*Migration, Incorporation, and Change in an Interconnected World*
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Preface

This book is and is not a textbook. It has the look of a textbook, in that it covers the bulk of material a student should need to understand to get a good sense of the empirical and theoretical trends in the field of migration studies. But it is not really a textbook in that it is not comprehensive. We planned it that way. We wanted the book to be short and cheap and conceptual so that the professor could use it to build a course around, and not feel too guilty assigning students additional materials to read. Wasn’t that nice of us?

Because the book is purposefully short, we had to make stark choices as to what to put in and what to leave out. If you compare our book to other migration textbooks, you will find that much of what they discuss is missing from here. Conversely, much of what is in here you won’t find anywhere else. Again, that is on purpose. A lot of what’s in the book is our take on what is important in the field, where we think the field is going, and to a degree is a matter of taste. The chapters on Muslim immigrants in the West, low-end migrant workers (including lengthy sections on marriage migration, sex work and human trafficking), and high-end expatriate workers are indicative of this. While you may not find the breadth of topics you could get elsewhere, we try to make up for it in depth and readability, especially with topics that others do not deal with, or only touch upon. (And for the professors out there, this lends itself easily to assigning short and long essay questions. If any students are reading this preface, please stop groaning.)

Much of the material in the book is based upon our own research on migration, multiculturalism, and race and ethnicity. Though we have both written on these topics, we are outsiders to the migration field, in the sense that we don’t have the personal network connections to the “big players,” and our approach in our published work is quite different from that of the bulk of researchers in the field. Ali’s studies of assimilation in multiple contexts (US, Europe, India, Dubai) have led him to a theoretical
stance at odds with mainstream conceptions of assimilation, theories that draw largely on the American experience. His studies of migrants in India and Dubai also shape his notions of why migrants leave and the different ways in which they adapt and are incorporated (or not). Hartmann approaches the topic of migration a bit differently, more from the perspective of his interests in race and ethnicity on the one hand, and social solidarity, diversity, and belonging, on the other. In current research, both of us have closely linked the concept of race and ethnicity to incorporation, and in ways different from how others have.

Being outsiders has disadvantages of course. But it also has advantages. The biggest is that we can “see the forest for the trees.” That is, we make the claim that because we are outsiders we can evaluate the field (what’s interesting, what’s not, what’s dead, what’s hot) better than others who are players in the field, who may have vested interests in certain theories or studies, or who will insist on incorporating as much research as possible. We chose to go another route—to make the book reader-friendly. You will immediately get a sense of that from some of the material we choose to foreground, the storytelling approach we use, and our writing style.

The writing style that we use is unique for a textbook. We have both written and worked for Contexts (Ali is currently an editor and Hartmann is a former editor), a sociology magazine dedicated to bringing insightful research that is written for the lay reader. So we wrote this book in a very simple, easy-to-read style, intended for undergraduates of all levels (and for non-Western students who often get lost in dense writing styles), graduate students (because they don’t want to read dense academic-y material any more than undergraduates do), and any journalists and other nonacademics who might be interested in the topic.

The question we ask ourselves when writing is, “Will my mother-in-law read this?” Your mother has to read it, but your mother-in-law is under no such obligation. But
don’t be put off or fooled by our writing style – simple is not simplistic! The theories and ideas in the book are often complex. We have done our best to explain in clear English what they mean. Some professorial types might not like our writing style (they’ll call it “journalistic,” as if that is some kind of insult). But from our experiences teaching undergraduates (and as life-long students and readers ourselves) we believe that students will greatly appreciate it, will pay more attention, and will actually read it! And in the end, they will likely learn more. Isn’t that what it should be about?