

## BOOK REVIEW

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Martin Geiger & Antoine Pécoud (eds.), **Disciplining the Transnational Mobility of People**, *New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 271 pp., (ISBN 978-1-137-26306-3)*

In the last decades a very diverse range of initiatives have been undertaken in order to intensify and diversify the ways human mobility is managed and restricted. This trend towards a ‘diversification’ of the migration control strategies stems from the increased awareness by the nation-states of the profoundly controversial nature of the migration management enterprise because of its political, economic, social and moral implications. The states’ ambition to rigorously regulate the movement of people across borders needs, therefore, to be made more “subtle” in order to appease and satisfy, or at least give the impression of satisfying, the number of objectives pursued by the different stakeholders. Satisfying these coincident objectives requires one to go beyond the idea of mere control and instead consider a broader strategic scheme where even opposing notions and ideas can coexist and be employed in pursuit of the same ultimate goal.

In their newly edited volume, Geiger and Pécoud propose the notion of ‘disciplining’ as a valuable interpretative tool that can be used to understand the current state of transnational human mobility and to help overcome its associated incongruities. According to the two editors, ‘disciplining’ does not entail the withdrawal of control, rather it goes “hand-in-hand” with it (Pécoud, p. 10) lending it a specific rational appearance and softening its oppressive modes. It is about a new form of ‘governmentality’ which encompasses the different techniques and procedures that have been designed “to make sense of, order and, in the end, manipulate and discipline people’s mobilities across borders” (Geiger, p. 34).

The two concepts, ‘disciplining’ and ‘governmentality’, of Foucauldian inspiration, guide us throughout this uplifting book, broadening and restoring our understanding and approach towards migration control dynamics. The editors have masterly assembled a remarkable list of contributions by scholars from a wide range of disciplines including, but not exclusive to, sociology, anthropology, geography, legal theory, law, ethnology and information studies, and covering a wide range of topics. The result is outstanding.

The multidisciplinary of the contributions are brilliantly harmonized by the two editors through the interpretative framework and the historical per-



spective they provide in the first two chapters of the book. By introducing the notion of ‘disciplining’, its main features and implications, Pécoud (Chapter 1) supplies the conceptual apparatus to interpret and insert the various contributions into a broader coherent framework. The various tonalities that disciplining can assume (from coercion to protection and persuasion) allows for a better understanding of the quasi-schizophrenic rationale that characterizes some recent developments in the politics of mobility, documented by some of the contributors (Hastie, Chapter 7; de Coulon, Chapter 11). This disciplinary regime can be achieved in different ways: through a paternalistic approach (Hastie, Chapter 7), using a set of ‘disciplinary tools’ (Pécoud, Chapter 1) and through the action of other non-State actors, such as, for example, international organizations (Rother, Chapter 3) and private firms (Smith, Chapter 5).

As evoked by the image of the chessboard in the background of the cover, disciplining is about an ordered rationality which creates the conditions and regulates “the mobility, and the immobility”, of people (Pécoud, p. 4). The capability of movement of the chess pieces depends indeed upon their role and is inserted into an ordered system characterized by endemic asymmetries. It is clear that the rationale behind the design of the game’s rules stems from the opposing interests of the players and that a win-win logic could neutralize the rules. The metaphor of the chess game is therefore illustrative of the complex relation between the rule of law and the migration management paradigm intriguingly presented by Schotel (Chapter 4). If the rules of the game can become a metaphor of the rule of law, disciplining can be understood as the act of giving names and assigning roles to the chess pieces and to establishing the objective of the game. Disciplining is indeed presented by Pécoud as a wide set of cognitive assumptions and ideological categories through which the world is labelled (and made knowable) and which makes the exercise of power possible. This point is perhaps the most significant of the book because it reveals its main and best achieved goal, which is: to critically and systematically de-construct the ways the control of migration has been conceived and approached. This also helps explain how it is possible that even charitable institutions can be involved in such disciplinary dynamics (as documented by Dünwald, Chapter 12) or that people can self-discipline, adhering to certain normative behaviours and practices that are not necessarily imperatively imposed (for an example, see the contribution by D’Aoust, Chapter 6).

In this sense, the contribution made by Geiger in Chapter 2 is fundamental. He traces the process that has led to what he calls a ‘new governmentality’, characterized by the emergence of the concept of ‘global management of migration’ that seeks to placate the need to maintain a global flexible labour market with the ever present security concerns and fears. Emblematic examples of the pursuit of these simultaneous objectives are the temporary migration programs (see Eriksson and Tollefsen, Chapter 10).

Geiger also highlights that ‘governmentality of transnational mobility’ is often related and influenced by humanitarian and protection concerns. These

concerns, however, are often revealed to be merely a humanitarian illusion that enables nation-states to bypass their legal obligations (Dünnwald, Chapter 12). The contributions also show how these disciplinary orientations, and the apparent “organized rationality” they promote, often lead paradoxically, to paralysis characterized by chaos and disorder. Their outcomes are furthermore often practically inefficient as well as humanly unacceptable (Hastie, Chapter 7; de Coulon, Chapter 11; Dünnwald, Chapter 12).

The historical perspective given by Geiger helps to identify how the categories currently used to consider migration were born and in which context they have been internalized. Rother (Chapter 3) focuses on the ways nation-states and international organizations have shaped discourse and propaganda and on the counter-arguments expounded by migrant organizations. He particularly shows how the term ‘management’ is itself part of the disciplining logic, demonstrating how the consideration of migration as a manageable challenge has paved the way to the legitimation of “solutions from above” (Rother, p. 41). Schotel (Chapter 4) systematically criticizes the current migration vocabulary and demonstrates how the failure of the effective protection of migrant rights can be traced to the use (and misuse) of words, whose subjacent logic, vagueness and apparent neutrality have the power to deactivate the rule of law, even legitimating socio-economic discrimination. He finally notes how the idea of ‘flow’, suggesting a chaotic, extraordinary phenomenon, leads one to put aside the law in favor of the increasing conviction of the necessity to manage the flows in both rational and technical ways. It is not a coincidence that the following chapter by Smith (Chapter 5) deals precisely with the way in which the uncertainty of the flows have led to the social and technological “construction” of borders increasingly conceived as a commodified service to be delivered.

One of the main arguments of the book is that the labelling power is not homogeneously distributed. As stated by Pécoud (p. 8), for example, “a voluntary return is a return that is labelled voluntary by those actors that have labelling power and legitimacy”. It is for this reasons that Alpes (Chapter 8) hardly denounces the uncritical usage of categories and concepts in migration studies, remarking how migration scholars often use legal categories from the perspective of the state. Furthermore, D’Aoust (Chapter 6) notes that scholars must be aware of the artificiality of categories and that “migrants are navigating categories in a more fluid way” (D’Aoust, p. 106). According to Basok, Piper and Simmons (Chapter 9) the discourse disciplines also through silence, selecting which topics should be made visible and which not. The puzzle pieces that do not find their place in the globe presented on the cover evokes artificial dichotomies that pervade discourse on migration, such as ‘desiderables-undesiderables’, ‘legals-illegals’ which are amply discussed and criticized throughout the book. But this eloquent image of a globe, representing the world and made up of a puzzle reminds us unequivocally of the constructivist approach of the whole volume. The ultimate (and successfully achieved) aim of the book is to offer a visualization of the hidden patterns that remain, “for

broadening and transforming the way in which the control of migration is thought about and researched” (Pécoud, p. 11).

Certainly, one may argue that the volume occasionally lacks a consistency of terminology and conceptualization due to the different ways the various authors present the relationship between discipline and control. Still, this apparent weakness can be considered as inherent in the constructivist perspective of the book. In fact, if the main goal is to escape from “epistemological reductionism” (Smith, p. 100) and dismantle the “totalizing narratives” (D’Aoust, p. 106), one cannot expect to find a unique set of concepts used in a univocal manner by all the contributors. The reader will not find any homogeneous reconstruction of meaning nor a clear re-proposition of categories, but will surely benefit from its reading. This book brings into question the layers involved when discussing migratory realities, revealing the need for a profound revision of our approach to deciphering them. It gives every reader the awareness of the false taxonomies and of the inconsistencies of the normative discourse on migration, alerting us of the need for continued critical research. Even if the lack of a concluding chapter leaves a sense of incompleteness, it also transmits the complexity of the power dynamics in the global political and economic arenas. Every reader will undoubtedly be challenged by the chapters in this new book, and benefit from the continuous fruitful, collaborative efforts of these two editors.