

BOOK REVIEW

UNFOLDING MYTH OF MIGRATIONS: RETHINKING THE MAIN NARRATIVES AND DISCOURSES

Judul Buku: How Migration Really Works : A Factful Guide to the Most Issue in Politics

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INTRODUCTION

“Migration in Europe will increase in 2024, thinktank says” is one of the headlines from a news piece published by The Guardian regarding the migration in Europe (UNHCR, n.a). The news explains the current situation in Europe, where the numbers of migrants increasing, trying to get in before Europe officially applies new regulations to tighten the border system. From this perspective, migration still becomes one of the issues in society, both from the destination and sending countries. On the one hand, migrants are concerned about how to get in before the regulation changes, which may be more difficult for them, but on the other hand, people in the destination countries are concerned about the increasing number of migrants in their area. Both concerns reflect on how migration and all the regulations around it show how migration may spark fears in society. Hein de Haas et al. (2020:3) explains that migration is not an isolated phenomenon because the movement includes the mobility of people, commodities and ideas that the social structures and policies around it should understand. The discussion of migration never ends, and somehow, other interests like politics, power, and agency have strong influences on the migration discourse in public. Constable (2020), using the concept of power geometry, explains the dynamic of state priority, the real situation of migrant workers in Hong Kong and Singapore, and the conflict between inequality and state regulations. Long before that, Hage (2003)

explained how migration related to the state security agenda when the notion of nationalism intensifies the idea of self and others between locals and migrants through the idea of fatherland and motherland. Although the two papers were published almost two decades apart, both of them raise discussion between migrants and state perspectives, which are often contradictory to each other, and how those different perspectives somehow spread misunderstandings and fears.

Answering the misunderstanding of migrations that proliferate in society, Hein de Haas (2023) published a book titled, “How Migration Really Works: A Factful Guide to the Most Divisive Issue in Politics”. This book is the result of Hein de Haas's years of research on migration studies that try to debunk the myth of migration and the truths beyond. One interesting fact about this book is the way De Haas argues in the introduction that he wants the reader to understand the facts and biases about migrations that the politicians and people with power hide.

“... my aim with this book is cut straight through to you, the general reader, and equip you with the knowledge that will enable you to more critically scrutinize claims made by politicians, pundits and experts, and see through the various forms of misinformation and propaganda that abound on this subject.”(Hein de Haas, 2023:5)



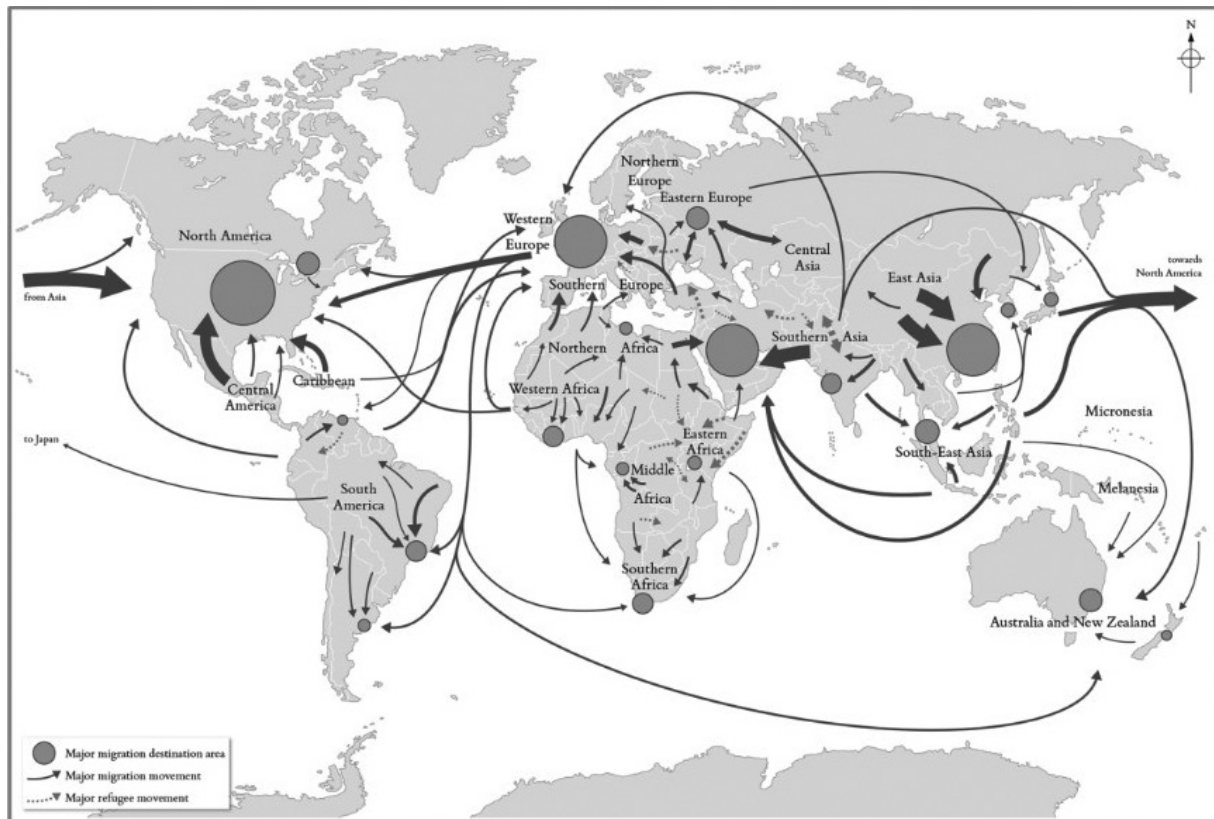
There is a total of twenty-two migration myths in this book. What makes this book more interesting is the way the author uses myth to not only re-name the chapter but also name the different assumptions of migrations. A famous anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, uses the word ‘myth’ as a way to evaluate stories or describe them as special or important stories and myths have intrinsic contexts that are critical to interpreting their meaning (Strenski, 1992:xii-xiii). Meanwhile, De Haas uses the word ‘myth’ to name the global migration issues he tries to unfold. If we use Malinowski’s definition of myth, it means that De Haas tries to evaluate the migration discourse and interpret the meaning of each myth through factual contexts. Furthermore, I found that Hein de Haas brilliantly chose the term ‘a factful guide’ as a way to highlight his intention to explain the right direction to see migration phenomena globally. Therefore, Hein de Haas deliberately uses the right terms to critically explain his thoughts and concerns so the readers will see the truth that lies beyond the misinformation and propaganda of migrations.

This book has 464 pages and is divided into four sections. First, the myth of migration explains the general narratives of migration globally. Have we ever heard the argument that “migration nowadays is at its peak or, now we are facing the era of refugee crisis”? If yes, then the first part of this book will answer these arguments. Second, immigration threats or solutions? This section discusses the immigration phenomenon, which usually seems like a menace to society. This part helps the reader to see migrations from different perspectives, which may make the readers think twice before judging such frightful news about

migrations. Third, migration propaganda unfolds the political perspectives that spread around the migration discourse. Moreover, the last is the road ahead, which explains the right perspective after the readers understand the real situation and what should be done next in the future in terms of migration. For de Haas, every narrative on migration issues should be critically and holistically seen in a full context.

Migration nowadays and post-colonialist perspective

News nowadays spreads the fear of migration issues, and we have to choose which story we want to trust. This book deliberately disclosed the facts that are sometimes missed from the discussion in public. An example is the case of migration in numbers in Myth 1, which investigates if migration in this modern time has reached the highest number compared to the periods ever. To answer these ‘rumours,’ Hein de Haas carefully explores how the direction of migration has changed. First, the changing pattern from colonialism to the current period. When in the past, the settler colonialists moved and resided in their colonies area, nowadays the pattern has changed from the former colonies to Western Europe and the rise of non-Western migration destinations like Singapore, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Second, short-distance movement changes the pattern of migration. While people assume that the number of migrants who migrate to far away countries increases yearly, the increasing number of migrations happens due to the short-distance movement of migrants, like from rural to urban cities.



Picture 1: Map of Major long-distance migrations, 1950-2020.

Source: *How Migration Really Works: A Factful Guide to the Most Divisive Issue in Politics*

Another example is in the myth 3, which dismantles the myth of the current refugee crisis. People in Europe and the USA believe that the remarkable number of refugees leads to a refugee crisis nowadays. This situation emerges in debates among people, especially in 2015 when UNHCR declared that year as the year of refugee crisis because of the refugee influx from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq coming to Europe (UNHCR, n.a). According to UNHCR, on December 7th there were more than 911,000 refugees had arrived in Europe offshore, and 3,550 lives had been lost during the process. This influx indeed had pushed the authorities to make a clear decision to manage the situation and to prevent future chaos. Border closure and concentrating asylum in some countries were some of the tended responses from the European authorities made upon the influx (Hatton, 2020). Criticising this situation, Hein de Haas entangled the complicated situation of the refugee crisis with one question, “Is it true that the refugee

number accelerating?” and explained the situation under seven eye-opening facts. However, for this review, I will discuss three main points that really caught my attention. First, the real refugee crisis is in the regions of origin. The argument that some refugees fleeing to other countries avoid the conflict in their origin areas is true, but how many of them can afford the expense of migrating to faraway countries? Only a few of them with enough capital can do it.

Consequently, many of them still live in conflict areas and become a displaced person in their own homeland; that is where the real crisis happens. Second, the inflating numbers do not cover all the stories about the refugee fluctuation. In this chapter, Hein de Haas explained that UNHCR, as a global institution that is concerned with the refugee situation, started to register the number of refugees in 1951, one year after their establishment. In 1951, UNHCR had a database of only 21 countries, which exactly did not represent the real refugee situation. After 1951,

the number of countries included in the UNHCR statistics database increased to 76 in 1970, 147 in 1990, and 216 in 2018. This fact shows that the number of refugees before 1951 may not be less than now because there was a lack of data and ability to cover the refugee number around the world.

Adding to this statistical problem, the problem of concept should be one of our concerns, too, when discussing the refugee influx. In myth 3, Hein de Haas deliberately explains that UNHCR added internally displaced persons (IDP) as one of the displaced categories, in which IDPs are forcefully moved to their own area but do not cross borders. Consequently, the number is going sharp, from 4.2 million displaced persons in 2003 to 41.4 million in 2018. Third, the refugee crisis is political. Refugee issues cannot be separated from political issues since they relate to borders and security, countries' regulation, and welfare issues. This argument from Hein de Haas reminded the author about the Rohingya refugees in Indonesia.

In late 2023, some people in Indonesia raised concerns about Rohingya refugee arrival in Aceh. Amidst the distressful condition of the refugees and how the locals helped them, some rumours spread about the refugee behaviours that upset the Indonesians (Prabawaningtyas et al., 2023). In fact, this situation raises some national issues, ranging from the option of relocating Rohingya refugees to another island because the arrival of refugees, to some extent, put the locals under certain pressures to strengthening coordination between local and national authorities. Some people thought that Indonesia, as a transit country, should provide appropriate shelters for Rohingya refugees. In contrast, others thought about border security and how the smugglers work and successfully 'help' the refugees to arrive in transit countries like Indonesia. However, the refugee crisis will remain unsolved without the right decision-making process, and it is related to the politician who has the agency in the government. Therefore, what Hein de Haas argues in his book, the Rohingya Case in Indonesia, eventually reflects how the refugee crisis, in reality, is political.

Discussing about migration, re-thinking about politics

Hein de Haas put the book title as a factful guide to the most divisive issue in politics for a solid reason: migration is always related to politics. Politics is related to power, agency, and discourse, and this book gives inherent explanations to recognise what really happens in migration discourse globally. In Myth 8, De Haas invited the readers to discuss the long-lasting debate of migrant workers who are often labelled as a threat to locals to find jobs. In addition, stereotypes follow this claim and create serious tension between locals and migrants. However, is it true that migrants 'steal' jobs from the locals? Firstly, De Haas argued that immigrants come to the destination country because there is a demand for workers. Migrants do not come and try their luck without labour demands. For example, Hong Kong and Singapore welcome migrant workers to support their economy with certain limitations to getting citizenship and permanent residence (Constable, 2020, p. 2). In fact, this situation reflects how the destination country contributes to letting the migrants in; meanwhile, through the regulation, they can create regulations and show their power to restrain migrants from staying longer than they should, as what Massey called power geometry (Massey, 1994, p. 149). Secondly, following the labour demands, destination countries have been applying strict regulations for migrants; however, as stakeholders with agencies, the government should be more focused on increasing their economic situation to keep stable wages for their citizens, and migrants are not the ones who should be blamed for low-wages condition. In addition, De Haas argued that politicians who have political choices that degrade the labour market, decrease labour security, and weaken trade unions are responsible for economic problems. This argument enlightens my point of view about the increasing number of foreign labourers from China in Indonesia. In 2023, there will be 59,320 Chinese labourers working in Indonesia (Madrim, 2023). Eventually, this condition worsens the negative sentiments of Chinese migrants. Amidst the difficult time for local people to find jobs, the government

permitted Chinese labourers to work in Indonesia. In this situation, I agree with De Haas's argument that the government actually has power on this condition, but they choose to follow their interest. Therefore, it is not about the Chinese migrants as a subject but more about the government that creates poor regulations.

Moving on to another issue, climate refugees currently emerge as a topic of concern for forced migration globally. The rise of sea levels, extreme weather conditions, and overcrowded dwellings are subjects related to the discussion of climate refugees. Why are climate refugees relevant to migration issues? According to UNHCR, by 2030, there will be an increasing number of forcibly displaced and stateless people fleeing from climate-fueled crises and/or living in climate-vulnerable countries to safer countries. Meanwhile, using similar logic, Indonesia's capital city moved from Jakarta to Nusantara in Kalimantan because Jakarta was 'sinking' (Irwandi, 2022). Climate change now becomes a new fear in people because it causes hospitable land to become unliveable and will lead to a mass migration event. However, how does it really work? To answer this, Hein de Haas, in Myth 22, explains how, historically, people showed huge resilience in coping with environmental threats. This evidence does not deny climate change, but to determine the ontological problem that seems to correlate with climate change will lead to mass migration.

Additionally, scientific evidence shows that some civilisations started from the river; a good land is where the water is, like in the Indus Valley civilisation. Water became a driving factor for people to reside in, and historically, people have learned to cope under certain circumstances. Hence, the statement that climate change leads to mass migration is not practically valid. Another argument from Hein de Haas that is considerably surprising is the evidence that the land is rising as the sea is rising. He quoted research from Ahmed et al. (2018:5) showed that there is a gain of 237 km² of land in the coastal area of Bangladesh. However, from these two arguments, there is no direct correlation between climate change and mass migration. Although climate

change is real, scientists and stakeholders have to comprehensively situate the impact of climate change and how the mitigation strategy should be done before concluding mass migrations and the spread of fears. All in all, as an implication, discussing migrations is discussing power too; it is discussing who has the power to spread the voice and to create regulations.

CONCLUSION

Migration is a worldwide phenomenon, and it raises various issues globally. However, what Hein de Haas tried to highlight in this book is that the people with power (like politicians and institutions) have an interest in creating their narrative to spread the news about migration; thus, the readers should see each narrative from a whole picture, and this book provides it. There are three different ways to explore this book. The first is for class discussion. The scenario that comes to my mind when I read this book is when the teacher or lecturer divides the class into groups and gives each group a different topic to present. Although each myth covers a different issue, Hein de Haas successfully tailored those three different parts in this book thoroughly so the readers can see the bigger picture that relates to each myth. For example, myth 1, titled 'migration is at an all-time high', myth 2 titled 'borders are beyond control', and Myth 3 'the world is facing a refugee crisis', those myths are related to big topics that may be a good trigger for a comprehensive discussion in class.

Furthermore, as Hein de Haas told the reader in the introduction section, the readers can read this book starting from the chapter (or myth) they are curious to understand, so the second way to explore this book is to see the content and pick your interest. Not all people love to read books, and some of them do not like to read the book continually from the first page to the end. However, since the readers can start from whichever part they love, this book is a perfect guide to critically view migration issues from different perspectives. Moreover, the readers can read this book conservatively from the first page to the end.

In conclusion, I want to express my appreciation to Hein de Haas for creating this amazing book because each myth in this book unfolds a holistic situation of migration discourse. Furthermore, this book serves readers on different topics to open in-depth discussions on migration issues. With an easy-to-read flow of writing, this

book neither forces the readers to trust one main argument of migration nor directly breaks the main issues on migration but gives the readers the whole context through data and solid analysis. Thus, I recommend this book to people who want to understand migration in a broader context. Happy reading!

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