

Etienne Piguet and Frank Laczko (eds.), *People on the Move in a Changing Climate: The Regional Impact of Environmental Change on Migration*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2014, ISBN 2213-2511, 99.99 Euros (hc) / 83.29 Euros (ebook).

A large body of empirical studies and theoretical models have developed over the last years with a view at understanding how environmental factors impact human mobility, in particular in the context of climate change. *People on the Move in a Changing Climate* provides a timely synthesis of this literature, with contributions authored by some of the leading authorities in the field. The volume appears to be primarily intended to policymakers, but it may also constitute a useful assessment of the current knowledge, gaps, and possible future developments for interested researchers and advanced students. The editors, Etienne Piguet and Frank Laczko, aim to “review and compare the existing evidence base in each major region of the world in order to inform policy responses, especially at the regional level” (3). Thus, the book constitutes a descriptive and informative publication, not a theoretical one. Its eight central chapters focus on Asia, Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, North America, Latin American and the Caribbean, Oceania, and the Himalaya. They are preceded by an introduction of the editors, and followed by a policy-oriented conclusion. Although five chapters are adapted from previous reports or publications, and despite significant differences of perspectives and a few blind spots (the Maldives are not discussed in any contribution), the volume generally provides a rather comprehensive overview of the current knowledge.

For sure, it is a challenge for contributors to identify distinct features in the environment-migration nexus in regions as broad and diverse as, for instance, “Asia,” where – Graeme Hugo and Douglas Bardsley note in their contribution – 60.5 % of the world’s population live (23). By contrast, John Campbell and Richard Bedford’s chapter on Oceania focuses on the “10 million living in the 22 Pacific Island nations and territories” (177). Several contributions distinguish between narrower sub-regions. One may thus differentiate between what is happening in East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asian and Central and Western Asia, or at specific states taken as examples (China, Thailand, Bangladesh and Tajikistan) (38-42). In Europe, Mark Mulligan et al. concentrate their attention on Mediterranean countries and Northern European states of destination. Within sub-Saharan Africa, James Morrissey cautions the reader against extrapolating the findings of country-specific studies too readily (102), insisting on “the size and diversity of the subcontinent” (84). Likewise, in their chapter on Middle East and North Africa, Quentin Wodon et al. focus on five countries (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Syria and Yemen) in order to show that “some broad or uniform messages for the region as a whole may not necessarily apply to all individual countries” (115). In fact, even Campbell and Bedford feel compelled to differentiate between “types of islands in Oceania” (184).

Consequently, there appears to be an overstatement in the claim of the editors that “[d]ifferent parts of the world will be confronted with very different environmental challenges..., which may result in different regional migration scenarios” (17). Different environmental phenomena can influence migration (for instance: floods, sea-level rise, drought, land degradation and desertification), but these phenomena or their impacts on migration are not generally region-specific: tropical small-island developing states, low-lying coastal areas or mountains may face the same physical challenges in different continents, and the resilience of populations has more to do with development and governance than with location. Contributors justly insist on the diversity of national circumstances within each region, showing differences according to population size, vulnerability, and socio-economic development (Wodon et al. 115-116) or acknowledging that the impacts of climate change “will be strongly spatially variable within countries both latitudinally, continentally and altitudinally” (Mulligan et al. 74). At least in terms of scientific analysis, there may be more to gain from comparing states with resembling national circumstances (e.g. same type

of climate, similar level of development, facing comparable environmental factors, in comparable socio-political circumstances, etc.) rather than states from the same global region.

Concededly, this remark may not fully apply to an informative synthesis for policymakers (as opposed to an analytical study for researchers). Policymakers may need at first to know what is happening in their region, even though they may then be interested in comparing how specific environmental phenomena affect different regions. Yet, by trying to characterize environmental migration in a specific continent, the book conveys a misleading message and enables political claims for specific regional frameworks on climate migration. This message is made explicit in IOM policy officer Karoline Popp's concluding chapter on policy relevance, which identifies three grounds for regional cooperation. The first two grounds are that "most migration is regional" and that states within a same region "are likely to face similar environmental phenomena and hazards, as well as similar effects of climate change" (230). These claims are not substantiated by the contributions (although they may seem to be in a book on the "regional impact of environmental change on migration"), which consistently show that most migration occurs within states and that migration scenarios are not region-specific.

As Popp adds as a third ground for regional cooperation, the rationale for regional cooperation is more practical: states are often more willing to cooperate with their regional neighbours, with whom they share more intense relations (230). But then, what form of regional cooperation may one consider? Here again, the volume seems to suggest that distinct regional frameworks should be adopted in response to "environmental migration" or "climate migration." The title of the book, however, avoids such a label, preferring to allude to "people on the move in a changing climate." The editors and several contributors also acknowledge the issue of multicausality with more or less emphasis: an environmental factor does not "cause" migration in isolation from a range of other social, political, economic, demographic and cultural factors (e.g. Laczko and Piguet 16, Campbell and Bedford 177). If migration "appears as one of any number of responses to a host of environmental and other livelihood stresses" (Morrissey, 92), why should "environmental migration" be addressed distinctively? In the guise of "inform[ing] policy responses" (Laczko and Piguet 3), *People on the Move in a Changing Climate* and the broader literature that it reflects also contribute to fame a topic – climate migration – on regional political agendas. Should researchers not also tell policymakers that they have important hesitations on the relevance of this topic; that it does not appear ethically appropriate to protect "climate migrants" (whomever this can be) rather than all migrants in a comparable situation of vulnerability or all individuals affected by climate change (including those unable to move); and that, given the indirect and complex relation between climate change and migration, "climate migrants" cannot even be distinguished from other migrants?

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