

**Migration and Political Theory**, by Gillian Brock, Cambridge, Polity Books, 2020, 218pp., £15.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1509535231

Public migration debate is increasingly shaped by the interplay between a xenophobic far-right bemoaning a fictive civilisational collapse and a liberal centre offering technocratic fixes to the incorrigible “problem” of migration. As the latter increasingly absorbs the policy proposals of the former, the normative values that supposedly underpin the liberal democratic states in which this exchange unfolds can fade into obscurity. In this respect, Gillian Brock’s *Migration and Political Theory* represents a helpful intervention. Aiming “to provide an introduction to the core of debates” (p. 2), each chapter is structured around a particular policy issue pertaining to international migration, presenting a series of normative arguments in favour and against with reference to theorists of liberalism and democracy. Normatively driven but not shy of empirical detail, chapters tackle such issues as the open versus closed borders debate, the responsibilities of states toward refugees, the criteria states can defensibly use in selection and citizenship policies, the degree of justification for temporary worker recruitment programmes, and the issue of out-migration regulation and brain drain.

As might be surmised from the above list, this book is primarily concerned with the state, the liberal democratic state in particular, and the coherence between its normative foundations and the positions taken toward migrants by many such states today. Indeed, a defence of the methodological nationalist approach is put forth at a late stage in the book (p. 198). But such an approach might also be said to inform preceding chapters. The second chapter, on ‘the Right to Exclude and Open Borders’, for instance, first presents arguments in favour of the state’s right to exclude, before then detailing a range of normative arguments for opening state borders. While the state and the political community it aspires to represent remain the point of reference, historically grounded considerations of more global scope also feature, such as the colonial heritage of the European Union (p. 40) and Joseph Carens’ comparison of national citizenship to a feudal privilege (p. 31).

The emphasis on state responsibility is carried over into the third chapter, which turns attention to obligations states have toward refugees. These encompass normative stances – from a materially detached humanitarian imperative to more grounded calls to redress the exploitative interconnections of the interstate system – as well as policy proposals, such as making resettlement an international obligation akin to the non-refoulement principle and making it possible to lodge asylum claims prior to departure.

Certain analytical pitfalls of the methodological nationalist approach also come to the fore in this chapter. While space is given to various shortcomings of the refugee label as it was constituted in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, there is little reflection on its effective exclusion of internal displacement. Such an omission may follow from the claim that “starting with methodological nationalism does no more than reflect the way the world is currently carved up” (p. 197). While the divisions of the interstate system cannot be simply dismissed, to naturalise them as methodological starting points can result in overlooking the vast numbers of people who are displaced within the countries of their birth.

Readers of this journal will also likely be curious about how the issues of race and ethnicity figure in the book. While there are grounds for their consideration within discussions of open borders and forced migration debates, it is the fourth chapter’s discussion of the criteria that states may permissibly use in selection and citizenship policies that explicitly brings race and ethnicity to the fore. Relaying points Joseph Carens has made in this regard, it is argued that using ethnicity, religion, and race as criteria of selection is inconsistent with liberal democratic principles. Ethnicity,

multiculturalism and the liberal democratic state paradigm also feature prominently in the subsequent chapter, which is concerned with relations between legal migrants and host states, before fading from view once more in the sixth chapter, which turns attention to undocumented migrants and host state responsibilities. On the other hand, the methodological nationalist emphasis on the liberal democratic state's normative framework persists, albeit in a manner that illustrates how undocumented migrants are, within this framework, nonetheless entitled to a range of rights which are in practice frequently denied.

Similar divergences between liberal democratic theory and practice are illustrated in the seventh chapter, dealing with temporary migrant worker programmes. It is here shown how recruiting migrants on temporary worker schemes without offering them pathways to citizenship can be considered indefensible on liberal democratic grounds. The eighth chapter's discussion of justice in out-migration is equally concerned with the liberal democratic normative framework, but its case study of brain drain in the health care sector of underdeveloped nations is more empirically driven than much of the rest of the book.

Of course, much falls beyond view when the analytical horizon is circumscribed by the relatively narrow parameters of the liberal democratic state and its normative foundations. It is perhaps for this reason that the constitutive and transformative role that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers themselves play within the international system does not figure in the book. This, notwithstanding discussion of insights offered by critical border studies in a compelling final chapter dealing with future directions. Readers interested in further exploring what critical migration and border studies can offer to political theory may wish to consult a collective writing project recently published in *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, fittingly entitled 'Minor Keywords of Political Theory: Migration as a Critical Standpoint' (De Genova & Tazzioli, 2021).

That said, this book is framed as an *introduction* to the topic of migration and political theory. In this regard, it succeeds in providing an account that is informed, nuanced and accessible, while also unveiling several divergences between the values claimed by liberal democratic states and their actual practice in the field of migration and border control. To readers to decide whether such divergences indicate a different logic at play than that openly proclaimed by such states, and if so, what migrants' experiences of exploitation and resistance might tell us about it.

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## References

De Genova, N., & Tazzioli, M. (2021). Minor keywords of political theory : Migration as a critical standpoint. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, (published online March 10 2021) <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654420988563>