

## Comments from Maya Goodfellow, City University London on 'Rethinking Migration'

Book Launch, Wills Memorial Building, March 2025

I'm so sorry that I can't be with all of you there tonight to discuss this wonderful book *Rethinking Migration* and hear from some of its contributors. I was very much looking forward to learning more after so greatly enjoying each of the chapters.

The subject at hand – how do we research migration without reinforcing the migrant as a problematic subject, and how do we do so in a way that moves beyond critique and intervenes to policy, practice and organising, questions that Bridget asks in her introduction – are ones that many of my colleagues and I have spent a long time thinking and talking about, though I recognise perhaps not for the length of time some of the people in this room and in this volume have been doing this important work.

Recently, at a workshop on migration, one of my colleagues made a point that I think relates directly to the contents of this book: so often when we seek to unsettle contemporary anti-migrant thinking, what we are trying to do is achieve a world in which people – that is politicians, policymakers and 'the public' – do not feel the need to talk about and focus on 'the migrant' at all. Where this becomes something of a redundant category.

I have thought about this a lot in the months since. And when I was reading this book, I realised I was being given a roadmap of exactly how I might begin to do this. By thinking about the ways human mobility is connected to other mobilities and how categories related to mobility are produced through naming and the law, we can begin to move beyond the figure of the 'migrant'. Not in a way that disregards the experiences of many people who move or normalises the discrimination they are subjected to but so that they are not defined by their migrantness.

Or put another way, as Bridget poetically explains, we should think of our globe as in motion "turning daily on its axis, annually around the star that is our sun. So too is the earth beneath our feet, where tectonic plates birth land. The sea is endlessly shifting, from tides and currents to the deep-sea ocean circulation that can take thousands of years to complete". It is not just people who move, the world does, as do goods and non-human animals. Human mobility in this context can take on a new meaning.

So too can it if we understand our histories properly. I was reading *Rethinking Migration* at the same time I was teaching an undergraduate course on political sociology. When it came to the week on borders, I realised that this book, with its insightful essays on the historical contingency of nationhood provided me and my students with all the tools we needed to challenge all the conventional ideas they had about the nation state. They were invigorated by the examples it provided.

Returning to some of the questions that seem to motivate this book, perhaps the most important is one of those that Bridget asks and which I mentioned previously: how do we move beyond critique and intervenes to policy, practice and organising. For creative, analytical work like this, it is refreshing to hear this being asked seriously. 'Impact' is often treated with suspicion by many critical academics,

it is perhaps easier to remain in the world of critique. But if how the world thinks about migration is as damaging as we know it to be, then we should be in business of trying to change that world – not by telling people they are wrong, but doing the kind of interdisciplinary work that this book does to *show* there is another way of thinking about movement and agitating for change. This is perhaps how we work on migration without continuously talking about migration.

Reading this book I was not surprised by all the necessary and exciting thinking it contains. Not because I knew it all, far from it. But because it so well encapsulates the kind of cutting-edge, practice-oriented work that Migration Mobilities Bristol does – it is truly interdisciplinary in a way that so many academics aspire to be.

One of the reasons I'm particularly disappointed not to be with you there tonight is that MMB is a first port of call for me and many of my collaborators when we are seeking out interdisciplinary, creative research that we can draw and take inspiration from. It is also a model of how to translate research into productive; unique institute that works with NGOs and others to affect change. As we develop our own projects and networks, it is to MMB we look and where we can also find points of vibrant collaboration.

In the often siloed terrain of contemporary academia, grassroots practice and also policymaking, it provides a space, and work – like this book, that is more vital than ever.