

Review

Peter Tinti and Tuesday Reitano (2016) *Migrant, Refugee, Smuggler, Saviour*. London: C Hurst

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While episodic mass migration is not a new phenomenon, the number of people seeking safety or economic opportunities in Europe has reached unprecedented levels in recent years. In what has been labelled ‘the worst refugee crisis since the second world war’ (Economist 2016), 1.3 million people sought asylum in the European Union in 2015 alone. ‘Distinguishing migrants from asylum seekers and refugees is not always a clear-cut process, yet it is a crucial designation because these groups are entitled to different levels of assistance and protection under international law’ (Park 2015:1). This large-scale influx of people has overwhelmed the capacity of states, the European Union and international agencies to deal effectively with mass migration from a rights-based perspective. Park (2015) suggests that this has created a grey area which is compounded by the inconsistent methods used by member states to assess asylum applications. States and law enforcement agencies have instead been preoccupied with how this development has affected the criminal landscape of Europe (Europol 2016), resulting in the ‘criminalisation of migration’ (Tinti and Reitano 2016). Indeed, the distinction between (irregular) migrant and refugee has become increasingly blurred as more and more desperate people seek out the services of smugglers in a country of temporary refuge to facilitate their journey to third states of their choice. According to Europol (2016), more than 90 per cent of irregular migrants made use of facilitation services provided by smuggling networks across Africa, the Middle East and Europe. This has created tensions within and amongst European states as how to conceptualise and manage this ‘migrant crisis’ as international migration and human mobility continue to increase in scope and complexity. The popular dichotomies, and international legal

frameworks, which currently exist regarding migrants, refugees and smugglers are challenged by Peter Tinti and Tuesday Reitano in their rich and detailed analysis of the migration crisis in *Migrant, Refugee, Smuggler, Saviour*. They also call into question how states should respond to mass mixed migration in an era of complex interdependence and uncertainty.

The collaboration between Peter Tinti, an independent journalist and Senior Research Fellow at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, and Tuesday Reitano, an academic specialising in the field of organised crime networks and deputy director of the Global Initiative, has produced an insightful examination of the complexities of migrant-smuggling networks and informal political economies within the context of the European migrant crisis. Extensive empirical research interwoven with rich narrative accounts of those at the heart of the smuggling industry, as well as migrants and refugees lived experiences, makes it a compelling and thought-provoking read. The book is intended for a wide audience and seeks to change the way in which we think about migrant-smuggling networks, and to recognise that ‘there is a new global paradigm when it comes to migration ... [where] existing strategies of border control do more harm than good’ (262-3). Counter-productive responses have resulted in higher barriers to migration, entrenching the role played by organised crime in facilitating such illicit journeys. Tinti and Reitano note that shifting power dynamics cause the smuggling industry to become simultaneously more profitable, exploitative and abusive. The authors thus suggest that European policy has inadvertently contributed to creating the very criminogenic environment it seeks to suppress.

The book comprises nine chapters and is divided into two parts. The first part of the book delves into the role of smugglers as ‘service providers in an era of unprecedented demand’ (6). Here the authors explore the recent increased demand for the services of migrant smugglers; the nature of the migrant-smuggler relationship; the structure of this illicit industry; and how migrant-smuggling networks operate. It provides the conceptual framework for the second part of the book which examines the key migrant-smuggling hubs through first-person observation and interviews with individuals intimately linked to a complex and highly adaptive smuggling industry. It is this analysis which sets it apart from other research into the migrant crisis in Europe which is typically based on traditional frameworks, such as war, conflict, underdevelopment, and

push and pull factors. The authors contend that such explanations only paint a partial picture of reality. Instead they maintain that we are confronted with a paradigm shift where long-standing political arrangements, economies and security structures are being transformed and challenged 'in ways that could potentially have a profound impact on global order' (6). This is a re-occurring theme throughout the book. They argue that we have entered an era where transnational lifestyles should be regarded as the new norm. The constant move of labour and capital also suggests that migration is a fluid phenomenon benefiting both countries of origin (in the form of remittances) and host countries.

One of the key strengths of the book is its nuanced analysis of the complexity and evolving intricacies of a burgeoning demand-driven criminal enterprise. Tinti and Reitano refreshingly focus on these networks and the smugglers, traffickers and other actors (networks of criminals) which comprise them, rather than solely the plight of refugees and economic migrants. They posit that 'the actualisation of the crisis is enabled and actively encouraged by an increasingly professional set of criminal groups and opportunistic individuals that is generating billions in profit' (4). The book convincingly examines the structure and nature of various smuggling networks which are both hyperlocal and global. Diverse smuggling networks and migration hubs 'are shaped by interlocking sets of local conditions, which are often very specific to the socio-political or economic realities of the people living and working in that environment' (263). Their case studies of major hubs in Libya, Egypt, Niger, the Sahel, Turkey and Europe bear testimony to this. Migrant smugglers are as diverse as the smuggling industry itself. Tinti and Reitano powerfully argue that while some smugglers are regarded by their clients as saviours facilitating their journey where no legal alternatives exist, smugglers and traffickers on the other end of the spectrum treat 'the lives of those they smuggle as disposable commodities in a broader quest to maximise profits' (5). It is this far end of the spectrum that we most commonly associate smugglers with, where men, women and children are subjected to brutal physical and sexual violence. Some even pay with their lives. 'Ibrahim tells me that once they reach Libya, the lines between human smuggling and trafficking can blur . . . Many will be abused and robbed. Some, especially those who do not have enough money for the next leg of their journey, will find themselves coerced into indefinite, unpaid labour, which for some women can mean forced prostitution and sexual slavery' (169). A Serbian NGO

reported that every adult woman that they had assisted, and many girls, had been raped and their abuse filmed in order to provide another revenue stream by uploading these images onto the internet or extorting families (261).

As Tinti and Reitano note (264) ‘a purely criminal justice response to human smuggling only serves to strengthen the very industry it is trying to undermine, enhancing the criminality of networks and increasing vulnerability of its victims’. There is a sense of impunity in the smuggling industry where only low level recruiters and transporters tend to be prosecuted. Corruption is a central component of illicit economies and poses a significant challenge to addressing transnational crime (266-7). Responses by European states have become increasingly militarised with little measurable impact in deterring migrants crossing the Mediterranean. Tinti and Reitano thus call upon states to reconceptualise migration. ‘The goal, therefore, should not be to limit migration, but to untangle the aspirations of people who wish to migrate from the worst elements of the smuggling industry, which facilitates and encourages their movement illegally, and often puts migrants at risk’ (273). They suggest that states analyse the unique political economies of each major smuggling hub and route in order to develop policies and interventions which are premised on an understanding of ‘the motivations of those moving through the route, those engaged in the trade, those who protect it, and those who are profiting’ (273). Economic migration, in particular, will continue to grow. ‘The migrant crisis has only reinforced the fact that humans today live in a complex web of interdependencies, where long histories of interaction between people and nations have interwoven to bring us to our current state of global affairs’ (279). Tinti and Reitano conclude by suggesting that states adopt proactive and pragmatic multilateral strategies to manage migration in such a way that both migrants and host states benefit.

Although Tinti and Reitano consider the challenges faced by Europe in managing the migrant crisis from a primarily criminal justice perspective, they do not reflect on the problems associated with absorbing migrants ‘not only due to cultural or religious differences but also (unlike the US, Canada, Australia) to the lack of history of being a land of immigration’ (Milanovic 2015:12). Integration remains a challenge where migrants from outside Europe are ‘left to fend for themselves, living on public or private charity, and small, often illegal, trade’ (2015: 12). Migrants thus

take on an uneasy duality – victim and criminal. It has been well documented that some migrants fall victim to crime during their journey to Europe; whilst others commit crimes (such as petty theft, benefit fraud, various sexual offences and even murder) in their host countries. Just as not all smugglers are altruistic, neither are all migrants. This has led to a sense of insecurity and fear amongst some of the citizenry – accentuating migrants’ ‘otherness’. This may, in part, also help explain the increase in xenophobia and populist right-wing parties. We tend to forget that the European Union comprises 28 member states with disparate political identities, cultures and economies. Southern Europe, for instance, is typified by sluggish economic growth and relatively high levels of unemployment. The current reality makes ‘availability of real, however modest, jobs for migrants, low’ in the region (Milanovic 2015: 13). However, these points reinforce Tinti and Reitano’s recommendation that European migration policies and strategies need to be holistic and pragmatic, and the entire process better managed. Increased cooperation and coordination amongst European states and with countries of origin is vital in this regard. Migrants will continue to make perilous journeys into the unknown as long as the conditions in their home countries remain unstable, inequitable and opportunities for a young population scarce. Tinti and Reitano’s book is a must-read for those interested in the intersection of transnational organised crime and migration.

References

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