

Edited by Eureka Henrich & Julian M. Simpson

**HISTORY, HISTORIANS AND
THE IMMIGRATION DEBATE**

Going Back to Where We Came From



History, Historians and the Immigration Debate

“People have been on the move, voluntarily and involuntarily, permanently and temporarily, successfully and less successfully, continuously in the modern era. Their stories and experiences make up modern migration as we know it. But this phenomenon is hard to understand without using a robust historic lens—which is what the authors in this excellent volume have done. The result is an impressive array of studies that serve to focus that lens on many key ideas and debates in migration studies. It is an authoritative and timely volume that expands inter-disciplinary knowledge about migration in a way that benefits all researchers and interested readers.”

—Shamit Saggat, Professor of Political Science and Public Policy, University of Essex, UK, and former Senior Advisor, UK Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit

“This wide-ranging volume shows how vital it is to contextualise contemporary debates about migration through an historical lens. The research shared within these diverse chapters informs our work presenting migration heritage to the public.”

—Sophie Henderson, Director of the Migration Museum Project, UK

“This important collection asks academics to urgently address the major questions of our time, using history as a ‘martial art’ in which to fight the social and political battles inherent in immigration debates.”

—Jayne Persian, Lecturer in History, University of Southern Queensland, Australia, and Author of *Beautiful Balts: From Displaced Persons to New Australians* (2017)

“This timely and provocative collection of essays illustrates how historians are uniquely placed to contribute in a meaningful and informed way to the polarizing debate over immigration and migration. Migrant peoples, as this book demonstrates, are far from anomalous or marginal; rather, they have long enriched and formed an essential part of the creative dynamic in their adopted communities.”

—David Wright, Professor of History, McGill University, Montreal, Canada, and co-editor of *Doctors Beyond Borders: The Transnational Migration of Physicians in the Twentieth Century* (2016)

Eureka Henrich · Julian M. Simpson
Editors

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The chapter by Gérard Noiriel was first published in German as 'Die Rolle der Einwanderung bei der De-/Konstruktion der Arbeiterklasse in Frankreich (19.-20. Jahrhundert),' in Alexander Mejstrik, Thomas Hübel, Sigrid Wadauer, eds., *Die Krise des Sozialstaats und die Intellektuellen* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2012). It appears here in Julian M. Simpson's translation of Noiriel's original French text. We are very grateful to Florence Tamagne and Béatrice Murail who made the time to comment on the first draft of the English version.

Last, but certainly not least, we would like to heartily thank all of the contributors who agreed to write for this volume and work with us to bring a historical perspective into the global migration debate. From recent Ph.D. graduates to leaders in the field of migration history, they have worked hard to deliver chapters which reveal historical understandings and speak to contemporary concerns. Their work demonstrates that lively, complex histories of human mobility warrant a wide readership.

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Introduction: History as a ‘Martial Art’

Eureka Henrich and Julian M. Simpson

The global ‘immigration debate’ that has become so central to political life largely involves rehearsing false dichotomies:

Are you ‘for’ or ‘against’ immigration?

Do immigrants represent a threat to national identity or a welcome addition to the cultural mix?

Are citizens’ jobs, housing, and welfare at risk because of ‘new people’ or do migrants’ labour and spending boost the economy?

Should governments do more to restrict the entry of refugees, or do they have a duty to offer sanctuary?

Those who are ‘for’ immigration praise the cultural contributions of migrants, arguing that they enrich what would, in their view, otherwise be a bland, mono-cultural society. Those ‘against’ mourn the gradual loss of supposedly home-grown traditions and values; they long for a past perceived as less complex and threatening to identities. Advocates of immigration point to the economic success of many

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migrants, underscoring the social benefits of the skills and labour they bring. Critics express concern over limited funds and pressure on public services. And then there's the question of people seeking asylum. Some commentators favour a humanitarian response, arguing that resettled refugees become hard-working citizens and that societies should be judged by the way they treat their most vulnerable members. The alternative view is that hardline border policies are needed in the face of widespread abuse of laws aimed at protecting those facing persecution.

These questions frame a public discourse on immigration that is all too often about 'us' and 'them', sedentary citizens and rootless foreigners, or about the potential breaching of the 'sovereign borders' of nations whose own pasts of movement, emigration and conquest are conveniently forgotten. They also elide the real complexities behind these questions. Arguments around the pressures migration places on public services take little account of the roles immigrants have played in staffing public sector bodies. Asylum systems can both offer protection to survivors of persecution and be used by economic migrants to gain entry into a country. For that matter, there are no clear dividing lines between different types of migration.¹ Scholarly history's ability to embrace contradiction and inconvenient truths has the potential to make a significant contribution in this area.

However, debaters on both sides of the 'immigration question' don't just currently ignore migration's past in all its complexity. They, in fact, invent pasts to suit their current political or ideological purposes. On the one hand, immigrant founders or innovators are lauded as national heroes, when in reality, their trajectories tell us little about the realities of the lives of most migrants. On the other hand, we hear sometimes apocalyptic warnings against current migrant intakes by those who talk of historical periods with lower, more 'sustainable' numbers—when, as Donna Gabaccia notes in this volume, the global proportion of people living outside the countries where they were born has remained stable at just over 3% since the 1960s and may be slightly lower than it was a century ago. The stories told about the past fulfil a contemporary function—to bolster entrenched ideological positions and heighten their emotional resonance. Mobilising the past in these ways may make good political sense, but it does not promote good historical understanding nor does it contribute to informed public debate and policy-making.

This book is a response to the binary thinking and misuse of the past that characterise contemporary immigration debates. It argues that history, and historians, are uniquely placed to contribute to the discussion, and demonstrates the potential of doing so with chapters from scholars in the UK, Asia, Continental Europe, Australasia and North America. Through their work on global, transnational and national histories of migration, an alternative view emerges—one that complicates the entrenched lines of immigration debates and reasserts movement as a central dimension of the human condition. Millennia of human journeys are ‘forgotten’ in political debates—including those of immigrants, emigrants, sojourners, settlers, workers, colonisers, convicts, enslaved peoples and other forced migrants. Recovering the historical complexity and diversity of migration histories can provide a vital perspective on migration for our times. This book also makes a case for historians to more confidently assert themselves as expert commentators. It features chapters that reflect on how we write migration history today, and how we might do so in the future.

Our ultimate goal—to link scholarly understanding of migration history to current debates—is ambitious and optimistic, and unapologetically so. It has been inspired by a tradition of historical scholarship that takes the view that connecting academic research to contemporary debates forms an essential part of a scholar’s remit. The US historian Theodore Roszak, writing in the 1960s, condemned academia’s disengagement from wider social concerns as an ‘act of criminal delinquency’.² In the same collection of *Essays criticizing the teaching of the humanities in American universities*, Staughton Lynd explained how his sense that history had to engage with the present world was the product of his experience of teaching black female students at the time of the US civil rights movement.³ Historians have much to contribute to the debate on immigration at a time when immigration policy and identity politics are having such a profound effect on so many lives. In this context, it seems vital that we attempt to make our voices heard. In the words of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu:

In Europe, at least, we are, as Edmund Husserl used to say, ‘humanity’s civil servants’, paid by the government to make discoveries, either about the natural world or about the social world. It seems to me that part of our responsibility is to share what we have found.⁴

This quote is taken from *Sociology is a Martial Art*—a collection of Bourdieu’s writings whose title was borrowed from a film about him called *La sociologie est un sport de combat*. The original French perhaps gives a better idea of the type of thinking that underpins our book. A ‘*sport de combat*’ is a combat sport; it can indeed literally be a martial art, but the expression also hints at other battles to be fought, of a social and political nature, to which an academic discipline such as sociology can contribute. As Bourdieu put it in Pierre Carles’ documentary, it can be a form of self-defence.⁵ But this is to do with self-defence in a social and political context. It is in this sense that we use history here—not as a didactic tool deployed to enlighten the masses but as a political instrument that can inform, illuminate and encourage different types of thinking beyond the limited realm of academic research. It is a form of defence against the poverty of much contemporary discussion of issues around immigration.

If connecting scholarly research to public debates was simply a question of making information available, a selection of articles and book extracts taken from scholarly journals and the output of academic presses might have sufficed. However, the conventions of academic writing do not make such a task straightforward. Scholarly credibility is the main criterion for publication, sometimes at the cost of intelligibility: jargon is tolerated and a great deal of knowledge is assumed. Academia has its own internal reference points and debates which readers need to be familiar with in scholarly contexts. These are often of little interest to those looking for insights into wider social questions. There is a long-standing disconnect between the concerns of academia and the major questions of our time. It seems to us that it is urgent to address this issue and offer a response to the rhetorical questions asked by Roszak when, fifty years ago, he diagnosed a dysfunction at the heart of scholarly endeavour that is still in evidence today:

The training of apprentice scholars and the pursuit of research – as these activities are presently handled – result in a great deal of mindless specialisation and irrelevant pedantry that ought not to be credited with intellectual respectability...Is it more ‘knowledge’ of this surplus kind, expertly gleaned by precise techniques, that we really require? Or, in the protracted emergency in which our civilisation finds itself, should our highest priority be placed on a scholar’s ability to link his special knowledge or moral insight to our social needs?⁶

As well as contributing to debates about migration and the relationship between history and policy, we are therefore also engaging here in a broader conversation about the future of academic research and its audiences.

This is about content but also about form. There would be little point in seeking to reconnect scholarly work to social interrogations if the insights generated were not to be widely disseminated. As Angelika Bammer and Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres argue in the introduction to their collection of essays *The future of scholarly writing*, the 'problem of communication' associated with academic work is a threat to its effectiveness and indicative of a 'writing "crisis"' in a context where 'established forms of scholarly presentation (the conventional monograph or peer-reviewed article) are no longer adequate to the needs of the contemporary academy, much less those of the world beyond it'.⁷ In attempting to bring historical knowledge into the public debate on immigration, we have endeavoured to produce a book that speaks to social concerns and addresses at least some of the questions posed by this 'crisis'.

New forms of communication cannot be expected to emerge fully formed overnight, not least because the way people absorb information in the twenty-first century is constantly changing. The approach used here is necessarily experimental. As editors, we have sought to offer a way forward by encouraging researchers to think about the relationship of their work to contemporary policy debates and to write in a way that makes their thinking accessible to a non-specialist readership. This approach is distinct from traditional academic writing, in that the focus is no longer exclusively on the relationship between the findings of the research and established understanding. It is also at variance with other forms of writing that are not grounded in scholarly research and reflection. We are grateful to the academic historians who have agreed to contribute to this volume and have been open to working in a way that seeks to bridge the traditional divide between the scholarly and the public realms. We have also added editors' introductions to each section to guide readers through the book, highlight the policy relevance of the contributions and provide a thread of continuity which explains how the individual chapters all contribute to a greater whole.

We feel that this exercise has shown how much each of these often-separate spheres can contribute to the other. This book is for scholars interested in new ways of conceiving of their research agendas and communicating their work. It is for a general readership open to reflecting on how research into the past might help reshape our understanding

of the present. It seeks to point the way to a more fruitful debate between scholars, policy-makers and the general public. The different chapters show that be it within national contexts in Europe, Asia or North America, or indeed at a global level, history has a major role to play: it can be a ‘martial art’, taking its place in political and social struggles surrounding immigration policy. By making these connections, we can also enrich scholarship by formulating new questions. In other words, this task is not solely about transferring knowledge from scholarship to the wider public sphere, it is also about encouraging historians to ask different questions of the past, in light of the challenges of the present.

BOOK STRUCTURE: GOING BACK TO WHERE WE CAME FROM

History, Historians and the Immigration Debate is structured geographically, with three central sections on Australia and New Zealand, Asia and Europe. Two additional sections bookend these case studies. The first addresses the profession of history, the role migration history plays within it and the choices historians make when framing their research. The last takes a step back to consider migration globally. The aim is to offer a global perspective on the relevance of migration history and its future. Naturally, it would be absurd to claim to provide an exhaustive perspective on such a topic. Future interventions from scholars working on Africa and Latin America would, for instance, be very welcome. What we offer here is a first step towards a global conversation on this topic.

A guiding idea throughout the writing and editing process has been to interrogate and subvert that most typical of injunctions directed at migrants: to ‘go back to where you came from’. The notion that a person ‘comes from’ a single place, and therefore is ‘out of place’ when encountered elsewhere, is grounded in perceptions of race, nation and locality which are constructed and historically contingent. To reveal these contingencies, the historians featured here ‘go back’ chronologically and present evidence of human mobility which challenges, surprises or shifts perceptions of what is ‘new’ or ‘natural’ about migration. Their chapters further academic scholarship while informing debates about immigration and identity within their own national and regional contexts. The question of ‘where we come from’ has also prompted us to reflect on our own professional identities as historians of migration, and to trace how migration history has developed in relation to the broader field of

historical studies. This is a theme that is addressed by a number of our contributors, making *History, Historians and the Immigration Debate* a useful source for both the past and possible futures of migration history.

Part I of this book, 'Moving Migration History Forward', addresses the challenges involved in trying to carve out a role for history in the politics of migration. In Chapter 2, 'From the Margins of History to the Political Mainstream: Putting Migration History Centre Stage', we begin by taking stock of the history of our own field, and of recent articulations of the immigration debate across the globe. Although different in context and detail, the politics of migration in countries including France, Germany, the USA, the UK, South Africa and Australia has in recent years been reinvigorated by popular nativist anti-immigration movements, and in some cases widespread protest against them. We argue that the expertise of historians has become sidelined in these popular discourses, partly as a product of a sub-discipline which has developed as an adjunct to, rather than as a central part of, the histories of nations and their politics. A move from the margins to the mainstream will involve reconnecting with a long tradition in our profession—reflecting on the past in order to inform the present. Leo Lucassen takes up these themes in Chapter 3, 'Beyond the Apocalypse: Reframing Migration History'. Migration scholars have a powerful opportunity to challenge narrow representations of 'migrants as trouble' in the media, politics and public discourse, but as Lucassen points out, uncritically reproducing or responding to that frame of reference can stymie any effective engagement. The 'cross-cultural migration rate (CCMR) approach' Lucassen advocates replaces the crisis of cross-border 'migration' with the phenomenon of 'human mobility' and shows how it has been a historical force for cultural and social change. As he argues, it is by changing the vantage point and therefore the terms of the debate that historians can 'use the full potential of their discipline and leave the imposed, but also self-chosen, ghetto'.

Part II features chapters on Australia and New Zealand, countries forged through settler colonialism which today proclaim themselves as modern, migrant nations with deep indigenous histories. In Chapter 4, 'Both Sides of the Tasman: History, Politics and Migration Between New Zealand and Australia', Lyndon Fraser shifts the familiar narrative of old-world to new-world migration by tracing the centuries of mobility between these two 'new worlds' across the Tasman Sea (reconfigured as the 'trans-Tasman highway'). This shared migration history is easily obscured by entrenched

national narratives, and as Fraser argues, rarely finds public expression beyond the commemoration of joint military endeavours. The policy implications of recognising these historical connections are potentially transformative and offer crucial perspective to current political issues including social services reciprocation and deportation. If immigration debates too often assume the novelty of migration, in doing so they also elide the ability of migrants to be agents of their own future. In Chapter 5, 'Changing Migration Policy from the Margins: Filipino Activism on Behalf of Victims of Domestic Violence in Australia, 1980s–2000', Mina Roces traces a remarkable and largely unknown episode in Australia's migration history, where Filipina activists successfully campaigned for reforms to federal immigration law to protect the rights of marriage migrants who, post-arrival, became victims of domestic abuse by their Australian spouses. These events occurred during the golden age of Australian multiculturalism in the 1980s and 1990s, where a policy environment concerned with equality and access meant the work of ethnic minority organisations found mainstream government support. As Roces argues, this case study sets a 'powerful and optimistic precedent for the possibilities of migrant collaborations with the states of their host countries'. It also shows how migration histories can prove useful for the contemporary 'mainstream', as Australian authorities struggle to gather data to address the complexities of family, domestic and sexual violence that persist across all socio-economic and demographic groups.⁸

Part III turns to the Asian region, and to the role migration has played in the post-colonial nation-building narratives of India, Pakistan and Singapore. In Chapter 6, 'Not Singaporean Enough? Migration, History and National Identity in Singapore', John Solomon examines how migration in Singapore's history has been understood by both scholars and the public, with a focus on museum representations. Ethnic pluralism, multiculturalism or multiracialism (as it is variously described) has been part of the national framework in Singapore since independence in 1959, enshrined in the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Other model. But as Solomon argues, it is a selective history of immigration that is mobilised by the government in narrating the story of the nation, and historians have unwittingly supported such notions by largely neglecting migration to the country after the 1960s. Immigration debates in Singapore have in recent years seen a strong public backlash against government policies to increase immigration rates and create simpler paths to citizenship. There is an opportunity here, in Solomon's words, for 'new approaches to history' that can 'create space for the emergence of more inclusive

understandings of national identity’. Chapter 7, “‘They Don’t Call Us Indian’: Indian Muslim Voices and the 1947 India/Pakistan Partition’, also traces identity narratives linked to independence from colonial rule, and how they have been represented in scholarship and public memory. The India/Pakistan partition of 1947 has been written and understood as a primarily migratory phenomenon, with millions finding themselves on the ‘wrong’ side of the newly created border and forced to flee. But as Anindya Raychaudhuri argues, this has created a shorthand for partition that entrenches simplistic notions of a Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan, ignoring the experiences of those who decided *not* to migrate. Oral histories with Indian Muslims are thus an invaluable historical source, used by Raychaudhuri to complicate and nuance the picture and to question claims of a secular, postcolonial India. The recent 70th anniversary of Partition and the continuing memorialisation of the event are a salutary reminder of the need for scholarship that resists flattening complex histories into tidier storylines.

Part IV focuses on Europe, and begins with an essay by Gérard Noiriel, presented in Chapter 8 for the first time in English translation. Rather than a post-colonial phenomenon, migration—both within and across national borders—is an integral part of French history. Noiriel argues that if we wish to understand current rifts and divides within the working class, and the appeal of politicians who promote a xenophobic agenda, a longer historical perspective is essential. The detailed and clear analysis in ‘The Role of Immigration in the Making/Unmaking of the French Working Class (Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries)’ is a powerful example of the value of historical inquiry in reframing politicised immigration discourses and informing understandings of contemporary issues, which in the case of France include social exclusion and urban violence. From class, we turn our attention to the other crucial category of historical analysis: gender. When it comes to public debates about rates of immigration and demographic change, migrant women often find themselves the reluctant subjects of projected anxieties about differences in culture and religion which stereotype them as submissive or oppressed. In Chapter 9, ‘Was the Multiculturalism Backlash Good for Women with a Muslim Background? Perspectives from Five Minority Women’s Organisations in the Netherlands’, Margaretha A. van Es asks how women with a Muslim background experienced the negative turn of attitudes towards immigrant minorities, their cultures and religions in the past two decades. Van Es’ observation that ‘intense public debate

about Muslim women's oppression has by no means always translated into substantial support for women in difficult situations' demonstrates the gap between rhetoric and reality that often exists when mainstream commentators voice concern about minority groups. Histories of the activism and involvement of migrant communities in Dutch society like van Es' can instead reveal the complex ramifications of political agendas on different groups, including Islamic feminists and women involved in secular organisations, and the agency of migrants which continues long after the news cycle moves on.

Part V offers global perspectives on migration history. In Chapter 10, 'Migrant Doctors and the "Frontiers of Medicine" in Westernized Healthcare Systems', Julian M. Simpson makes a case for a transnational approach to the migration of doctors. The labour of this migratory medical workforce has been essential to the functioning of a number of healthcare systems around the world, but previous scholarship on this phenomenon has tended to be ahistorical or framed within national narratives. Simpson argues that this topic can only be properly understood *across* borders and *throughout* history, and provides a model for understanding the professional impact of migrants over time. Such an approach can be instrumental in countering simplistic arguments which equate national identity, border control and the protection of jobs. In Simpson's words, 'by studying the history of migrants and work, we cast our gaze towards their interactions with the mainstream, rather than what defines them as outsiders'. The category of migrant that dominates today's migration controversies is the refugee or asylum seeker. In Chapter 11, Klaus Neumann demonstrates that the very concept of a right to grant or seek asylum has a complex and hidden international history. Taking Australia as a case study, Neumann traces the history of these ideas about asylum in public debate over the course of the twentieth century. When personal freedoms are at stake, an understanding of the genealogy of these legal instruments is crucial. Neumann's untangling of the use and misuse of the past in political debates about 'rights' starkly illustrates why policy understandings need to be informed by historical scholarship, rather than being based on the 'fickle emotion of compassion'. It also demonstrates the importance of history's 'dead ends', which 'allow us to imagine futures that are more than endlessly reproduced versions of the present'. This, ultimately, is where history

and the work of historians can transform approaches to today's policy challenges. In the final chapter of the book, Chapter 12, Donna Gabaccia also looks to the future by way of the past to ask 'Will the Twenty-First Century World Embrace Immigration History?'. By tracing the origins of a proud and contested immigration historiography in the United States and contrasting it to the lack of such a tradition in Switzerland, a country with 'many foreigners, but few immigrants', Gabaccia reminds us that the projects of immigration history and nation-building are intertwined. The majority of the countries in the world have no field of 'immigration history', even though cross-border mobility may be a significant feature of their pasts and presents. Without the intention of turning foreign workers into citizens or subjects, there is no need for a national story of immigrant incorporation. The invisibility of migrants in the historiography and national mythology of countries like the United Arab Emirates, Qatar or Kuwait, who have some of the highest proportions of foreign-born residents, is a powerful example. Mobility does not promote the writing of immigration history, and its future beyond the handful of self-styled 'immigrant nations' is far from secure.

We are under no illusions that it will be straightforward to communicate an alternative message about migration by drawing on the past. Ultimately, however, a world such as ours, concerned as it is about migration, should really concern itself with migration history. The global immigration debate will remain ill-informed if it does not anchor itself in an understanding of our shared migratory past. This book is therefore a contribution towards a public and policy-relevant history of migration and an argument for placing migration history at the centre of the concerns of historians around the world. With the exception of a few countries, migration history remains a relatively marginal pursuit. The US historiographical model of the nation of immigrants is naturally not to be uncritically celebrated. The forced migration of African slaves has remained on the margins of this history which has also tended to privilege the Ellis Island story, giving a very partial view of who came to North America.⁹ It is, however, a given that American history can only be understood in relation to migration history. Our aim here is to start a discussion about how migration history can become central to global history and help us rethink our current views of mobility.

NOTES

1. See, for instance, Christopher Kyriakides, 'Words don't come easy: Al Jazeera's migrant-refugee distinction and the European culture of (mis) trust,' *Current Sociology* 65, no. 7 (2017): 933–52.
2. Theodore Roszak, 'On academic delinquency,' in *The Dissenting Academy: Essays Criticising the Teaching of the Humanities in American Universities*, ed. Theodore Roszak (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 19.
3. Staughton Lynd, 'Historical past and existential present,' in *ibid.*, 89–91.
4. Pierre Bourdieu, 'On Television,' in *Sociology is a Martial Art: Political Writings by Pierre Bourdieu*, Pierre Bourdieu, ed. Gisèle Shapiro (London and New York: The New Press, 2010).
5. Pierre Carles, *La sociologie est un sport de combat*, Documentary Film, C-P Productions, 2001.
6. Theodore Roszak, *The Dissenting Academy*, 38–39.
7. Angelika Bammer and Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, 'Introduction,' in *The Future of Scholarly Writing: Critical Interventions*, eds. Angelika Bammer and Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1–2.
8. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence in Australia 2018* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018), ix. Available online, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-in-australia-2018/contents/table-of-contents>.
9. Paul Spickard, 'Introduction: Immigration and race in United States history,' in *Race and Immigration in the United States: New Histories*, ed. Paul Spickard (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1–12.