

BOOK REVIEWS

Kevin Johnson (2004). The “Huddled Masses” Myth: Immigration and Civil Rights. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. (x + 254 pp., ISBN: 978-1-59213-206-5).

Reviewed by Stephanie Pedron, Georgia Southern University, United States

Huddled Masses, by Professor Kevin Johnson examines the intersection between civil rights and U.S. immigration law to debunk the myth that the U.S. has historically welcomed all incoming migrants. Johnson makes a compelling argument for how U.S. immigration policies contradict prior assumptions of openness by considering how the U.S. has barred the migration and social inclusion of various groups. Immigration policies are shaped by discrimination against disfavored minorities, reflecting the social hierarchy prevalent within U.S. society. By linking a wide range of literature from several fields, Johnson broadens discussions of exclusion and integration, while daring readers to reconsider previous assumptions about social constructions like race and citizenship.

Johnson’s book is divided into eight chapters. In the first chapter, he contends that the U.S. government’s treatment of immigrants is knotted to the struggles of domestic minorities to secure civil rights. Citizenship comes with a sundry of domestic privileges, hence why the U.S. government’s treatment of citizens and non-citizens differs so sharply. But Johnson argues that laws against non-citizens reflects society’s potential treatment of citizens that share similar characteristics in the absence of legal constraints (Johnson, 2004: 4). A framework for denying rights to citizens lies within current practices of excluding non-citizens. This is exacerbated by the reality that “meaningful political checks on the unfair treatment of immigrants does not exist” (Johnson, 2004: 3). Disfavored minority groups have been used as “scapegoats” during times of economic downturn or social upheaval, which generally allows Congress to implement restrictive immigration controls without much political backlash (Johnson, 2004: 50).

Discriminatory immigration laws and practices are the central themes of the succeeding chapters. In chapters two to five, Johnson covers the exclusion and deportation of racial minorities, political undesirables, the poor, and criminals. He examines well-known examples of restrictive laws and practices such as public charge provisions that excluded the poor, the Anarchist Exclusion Act, the internment of Japanese-Americans, deportation raids, and the national quota system. What distinguishes Johnson’s analysis from other scholars is his express focus on Asians and Asian-Americans. Throughout his book, Johnson asserts that immigration laws underscore society’s potential treatment of citizens that are part of disfavored minority groups, and he does so by frequently underscoring the experiences of Asian immigrants. For instance, when discussing how the Chinese Exclusion Act barred Chinese laborers from entering the U.S., he also notes how it prevented Chinese immigrants already within the country from acquiring citizenship (Johnson, 2004: 22). Naturalization is a critical step in the immigration process. By preventing Chinese laborers from fully assimilating, they continued to be viewed as foreign. Another example is his consideration of the Refugee Act of 1980, which was enacted out of a desire to limit Vietnamese immigration. This paved the way for the passage of the Immigration Act of 1990 that gave preferential treatment to immigrants from predominantly white countries. These policies reveal how “modern immigration laws produce disparate racial impacts” (Johnson, 2004: 27).



In chapters six and seven, Johnson shifts to an examination of the marginalization of women and homosexuals. In the past, U.S. immigration and naturalization laws stripped women of legal identities by treating them as extensions of their spouses (Johnson, 2004: 124). Women were also often subject to unequal treatment under laws that offered citizenship strictly to men or that targeted prostitutes. Gender biases in immigration laws parallel dated gender stereotypes about immigrant women frequently participating in sham marriages or coming to the U.S. to give birth (Johnson, 2004: 135). While treatment of women under the law has improved in recent years, modern worker visa programs still exhibit bias by making it more difficult to obtain employment visas for domestic labor typically regarded as “women’s work” (Johnson, 2004: 137). From 1952 to 1990, homosexuals were classified as “psychopathic personalities” and barred from migrating (Johnson, 2004: 140). It was not until recently that homosexuality was addressed directly by immigration law as a result of growing political sensitivity toward topics related to sexuality and gender. The hostile treatment of immigration laws toward women and those that identify as gay or lesbian limns the link between public attitudes toward specific groups and the immigration system.

By reviewing these past examples, Johnson shows how a complex structure of race, partisanship, and national origin shape immigration policies and practices, which subsequently impacts who is and is not seen as a citizen, regardless of their formal citizenship status. Johnson concludes his book with a call for an expansion of legal protections for noncitizens (Johnson, 2004: 175) and a reconsideration of the legal terms used to describe immigrants (Johnson, 2004: 156). The *Huddled Masses* successfully builds a case for how the exclusion of different minority groups has been a recurring theme in American history. Johnson, however, focuses largely on federal statutes. His work might benefit from a consideration of how immigration policies and practices vary among states. State policy differences have implications for the integration of minorities and the influx of coming migrants. This could lead to more profound discussions of exclusion and subordination.

Overall, the *Huddled Masses* is a well-written, informative account for readers interested in learning about the spectrum of citizenship and the long history of immigrant exclusion within America. Johnson lays out a critical and extremely valuable perspective that connects the experiences of various groups to demonstrate the intricate relationship between immigration and civil rights.

Vicky Squire, Nina Perkowski, Dallal Stevens and Nick Vaughan-Williams (2021). *Reclaiming Migration: Voices from Europe’s ‘Migrant Crisis’*. Manchester University Press. (224pp. ISBN-13: 978-1526144836).

Reviewed by Helene Syed Zwick, British University in Egypt, Cairo, Egypt

A lot has been said and written on the European Union (EU) so-called “migration crisis” of 2015-2016. As of official data, about one million refugees and migrants crossed into Europe, mainly by sea through the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR) and the Eastern Route. These mixed migration movements created tensions in the EU as member states struggled to cope with the situation leading to a European-level response embodied in the European Agenda on migration adopted in May 2015 by the European Commission. Launched by the European Commission, the 2015 Agenda officially intended to on-the-spot challenges and provide the EU with the tools to better manage migration in the areas of irregular migration, borders, asylum and legal migration.

In their *Reclaiming Migration* book, the authors critically assess the tangible and embodied impacts of the 2015 Agenda on migration on the experiences of people on the move. The main argument of the book is the following: the 2015 Agenda marked the intensification of a preventative or deterrent approach to migration management and border security based on a form of crisis politics that has been ineffective and produced overlapping precarities and increased vulnerabilities to exploitation and ill-treatment. The authors affirm that their contribution to the current knowledge is both political and methodological and I do agree with them.



Politically, the authors base their critique on the crisis narratives, a specific genre of political narrative, that the European and national authorities have adopted during 2015-2016. The securitizing narratives of crisis materialized in the use of a specific vocabulary such as “surge”, “uncontrolled flows”, in addition to populist slogans used in some EU member states (such as Austria, Denmark or Hungary). The securitizing narratives of crisis are complemented by a humanitarian one, emerging mainly from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) based on a vocabulary including words such as “rescue”. The authors explain then that such crisis politics is linked to “power”, “authority”, “governance” (33) and justified the intensification of a preventative or deterrent policy agenda across the EU, that consists of rolling out border security and migration control to a series of third countries outside the EU and creating various hostile environments within the EU (12).

Methodologically, the authors adopt a counter-archive approach of migration testimonies that aims to engage in alternative modes of knowledge production to reopen the discussion about what appears in public archives. In the book, the counter-archive presents the perspective of the people on the move in 2015-2016, who remain invisible in “narratives, practices and projects of migration” (17) and have been silenced while the crisis narratives appeared as “official truth” (7). The authors thus conducted in-depth qualitative research across multiple sites during 2015-2016 (7 sites including Malta, Sicily, Berlin, Athens, and Istanbul) and 257 interviews, in addition to site-based observational research where possible (57). As a consequence of this positioning, the authors adopt a specific terminology that aims to take distance from the Eurocentric approach of the regional migration system. Terms such as origin, transit and destination countries are therefore not used. They also avoid talking about migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, but use the term of people on the move (in precarious conditions). This strategy allows setting apart the mainstream discourses on migration and takes part in a growing stream of scholarship on human-centered approaches in migration studies.

A vicious circle. While the first two chapters aim to set the scene, the argumentation is built on four empirical chapters (chapters 3 to 6). From this anti-crisis framework, three main takeaways emerged: precarity, justice and postcolonialism (23 & 198). While multiple precarities and claims for justice are already widely evidenced in the current literature on migration studies, the discussion on postcolonialism is original and insightful. The authors explain that the EU might produce the drivers and conditions of flight across various sites and along diverse migratory routes, by perpetuating war and conflict (in Syria, Iraq, and Ethiopia, among other examples) and through the ongoing significance of colonial legacies (173). For the authors, migration can therefore be understood as a post-colonial or anti-colonial movement. However, to treat these migratory movements, rather than providing an equal right to migrate and/or to remain in the EU (172), and to treat humanely and with respect to those migrating under precarious conditions, the EU proposed a deterrence policy, based on an anti-smuggling measure, that carries detrimental consequences (98), such as a higher reliance on smugglers, more undertaken risks during the journeys and increased vulnerability to exploitation and violence, and produces sub-standard living conditions. This policy agenda suggests the lack of understanding by the European policymakers of the drivers of migration beyond the traditional pull factor approach and the lack of knowledge about deterrent measures (detention, deportation, rescue missions, among others) that depend on the routes, but also the level of information on these measures of people on the move. The situation conveys the message of failed European asylum and protection policies, while the EU was founded on the value of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, and respect for human rights.

Overall, *Reclaiming Migration* is a timely and pleasant work that takes part in a worldwide movement that critiques the silences imposed by public archives. Thus, the book represents an essential ground for anyone with an interest in acknowledging the experiences of people on the move. The question might be then: what are the political and programmatic implications of this movement?