
BOOK REVIEW

Zapata-Barrero, Ricard and Yalaz, Evren. (eds.). 2018. *Qualitative Research in European Migration Studies*, IMISCOE Research Series. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Open. 302 pp.

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Qualitative Research in European Migration Studies is an open access book edited by Ricard Zapata-Barrero and Evren Yalaz. It has an impressive list of authors, both senior academics and other scholars with qualitative research experience in the interdisciplinary field of migration research. The book aims to address a gap in our understanding of qualitative research and its diverse research techniques in migration studies. The objective is thus not to provide an overarching 'how-to-guide' on conducting qualitative research within this field but to highlight the variety of research designs, techniques and epistemological approaches in use. Selecting Europe as the context of the book is a good choice, because the mix of chapters with different methods and research designs makes the scope of the volume quite wide. As the authors have adopted diverse ways of how to structure and write their own chapters, the book somewhat suffers from unevenness of focus – probably the most typical fault of edited volumes in general. This is, however, a minor fault in an interesting and useful book.

The book begins with two introductory chapters that focus on *why this book is needed* and *the state of qualitative migration research in Europe*. The latter chapter is based on an analysis of a notable number of articles (2,400) published in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* and *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (2000–2016). Yalaz and Zapata-Barrero identified 627 articles that were based on research conducted in Europe with qualitative methods. The article thus provides an interesting view into the state of the research field in the 2000s.

Part I *Theoretical and epistemological issues* consists of four articles by Russel King, Maren Borkert, Ricard Zapata-Barrero and Theodoros Iosifides. In his chapter, King emphasises the value of *multi-sited research and the importance of context*, including the contexts of sending and receiving societies, routes and transit areas and the translocal contexts that shape migrants' lives. There are also temporal contexts that are related to economic cycles, restructuring events that fuel transnational mobility and geopolitical temporal contexts, such as wars or natural disasters that induce migration. Borkert tackles the promise and pitfalls of

interdisciplinary collaboration in research focusing on wicked real-life problems and tragic phenomena, such as human smuggling or migration induced by environmental or humanitarian crises.

Zapata-Barrero examines the links and *potential between applied political theory and qualitative research* and concludes that a 'conflict-based approach' might be the way forward in solving migration puzzles with the help of the best attributes of both approaches (p. 78). With conflict, the author refers not only to wars but also to, for example, racism, identity or religious tensions and legal conflicts. In his chapter, Iosifides focuses on crucial *epistemological issues* related to qualitative research methods and findings in migration processes. He argues against methodological nationalism and suggests ways in which research can focus on real causal processes, avoid becoming a part of state migration management efforts, but rather empower migrants and non-migrants.

Part II *Building a qualitative research design* includes articles by Ewa Morawska, Dirk Jacobs and Karolina Barglowski. In her chapter Morawska sees the *value of qualitative research* in 'its ability to render more accurate representations of the actual life-worlds of those who inhabit them than purely quantitative surveys and analyses can' (p. 115). Qualitative research, in her opinion, has five distinct goals: it can help interpret culturally or historically significant phenomena, explore diversity, lend a voice to research subjects and participants, be used to test and refine theories and concepts and generate new research questions (pp. 115–116). Jacobs tackles the *problem of categorisation*. He concludes that although useful and necessary in research, categories can become 'performative acts with political consequences' (p. 134) that are to the detriment of the groups involved. He stresses that the use of 'contested concepts', such as race or ethnicity, should always be embedded in particular political and societal contexts. One should pay attention to potential bias triggered by categorisations, on case study selections, comparative designs (including with non-migrant peers) and analysis methods.

In her chapter, Barglowski catalogues selected *sampling techniques* and discusses their advantages and disadvantages. She emphasises the importance of case selection and sampling in qualitative research, because it directly links the overall validity and generalisability of the research results. She concludes that cases are constructed in three steps: decisions on the site of the study (place, country), on the unit of analysis (group, family, social class) and on the identification of appropriate empirical incidents (situations to observe, people to ask). The process aims for the best and most accurate answer to a simple question: what is this a case of?

Part III *Qualitative techniques and data analysis* has five chapters by Olena Fedyuk and Violetta Zentai, Annalisa Frisina, Paolo Boccagni and Mieke Schrooten, Teun A. van Dijk and Koen Leurs, and Madhuri Prabhakar. These chapters discuss the merits and future directions of key qualitative methods, but also provide practical tips for research projects.

The chapter by Fedyuk and Zentai discusses *interviews* as a key method valuable in, for example, researching vulnerable or hard-to-reach populations, hearing elite and expert opinions and promoting collaborative knowledge production and open-ended research agendas. They stress the notions of how we listen (empathy) and how we tell our stories (performativity) as key aspects of successful interview encounters. Frisina writes about *focus groups* as a forum for public thinking. In contrast with interviews, this form of data collection lets the researcher observe group interaction and dialogue around a specific topic. The chapter also gives clear advice on how to build focus groups, facilitate discussion and communicate the results. In their chapter Paolo Boccagni and Mieke Schrooten discuss *participant observation*, which 'allows dynamics of power, agency and politics to be theorized from below' (pp. 209–210) and 'is an embodied and extended presence in the social world of those being studied' (p. 212). After a brief history of participant observation, they describe the five research phases

of ethnographic fieldwork: before the field, accessing the field, staying in the field, getting out of the field and from fieldwork to textwork (pp. 212–214).

The article by Teun A. van Dijk is an excellent summary of how *discourse analysis*, and the various methods it encompasses, can offer sophisticated theoretical and methodological frameworks for the systematic study of migration discourses. Lastly, the article by Leurs and Prabhakar discusses the methodological considerations related to the emerging research focus of *digital migration studies*. Information and community technologies (ICTs) have an impact on migration at least on two levels: first, in the use of digital technologies in border control and surveillance by state authorities and second, in the way, for example, social media is used by migrants to uphold transnational ties and access information on migration destinations (pp. 246–249). The phenomena concerns both forced and voluntary migrants, and the chapter contains important insights for anyone interested in studying '(...) migration in, through and by means of the internet' (p. 248).

Part IV *Significant requirements before embarking* has two articles, one by Ilse van Liempt and Veronica Bilger and the other by Peter Scholten. Van Liempt and Bilger focus on the methodological and ethical dilemmas of conducting research among *smuggled migrants*. As the authors note, questions related to gaining access, building trust and being reciprocal are highly important in such a setting. In the final chapter of the book, Scholten addresses the topic of how to deal with *research-policy relations in migration studies*. He notes that the relationship goes at least two ways: First, the political urgency around migration provides opportunities for researchers to impact policy discourses; and second, the political and social context influences migration research itself, for example, via funding opportunities (pp. 287–288). The author then distinguishes four ideal types of how the relations can be arranged depending on which party co-ordinates these relations. This self-reflexive look into how the research field operates provides good tips on how to engage in research-policy dialogues.

The last two articles (Part IV) seem a bit out of place at the end of the edited volume. So far, the logic of the book has followed the research process: thinking about theory and epistemology, building a research design and selecting suitable methods to be used. However, as the two final articles are very interesting, there is a case to be made for them to be included in the book. Instead of having two introductory chapters by the editors, perhaps there would have been room for a concluding article that would have tied the themes and topics of the book together. Overall, the edited volume is a useful read for any student or scholar planning to start a new research project. Because it is open access¹ and thus easily available, I predict the book will find its way onto the curricula of many study programmes of the field of migration studies.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

¹ Book available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76861-8>.

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