



# CCIS | Center for Comparative Immigration Studies

## UCLA Center for the Study of International Migration

### L'asile et l'exil: Une histoire de la distinction réfugiés/migrants & Crossing: How We Label and React to People on the Move

Friday, December 3, 2021 | 12:00PM - 2:00PM Pacific Time

Will be held via Zoom



**Author: Karen Akoka**

Karen Akoka is Associate Professor of Political Science at Paris Nanterre University. She is a researcher at the Institut des Sciences Sociales du Politique (ISP) in Paris and currently in sabbatical at the French National Center for Research in Jerusalem. She works on the implementation of asylum and immigration policies in different contexts with a focus on comparative approaches over space and time.

The distinction between political refugees and economic migrants has become self-evident, as has the hierarchy that legitimizes the reception of refugees at the expense of migrants. This book studies the making of this distinction and hierarchy by looking at the daily work of the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (Ofpra), since its creation in 1952, till today. By focusing on the actors, their social properties, trajectories, and their daily practices, this social history, from below, of refugee labeling in France highlights the weight of foreign affairs, ideological and diplomatic considerations as well as domestic policies in the making of refugees. It argues that there is no such thing as a refugee per se that institutions could identify if they were independent or had the means. The category of refugee is to the contrary constantly reconfigured, over time, according to changing power relations and political priorities. It says therefore more about the societies who grant it than about the individuals it is supposed to designate.



**Author: Rebecca Hamlin**

Rebecca Hamlin is Associate Professor of Legal Studies and Political Science at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She received her PhD in Political Science from the University of California, Berkeley in 2009. Since then, her research has focused on law and immigration politics, with a particular interest in migrant categorization and the concept of a refugee.

Today, the concept of "the refugee" as distinct from other migrants looms large. Immigration laws have developed to reinforce a dichotomy between those viewed as voluntary, often economically motivated, migrants who can be legitimately excluded by potential host states, and those viewed as forced, often politically motivated, refugees who should be let in. In *Crossing*, Rebecca Hamlin argues against advocacy positions that cling to this distinction. Everything we know about people who decide to move suggests that border crossing is far more complicated than any binary, or even a continuum, can encompass. Drawing on cases of various "border crises" across Europe, North America, South America, and the Middle East, Hamlin outlines major inconsistencies and faulty assumptions on which the binary relies. The migrant/refugee binary is not just an innocuous shorthand—indeed, its power stems from the way in which it is painted as apolitical. In truth, the binary is a dangerous legal fiction, politically constructed with the ultimate goal of making harsh border control measures more ethically palatable to the public. This book is a challenge to all those invested in the rights and study of migrants to move toward more equitable advocacy for all border crossers.



**Discussant: Roger Waldinger**

Roger Waldinger, Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Director of the UCLA Center for the Study of International Migration has written on numerous aspects of international migration. Recent publications include: *The Cross-Border Connection: Immigrants, Emigrants, and their Homelands* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); *A Century of Transnationalism: Immigrants and their Homeland Connections* (co-edited with Nancy Green; University of Illinois Press, 2016); and *Origins and Destinations: The Making of the Second Generation*, co-authored with Renee Luthra and Thomas Soehl (Russell Sage Foundation Press: 2018).

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