

BOOK REVIEWS

Keith Jacobs, *Experience and Representation: Contemporary Perspectives on Migration in Australia*, Surrey: Ashgate, 164 pages, ISBN 978-0-7546-7610-2 (hardcover)

Review by Marius I. TĂȚAR

Combining multiple and complementary perspectives is particularly useful in the scholarly publications aiming to explore new directions in understanding the complex phenomena of migration and its challenge in redefining identity. *Experience and Representation: Contemporary Perspectives on Migration in Australia*, by Keith Jacobs, can be included in this trend, as the book brings in an approach to the study of migration that departs from mainstream research in several ways. First, as the author notes in his *Introduction*, it “is not a book that attempts a synthesis of economic, legal, social policy, demographic or political perspectives, nor is it one that sets out to prove a thesis about the study of migration by gathering new empirical data from interviews with individuals with individuals who have migrated” (p. 3). Second, the perspective proposed by the author steams from his own dual status of insider/outsider, noted in her *Preface* by Anne J. Kershen, the *Studies in Migration and Diaspora* series editor at Ashgate. As an insider who migrated from United Kingdom to Australia, the author has firsthand knowledge of the social and psychological issues set in motion by migration. At the same time, from the outsider’s perspective, the author is an academic who “deconstructs and applies a range of theories of migration theories and combines these with reference to leading anthropological, political and cultural

scholarly studies” in order to point out how migration has been represented in contemporary Australia.

Consequently, the focus of the book is on the subjectivity of migration and its impact on identity and self-image, and not on demography and social policy related to migration (although these are also briefly reviewed in the introductory chapter of the book, but just in order to provide a historical context for recent developments of migration processes in Australia). Migration as subjectivity is explored in reference to an academic literature grouped by the author into three strands: socio-anthropological (migration understood as part of the trajectory of mobility and a social feature of globalization), psychoanalytical (the feelings and thoughts associated and affected by migration experiences) and artistic representations of migrations (the way migrants are portrayed in the media, literature, films). The book also discusses “some of the interpretations within the sociological literature on migration and ethnic relations” in the political context of the Australian society. In addition, the author discusses the ways in which understandings of migration informs Australian cultural attitudes.

The main contribution of the book is to set out the appropriate perspective on “how our understanding of migration requires us to consider movement in concert with place and how these two formations are embedded and nested within one another” (p. 136). The author argues that migration (re)shapes identity and self-image as “migration forces upon us changes in terms of who we are and how we see the world”, and he frames this migration-identity interplay in the contemporary debates about globalization, trans-nationalism and multiculturalism.

The book is structured in three parts. Part I on *Understanding Migration* consists of two chapters that explore the key theoretical perspectives on migration with reference to sociological, psychoanalytical and cultural geographical insights. The chapters in this part highlight the importance of “situating” both the *cultures* and experiences of migration in “a place, a time and an interlocking set of policy environments”.

Part II on *Migration and Urban Encounters* consists of three chapters, the first of which focuses on the political impact of globalization for Australians and migrants as well, which live in ethnic neighborhoods and are both affected by their physical environment and the encounters and interactions they have with others. The chapter on the *Politics of Australian Multiculturalism* focuses on the sites of contestation and debate about multiculturalism, both in the realm of political



philosophies, namely on the role of the state in promoting social equality, and in the realm of empirical sociology, where multiculturalism is used to evaluate everyday life experiences. The chapter on *Media Portrayals of Migrants* points out that the media coverage is symptomatic of the existing power relations as media often reinforces ideological understandings of migrant lives in opposition with Australians' way of living. However, the author notes that "we have to be careful not to construe it [the media] as a monolithic agency performing in accordance to a particular trajectory". Instead he suggests that a more agency-based interpretation is required to account for the fact that, at least in some instances, individuals and social groups are able to shape and change the dominant ideological categorizations.

Part III on *Contemporary Australian Identity* examines different understandings of Australian identity (especially those that spring out of the debate around the opposition between migrant and Australian identities); cultural expressions of belonging manifested in the Australian literature and cinema; and "the ways in which migrants maintain material and symbolic connections with their home".

As a provocative and thoughtful monograph that contributes to the ongoing academic and political debates on globalization, digitization and post-colonialism, this book will be of interest to scholars of migration and identity, ethnicity, culture and politics, as well as policy-makers and political activists involved in these fields.