



Book Review “Migration and Climate Change”

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Piquet, E., Pécoud, A., and de Guchteneire, P. (Eds.): Migration and Climate Change, UNESCO Publishing, Cambridge University Press, 442 pp., ISBN-13: 9781107662254, €82.24, 2011.

This collected volume, edited by Étienne Piquet, Antoine Pécoud and Paul de Guchteneire, provides a comprehensive overview of the current debate on climate change, environment and migration. With Susana B. Adamo, Stephen Castles, François Gemenne, Graeme Hugo, Douglas S. Massey, Anthony Oliver-Smith and Koko Warner, it brings together a range of important authors in this field.

The introduction by the editors and the conclusion by Stephen Castles frame the two main subject areas of this volume. Following Martine Rebetez’s general identification and discussion of the climatic factors relevant to the question, the results of case studies on the relationship between climate, environment and migration are presented in the first part. While Barbieri and Confalonieri, in their scenario-based article, discuss potential consequences of climate change and migration on human health of people in the north-east of Brazil, the other chapters discuss migration in different so-called hotspot regions of environmental change, such as Nepal, Bangladesh or the Sahel countries. Three articles (McAdam, Findlay and Geddes and Oliver-Smith) focus on the consequences of the rising sea level. While the rise in sea level is often quoted as the most prominent example of forced migration due to climate change, the authors present empirical findings, for instance from Bangladesh or the “sinking” Pacific islands, which show that this direct connection needs to be reconsidered, and that the people concerned cannot simply be regarded as victims without any agency of their own. The empirical results of the most ambitious research project in this field to date, “Environmental Change and Forced Mi-

gration Scenarios” (EACH-FOR), 2007–2009, are summarized in chapter eight. Warner et al. and Castles are critical of the methods used in this project, and point out some of the many difficulties bound up with empirical research on the environment-migration nexus.

The focus in the second part is on political and legal aspects of migration in the context of environmental and climate changes. Francois Gemenne provides an overview of the not unproblematic interaction in this field between research and political advice. This is particularly interesting since some of the authors are representatives of the closely intermeshed policy-science complex. In their article, Hunter and David discuss gender-specific aspects of migration processes connected with climate change. The following articles focus on various aspects of displacement and resettlement processes (Hugo), human rights of drought-affected people (Leighton), the legal protection of international and internal migrants who are described as “environmental refugees” (Cournil, Koser), and the international community’s political responsibility for them (Epiney). Overall, this second part gives an overview that is well worth reading of the current debate over legal and political issues relating to responsibility for and ways of handling different kinds of environmentally-induced migration.

In a way this book reflects two special features of the debate on climate change, environment and migration. Firstly, it is striking that while intense discussions continue over how it is possible to link climate, environment and migration epistemologically, the best way to methodically demonstrate the influence of climatic and environmental factors, and which concepts and terms are properly applicable, the debate on the legal and political aspects of dealing with “environmental refugees” seems to be much further advanced, and relies only to a very limited extent on the, admittedly contradictory,

findings of empirical research. Secondly, it is obviously very difficult to avoid extreme politicization of this issue. For the reader it is not clear why "...the climate change component is likely to become increasingly significant" (Castles:423) for future migration, when the 50 million environmental or climate refugees that were predicted for 2010 never materialized, and current research has produced no evidence of a clear, climate-change-induced increase in migration.

For anyone who has followed the academic debate on this topic, this book has no new theoretical or methodological insights to offer. But nonetheless the introductory chapter by Piguët et al., the overview by Gemenne and the conclusion by Castles provide a good summary of the academic and political debates, and together with the illustrative case studies can definitely be recommended as an introduction to this topic.