

Received: 4 May 2020
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33182/ml.v17i3.983>

Maurizio Ambrosini (2018). Irregular Immigration in Southern Europe: Actors, Dynamics and Governance, Palgrave Macmillan, (IX, 164 pp., ISBN: 978-3-319-70518-7).

Reviewed by Gül Oral¹

Irregular migration has been one of the EU's main challenges and influenced its policies, practices, and relationships with third countries in its southern neighbourhood. Southern Europe, which has emerged as the borderland of Europe, has extensively experienced the migration pressure as being a prominent route for irregular migrants and refugees. The growing numbers of refugees and migrants in the post-Arab Spring period has further enhanced the significance of the regional countries for controlling the EU's external borders and deterring the new flows of refugees and irregular migrants.

In this book, while focusing on migration governance and irregular migration in the region, the author intends to evaluate the nexus between legal and political systems as well as between markets and irregular migrants or “asylum seekers” in Southern Europe. Therefore, the author discusses the link between the public image and real profile of irregular migration by also regarding the interplay among irregular migrants and various actors in the regional countries while paying particular attention to the case of Italy. In order to do so, Ambrosini deals with such questions related to the continuity of irregular migration, the access to legal status, diverse attitudes of the regional countries concerning irregular status and perceptions of asylum-seekers.

In the first chapter, the author assesses the complexity and fuzziness of the concept of irregular migration by indicating his preference to use this concept instead of illegal migration with regard to the latter's indication to criminal actions. Thus, his perspective offers invaluable insights about dynamics occurring in the region and hosting societies rather than placing the issue within a merely securitarian perspective. Furthermore, Ambrosini introduces a typology based on two dimensions as formal authorization, and social recognition with the aim of examining the interaction between the hosting societies and irregular migrants pertaining to social acceptance, access to services and the labour market and the acquisition to legal status as well as rejection and expulsion of specific groups and also adds another framework for interpreting processes of transition towards legal status by perceiving the concept as a dynamic rather than a static one.

After presenting the conceptual and analytical framework of the book, in the second chapter, the author moves forward to review the significant role of a group of actors referred to as intermediaries. Formed based on the concept of intermediation and their activities, they are defined as institutions as well as people including various actors such as local authorities, religious institutions, NGOs, trade unions, employers, and even smugglers. By creating such a broader framework with diverse actors, he evaluates their influences in the lives of irregular migrants regarding the implementation of different practices from the legalization of their status, provision of essential services or legal advocacy and even moral support. While doing so, he elucidates the complexity of migration governance by highlighting

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the diversity of actors and predicament of preventing irregular migration rather than seeing the process between solely two actors, i.e. states and migrants.

The third chapter focuses on migration governance and persistence of irregular migration in the region while examining the connection among various factors from politics and regulations to markets and social networks. Therefore, the author assesses the regional countries, i.e. Spain, Greece, and Italy concerning the effect of economic crisis, the labour market needs in different sectors from agriculture to domestic and care services, and the rise in numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers in the post-Arab Spring period as well as the propensity to form stricter policies akin to Northern European countries and the transformation of practices, action, and policies. In this way, this chapter particularly presents significant insight into the discrepancy between labour needs and political regulation and the influence of the market in migration governance for accessing legal status and the changing economic and social circumstances of migrants after the economic crisis of 2008 in those countries.

In the next chapter, while discussing the growing importance of the EU's border security in the Mediterranean, the author further emphasizes on Italy so as to examine the case of Lampedusa as one of the prominent symbols of the EU's borders in addition to the Greek island of Lesbos, Spain's Ceuta and Melilla enclaves. This chapter sheds light on the case pertaining to reception and rescue operations and also provides a historical overview since 2004 while paying attention to the relationship with Libya and transition in the post-Arab Spring period due to the development of a new facet of emergency and growing securitization of the issue. Moreover, the author analyzes changing attitudes towards asylum and borders by reviewing the rise of criticism and accusation towards the NGOs and enactment of new local exclusion policies diverging from former ones mainly towards asylum-seekers as well as actions and practices based on the rejection of the implementation of national-level decisions.

As broadening his analysis with the inclusion of asylum-seekers in the case of Lampedusa, the author makes a substantial contribution to the examination of the subjects of irregular migration, migration governance, and also the condition of asylum-seekers in the Southern European countries, especially in Italy. While viewing the process as a dynamic one, he attains to display the complexity of the migration governance as well as the significance of various actors called as intermediaries in the process, yet in a clear and comprehensible manner.

In addition to that, evaluating the presence of irregular migration pertaining to needs of markets as well as adherence to the EU's rules, he positions the issue into a broader perspective than merely connecting it to geographical proximity or new refugee flows; hence, his perspective with the analytical framework presented in the book could be used for the analysis of new case studies.

