

Martin Van Der Velde, Ton Van Naerssen. *Mobility and Migration Choices: Thresholds to Crossing Borders*. London and New York: Routledge, 2015. 310 pp. Paperback: \$49.95. ISBN 97801138546967.

In the course of the past three decades, cross-border mobility has substantially increased. The book *Mobility and Migration and Choices: Thresholds to Crossing Borders* is a collection of articles edited by Martin Van Der Velde, the associate professor of Geography in Radboud University, and Ton Van Naerssen, senior research fellow in international migration and development in Radboud University. Their book examines the decision-making process of migrants addressing the fundamental question: why, how and where do people cross borders? Most of the traditional frameworks that tried to explain why people move have been based on rational decision models. The difference between the foreign and domestic labor market, inequalities in welfare and political conflicts in origin countries serve as the driving forces in these models. However, as the editors pointed out, these frameworks failed to explain why most people don't even consider leaving their country of origin, even under great duress. Velde and Naerssen offers a new way of thinking of the cross-border mobility, under the assumption that borders are not merely cut-off lines of economic difference, but represent instead a dynamic process of negotiation.

Before borders are traversed, three crucial thresholds need to be crossed: first, the mental threshold, relating to the migrant's mindset about migrating. The would-be migrants considering keep or repel factors such as economics, social, cultural similarities and differences specific to either side of the border. The would-be migrants are prone to move across the border if there are strong networks or transnational communities on the other side that reduce the mental distance. Once the decision is made, the question arises: where should s/he go? This decision is influenced primarily by the presence of available networks, the migrant's language skills, religious factors, and other social concerns. The editors refer this variable as the locational threshold. After choosing the destination, the migrant has to establish how to get there. This final part of the decision-making process is defined as the trajectory threshold. An individual will make the decision of why, how and where to migrate only after the crossing these three thresholds.

Within this logic of a triple decision-making process, the editors arranged 16 case studies from around the world by applying the threshold approach. Many of the findings are counter-intuitive. For example, in the case study of academic mobility of Chinese scholar by Maggi W.H. Leung and the case of African Passages through Istanbul by Joris Schapendonk, researchers have found that the decision to move is a continuous process, rather than a "once and for all" decision to cross a threshold as usually described in the literature. The routes of migrating in these cases are always in the making, and there is often no definite destination to speak of. This book review selects five cases studies as representatives to further examine the threshold approach.

In most of the cases, economics incentives serve as the driving force in one's decision to move. In the Thai-Cambodian Border case, the border situation between Cambodia and Thailand has undergone tremendous change in the last four decades. During the 1970s, Thailand closed and militarized its borders with Cambodia to prevent communist insurgencies spilling over into its territory. In the late 1980s, the major shift in border relations occurred because of market liberalization. However, the growth of border industries remains attractive given the geographical advantages and easy access to abundant and cheap labor force, lower service link costs and more reliable and cheaper utility services. These factors constantly lowering the mental threshold to migration. In this case, despite of the dynamic change in border area, economics incentives drives people to constantly cross the border.

The second case study examines the mobility around the German - Polish Borderlands. After the World War II, the Polish territory borderline was moved westwards under the pressure from Soviet Union. In the meantime, many Germans were expelled by the government because of the ideologically-driven conflicts and settled in the borderline. For that reason, although living in close proximity to each other, people living the German-Polish borderline remained unfamiliar with the other side of the state border. Furthermore, the constant closing of the state border between Poland and Germany also reduced familiarity with people and places across the border. However, contrary to people's thoughts, travel restrictions and controlled border policies did not stop people from getting to know each other. Border restrictions instead generated curiosity and opportunities which people seized upon, in order to familiarize themselves with what lies on the other side of the state border. Bazaars were organized in order to bring new opportunities for petty trade and shopping practices on the borderline, which contributed to circular nobilities and cross-border encounters in different times, directions and places. Even though the initial novelty a curiosity fades, a certain degree of unfamiliarity with regard to otherness across state borders has remained, which even now enhances the attractiveness of cross-border trade and shopping in the German-Polish borderland. Nowadays, cross-cultural trade and shopping practices have become a continuous part of everyday life in the German-Polish borderline. In this case, border mobility between Germany and Poland occurred for a large part because the state border did not develop freely. Borders here are regarded as continuously evolving social constructs that go beyond state borders. These mental borders contribute to significant levels of perceived otherness, encouraging or discouraging cross-border mobility. As mental borders are not restricted to state borders, people find opportunities in places where cultural, social and economic difference meet regardless of the opening and closing of the state border.

After illustrating the mental borders are different than the state border, Case study of Somali Migration to South Africa illustrates that the process of crossing mental border is a highly subjective process. Traditionally, scholars have attributed contemporary Somali migration only to collapse of the central government in 1990 and the ensuing civil war. However, in the two narratives stories provided, Egypt seems like a more logical choice to migrate objectively because of its non-encampment policy, closer geography to South Africa and stronger linguistic and religious ties with South Africa. Nevertheless, South Africa instead was perceived as a better country to migrate to because of the incomplete information they heard from relatives in both narratives. To them, migration was conceived as an option to overcome personal difficulties or to meet personal goals rather than as a response to general environmental conditions. Even within particular and dominant political and economic factors, it is the realities of one's own world and the strength of one's perceptions and dreams that condition decision-making in the migration process. For the Somali migrants in this case study, personal, subjective realities provided the real driving force in considering migration.

Rise of a culture of mobility in the Chinese academia further illustrates that the decision-making process in migration is rooted in subjective realities that derive from the information and resources at hand rather than as an objective exercise taken by a rational individual who relies on formal, complete knowledge. It introduces the concept of institutions in nurturing the migration culture, lowering the indifference threshold in academic mobility. The current academic mobility wave was initiated by Deng Xiaoping, the Chief Architect of the Open-Door policy that commenced in 1978. Since then, scholars and students studying and working oversea have been expanded to a wider population. However, besides the policy factor, academic mobility is heavily influenced by the institutional opportunities such as the existence of exchange programmed, academic networks and sponsorship. In many interviews, participants explained their decision to

move and location decisions with institution-related reasons: “my department in China has a long-standing relationship with this department”; “my senior colleagues suggested me to come here” (89). Similar to the case study of Somali Migration to South Africa, a decision to migration is deeply rooted in subjective realities that derive from the ability to mobilize information and resources at hand. Therefore, it is common to see the impact of coincidence in choosing a certain location. Hearsay and social networks play a crucial role in shaping the destination to migrate. In this case, rather than considering academic mobility solely as a dependent outcome of structural factors, the approach underlines the intersections between agency of individuals and regulating structures and institutions, as well as the coincidence.

Even if sometimes migration seems like a rational choice given the incentives provided by law and economics, there are other factors in the mental threshold that might hinder one’s desire to across. Finnish – Russian border is one of the oldest extant state borders in Europe. During the World War II, the previously Finnish region of Karelia was divided into two regions. A part of the former Finnish Karelia was annexed by the Soviet Union. The entire Finnish population moved to Finland. The ceded territory was turned into a closed border zone. Migrant from different parts of Soviet Union settled in this region. Nowadays, on the Finnish side, North Karelia is often portrayed as an economically deprived peripheral area in Finland. The Republic of Karelia, on the other hand, plays a key role in the north-western region cross border contact with EU. In this case of two Karelias, the historical image of the “enemy” has made it difficult to transform relations into a “neighborly” one with common interest even after opening of the border. The Finnish still carry pre-WWII nostalgic images and childhood memories of the ceded territory. Despite the subsequent economic improvement in this border region, these early images have persisted. Therefore, while the border is now open, the possibilities to cross it have not really grown. In this case, despite the opening of the borderline, the border still represents a gateway to keep the “other” out.

This book review selected five cases studies as representatives of Velde and Naerssen’s new way of thinking of the cross-border mobility. The threshold approach incorporates factors that have been remained outside of the research focus such as formal and informal institutions contributing to a steady flow of migrant, strength of one’s perceptions and dreams that condition decision-making, impact of coincidence in choosing a certain location, the emotional impact, psychological dimension of migration and cultural remoteness that keep “other” out despite the shared economic interest etc.

Since the decision-making process of migrants is not only complicated but also dynamic that far more than simple balancing test between benefits and costs, it raises an interesting issue as to the effectiveness of the migration policies. This book did not explicitly examine the effectiveness nevertheless the studies all hinge on this issue. Migration policies are designed to shape and direct would-be migrants’ and migrants’ behaviors on the assumption that they are rational players making rational choices. However, as we can see from the previous studies, it is simply not the case in reality. Migrants always facing incomplete information, making subjective decision based on one’s perceptions. They sometimes even chose to act “irrationally” by ignoring the economic interest. With the inaccurate assumption of the migration policies, the question as to effectiveness of those migration policies arise. Scholars in different studies have reached different conclusion.

On the one hand, the migration policies have been heavily criticized because immigration to North American, European, and other wealthy countries has risen substantially over the past decades despite the efforts by migration policies to curtail it. It seems to corroborate the idea that migration policies have been ineffective. However, on the other hand, some studies of historical and contemporary migration have pointed to the major role of states in shaping migration patterns

(Skeldon 1997; Strikwerda 1999). It is supported by a growing number of quantitative empirical studies which indicate that immigration restrictions do significantly affect the magnitude and composition of immigration flows. (Beine, Docquier, and Özden 2011; Hatton 2005; Mayda 2010; Ortega and Peri 2013).

In order to examine the effectiveness of migration policies, first thing to do is to define migration policies. Many policies not within the scope of migration policy nevertheless influence migration, such as policies on labor market, economic, welfare, foreign, military etc. In the case of Chinese academic mobility, the Open-Door policy heavily influenced the current academic mobility wave, yet it was designed to open up China to foreign business that wanted to invest in the country as an economic policy. Similarly, the policy shifts toward market liberalization in the Thai-Cambodian border case achieves a similar effect. It is hard to draw a line between migration policies and those are not. In the book review, I will use the broad concept of the migration policies to better capture their effectiveness on mobility.

In both the German – Polish borderline and the Finnish – Russian border, migration policies, at one time, were restrictive. However, it achieved dramatically different results in two cases. The mobility around the German- Polish borderline increased while the mobility around the Finnish – Russian borderline is still the same as before even after the migration policies loosen up. In the German – Polish case, border restrictions generated curiosity and opportunities which people seized to experience and get to know the unfamiliar or previously known other side of the state border. However, in the Finnish – Russian case, the historical image of the “enemy” has made it difficult to motivate both sides to interact each other regardless of the existence of restrictive border policies or not. Velde and Naerssen’s threshold approach offers an explanation as to the difference effectiveness in these two cases. While both migration policies are restrictive, intended to defer would-be migrants, the travel restrictions and controlled border policies enhance the attractiveness of cross-border trade and shopping practices around the German – Polish borderline. At first, price and availability of goods were the main factors driving the cross-border shopping. Nowadays, the experience of taking a break from the everyone seems to matter more. People are attracted by the possibility to enter a space of difference where they can experience difference in surroundings. Feelings of unfamiliarity thus contribute to overcoming the mental border threshold. While in the other case, the mental border threshold remains high given the ancient history between Finnish and Russian. Mental threshold approach, therefore, offers us an explanation as to the difference effectiveness of migration policies in both cases.

Threshold approach, however, cannot offer explanation to effectiveness of migration policies in all the cases especially in cases that involve too much subjective values as driving force in considering migration. One reason is that it is hard to quantify different subjective values and which subjective values should be weight more heavily in this evaluation. Nevertheless, threshold approach offers us a new way of thinking why, how and where do migrants’ cross borders. Consequently, it gives us a new way to evaluate the effectiveness of the migration polices.

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