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## FEATURED REVIEWS

***The Great Departure. Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World.*** By Tara Zahra. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016. 392 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. \$28.95, hard bound.

doi:10.1017/slr.2017.18

One of the main motives driving a majority of UK voters to support “Brexit” in the 2016 EU referendum were their concerns about immigration, in particular from the eastern European EU member countries. While the right to take a job in any member state is one of the four “freedoms” that underpin the EU, it also provokes anti-immigration sentiments. In Austria—the country that has arguably benefitted most from EU enlargement—not only the far right but also leading politicians from mainstream parties question the right of free movement, in view of many migrant workers from eastern Europe. In the new member countries, on the other hand, governments rant against immigration while defending the right of their citizens to freely move to other EU countries. Migration debates are thus full of paradoxes but unfailingly linked to public anxieties.

Tara Zahra’s remarkable new book helps to put these recent developments in historical context. She highlights the long history of problematizing migration from eastern Europe in both sending and receiving states, ever since massive emigration from eastern Europe to America began in the late 19th century. Zahra’s objective is to show how closely emigration was linked with salient political debates about welfare, citizenship, and the nation. In particular, she is interested in the intricate relationship between migration and freedom. While many see the right to emigrate as a hallmark of freedom, others regard emigrants as victims of dreadful conditions and unscrupulous traffickers. Another overarching theme concerns the continuities in the politics of emigration. The author asserts, for example, that the Iron Curtain was not merely a Soviet imposition but “the culmination of a century-long struggle against emigration in Eastern Europe” (21).

So, what is this book about? Chapter 1 focuses on emigration from the Habsburg Empire, which before WWI became one of the major suppliers of immigrants to the United States. The chapter opens with a revealing story that captures the fears but also the hopes pinned to emigration: the spectacular 1889 court trial of migration agents in the Galician town of Wadowice. Zahra shows that migration agents were used as scapegoats by media and policy makers, not unlike today. One important theme in the Habsburg debates was the nationalists’ fear that emigration deprived their nation of its most valuable members. More generally, the government was concerned about maintaining sovereignty over citizens who left, and social reformers voiced fears about the welfare of emigrants. The ensuing politics of emigration in the Dual Monarchy already encompassed some of the tensions that would shape later developments, such as between the state’s interest in migrant transfers and its impulse to control movement.

Chapter 2 details concerns by government officials and public activists about the fate of overseas emigrants, again focusing on the Habsburg Empire,

where the debate about emigration became closely aligned with social reform. Emigration was thought by some to be a solution to socio-political problems, most notably Zionism. Simultaneously, others highlighted the misery of emigrants and considered emigration a threat to traditional family relations. Such anxieties were particularly pronounced with respect to migrant women, who were often presented as “white slaves” forced into prostitution. Yet, what authorities and activists generally ignored was the fact that migrants had their own agency, as illustrated by the many “small” stories of individuals in the book.

Chapter 3 shows how and why instrumental attitudes towards migration hardened in the interwar period. The governments of the new nation-states considered emigration an instrument for getting rid of undesirable minorities while at the same time inviting pre-1914 emigrants to come back. The intensification of restrictions on migration was the general trend of the time. The International Labour Organization even attempted to create an international framework for migration control, including welfare provisions. Still, migrants found ways around the rules, not least thanks to the inconsistent application of these by local authorities. Government approaches were also not coherent but torn between conflicting agendas, promoted by different parts of the government. After all, in times of economic crisis emigration served as a safety valve, despite the emotive talk about the patriotic duty to stay home.

Under the provocative title “The First Final Solution,” Chapter 4 discusses the most extreme form of instrumentalist migration policy, which is to use emigration as a means of ethnic homogenization. Zahra concentrates on government attempts to get rid of Jews by emigration, mainly before the outbreak of WWII. The most pronounced example was of course Nazi Germany, but it was not the only one. Poland tried to reach a negotiated resettlement of parts of its Jewish populations at the end of the 1930s as well. Even president Roosevelt regarded the organized emigration of east European Jews as the solution to the “Jewish question” (144). Zahra essentially shows how racial ideologies and humanitarian impulses intersected in the support of emigration of the Jewish populations of Germany and east central Europe. Here, she could have drawn a stronger link to “population exchanges” in the Balkans in the wake of the Balkan Wars and WWI. These had set a precedent for internationally-accepted forced resettlement of large numbers of people in the name of conflict resolution.

Chapter 5 further develops the argument that economic concerns were a prime rationale for state policies towards emigration, but co-existed in an uneasy relationship with other political aims. In 1945, war-ravaged Europe was faced with millions of people on the move: displaced persons, former POWs, German expellees, refugees. Zahra shows that authorities were often torn between economic considerations and their ideological frameworks concerning citizenship when deciding whom to accept and whom not to. Such cracks helped refugees to present themselves in a way that would make them acceptable, for example by claiming the “right” ethnic descent. With the emergent Cold War and the 1951 Geneva Convention, the differentiation between political and economic migrants became more pronounced, which would shape governments’ attitudes in the next decades.

Chapter 4 describes the ambivalent meaning of migration from communist countries during the Cold War. The communists' severe restrictions on travel, most spectacularly exemplified by highly fortified borders, became one of the most powerful tropes in the west's self-image of being the "free world." Zahra rightly stresses that the communists built on a long tradition of anti-immigration rhetoric, stringently restricting travel sometimes before they assumed exclusive power primarily due to the desperate need for labor for reconstruction and industrial expansion. In the west, "escapees" from communist countries were praised as icons of the anti-communist liberation struggle—as long as they did not come in large numbers. The liberty to travel became a yardstick of judging a country's level of freedom, which is why Yugoslavia was seen in such a different light.

The last chapter is a perforce tour from the 1970s to the present day, describing how the Helsinki Act, the end of communist rule, and European Union enlargement shaped recent east European migration patterns. Again, a common thread through these periods is the instrumental approach of governments trying to make emigration correspond to their development goals. Nicolae Ceaușescu's Romania literally sold Germans (to Germany) and Jews (to Israel), exploiting emigration as a means to earn hard currency and to get rid of unwanted minorities. During the Cold War, western democracies had articulated a clear link between the freedom to travel and freedom. Yet, when the Berlin Wall fell, alarm bells rang in the halls of European governments frightened by the prospect of millions of immigrants from eastern Europe. Nevertheless, despite popular misgivings, the European Union created a space of free mobility. As Zahra poignantly concludes, however, current developments show that the "end of the Cold War did not end the long-standing debate about the relationship between freedom and mobility" (287). Is it really freedom if one flees from misery? Zahra rightly calls for not so easily dismissing all those voices in eastern Europe who for more than a century—at least on surface—were worried about the well-being of emigrants. I think we can also read these pronouncements as a manifestation of perceived marginality: east Europeans, who live next to one of the richest regions in the world, recognize that emigration is often the only available strategy for personal advancement. On the other hand, they see it as proof of their peripheral status *visa-a-vis* the west: one might draw a link between concerns over emigration and uneasiness about the west.

As with all books presenting a bold idea and covering—on less than 300 pages—more than a century and multiple countries with complex histories, one could identify some minor inaccuracies, but that is not the point. Sometimes, the author wants to say too much and is carried away by interesting but maybe not so relevant side developments. Yet, this makes for an engaging read, even though many of the stories are rather sad. My only criticism concerns the relatively weak engagement with migration research. This might explain why the social and economic dimensions of emigration receive little attention. One cannot have all in one book, obviously, but some of the author's arguments would have benefited from drawing more on migration studies, for example state attempts to control the use of remittances. I also wonder how we can explain the continuities in government responses to emigration: are they linked to person-

nel continuity on the expert level, to the hegemony of discursive frameworks, or just to the limited number of options available to governments in the region?

These quibbles aside, the book is doubtlessly an important contribution to eastern European and to migration history. It shows that the modern world order was in significant ways shaped by developments in eastern Europe. It is important to note that this concerns not only the Cold War but also the time before and after it. As for migration history, Tara Zahra's book helps to overcome the prevalent imbalance in migration research, which spends much more ink on the effects of immigration than emigration. "The Great Departure" firmly places the experiences of eastern European countries in the study of migration, and migration in the study of the history of the region. The book is a fine example of a genuinely entangled history of eastern Europe. It is written in a very accessible and lively manner, so that it will appeal not only to scholars and graduate students but also to undergraduates and the general audience. If you are searching for a book in order to convince anyone of the relevance of eastern European history, you can just use this one.

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***Paprika, Foie Gras, and Red Mud: The Politics of Materiality in the European Union.*** By Zsuzsa Gille. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. xii, 164 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Tables. \$27.00, paper.

doi:10.1017/slr.2017.19

Following news about the EU, one is perplexed that political personalities as different as Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson give so much rhetorical importance to seemingly insignificant things, like fruits and vegetables in their "fight for national sovereignty" against the EU. In his 2016 national holiday speech, Orbán used regulating the curvature of cucumbers as a symbol of what is wrong with the EU. Similarly, as part of his Brexit campaign, Johnson claimed as an example of "pointless EU regulations" that "you cannot sell bananas in bunches of more than two or three."<sup>1</sup> There are indeed minute regulations concerning all vegetables and fruits to be sold fresh, which stipulate that in addition to being "intact, sound, firm, clean, non-bitter, and free of foreign smell," extra and first class produce have to meet the "arc criteria": they "must be well shaped and practically straight (maximum height of the arc: 10 mm per 10 cm of length of the cucumber)" (No 1677/1988). There are also marketing standards for bananas (No 1333/2011) that deal with their presentation (in wholesale, not in retail as Brexit campaigners claimed). Politicians are not known for investing much

1. *The Telegraph*, May 17, 2016, at [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/17/boris-johnson-accused-of-making-it-up-as-he-goes-along-after-cla/](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/17/boris-johnson-accused-of-making-it-up-as-he-goes-along-after-cla/) (last accessed January 24, 2017).