

**Wright, Katie. 2012. *International Migration, Development and Human Wellbeing (Rethinking International Development Series)*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan. xi + 155 pp. Hb.: £55.00. ISBN: 9780230248281.**

The main focus of this book is human wellbeing during migration. A conceptual shift from coping strategies to “living well” is a promising approach, and Katie Wright does present her research very convincingly. The book starts with a foreword by Willis, and I cannot agree more that this nuanced research is a significant contribution to both development and migration studies. Moreover, it is rich in theory background and data, thought-provoking and yet easy to read.

In six chapters, Wright proves step-by-step that a wellbeing approach provides concepts and tools to shift away from the limited focus of what people lack to the much broader view of what they need and how they individually and collectively construct what it means to “live well”. Let us take a closer look how this approach in combining with migration and development literature unfolds in a study of migrants from Peru in two European cities, London and Spain.

In the Chapter 1 (Introduction), the author outlines the main functional and psychosocial dimensions of wellbeing and argues for a need to focus on the interplay of these dimensions. A small drawback is that in parts of the introduction and the theory chapter the authors overemphasise the need to move away from focus on survival and coping strategies among poorly paid migrants and repeats herself several times.

The theory chapter (Migrating For a Better Life?) provides a constructive critique to limits of the capabilities approach and demonstrates how the focus on wellbeing diverges from it. Wright skilfully synthesises how various disciplines – psychology, gender and cultural studies, to name among others – contribute to wellbeing approach. The author underlines that researching what people need is also less stigmatising; the wellbeing approach see migration as an active choice to improve life. She lays out strong theoretical points to analyse more deeply how gender and age as nonmaterial aspects of inequality shape whether people can achieve their own goals or believe they can enhance better life for their children. In order to demonstrate how wellbeing is constructed dynamically, Wright theorises how subjective constructions of wellbeing travel and transform themselves over time and across boundaries. Altogether, she provides strong analysis for joining wellbeing with development and migration.

In Chapter 3, the author describes the history of migration regimes in London and Madrid and introduces the research sample. Data comprised of 99 semi-structured interviews in both European cities and 10 in-depth in Peru with relatives and friends. In Chapter 4, the functional and psychosocial needs of migrants are analysed in dynamic interaction. She distinguishes what these dimensions are in specific places and then demonstrates how some of them, e.g. legal documents, are universal needs for migrants, while language skills are seen as a functional need in London but not in Spanish-speaking Madrid. Employment and regular income, not only economic needs but also needs to realise one’s potential, should be understood in the interplay between functional and psychosocial needs. This chapter provides a novel focus of time and money management as a functional need in both locations. It is importantly related to a need for developing competence and managing ones’ own lives to achieve wider goals. Among important psychosocial needs,

“relatedness” and “understanding social norms” are highlighted as of special importance. Both of them transform over the life-course and migration stages. The latter also transform attitudes and values of Peruvian migrants who see the need to become more “orderly” and “methodological” in the new socio-cultural environment and also when returning to Peru.

Although Wright draws attention to frictions between multicultural models and reality in which a migrant should “fit in” a new environment, my reservations are that the author may be slightly uncritical about the internalised management language used by informants themselves. Resistance and challenging of these needs are partly revealed in shared narratives. Stronger contextualisation of individualism and capitalism relations may have helped deepen more critical analysis about instrumental necessity to fit into a society in particular ways, for example, according to roles ascribed to low income migrants of a particular ethnic or regional origin. This could be taken further in future research, for example, how these needs are recognised as stemming from particular migrant status and whether they are challenged and transformed by middle class, highly skilled migrants or the second generation.

Chapter 5 provides a valuable analysis of global interconnectedness of human wellbeing and how constructions of a better life travel between London, Madrid and Peru. Her data from three locations provides a solid basis to unpack discourses of “good” and “bad” migrants, and how Peruvian migrants actively challenge perceptions of relatives and friends about life abroad. Wright convincingly proves that Peruvians back home are not just passive recipients of “patchy” information, but they choose to believe certain versions of how a migrant can achieve wellbeing goals abroad. She demonstrates that values of individualism, respect to neighbours, practices of food-making and recycling travel relatively easy. However, a need for personal privacy might get misinterpreted as coldness and cause resentment. Thus, bridging understanding about migration reality and some of the acquired psychosocial needs do not always travel well.

The last chapter contains conclusions and implications for policy. Although the contribution to policy making was promised in the beginning, suggestions are outlined in just the two last pages. The author draws attention that policies that aim to promote development and return usually fail because they are not grounded in understanding of how wellbeing is constructed by migrants themselves. She urges moving the policy focus away from governance to assessing intersubjective impacts of migration. These suggestions for policy makers are well justified in her data. However, I was struggling with the two other suggestions: Wright underlines that states should encourage circular migration and to support grass-roots migrant associations ‘that play a vital role in offering material and psychosocial support to enhance migrant wellbeing’ (p 135). Even if this may sound logical, these suggestions are not derived from her analysis presented in this book and need more empirical justification.

Having said this, including some criticism I spelled out, I reiterate that this is a tremendously valuable book, which hopefully will encourage researchers from various disciplines to take the wellbeing approach further in research of culturally and socially mediated understandings of the good life and greater good for migrants themselves as well as their relations and friends.

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