

Regina Polak, Aybiçe Tosun and Ansgar Jödicke (editors)

Religious and Non-Religious Narratives on Migration: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

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In an era increasingly shaped by transnational movements and marked by the discourses of insecurity and fear, *‘Religious and Non-Religious Narratives on Migration’* edited by Regina Polak, Aybiçe Tosun and Ansgar Jödicke, provides an insightful look into how narratives on migration are interrelated with religion. Emerging from the COST Action “Connecting Theory and Practical Issues of Migration and Religious Diversity” (COREnet CA20107), this volume brings together twenty-seven authors from various European countries. Across ten chapters the contributors, through an interdisciplinary approach, shed light on the essential role of human experience not only for receptiveness but also for migrants' self-perception, highlighting that the religious dimension is embodied within narratives of migration, even in highly secular contexts. Grounded in the view that migration is best understood through lived experience, the authors adopt a flexible framework that moves beyond predefined conceptual boundaries and transcends the usual legal and policy-oriented approaches. The volume centres on three key concepts: ‘narrative’, ‘religion’, and ‘migration’, whose interconnectedness is seen through the lens of diverse national contexts of migration.

This volume presents the analysed narratives across three main themes: *Religious Narratives on Migration*, *Narrative Cafés* and *Non-Religious Narratives*. The first thematic cluster encompasses three articles that approach migration from theological and sociological perspectives. Katz-Wilfing, Polak and Jašić, through an analysis of foundational religious texts explain that historical memory and collective experiences of migration are embodied in the narratives of different religious traditions. The second article by Coşan Eke, Djurić Milovanović, and Zrinščak examines interreligious dialogue in Austria, Croatia, and Serbia, focusing on how religious diversity is woven into initiatives related to migration and refugees, and how these dialogues challenge prevailing portrayals of migration as a threat. In the final article, Coşan Eke, Can Zırh, Çetin and Jenkins illustrate the position of the Alevi community in Turkey, Austria and the UK, focusing on the relations between Islam and Alevi identity, the role of Alevi associations and the narratives of their political recognition.

The second section, *Narrative Cafés*, represents the essential objective of this volume: to convey the significance of human experience in researching migration. The first article (by Tosun, Polko and Stojanovic) discusses the methodological contributions and challenges of the Narrative Cafés approach, based on focus group interviews conducted in Austria, Turkey and Serbia, and elucidates the methodological potential of narratives. The second article (by Jovanović, Koca and Stauslane) not only reveals the lived experiences of refugees through storytelling but also illuminates fragments of

religious meanings hidden within narratives of migration, thereby identifying five elemental categories of religious meanings embedded in the migration experience.

The third cluster, *Non-Religious Narratives*, consists of three articles. Dias Branco, Jovanović and Škobla analyse two films, *Le Havre* (2011) and *The Other Side of Hope* (2017), depicting migrants' journeys as transformations across physical and symbolic thresholds, revealing an unjust European system that, instead of protecting, corrodes the essence of human rights. Göksel, Jödicke and Tramontanis explore the narratives of religiously affiliated humanitarian NGOs in Turkey and Greece, showing that the encoded religious narratives are intended to support migrants' rights and that humanitarian commitment overrides the political and religious divide. Finally, Ališauskienė, Juchnevičiūtė, Krčál, Naxera, Polko and Stasulane analyse parliamentary debates in Czechia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland during the 2015 and 2022 refugee crises arising from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries and Ukraine. By decoding the patterns of language use, the authors highlight how political language gradually shifts from a rhetoric of threat to a more positive framing of migration.

Following the three thematic sections, a reflective chapter (by Helfrich, Gniazdowski and Vydrová) reconsiders the prevailing migration narratives and inequality as the ever-present condition of migration, bridging the discussion with the concluding section (by Polak, Tosun and Jödicke) that outlines the main findings, challenges and perspectives for future research.

Religious and Non-Religious Narratives on Migration represents a significant contribution to contemporary migration and religion studies. While human experiences alone may not entirely deconstruct the deeply rooted patterns of prevailing exclusionary narratives, they can give voice to the existing and unknown realities of migration. The deliberate decision not to fix rigid definitions of "migration," "religion," or "narrative" allows conceptual openness and analytical depth, while placing migrant experiences at the centre of the analysis. The volume evokes the notion that narrative, religious and secular alike, can stigmatise and humanise migrants. Its interdisciplinary scope and methodological approach make it a valuable resource for anyone seeking to understand migration from within, across the inner landscapes of migrants' lived experiences and narratives. It reminds readers that narratives are not mere stories to be taken for granted, but crucial spaces of meaning that must be engaged with to understand the complexity of migration and its entanglement with lived realities.