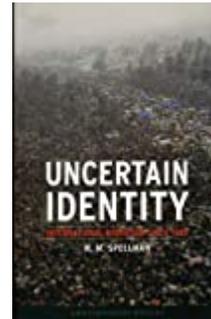




William M. Spellmann. *Uncertain Identity: International Migration since 1945.* London: 25fps-filmproduction, 2008. 240 S. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-86189-364-2.



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W. Spellmann: Uncertain Identity

This work presents a global survey of international migration since 1945 – that is, since the great cycle of transoceanic and transcontinental migration from 1840 to 1940. The author argues that post-1945 migrants came from a wider range of homelands than before, and that post-1945 migrants moved from poor to rich regions rather than from densely to sparsely populated regions. Principally, however, the author concentrates on the contemporary tensions in migration. The opening chapter notes, for recent migrations, the “perceived vulnerability of both source and destination states to the disruptive forces of globalization, ethnonationalism and international terror.” As a result, the deregulation of commerce is accompanied by expanded regulation of migration. “Thus at the very moment when ideas, money, business, manufacturing and products move ever more easily across international borders, restrictions on the movement of humans across those same borders have become more rigorous.” (p. 11)

Under these conditions, he argues, it is easy to forget the economic benefits brought by migrants. In addition, we now live in a world of national states (large and small)

rather than of empires. The forum of the United Nations became available to the smaller states, and they led in creating the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. This convention, signed by nearly 150 states, contests migration restrictions by encouraging the opening of borders to refugees and, by extension, to other migrants.

In these and other ways, this book poses important questions and dilemmas on contemporary migration. Details of the text, however, are descriptive rather than analytical. Thus, Spellman gives more attention to old-style push and pull mechanisms than to social capital, family dynamics and other recent theories on migration. Further, while Spellman compares post-1945 migrations to the previous cycle, he is not especially strong in comparing and contrasting the two periods. In particular, he underplays the importance of Asian migration before 1945.

The opening and closing chapters provide general statements on migration since 1945, while the five intervening chapters provide case studies organized by continent, addressing Europe, the Americas, Africa, the Mid-

dle East, and South and East Asia. The five regional chapters emphasize the diversity of migratory experiences more than recurring trends. Chapter sections include case studies of migration into the European Union, out of Central America, the experience of Angolan civil war, migrants to Gulf states, Sikh migrants, Vietnamese boat people. The cover photo is a stunning aerial image of thousands of guest workers expelled from Nigeria, on their way home to Ghana, halted at the intervening Togo-Benin border. Nevertheless, since the examples are presented as concise and discrete case studies, the reader is left with the task of assembling them into more general patterns. Still, some patterns are clear, such as the rise of dominantly female migration from Southeast Asia.

Spellman argues in his conclusion that, in wealthy countries, immigration policy functions as a tool for creation and clarification of national identity, but that the results of such policy fuel envy in developing countries. The expanded migration of recent decades, rather than proceed smoothly, has brought political and social discrimination and conflict. The pressure on the poor to migrate intensifies. Wealthy countries have sought to restrict immigration to highly skilled persons, though poor and unskilled migrants have shown skill and determination in migrating despite all barriers. The fear of overburdening benefits systems in lands of settlement is partly

realistic but partly neoliberal propaganda to encourage privatisation. Despite the effort of wealthy countries to be more skill-selective in immigrants, the U.S. became the destination of the great majority of migrants from developing countries. Spellman proposes that domestic migration â especially country-city migration in 1980s and 1990s â is part of this pattern, but does not analyze it systematically.

The conclusion returns to the questions posed at the beginning of the book, but without much in the way of answers. Why has migration remained such a glaring exception to globalizing trends? Why is there trade liberalization but no migration liberalization? Why did neoliberal theorists of globalization believe that reducing trade barriers would reduce the need for economic migration? In response, Spellman cites approvingly the work of Robert Flanagan, who has estimated in contrast that unhindered migration would increase global output.

Overall, the book presents a timely reminder of this era's contradiction of free flows of capital with restrictions on flows of labor. It is effective as a call for global and interdisciplinary research on migration past and present. Researching these questions with fuller attention to a range of theories and more detailed tracing of the historical record is a priority both for academic understanding and for social priorities.

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