International Migration and Citizenship Today

International migration has emerged in the last decade as one of the world’s most controversial and pressing issues. This thought-provoking textbook offers the reader a carefully nuanced and knowledgeable understanding of the complex economic, political, cultural, and moral concerns that arise when people move across borders seeking admission into other countries.

Splitting the text into five broad sections, Steiner facilitates easy navigation of the complex discussions that surround the issue of migration:

- **Section I – Introduction**: examines how the central questions that frame the book will be addressed, including: *What criteria should countries use to admit migrants?* and *How does a country decide which migrants should be granted citizenship?*
- **Section II – Immigrants**: discusses the criteria for accepting immigrants, dealing with the unwanted, and assessing the economic, cultural, and political impacts.
- **Section III – Refugees**: evaluates the methods used to protect refugees, the controversies surrounding asylum and the shortcomings of current refugee definitions.
- **Section IV – Citizenship**: charts the rise of nationalism, presents modern issues of minority rights and diversity, and examines processes of naturalization across the globe.
- **Section V – Conclusion**: considers more unconventional approaches to migration and citizenship and suggests moving toward a more holistic approach.

Carefully constructed to spark discussion and student reflection and featuring suggested resources at the end of each section, this book offers dozens of contemporary examples and case studies from across the globe. *International Migration and Citizenship Today* is essential reading for students not only of migration and citizenship, but also of globalization, international relations, and democracies.

**Niklaus Steiner** is Director of the Center for Global Initiatives and Adjunct Professor of Political Science and International Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA. His research and teaching interests are immigration, refugees, nationalism, and citizenship, and his publications include *The Problems of Protection: UNHCR, Refugees, and Human Rights*, eds. Niklaus Steiner, Mark Gibney, and Gil Loescher (Routledge, 2003).
“An excellent and accessible introduction to the complex issue of migration and citizenship. Its substance and style encourages discussion of topics that are too often dealt with in simplistic ways. Steiner effectively challenges our outdated concepts and thinking on migration and citizenship and challenges us to reimagine and remodel our analytical framework to meet the demographic, economic, and political challenges of the 21st century.”

Demetrios Papademetriou, President, Migration Policy Institute

“This brief yet substantive book is an unconventional and conceptually rich overview of the complexities and debates within global migration. The critical questions on immigration, refugees, integration, and citizenship are debated in a very engaging and accessible way that will be of great interest and value to teachers, students, policymakers, and the wider public. Having examined many books on migration, I will be using this contemporary study as the core text in my upcoming courses in Global Migration and Global Studies.”

Safia Swimelar, Elon University, USA

“Every college student should read this book. Niklaus Steiner guides the reader through the complexities of immigration, including research on global migration, naturalization, citizenship, border protection, and much more. The purpose of the book is to inform the current debate on immigration by providing information and perspective on how to create better policies for one of the most salient issues of our time.”

Regina Cortina, Teachers College, Columbia University, USA

“Niklaus Steiner’s book on migration should be required reading for all citizens of every country, including students and policy makers. The reason is that migration is a key issue in a global world that entails both frequent movement of people and maintaining boundaries of nations. He offers an analysis that is at once clear and accessible as well as humane, informed by both legal and cultural understanding. This is an important text for courses ranging from social sciences to law and administration.”

James L. Peacock, former President, American Anthropological Association

“This book does a wonderful job of bringing together elements of political science, law, demography, history, economics, and ethical considerations that help to broaden our understanding – and our overall approach – to issues relating to human migration. This is highly readable and thought-provoking at the same time.”

Mark Gibney, University of North Carolina Asheville, USA
International Migration and Citizenship Today

Niklaus Steiner
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Acknowledgments

I was inspired to write this book because of the wonderful experiences I’ve had teaching at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, as well as at North Carolina State University and Northwestern University. The book is a reflection of the discussions that have taken place in my classroom over the years. Because it is built upon my students’ engagement with the topic of international migration and citizenship, I wanted to bring them into the process of writing it. I therefore used my undergraduate seminar in Fall 2006 and Fall 2007 as a platform for researching and writing this book. The students in these two classes wrote their term papers on topics directly addressed in *International Migration and Citizenship Today*, and they proved invaluable to the process of producing it.

I therefore gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Gia Branciforte, Kaylan Christofferson, Matt Craig, Olivia De Lancie, Kristin Economo, Pablo Friedmann, Mark Godfrey, Laura Gustafson, Melissa Henderson, Kate Horton, David Kennedy, Amanda Koser, Casey Lesawyer, Grant Ligon, Katie Littlefield, Julia Marden, Katie Mason, Alyssa Morrison, Sarah Press, Josh Rivera, Caroline Schneider, Jesse Soloff, Nathan Stern, Joao Toste, Mantas Valiunas, and Sara Wise. I especially want to thank Matt Garza, John Tabor, and Laura Williamson for the work they did outside of class.

This book is dedicated to all the students I’ve had the privilege to teach.
Section I

Introduction
1 The nature of this book

Introduction

Human migration is a truly global phenomenon. Not only does it involve every country on earth, but it also connects with a wide range of diverse issues ranging from farm subsidies and militias to democracy and demographics. Because migration is interwoven into so many places and issues, it is enormously complex. This complexity often catches people off guard who at first glance think it is fairly straightforward. Scratch the surface, however, and it quickly becomes clear that it is not simple to “help refugees” or “get rid of illegal immigrants” or “become a citizen.”

Because of the unexpected complexity that lies just beneath its surface, migration has emerged in the last decade as one of the world’s most controversial issues. And migration will continue to press us, and may well become one of the defining issues that marks the twenty-first century as fundamentally different from the last one. This book sets out to explore the complexity and controversy of migration.

The Global Commission on International Migration, in its 2005 report *Migration in the Interconnected World*, notes that some of the key reasons people migrate are wage disparities (almost half the people in sub-Saharan Africa live on less than $1.00 per day), unemployment (the unemployment rate in the Middle East and Africa is nearly twice the rate of that in industrialized countries), differentials in life expectancies (58 years in low-income countries compared with 78 years in high-income countries), and education gaps (58 percent of women and 68 percent of men are literate in low-income countries while there’s almost full literacy for both in high-income countries). Simply put – life is better in some countries than in others, and this discrepancy drives international migration.

Unique modern juxtaposition

While migration has marked the human experience for thousands of years, what is unique about migration today is the juxtaposition of two truths: the ability of people to move and the ability of governments to control this movement. Never before has it been possible to travel so far so quickly and so easily – it simply astonishes me that I could walk away from my desk right now in Chapel Hill, NC drive out to the airport with nothing more than a credit card and a passport, and be in Beijing, China, within 18 hours. Crucially, at the very same time, never before have governments had so much power to control the movement of people. Both the Chinese and the American governments could easily prevent me from completing this trip. Held in juxtaposition, these two truths bring into stark relief the reasons why migration is such a complex and controversial issue in world politics: there is now a monumental struggle
between the ability of migrants to seek admission into countries and the ability of countries to control this admission.

Focus on wealthier countries

This struggle is most strongly felt in the wealthier countries, not because they have more people seeking admission than poorer countries (quite the opposite in many cases), but because wealthier ones have more capacity to control this admission. Britain, for example, has significantly more control, power, and influence over Ghanaians entering than does Togo. Because of this capacity, Britain and other wealthier countries face difficult questions as they consider the issue of admitting migrants.

This book, then, focuses on the struggle in wealthier countries over admitting and accepting migrants. As for defining “wealthier” countries, a useful list comes from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which as of 2008 had 30 members. OECD countries are the primary focus for several reasons. First, they are all struggling with outsiders trying to move in and insiders trying to control this movement. Second, they all demonstrate a commitment to the tenets of liberalism (open-market economies, democratic pluralism, individual freedom and equality, and respect for human rights), and, as we’ll see throughout the book, this liberal commitment is central to the controversy over migration. Finally, readers of this book will largely be from OECD countries, and so by drawing heavily on these countries for examples and issues I hope to make the material most accessible.

“Wealthier” and “poorer” are, of course, relative terms, and people often move to another country that is only relatively better off than their own. Romania, for example, is attracting workers from China both because the wages are better and because many Romanians have left to find better jobs in even better-off Western Europe. The New York Times reports on one textile company in Romania that had to suspend its operation in 2003 because it no longer had enough Romanian workers, even after the owner posted hundreds of job offers with local agencies that went unanswered. The owner then began recruiting workers from China, and one such worker, Xiu Xian Hong, plans to stay at least three years and then return home to her husband and daughter with the money saved to open her own business. Critics of hiring such migrants charge that if the company would raise its wages it could attract enough Romanian workers, but the owner says that his products would then be too expensive to compete on the international market.

It is important to note that despite the heated rhetoric in OECD countries, the number of migrants worldwide is relatively small. The Global Commission on International Migration reported in 2005 that about 200 million of the world’s total population of 6.5 billion (or about 3 percent) live outside of their countries of origin. This is surely a significant number, but it is not the “overwhelming horde” about to overrun us that we are led to imagine by some sensational media outlets and politicians. And the Commission reports that migrants make up only about 8 percent of Europe’s population and about 13 percent of North America’s. So you may reasonably ask, “Why are we so exercised about migration?” The answer is that, as we’ll see repeatedly in this book, migration cuts to the very heart of national identity. How we citizens deal with migrants is a mirror in which we see ourselves and also a window through which others see us.

Two questions and one goal

This book is framed by two central questions: (1) what criteria should we use to admit migrants who want to come into our country? and (2) what criteria should we use to grant
citizenship to those migrants we have decided to admit? Note the emphasis on *we*, by which I mean *we citizens of democracies*, because the overarching goal of this book is to help citizens engage thoughtfully in discussions over admission and citizenship. Regrettably, too often the debates surrounding migration are either shrill or naïve or both. This book seeks to spur on deeper and more nuanced discussions surrounding the myriad of complex issues raised by people moving across international borders. Only by engaging in thoughtful discussions can we hope to get a handle on an issue that everyone, regardless of political affiliation, agrees is fraught with problems but that has no easy solutions.

I have taught classes on international migration for a decade, and this book deliberately focuses on those issues that spark particularly engaging discussions among students. Not surprisingly, these same issues are also prominently featured in everyday discussions among family and friends, debated in the media, and fought over by policy makers and politicians. Because I truly believe that the struggles over migration can only be effectively addressed through thoughtful discussions, I seek here to provoke debates among the readers by raising many questions with no clear answers. Rather than offering lots of detailed facts and statistics, which are now readily available with a few clicks of a mouse, I am instead interested in presenting broader concepts and controversies raised in the debates over migration and citizenship by academics, politicians, practitioners, and policy makers in order to help the reader engage with them. For more details and up-to-date information about specific aspects of the concepts I raise, please consult the suggested readings and resources at the end of each section, as well as the bibliography.

**Types of migrants shaping our debates**

The debates over migration are complex because there are so many different types of migrants moving around the globe, and an approach that may work for dealing with one set of migrants is likely to be inappropriate for another. Of the almost 200 million people currently living outside their country of birth, the vast majority moved for economic reasons. In some cases, their decision to move was a comfortable one in which they were pursuing job offers with nice salaries. In other cases, the move was a desperate quest to feed themselves and their families. About 185 million people around the world are unemployed, and almost half of the world’s 2.8 billion workers earn less than $2.00 per day. We therefore tend to think that it is mainly poor people who are on the move, and that they are heading toward rich countries. In fact about the same number of people (60 million) move from one poor country to another poor country as move from a poor country to a rich one, and almost that many people move from one rich country to another.

While much of the debate over migration focuses on economic migrants, another important set of migrants are those who flee across borders to escape persecution. Such fleeing migrants are in crucial ways different from economically motivated migrants, especially in our tendency to feel a moral obligation to admit them. It is, therefore, helpful to think of *international migrants* as an overarching term for people moving across borders, and *immigrants* and *refugees* making up two subsets – the former move voluntarily and the latter move involuntarily. As Section III will explore in great detail, despite the significant differences between immigrants and refugees, there are also significant overlaps between them, and much of the controversy today, especially in Europe, revolves around the perceived overlaps and differences between these two types of international migrants.

Having now described what this book sets out to do, I should add that it will not deal with two important aspects of migration: *internal migration* and *human trafficking*. Internal
migration is the movement of people that takes place within a given country. It therefore does not involve citizens in another country debating the implications of such movement for their own admission and citizenship policies and so is beyond the scope of this book. I do urge readers to explore internal migration elsewhere because it is of great importance to understanding the contemporary world, whether the focus is on Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Darfur or the more than 100 million Chinese who are moving about in their own country.

Another important movement of people that is beyond our scope is human trafficking. Trafficking is commonly defined as the coercive or deceptive movement of people who upon arrival in a new country are forced to work against their will in exploitive settings such as prostitution. While trafficking is a profoundly troubling issue, it is illegal and so does not raise debates among us about admission. Instead, our debates revolve around effectively preventing people from being moved across borders in such cruel ways and for such exploitive purposes.

**Moral obligations toward migrants and hosts**

If we could deal with immigrants and refugees on purely selfish grounds, things might be simpler: we would try to devise policies that would let them in when they helped us and keep them out when they didn’t. But migration policies, like most public policies, are infused with moral concerns that we must consider when we set them. We therefore must decide whether different types of migrants have different claims on our sense of moral obligation to help them. Refugees fleeing a brutal dictatorship, for example, are commonly thought to have a greater claim to admission than a doctor seeking a higher salary. What about a healthy young woman versus an invalid grandfather? Of course, not only do we need to consider the moral obligation we have toward migrants, but also the obligation we have to ourselves. Striking a balance between what we owe migrants and what we owe citizens is difficult and leads to much of the tension over admission and citizenship policies.

A great deal has been written on the question of such moral obligations and I can’t do justice to all its richness. Let me try, though, to sketch the outlines of two important pieces that have shaped much of the debate in the last two decades. One piece, written by Michael Walzer, stresses the right of the community (i.e. the host country), while the other piece, by Joseph Carens, stresses the right of the individual (i.e. the migrant). Where one comes down on this debate will significantly affect what type of admission and citizenship policy one articulates and defends.

Michael Walzer wrote in 1983 that migration policies can be guided by the principle of mutual aid along the lines of the Good Samaritan story, in which someone comes across a stranger in need along the side of the road. He explains:

> What precisely they owe one another is by no means clear, but we commonly say of such cases that positive assistance is required if (1) it is needed or urgently needed by one of the parties; and (2) if the risks and costs of giving it are relatively low for the other party. Given these conditions, I ought to stop and help the injured stranger, wherever I meet him, whatever his membership or my own.7

Walzer says this principle can be extended to the collective level so that groups of people should help strangers in need when they are encountered. However, he believes there are sharply drawn limits to what we owe such strangers, writing “I need not take the injured stranger into my home, except briefly, and I certainly need not care for him or even associate
Walzer believes that when considering whether to help strangers by admitting them into your country, the most important thing to weigh is how the strangers will affect the country as a political community. He draws the parallel between a country and a club because both distribute membership, and he stresses that such membership must be restricted to some extent for the sake of the community, which he thinks must have boundaries. He writes:

Admission and exclusion are at the core of communal independence. They suggest the deepest meaning of self-determination. Without them, there could not be communities of character, historically stable, ongoing associations of men and women with some special commitment to one another and some special sense of their common life. Walzer, however, argues that the community’s right to self-determination is not absolute, because it is constrained by the moral principle of mutual aid, which imposes some obligation. It is further constrained by the fact that if a country does decide to admit a stranger, then it must also offer that stranger the opportunity of full membership in the community, i.e. citizenship in the case of migrants. While the country can of course determine the eligibility requirements of citizenship, it may not rule over people in its territory to whom it does not grant citizenship, because this is, in Walzer’s view, a form of tyranny. “Indeed, the rule of citizens over non-citizens, of members over strangers, is probably the most common form of tyranny in human history … The denial of membership is always the first of a long train of abuses. There is no way to break the train, so we must deny the rightfulness of the denial.”

While Walzer stresses the right of the community, Joseph Carens in a 1987 article stresses the right of the individual, based on the assumption of the equal moral worth of all individuals. If one accepts this assumption, then he sees little basis for drawing the fundamental distinction between those inside of a community and those outside of it, which, in the case of migration, is the distinction commonly drawn between those inside a country and those wanting to get in. Carens therefore concludes that there is little justification for restricting immigration policies and argues that “borders should generally be open and that people should normally be free to leave their country of origin and settle in another, subject only to the sorts of constraints that bind current citizens in their new country.” He feels that his argument is strongest when applied to people from poorer countries wanting to move to richer countries; after all, their life chances are significantly affected by something over which they had no control – the place of their birth. Neither people born into rich countries nor people born into poor ones deserve their citizenship, which he argues is basically an inherited privilege or curse. “Citizenship in Western liberal democracies is the modern equivalent of feudal privilege – an inherent status that greatly enhances one’s life chances. Like feudal birthright privileges, restrictive citizenship is hard to justify when one thinks about it closely.” In other words, people born into a given country are no more entitled to the benefits of citizenship of that country than those born elsewhere.

Caren criticizes Walzer for emphasizing the importance of the differences between countries as political communities, because within countries there are also different political communities, and yet we would not think to restrict a New Yorker’s move to Mississippi. He writes:

No liberal state restricts internal mobility. Those states that do restrict internal mobility are criticized for denying basic human freedoms. If freedom of movement within the
Carens acknowledges that more open immigration would change the character of liberal democracies, but rather than diminish it he thinks such changes would affirm our character because it would bring us more in line with liberalism, which is a central part of our culture. Other cultures that assume fundamental moral differences between people have an easier time drawing distinctions between insiders and outsiders “[b]ut we cannot dismiss the aliens on the ground that they are other, because we are the product of a liberal culture … [T]he general case for open borders is deeply rooted in the fundamental values of our tradition. No moral argument will seem acceptable to us, if it directly challenges the assumption of the equal moral worth of all individuals.”

He therefore concludes:

The current restrictions on immigration in Western democracies – even in the most open ones like Canada and the United States – are not justifiable. Like feudal barriers to mobility, they protect unjust privilege. Does it follow that there is no room for distinctions between aliens and citizens, no theory of citizenship, no boundaries for the community? Not at all. To say that membership is open to all who wish to join is not to say that there is no distinction between members and nonmembers. Those who choose to cooperate together in the state have special rights and obligations not shared by noncitizens. Respecting the particular choices and commitments that individuals make flows naturally from a commitment to the idea of equal moral worth. … What is not readily compatible with the idea of equal moral worth is the exclusion of those who want to join. If people want to sign the social contract, they should be permitted to do so.

Let me add a final note to this brief discussion about liberal democracies’ moral obligation toward migrants. As mentioned earlier, we often make a distinction between immigrants and refugees, and this distinction rests to a significant extent on the fact that it is broadly accepted that there is a greater moral obligation toward refugees than immigrants. Within the Western tradition that gave rise to the modern refugee protection system, refugee advocates most often build such moral arguments on either a Judeo-Christian or a liberal foundation. Using the former, some argue that a moral commitment toward refugees is solidly grounded in the Bible. They point out that the Bible is filled with images of refugees and commands to help them, and they note broader commands to help the weak, to love one another, and to believe in the commonality of humans. Others argue for protecting refugees by appealing to moral arguments based on liberalism’s central ideals of equality and liberty. Those who present liberal arguments on behalf of refugees do so for one of two reasons: either they want to help refugees because they are morally repulsed by the injustices refugees face, or they argue for a more open refugee policy because of their respect for individual liberty and their distaste for government restrictions. The French village of Le Chambon, whose 5,000 Huguenot villagers harbored 5,000 Jewish refugees during World War II, well exemplifies such religiously inspired refugee protection, while Britain’s nineteenth-century refugee policy, which did not exclude or expel a single refugee between 1823 and 1905, drew largely from its dedication to liberalism.

I do not at all mean to imply that these two moral codes are the only ones that can be used to argue on behalf of refugees, because of course other moral arguments based on other religions and ideologies exist, but these two tend to be the most common ones articulated in OECD countries.
Looking ahead

Raising the moral dimensions of migration is crucial for understanding why migration debates can be so emotionally raw. For those in favor of stricter policies and of emphasizing the rights of the host society often face the accusation from the other side of being anti-foreigner and implicitly (or even explicitly) racist. Given the morally repulsive standing of racism in democracies, such charges are vehemently denied by all but the most marginal figures. As we’ll see throughout the book, this charge and its denial crop up in various contexts, and it raises the touchy question of whether and how one can hold an anti-migration position without this position being anti-migrant. Or perhaps holding an anti-migrant position is acceptable as long as it doesn’t bleed into a racist position, but how is this balance struck?

I seek to raise many such difficult questions, because only by engaging with such questions can we hope to come to some kind of consensus about what constitutes a “good” migration policy. Over the course of reading this book, you will find that the modest proposal of articulating a good migration policy is in fact devilishly complex – hence the controversy in every OECD country.

And all too often overlooked in our migration debates is the fact that a good migration policy is unlikely to be effective without addressing the root causes of poverty, hardship, and persecution in sending countries. While the root causes of migration warrant a whole other book, I urge us to be mindful that by adjusting our migration policies, we are addressing only half the story. We must also address policies as diverse as selling military hardware abroad, consuming fossil fuels, and exporting subsidized wheat, all of which contribute to people moving about the globe. Some of this movement is positive and should be encouraged, while some is detrimental. In either case, our migration policies will be ineffective if dealt with in isolation from the other ways we conduct ourselves in this global community. Coming up with newer, broader, interconnected policies is our major challenge.

Suggested resources