

Review Essay: Moving Beyond the Migration State

Faist, Thomas. 2022. *Exit: Warum Menschen Aufbrechen – Globale Migration im 21. Jahrhundert* [*Exit: Why People Leave – Global Migration in the 21st Century*]. Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 400 pp., 32 Euros.

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In his most recent book *EXIT*, Thomas Faist poses the question of why people chose to cross international borders when searching for a better life. Similar to his previous work, he grounds his inquiry within the so-called social question, an approach that deals with the fundamental differences in socioeconomic living conditions in countries of origin and destination. Instead of grounding the social question purely in labor, capital, and the antagonistic class positions, Faist takes an intersectional approach to see how states forge and instrumentalize inclusion/exclusion and (non-) recognition.

The decision to leave behind the country of birth is one of several other possible options to react toward inequality and injustice, both at an individual and a collective level. Yet, voting with their feet, as many migrants come to learn, does not automatically result in economic improvement for themselves or the society at large in the country of origin. A less contested fact is that receiving countries almost always benefit from immigration in the mid to long term.

Dealing with the social question, these days, has to be done from a transnational perspective. It is not enough to scrutinize individual nation-states and their migration policies. It is also not enough to retrace the rise and decline of the Western welfare states more generally when exploring the appeal of certain destinations over others; the (un)making of the development state in the global south has to be part of the deliberation. While Part 1 of the book is concentrating on how Faist approaches and situates the social question within the wider migration debates in the Global North, he then directs his attention to foregrounding the structural conditions in the Global South. In Part 2, the theoretical backbone of his analysis, Faist discusses four paradoxes, that is, development, welfare, state of law, and national paradox, and

how they have spurred mass exit from the Global South and impeded tolerance for mass receptions in the Global North.

One of the strengths of *EXIT* is that Faist props up his views on why people decide to leave behind their familiar ways of life with a lot of empirical evidence. This makes for a highly engaging reading. For example, we learn more about Romanian seasonal harvesters and Portuguese construction workers, but Faist also cites from many other parts of the world, be it Philippine care workers or Senegalese fishermen.

Another strength of *EXIT* is its historical–sociological embeddedness over the last 200 years during which unjust economic systems have triggered human migration. In that period, we saw massive transformations around the globe, industrialization, urbanization, imperialism, two world wars but also decolonization and all the processes usually merged under the label “globalisation.” Each of these had a profound imprint on migration. Embedding the discourse of contemporary migration in the global historical context makes the book particularly valuable for newcomers to Migration Studies. Faist succeeds in offering the large picture, which is an overview of the most profound theoretical debates without getting lost in theoretical detail. He explains why the modern world ended up with the policies and political constellations in place now.

Most important, in my view, is the third part of *EXIT*, where Faist pays attention to ecology, climate change, and environmental degradation when dealing with the transnational social question. Here Faist’s thoughts are particularly insightful. Against those who forecast millions and millions of climate refugees about to get on their way somewhere safe, most likely the more affluent countries in the moderate climate zones in the Global North that are facing their own climate change-induced transformations, Faist points out to the underlying monocausality of many such forecasts.

While it is true that for long many migration experts have ignored nonhuman factors and how they influence migration, it seems that in turn climate researchers have ignored the complexity in migratory decision-making that migration experts have been insisting upon for so long. Those who are particularly vulnerable to climate change (droughts, floods, and famines) most likely will not have the means to migrate far. Instead of “climate flight” as in international mass migration toward the global north, it is more likely to see internal migration (relocations) and other adjustments to mitigate the adverse climate change. The different capacities for adaptation will increase social inequality, potentially leading to more political instability, and therefore, human resilience—as the main mitigation strategy—should not be overestimated.

In a field such as Migration Studies that is ever more politicized, Faist is somebody who can really offer a solid understanding of what is at stake as he carefully weighs up different positions. His book offers a sober analysis amidst the many shrieking accounts that mean to stir up panic and demand short-term solutions, such as more border closures, particularly in times when migration and migrants

are more visible. Faist contradicts those who demand the partitioning of the Global North, with the sinking birth rates and rapid aging of their societies. Instead of supporting strategies for more selective migration, that is, the hunt for global talent or more temporary “win–win–win schemes,” Faist argues in favor of developing global standards for fair migration, which may even entail compensation to those countries that send us their youngest and brightest.