

Haynes, A., Power, M.J., Devereux, E., Dillane, A. and Carr, J. (eds.): **Public and Political Discourses of Migration: International Perspectives**. London, Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016. 302 p.

Whereas migration has been a key topic in geography and sociology already for some time, it could be expected that the events of 2015 will only serve its further growth. True, as this volume was finalised in September that year, we cannot expect it to have focused on the refugee crisis that reached its peak during exactly that month. The introduction as well as the conclusions nevertheless refer to the world-famous image of Aylan Kurdi – a young boy fleeing or migrating to Europe with his family – as he lies drowned on the Mediterranean shores of Turkey (p. xv; p. 227). The manner in which various acts of migration have been “discursively framed in recent times, and how that framing impacts on individual and collective lived experience, whether through formal policies or through more nebulous and often hostile public attitudes,” is what concerns the authors of this volume (p. xv).

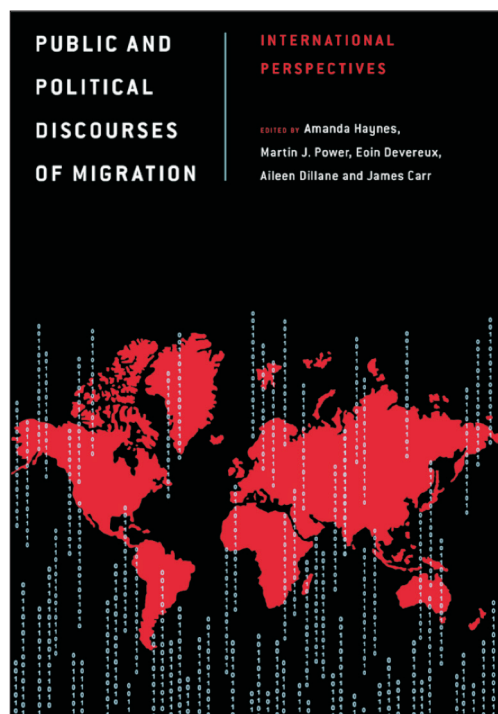
From the perspective of social sciences in Hungary and Central and Eastern Europe, an interesting feature of the book is its open and explicit positionality: “in terms of the politics of the contributions contained herein ... they are all supportive of migration” (p. xvi). Such a transparent approach can be exemplary in a region where social scientists still too often think or

at least work under the premise that objectivity is always necessary, or even desirable. The added value of not assuming that is reflected in the volume’s aim: “this text seeks to explore *and problematise* the relationship of discourse to issues of representation, and as such, highlights *inequality, exclusion, subjugation, dominance and privilege* in the context of migration” (p. xv, my emphasis). Indeed, such a position implies an emancipatory character of the contribution, instead of simply providing a descriptive account of the state of affairs that can never be fully objective anyway.

Perhaps almost inevitably, such a position will also frame the analysis so that it will arrive at conclusions such as that “the mainstream media routinely circulate content which presents the migrant and migration in a predominantly negative light” (p. 225). While such a general statement is far-fetched (cf. The Economist 2011; CARVALHO, P. 2015; HARFORD, T. 2015; TRAVIS, A. 2016), it needs to be seen in the light of that “the book is not an exhaustive account of the phenomenon of migration. Far from claiming to be definitive, this volume is unapologetically selective” (p. xvi).

Still, an extensive volume on migration in our days would benefit from at least touching upon, if not thoroughly engage with, influential conservative thinkers such as Roger SCRUTON (2015). The latter argued that “true conservatism seeks to maintain the authority of and public allegiance to the state... It encourages respect for the customs and institutions of civil society, including marriage and the family, religion,” etc. (FREEMAN, S. 2016, p. 32). For Scruton, liberalism “regards individual freedom and individuality as fundamental values,” and “thereby threatens to undermine the institutions that are the source of individuals’ identity as well as the bonds of their community” (FREEMAN, S. 2016, p. 32). Whether or not we agree with such criticisms of liberalism, we cannot fully ignore them in a time of their apparent growing influence.

The volume should be interesting for Central and Eastern European scholars already for its methodology. While approaches differ, most chapters apply particular models of discourse analysis that are still relatively uncommon in our region. The editors understand discourse as “both an expression and a mechanism for power, by which particular social realities are conceived, made manifest, legitimated, naturalised, challenged, resisted and re-imagined” (p. xv). Public and political discourses on migration are of key importance as “they are responsible for framing the issue, and for how, when and where it arrives on the public/political spectrum” (p. xvi). In other words, discourses can strongly influence public opinion and policy, which could well be observed in the ways the 2015 refugee crisis was framed in Hungary (BALOGH, P. 2016).



The anthology includes fifteen case studies, fourteen of which focus on communities in a specific country (in one case, in two countries). Six cases are on Ireland; two on the UK; and one each on Italy, the US, Finland, Israel, France/Germany, and Spain.

From a geographic point of view, an interesting observation is made in Chapter 1, which is less country-specific than the others. The point is made that arrivals by sea are emblematic and iconic of the more general coverage of migrations, and have a particular resonance. Although (attempts at) crossing or circumventing fences at land borders can also be very dramatic, the drowning of thousands in the Mediterranean and elsewhere indeed well illustrates the heightened vulnerability of people trying to move on huge water surfaces.

A number of chapters deal with how various migrants, not least Muslims, are ‘othered’ in political and public discourses. Chapter 5 on Finland particularly highlights the responsibility of public national media in maintaining the ideal of equality and integrity of various groups versus its involvement in the public exercise in othering. Relatedly, Chapter 7 on debates in the Irish Parliament argues that parliamentary discourses have a significant impact upon other institutions (such as the media) and upon the publics’ understanding of ‘illegal migration’. Chapter 9 examines media depictions of Roma communities in Ireland, demonstrating how well-worn tropes regarding this group were circulated with ease, showing a lack of reflexivity on behalf of the media. Raising these issues should be particularly relevant in the case of Hungary.

Highly important for East Central Europe, Chapter 8 studies how Irish politicians constructed non-Irish EU migrants to Ireland during the period in which the Irish economy turned from ‘boom to bust’. It concludes that politicians on all sides of the spectrum were not averse to perpetuating to frame migrant workers as an economic threat. The study also describes how pro-migrant policy-makers became ensnared in a reactive approach when the course of the debate was set by problematising the issue. Again, there are some parallels here to Hungary, where (despite a lack of economic recession) over the past year certain initially pro-migrant or at least hesitant politicians on the left were gradually giving in to hegemonic discourses.

Despite a number of challenges with integration, Chapter 10 for instance describes more positive developments. In Israel, namely, Salsa music and dance has created and maintained a ‘pan-Latin’ identity among Latin American labour migrants, at the same time serving as a cultural interface for interaction with the hegemonic society. Elsewhere, as detailed in Chapter 13, commonly organised French-German exhibitions do not only deal with public negotiations of immigrant representations, but also form a cross-cultural stage for negotiation.

The anthology’s conclusions (Chapter 16) reflect on some possibilities and challenges of mobilising discourse as resistance. Admittedly partisan, these consider the efficiency of different modes and means of disrupting and replacing anti-immigrant discourses. Various opportunities for agency are discussed, targeting academics, policy-makers, civil society actors, online activists, and migrants themselves.

The conclusions also mention Hungary, whose policies towards refugees and migrants are contrasted to Germany’s *Willkommenskultur* (p. 227). This was indeed a fair description in September 2015, when the book was finalised. Nevertheless, by the end of that year Prime Minister Orbán’s stance has gained some acceptance throughout Europe (HIGGINS, A. 2015), with a number of Western European countries introducing temporary border-controls within the Schengen Area. Most recently, Angela Merkel has called for a burqa ban in Germany and said the refugee crisis “must never be repeated,” while making her pitch for a fourth term as Chancellor (DEARDEN, L. 2016). Whatever direction European migration debates and policies will be taking in the future, it is clear that the topic of refugees and migrants will need continued engagement by social scientists and others. In a climate of hardened debates, the present volume is an important contribution.

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