Foreword

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This is certainly an auspicious and authoritative book about migration and timespaces which addresses a patent pressing need to deepen understandings of the shifting and enduring relationships between migration, time(s) and space(s). Although there is some distinct pre-existing scholarship that exposes the varied effects of time and space on migration flows, behaviours and experiences, time is generally a topic that has been under-researched, until recently, within the wider field of migration studies. What has been particularly lacking, to date, is a compelling and coherent collection of discussions that are united by a dedicated focus on migration and timespaces from different ontological and epistemological perspectives, and which are also focussed on diverse forms and dynamics of migration. This book – and the diverse collection of insightful chapters on a range of forms of sub-national, international and transnational movements – will therefore provide an essential text for migration and broader social science scholars. The book should be warmly welcomed for providing a strong direction of travel to more fully incorporate theorizations and conceptualizations of time and temporalities into geographical analyses of migration.

It is surprising that migration scholars have tended to treat time(spaces) as a taken-for-granted (re)constituent of migration – given that time and temporalities are inherently pivotal to causes, planning, decision-making, execution of movements, and everyday experiences and perceptions of migration and migrants. These dimensions are epitomized in Halfacree and Boyle’s (1993) oft-cited ‘biographical approach’ to migration studies, and the need for a critical approach to reading interconnected threads of time(spaces) in (non)linear and (non)compartmentalized ways within migration processes – one of the central themes of this book.

Yet, until recently, an explicit focus on timespaces and migration has been generally absent from the wider scholarship, and/or quickly passed
over in relatively fleeting ways by scholars – despite direct acknowledgments of the importance of time within migration processes and outcomes. A recent exemplar here is Wright and Ellis’s (2016: 13) impressive commentary of perspectives on migration theory. Noting the ‘pioneering’ work of Hägerstrand on time-geography, and that geographers ‘recognise that migration is a time-space process’, time-migration is simply devoted one paragraph in their discussion. By contrast, Russell King’s retrospect and prospect for migration theory includes a fuller discussion of time and migration. Indeed, King’s starting point in ‘Geography and migration studies: retrospect and prospect’ (2012: 134) is that: ‘migration is clearly a space–time phenomenon, defined by thresholds of distance and time; this makes it intrinsically geographical.’ Time (and space) is thus one of the key features of King’s typology of migration, and a sub-section in the commentary is devoted to the impact of Hägerstrand’s work on migration theory. Likewise, Fielding’s (2012) typology of internal migration hinges on differential times/durations and movements of population, from commuting to long-distance residential relocation. Nonetheless, it can be argued that these latter works are the exceptions to the norm, with a relative dearth and paucity of studies of migration and time. This book does an excellent job of exemplifying that it is now the right ‘time’ to take ‘time’ more seriously via ‘time-informed studies of migration’.

It is encouraging that this book illustrates the many benefits of weaving and integrating a fuller focus on timespaces into migration studies. Important here is the landmark work of Griffiths et al. (2013), whose wider works have been important for paving the way for a fuller critical perceptive and treatment of time in migration studies, such as Lulle and King (2016). This book clearly takes up this mantle, and drives forward the ongoing agendas through the diverse and broad ways that timespaces and migration are conceptualized, theorized and explored in different spatial, societal and historical contexts.

In this Foreword, I want to briefly highlight three particular contributions of the book that are likely to have long-lasting impacts on migration studies. First, the collection of chapters is important for forging a more nuanced ‘lexicon of time’ within an extending branch of migration studies. Throughout the chapters, the authors utilize different terminologies, and, in so doing, illuminate the varied conceptual meanings and differences between terms such as timespaces, placetime, lifetime, timing, space-time, ‘sticky time’, timetables, and migrant temporalities, for instance – which enrich the overall discussion and set of contributions. Reading the chapters of the book readily demands that we take more
seriously how, why and when we use time-based metaphors, descriptors and concepts within discourses of migration studies.

Second, the chapters provide a vitally important springboard for future studies to consider how effects (for example migrant identities and belonging, migrant family life, migrant workers, asylum seeking) and everyday perceptions of time on migration experiences are being reshaped in profound ways by changing structural and political conditions – such as the imposition of technological advances, the restructuring of the global economy, terrorism and the reconstitution of transnational connections. Also very welcome is the prevalent focus on migration, governance, time and discipline (for example immigration systems and deportation) in some chapters of the book which implicitly emphasizes the need to rethink the pertinence of previous landmark texts on timespaces, such as Thrift’s (1990) exploration of time-consciousness and capitalism. Likewise, this book is invaluable for taking forward and developing, albeit somewhat belatedly, many ideas that were presented in May and Thrift’s seminal text TimeSpace: Geographies of Temporality (2001), which stressed the need to transcend the old certainties of time, time–space compression, and so on. At its heart, this book meets this agenda head-on, and exposes many of the ways in which different rhythms, forms and scales of contemporary migration disrupt and/or are disrupted by different constructions of timespaces, and connected to different social groups, actors (for example international students) and institutions.

Third, the book provides a timely launchpad for migration studies to more effectively shape and inform broader social science debates about time(spaces) and societies/economies. Such a contribution is currently lacking, and signifies an area of rich opportunity for migration studies to more fully impact on wider debates within the social sciences. For instance, recent work in journals such as Time & Society provides untapped hidden treasure troves for migration scholars, with, for example, recent papers on ‘waiting for migration’ and ‘time politics of asylum’. What this book clearly delivers is a positive leap in the right direction for migration scholars to extend and open up engagements with broader scholarship on sociologies and theories of time.

Finally, while reading and digesting the chapters of this book, I was constantly reminded of the repetitive lyrics in Cyndi Lauper’s classic 1983 song ‘Time After Time’. Undoubtedly, this book makes a crucial contribution to progress unfolding research agendas on migration and timespaces, and the diverse collection of chapters effectively delivers the take-away mantra for migration scholars: ‘you can look and you will find me – time after time’.
REFERENCES
