

2016

Preface

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Recommended Citation

Harris, Sascha (2016) "Preface," *CALL: Irish Journal for Culture, Arts, Literature and Language*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 2.

doi:10.21427/D75P45

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/priamls/vol1/iss1/2>

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CALL Vol. I/1: Language, Migration and Diaspora

Editors: Alma Conway, Noel Deeney, Sascha Harris

A Short Preface

In November 2011, the Committee for Modern Language, Literary and Cultural Studies of the Royal Irish Academy and the School of Languages at the DIT staged a symposium on Language, Migration and Diaspora. A year later it was decided that in view of the very large and wide-ranging number of contributions at least a digest of the proceedings deserved to be published. CALL's first volume is the outcome of that editing process, offering some twenty papers from well over sixty presented at the symposium.

The topic of the symposium and the contributions gathered here could not be more timely. In 2015, the number of refugees worldwide reached 21.3 million.¹ While the number for 2016 has not been released yet, it is likely to be even higher. The migration of people, whether in the spectacular shape it has taken in the Mediterranean, across from Greece to Germany, the large scale emigration from Ireland in the wake of the 2008 financial crash or the everyday change of workplace across national borders, is not really an extraordinary phenomenon. And yet, the images and ideas of migration and the migrant, more often than not, are attached to the extraordinary, the spectacular, presenting them as marginal events in peripheral places. Migration is an everyday event, to the extent that large institutions such as the European Union have been created to encourage and facilitate it. This misperception is to no small degree a result of the unhelpful quantification with which even this preface opens.

With the relentless proliferation of vocational 'research', that combination of opinion polls, 'case studies', statistics and 'bottom lines', quantification itself has darkened any substantial insight into the issues which touch on migration. The splashing of numbers across headlines – especially when it comes to the 'floods of migrants', or even when the numbers are actually negligible, such as at Calais, is enough to instigate a media frenzy, quickly followed by organised racism, sweeping generalisation and the current emergence of populist movements

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

which structurally rely on anti-immigration or xenophobic sentiments fed by more numbers and abstractions.

This issue shows that quantification itself is a key factor in causing migratory problems. The calculation of asylums seekers, or of the cost of feeding, teaching or training, or even repatriating refugees reveals nothing at all about the migratory existence. In fact, it turns what is an individual, real person into a non-existent, abstract case, a number, and thanks to the all-pervasive simplifications and ideological jargon emanating from business studies, into a costly liability.

Christina Boswell's introduction to her 2003 study can stand without changing a word – a worrying indication that the migration debate has not really moved on in any constructive manner.² It seems that as migration unfolds in all its diversity and complexity, the perception of it and the thinking about it remains fundamentally unaltered. An example is Ireland, for which migration has been central for so long. Only when it experienced its first influx of immigrants rather than the usual wave of emigration a wider audience began to concern itself with the issues around migration.

The articles in this issue of CALL explore issues of migration as they should be explored. People sitting at desks, calculating the cost of this and the increase of that, have nothing to tell us of the realities of those who are 'stationary' or those who migrate. That is why the plight of a single child in the Mediterranean tells us more and grips us more than the debate about allocation of quotas – a debate which does nothing but exacerbate racism, hostility and an unwillingness to engage with the actual issues.

The contributions in this issue come from across the world and touch on the most diverse situations across the world. Opening the issue, Frangos offers a pert reminder not only of the origin of the word and the concept of diaspora, but of migration as a phenomenon fundamental not only to contemporary Greek identity and life, but as central to the society which gave this continent its name and whose heritage continues to condition our values of integration. In her well-illustrated study into Volga Germans in Russia, Andersen documents the fascinating impact a new home has on one's first language, but also the resilience of that language of origin. Opitz offers us similarly precise insights into the relationship long-term migrants have with their adopted language, here of Germans adapting to English in Ireland.

² Christina Boswell: *European Migration: Policies in Flux, Changing Patterns of Inclusion and Exclusion*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.

Androulakis, Mastorodimou and van Boeschoten examine how adult immigrants could be facilitated in their acquisition of Greek and the factors educators need to consider. Heying and Kennedy tackle this issue for Chinese students in Ireland, highlighting the relevance of the key factors of intercultural competence and the development of personal motivation as part of an integrative process.

Carthy provides an insight into the problems around learning a foreign language against the apparent predominance of English and the language policies adopted in English-speaking countries, and answers the question whether a policy of language diversity can encourage not only foreign language acquisition but cultural diversity and openness in the affirmative. Gaynor's study of Japanese attitudes towards foreigners mirror this to an extent; here spaces of language homogeneity, which for a long time meant cultural homogeneity or exclusiveness are beginning to break up, with the Japanese state reacting very slowly, not dissimilar to English-speaking countries.

Prikhodkine, Saavedra and Mamed very pointedly show us the workings of prejudice and how they are activated by name alone. It is a phenomenon not restricted to French-speaking Switzerland, but Catalano points out with equal sharpness the manner in which the use of language predisposes to, engenders and maintains such prejudice, in this case in the U. S. American media treatment of those of Latino origin, whether convicted of a crime or not.

Rabourdin directs our interest towards the spatial elements which mark a migrant's experience, and, coming from the perspective of an architect, shows how this spatial experiences translates itself in and through language. Narcis explores the significance of space, and indeed the space that is also 'in between time', as it articulates itself in and through language on the occasion of the crossing of Catalans and Spaniards into France as they escape from Franco's victory in 1939.

Fischer provides a much-needed insight into how contemporary Irish fiction represents and deals with a less homogenous Ireland and opens up the debate about Irish identity and Ireland's "Leitkultur"; more often than not this fiction proffers a more critical and accurate insight into Ireland's issues around diversity than the press and popular discourse. In her very apt look at the poetry of Zschorsch, Drawert and Oleschinski, Egger convincingly traces the role of the dynamic projections inherent in that sweeping East-West dichotomy (and its partner centre-periphery pairing) as it manifests itself in the treatment of spaces, in historical associations, the use of imagery, but also finds expression in popular politics and ideology. It

is a strangely dynamic and adaptable dichotomy, which can be seen to operate inside a single nation as much as between any combination of ethnic or national identities. Olsson shows how literature offers an authentic insight into the impact of migratory pressures on identity and its rendering in language and indeed on family dynamics as Hispanic parents and children try to integrate into the U.S.A. Vendrell hones in on the key function of language as a guarantee against the disappearance of a migrant's 'time'. Language, he argues, preserves memory, and with it the space, place and time of the migratory movement in a very specific manner; like Narcis, he follows the exodus of Spaniards across the French border. The key significance of place, and its very dynamic relationship not only with a migrant's identity, but the formative, interactive and intercultural realities of separate diasporas are the theme of Karimi's apt juxtaposition of the Latin American and African diasporas as their members negotiate themselves between their lives in Paris and their heritage and origin. Here, again, literature defies sweeping statistical answers; Karimi sheds light on the multiply-determined nature of the diaspora and the migrant living within it. Fernández pursues a similar theme. In the work of Antunes he tracks down the very unique experience of Portuguese settlers forced to return to what was once their home country. Places of memory do not necessarily offer space for integration. In extrapolating this experience, Fernández draws our attention to another type of migrant, seemingly postcolonial, but in many ways typical in the age of long-term economic migration. Fernández describes the painful, shifting nature of migratory identity and the unique precariousness of any diaspora.

Pols creatively asks us to join him on an excursion, or possibly a Dutch incursion into the Germany at the beginning of the 20th century. The idea of perception as construction here comes alive as the Dutch gaze infuses Germany with very Dutch sentiments, adapts, heteronomises what it observes, yet equally absorbs that which is German, allowing it in turn to condition and 'impregnate' that gaze. One culture, Pols argues, is also construed through another; a realisation entirely missing from the current popular discourse on migration. This interdependence and interaction, especially between migrant's view and place of residence, and the construction of a diaspora is central to Vettorato's study into the emergence of an African diaspora. Vettorato views language as the key to negotiating the identity of original belonging with identity in the new place of abode. A particular role is played here by translation – literally the translation of one text into another, but also the engagement in the process of 'transposing' such texts or the discussion of these into that constructed perception, which in turn will articulate itself as a new or separate identity. Hernández-González

examines a related process for the shifting construction of Italy and Italian identity for those emigrating to Argentina; with Pols and Vettorato she offers us an insight into the cross-cultural rendering inherent in translation and transposition, serving the values, needs and sentiments of the cultures of origin, destination and migrant alike.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow editors, Alma Conway and Noel Deeney, for their help throughout the lengthy process of putting this volume together. I would also like to thank the former colleagues on the RIA Committee for Modern Language, Literary and Cultural Studies who offered their help or volunteered for the Supervisory Board of the journal. Many sincere thanks also to the selfless second and, in some cases, third readers. Amongst colleagues I particularly would like to thank Marty Meinardi, Susanna Nocchi and Henry Leperlier for their assistance in the hour of need. I need to make emphatic mention of Yvonne Desmond, whose competent and reliable help allowed this journal to see the light of day. It is her and her colleague Brian Widdis at Central Library Services of the DIT I would like to thank especially, not least for their patience, advice and knowledge of digital publishing.

May I also draw attention to the second issue of CALL, which will be published shortly and will be edited by colleagues at Queen's University Belfast.

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November 2016