

## BOOK REVIEW

Paul Collier, *Exodus. How Migration is Changing Our World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

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The debate concerning the migration phenomena has shown a great development during the last two decades. Geographers, sociologists, economists, historians, demographers and all the other social scientists have developed a lot of empirical research and a lot of theories. However this very rich literature has produced a large number of contradictions among scholars both in a theoretical perspective and in the interpretations of empirical data. This condition is consequent to a lack of discussion among disciplines and scholars. In other words, we can say that some concepts can be considered as dogma for some scholars or within some disciplines, while they are totally confuted by others. The aim of Paul Collier's book is to examine these concepts using a strictly analytical perspective to discuss their reliability.

On the other hand, the author is not a migration specialist. His contribution to the scientific debate is mainly focused on the analysis of processes of economic development in developing countries of Africa and on the explanation of the relation between the economic conditions and the internal civil conflicts of these countries. This condition of novice allows him to offer a very personal point of view on migration, adopting the methodological equipment not only of Political Economy (his discipline), but also of Demography and Human Geography in a perspective of integration.

The first polemic target of this argumentation is the tendency to be ideological typical of the main part of scholars in the migration field. Collier criticizes the improper use of data to support ideological perspectives on the phenomenon. He argues that the political conflict in migration policies has become a clash among ideological values also in the scientific debate. In the first part of his volume, Collier also discusses several macroeconomic data about different migration fluxes all around the world. His main hypothesis on the possible future of the migration phenomena suggests that the rate of migration fluxes from underdeveloped countries to developed ones tends to increase during the first part of the new millennium.

The second part of the book is devoted to analyse the social and economic consequences of migration for destination countries. The discussion seems to be focused on the identification of structural mechanisms causing the segregation of migrants in the destination societies both in terms of strategies of the migrants as communities and in terms of economic and political exclusion processes (intentionally or not) built up by natives. On the other hand, he discusses with laudable lucidity and simplicity (very appreciable qualities, to make the book accessible to non specialists and students) possible economic tendencies due to migration fluxes in destination countries labour markets. He also underlines with rich exemplifications the substantial inadequacy of a political perspective focused on integration. He sheds light on the social and economic consequences caused by the “policies of emergency” frequently adopted by governments to late solve critical situations. Collier demonstrates the inconsistency of these emergency policies and their possible dangerous implications in terms of long period tendencies.

The third part of the volume is due to a very politically incorrect discussion of possible motivations of the migration decision by people from underdeveloped countries, of hypothetical advantages in destination countries labour markets, and of disadvantages for this people because of the arrival of other migrants after them. Again the perspective offered by Collier is a strictly analytical one, very rich in exemplifications on the basis of macroeconomic data of different geographical areas.

The fourth part of this book is centred on the consequences of migration on origin countries, again both in an economic and a social sense. The main argument is that migration can be both an advantage and a disadvantage for these countries. On the one hand, the increase of migration (both in the case of skilled migration and in the case of labour one) obviously produces a diminution of human capital in the origin countries implying a diminution of productivity. On the other hand, migrants can represent points of contact between the origin countries and the more developed ones and can offer opportunities of transnational cooperation for universities, enterprises and other organizations. Besides, migrants can also support the local development of their origin countries with the remittances to their families, thus encouraging the growth of new markets and new economic activities. Moreover back fluxes of migration can return human capital (with better knowledge to offer) and more generally human resources for the economic, social and political arenas of origin countries. Finally the path to success in the migration adventure induces imitation processes within the rest of people in origin countries. On the basis of these imitation processes, there is an increase in the individual and familial investment in education and in building other conditions that influence successful migration. This tendency to major investments in human capital built by individuals and families produce a growth of general productivity also in the part of population that remains in the origin countries and implies a general advantage for the whole origin society itself. However Collier makes clear that these possible circumstances in origin countries due to migration processes gain good consequences in terms of actual development but not in every case. The mechanism requires severe conditions to activate these processes of development. The most important one is the availability of a positive demographic rate offering the minimum mass of human resources within the origin countries to make the beginning of development paths

possible. This is a very controversial argumentation, but once again Collier discusses specific cases on the basis of macroeconomic data.

The last part of the book analyses the opportunity to rethink the idea itself of migration policy. Collier exhibits his disapproval for the common emergency policies adopted in the last decades and holds up the necessity to organize specific packages of anti-cyclic policies to govern both economic and social tendencies. Following Collier argumentation, it should be possible to limit the increasing of migration fluxes within well balanced and rational parameters. But these parameters should not be biased by the sentiment of public opinion in occidental countries, which are actually compromised by irrational social sentiments fed up by an ideological interpretation of data. These social sentiments make difficult for each government to adopt proper measures to manage migration fluxes in the best way. On the other hand, also in the case of the adoption of adequate policies, we would expect new world *aequilibria* influenced by the natural growth of international migration as an answer to globalized inequalities among countries.

In particular, Collier stresses argumentations on the possible effects of the expected increase of the rate of multiculturalism in occidental countries facing a possible growth of monoculturalism in the rest of the world. If on the one hand multiculturalism can be read as a desirable effect of international migration in term of the increasing of the pluralism of world elites, on the other hand, its actual positive effects on economy and on social *aequilibria* of destination countries is questionable. Moreover the persistence of a nucleus of not-multicultural countries what kind of effect can present for future international assessment?

As said before, the book is clear and the author's attempt to offer a great review of the most common issues in the migration studies debate is appreciable. Moreover the critical tension against the ideological interpretation of data represents a very important value of this volume. Sometimes the extensive use of macroeconomic data and the lack of other methodological approaches currently used in migration studies jeopardise the reliability of the entire argumentation. In particular the forecasting of the increase of migration fluxes and of the social consequences both in origin and destination countries should be discussed also with the help of the empirical evidences provided by lots of qualitative studies. Anyway it is incontrovertible that, thanks to the simplicity and the clarity of both argumentation and language, this book can be considered as a very important contribution to put some contradictions in the political and public debate on migration phenomena in order. Besides, it is a very interesting contribution to the scientific debate and it probably can help to make the opportunity of a real multidisciplinary debate about a set of common and well specified issues on future possible assets of migration fluxes more evident.

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Paul Collier's book has been a publishing success, receiving favourable reviews in newspapers of various political colours, achieving large sales for an academic book, and being translated into several languages. In years in which immigration has moved even further up the political agenda, the prime reason for the book's success is probably that it disputes – from a liberal perspective - what Collier sees as the prevalent orthodoxy among academics – that immigration is essentially a good thing, and that public opposition to migration therefore springs mainly from irrational racist fears. It therefore has the attraction of breaking what Collier calls the liberal “taboo” of advocating migration controls and tackling the possibility that migration may have negative effects. But it also provides stimulation on other issues.

Collier presents himself as giving an objective overview of research findings, drawing conclusions un-blinkered by political correctness. The impression of authoritativeness which the book has given many reviewers is only partly justified (also because Collier is not a specialist on migration: he is best known for his work on the political and social factors hindering and fostering economic development in Africa). Collier gives good summaries of some lines of research (e.g. on the effects of migration on the wages of local workers), but completely ignores others (even within the economics of migration, let alone the work in other disciplines) which do not fit his arguments. For example, leaning on an article by Robert Putnam, Collier asserts - as though it was an established research finding - that societies with large numbers of immigrants or ethnic minorities are less solidary and cohesive. In reality, the studies which have explored this question (or even re-analysed Putnam's data) have produced differing results: many researchers have found no effect when controlling for other factors. It is unfortunate that Collier does not discuss this literature because it is central to his thesis about the social consequences of immigration.

Basing himself on Putnam's results, Collier believes that levels of trust (as measured by responses to questions such as ‘Would you say most people can be trusted?’) fall when the numbers of immigrants and their descendants are high in a local population. Collier then extends these findings (a bit too incautiously) to willingness to cooperate, willingness to pay taxes and support the welfare state, and ability to enforce informal sanctions against people behaving badly. Collier thus fears that “excessive” migration, and the existence of large “diasporas” closed in on themselves, may weaken the general social fabric and basic premises of democracy.

It certainly is a problem if large-scale migration does reduce identification with a local or national community: the welfare state does in fact probably rest (at least in part) on an idea of “we” and an acceptance of the legitimacy of claims for assistance and a minimum standard of living and of health for all members of the local or national community.

However, the effect of migration on this issues may be less simple than Collier imagines. Collier takes it for granted that if levels of declared trust are lower in a neighbourhood where there are many immigrants, this is *because of* ethnic diversity. But an obvious objection (advanced by many scholars) is that it may be due to living in an

area where residents feel de-classed, where there is crime, or where immigrants are seen as “the poor”. In this sense, it may not be so much “diversity” which is at issue but rather the social inequalities which are often associated with migration.

The assumption that it is cultural diversity which is the problem runs right through Collier’s book. Collier assumes that migrants bring with them a “national culture” which remains largely unchanged, persisting even into the second generation. However, as innumerable anthropologists have argued, this is unrealistic. The ideas, values, sense of identity of migrants – like those of other people – depend in large part on their life situation, on the exchanges they have with other people. So once again, to take up a phrase of Alejandro Portes, it may not be “diversity” but “unequal diversity” which is the problem.

Collier fears that (say) Nigerian migrants who identify very weakly with their own nation, and have grown up in a nation with a “dysfunctional social model” will be unwilling to (say) pay taxes or display other forms of social solidarity with their new national community, and will tend to act opportunistically. The history of migration contains many examples of similar fears: in the nineteenth century many Americans feared that Catholics were culturally unsuited to be citizens of a democracy. But predictions of this kind proved unfounded because “culture” changes.

Collier is also over-simple in his projections about the “acceleration” of immigration, which he sees as inevitable unless border controls are reinforced. Collier is certainly right that the absolute gap between average wages in many African (and some Asian) countries and countries in the West will continue to increase for some years to come. But research finds little correlation between the salary gap between countries and the volume of migration. As Michael Piore noted many years ago, the number of people who could potentially benefit economically from migration has always been virtually infinite. The real volume of migration depends more on the number of people who manage to find jobs than on the number of people who could potentially benefit. In this sense projections about population and about wage gaps don’t tell us much about future migration flows. Migration has increased in Europe and the USA in recent decades because the sources of mass internal migrants (from the south of Italy and Spain, but also from the South of the United States) have dried up, and low fertility and the increase in level of education of the local population have meant that there are jobs left unfilled by local young people.

As an outsider to migration studies, Collier has the advantage of raising broad questions which have been insufficiently explored. In fact, there are major gaps in our knowledge of what mass migration does to social relations generally and the social structure - of either immigration societies or indeed of emigration societies. It is often said that migration “transforms” society, but what this means exactly is not clear: the fact of having more kebab shops or seeing more women with head-scarfs in the street does not seem to justify use of a word like “transform”, nor does counting the percentage of persons of immigrant origin amount to a transformation. However, in order to make progress in this area, we need a more realistic framework than that used by Collier, who simply assumes ethnic diversity, and “culture” on the basis of national origin.

