, associated with work and welfare, and conceptual, associated with notions of belonging, entitlement, and identity. In so doing, his discussion intersects suggestively with other chapters in Part 1 of the volume, particularly those of Schierup and Castles and Bauder. Geddes argues that EU strategies to control and manage migration, concentrated as they are in efforts to secure and strengthen territorial borders, carry particularly damaging consequences for organizational and conceptual borders, and he explores the political and institutional processes that have propelled the emergence of these strategies.

The emphasis on politics and institutions is carried through by Susan Martin in Chapter 11, where she addresses the dynamics of immigration reform in the United States. Her central objective is to explain the paralysis in immigration reform that has long prevailed in this context, pointing to an intractable contradiction between the structural centrality of migrant labor in the US economy and the continued political and social reaction against large-scale immigration, along with the repeated failures to put in place legislation that could effectively address the problem of illegal movements of workers into the United States. She explores these issues in the context of the most recent attempt at comprehensive immigration reform, which took place during the administration of George W. Bush, and concludes that the contradictions that govern the politics of immigration in the United States, and indeed across the world, remain firmly in place.

In Chapter 12, Jock Collins takes our attention finally to Australia, where again the politics of immigration have been thrown into sharp relief in the form of ethnic tensions and social unrest. Like Martin and Geddes, as well as others in the volume, he starts from the key contradiction between the global economic and labor market structures that shape the place of migrant labor in the Australian economy and the reactions against immigrant workers that are visible in both electoral politics and everyday social life. Collins explores the ways in which both official immigration policy and the societal dynamics of immigration reflect these contradictions and carry significant implications for the welfare and experiences of migrant workers. His conclusions are amplified in the context of the global economic crisis of the late 2000s, whereby, in a “cruel irony,” migrant workers shoulder the greatest burden of the recession and are most adversely affected by it even as, across the world, they are made the scapegoats for it.

My concluding chapter picks up where Collins leaves off, offering a tentative perspective on the implications of the global economic crisis for migration and migrants. I seek to reflect on what we now know about these implications and to consider what they indicate for future trends. One thing that is already clear is that both migrant workers and migration patterns have proven far more resilient in the face of the crisis than many expected; dire predictions of mass unemployment and catastrophic reductions in the volumes of remittances flowing to poorer countries and poorer households have not, overall, come to pass. But the uneven geographical and social impact of the crisis has been highly significant across the issues explored in this volume: the dynamics of stratification and polarization that create and perpetuate vulnerability, exclusion, and marginalization; the nexuses between migration and development in different parts of the world; and the often highly tense politics that continue to surround the mobility and movement of human beings.