In the second decade of the twenty-first century, global migration has become one of the most prevalent topics, if not the most important one. Europe’s so-called ‘migrant crisis’ has dominated public discourse for the past few years, while, across the Atlantic, the announcement of plans to erect a wall to stem unwanted migration into the United States was a major point of dispute in the 2016 presidential election. Meanwhile, Australia’s controversial anti-immigration policies have incited public debates within and without the country on the responsibility of states towards non-citizens and on the human right to have rights. Ever sensitive to current debate, playwrights, theatre makers and directors have actively participated in these public debates by aesthetically and politically engaging with migration in its various forms, a trend reflected by two publications that could not be timelier.

Gad Guterman’s monograph *Performance, Identity, and Immigration Law: A Theatre of Undocumentedness* (2014) discusses the constitution of legal non-existence and accounts of living without documents in relation to theatrical language, identity performance, and presence through the lens of several case studies of recent US-American plays on immigration. Concerned with questions of visibility and invisibility, Guterman examines how contemporary US theatre engages with the topic of immigration and which role performance takes in immigration debates. Intriguingly, his study is structured alongside the framework of US immigration law, and the chapters take their titles from the headings of different sections of the US-American “Immigration and Nationality Act,” while the theoretical groundwork draws on Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1975). The publication opens up a score of plays exploring US immigration law and can function as a guide to what to read and study. Guterman explicitly chose the ‘more mainstream’ plays of this genre, reasoning that material which had gained more visibility allowed for conclusions to be drawn about the reciprocal influences of cultural productions and processes of identity formation.
The introductory chapter, “Act § 237(a)(I)(B) – Present in Violation of Law,” establishes the central term “undocumentedness” as the author’s deliberate choice over labels such as “illegal” or “alien” (2) to mark a “space of legal non-existence” (3). The chapter also offers a succinct history of 19th- and (mainly) 20th- and 21st-century US immigration laws and practices, and this outline of the history of “a theatre of undocumentedness” reminds us that the contemporary debate on immigration and immigration law in the US is not a recent development but in fact “part of a long-standing, ongoing negotiation” (18). To underline this point, Guterman’s analysis moves back in time to include Arthur Miller’s A View from the Bridge (1955) about the Italian-American community in 1950s New York City, and Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein’s 1958 musical Flower Drum Song about the Chinese-American community in San Francisco. Throughout his study, Guterman makes a strong case “for connections between cultural productions and processes of identity formation” (14) and suggests considering a person’s legal identity as formative and performative as their gender, their ethnic or national identity.

The second chapter (“Act § 275(a) – Improper Entry by Alien”) points at the live performance of border crossing and (in reference to Sophie Nield) “the border’s theatricality” (33), the hypothetical space occupied by the theatre, arguing that the various plays on immigration scenarios allow for a reimagining of the concept of national borders. The chapter then turns to an in-depth discussion of three plays from the later 20th century: the satirical, interview-based Bordertown (1998) by San Francisco-based performance troupe Culture Clash, Genny Lim’s Paper Angels (1980), a poetry- and interview-based one-acter tracing the narratives of Chinese immigrants detained on San Francisco’s Angel Island in 1915, subject to the Chinese Exclusion Act, and Josefina López’s Real Women Have Curves (1996) about Latina immigrants working in a sewing factory in Los Angeles in the 1980s.

“As works of art,” Gutermann states,

theatre pieces that stage border scenarios ably play in the hypothetical and allow for a reconsideration of the border. [Sophie] Nield advocates that theatre opens ‘an alternative form of border space’ in order to frame and problematize questions of nation and identity. However, border scenarios, especially when staged in an interview-based piece such as Bordertown, reminds us that the line between hypothesis and observation is not clear-cut. What if, the stage piece insists, can alert us to what was or what is. [...] We must therefore pay attention to how representations of border interactions can both propel cultural imaginaries and direct real-life exchanges between border crossers and managers. (34–5)

Throughout, the study acknowledges the difficulty of escaping “rigid systems of categorization and borderization” (60). The works analysed in this chapter were created in the 1990s at a time when identity politics and subsequent labelling
were at their peak, and Guterman aptly problematises the practice of and preoccupation with labelling within the field of cultural production (and, subsequently, critical discussion thereof) by pointing out that this practice erases differences in the “varied histories of immigration and community-building in the United States,” but that the creation of “possibly productive connections” (61) is also hindered by such practices. Although the author challenges the notion of labels and criticises the categorising processes of identity politics, the study also partakes in exactly these mechanisms by suggesting a person’s legal identity as another category, while an examination of the systemic global and political structures that enable and enforce these categorisations might have situated the argument within a wider critical debate. Guterman does draw attention to the fact that “immigration is treated predominantly as the story of immigrants (and to a lesser degree of its policy enforcers)” and that the topic is rarely “discussed as a broad phenomenon in a politico-economic system in which all US residents and citizens partake” (65–6) – a valid and crucial point that calls for expansion.

Throughout this study, theatrical performances are recurrently described in terms of a spiritual cleansing or an awakening of the audience, and hence Guterman’s publication may be understood as probing the psyche of a nation of immigrants attempting to come to terms with its own complicated and partially disavowed history of immigration. Though touching on Homi Bhabha’s The Location of Culture (2004), the study does not acknowledge Bhabha’s rootedness in Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities (1983) and how this might bear on the larger context of Guterman’s project, nor does it explore Bhabha’s underlying concept of ‘nation and narration’ within a wider theoretical framework. The study thus remains engaged in suggesting new “modes of articulating nation” (60) by searching for a cohesive national narrative, without taking into account that such a project might ultimately be impossible and probably futile.

The third chapter, “274A – Unlawful Employment of Aliens,” focusses on the employment of (undocumented) domestic personnel, via analyses of plays such as Lisa Loomer’s Living Out (2003), Milcha Sánchez-Scott’s Latina (1980) and Octavio Solis’s Lydia (2008). Although the author states he made a conscious choice not to focus on questions of gender, he is still conscientious about gender and appropriation throughout the whole study. Nevertheless, an analysis taking into account the interrelatedness of gender, class, and a neoliberal work environment (which often necessitates the employment of domestic staff) might have pointed towards the wider implications of how large parts of the US-American socio-economic system rely on precisely such undocumented work.

The chapter also explores the notion of ‘undocumentedface’ as a pendant to blackface and yellowface: the “phenomenon in which members of a dominant
social group perform as marginalized Others” (68), in this case undocumented members of the community. Guterman examines the implications of such a practice, given that “those in undocumentedness are precluded from partaking directly in processes of theatre-making and theatre-going” (68).

Regrettably, the ensuing discussion of comfortable middle-class audience members’ presumed experience of the plays remains assumptive and rooted in the worry that spectators might not realise they are being critiqued. Throughout the presentation of these case studies, Guterman voices concerns that theatres and audiences alike may not recognise their own “complicity in maintaining and benefiting from an economy that relies on undocumented labor” (97).

Via readings of Teatro de la Esperanza’s 1976 play La víctima, and Janet Noble’s Away Alone (1989), chapter 4 (“Act § 212(a)(9)(B)(iii)(III) – Family Unity”) probes how immigration law and undocumentedness break up families by creating “legally nonexistent, vulnerable groups, for whom resources and aid are extremely limited” (117). The chapter also analyses how performance may be subversive by interfering with immigration laws and the exclusively endorsed familial categories. In his reading of Guillermo Reyes’ Deporting the Divas (1996), Guterman contests that “undocumented, homosexual immigrants occupy a doubly framed space of legal nonexistence” (118), thus foregrounding the understudied aspect of the construction and policing of sexual identities by immigration authorities.

In this chapter, Guterman eventually examines the larger context of a globalised economy that necessitates migration and, importantly, observes that the law, by creating the categories of ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ immigrants, protects business interests while diverting attention “away from commonalities around which seemingly different communities could unite” (147). He argues that the US working class has been deliberately divided by this kind of legal categorisation, which creates and replicates racial and ethnic difference in order to maintain capitalist structures. Linking performativity to performance, the chapter also considers, via Judith Butler, the implications of asserting one’s rights, even if these rights do not exist, as “a critical initial step in making them possible” (150).

In his fifth chapter, “Act § 331 – Alien Enemies,” Guterman expands on the subject of rights and of criminal labels through the lens of Michael John Garcés’ Los Illegals (2007), Ntare Mwine’s Biro (2003), and Yussef El Guindi’s Back of the Throat (2005). He examines the intersection of ethnicity and the likelihood to be marked ‘illegal’ alongside the distinction between citizens and noncitizens based on ‘the right to have rights.’ He also analyses the framing of a person’s undocumented status as criminal, as “an individual’s nefarious choice” instead of the result of global policies and globalised capitalist interests “that compel immigration in the first place” (145). Again, a wider exploration of ‘the right to have rights’
might have been useful in the context of the recent revaluation of Hannah Arendt’s discussion of the topic with regard to refugees (in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1958, and critiqued by, for example, Jacques Rancière in his 2004 article “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?”). However, the chapter makes a claim for the disruptive function of narrative and performance, as both modes have the capability of making alternative and marginalised voices heard: in this way, performance can in fact “become a means to assert rights” (162).

The repeated reference to El Guindi’s play as a “thought game” (156, 157) mark this publication’s heightened interest in narratives rooted in personal experience, interviews, testimony, and witnessing – much like the legal system itself, which is presented as a cultural system here. Sorting the material within a legal grid proves to be a convincing choice, as it allows for a very intersectional approach and for precise distinctions within the framework of undocumentation and all the facets this entails, while working across all those labels that fence in other studies on specific migrant groups. In this way, the study also offers a lot of useful data and details on immigration procedures and legal framework, historically and now, in a very accessible way specifically for those unfamiliar with the US immigration system.

In his last chapter (“Act § 505 – Appeals”), Guterman reiterates his claim that theatre may offer “visibility and dignity” (167) to those that are otherwise ignored. He departs from the discussion of theatrical plays to reflect on street performers impersonating Disney characters on New York’s Time Square. He states that several of them happen to be undocumented immigrants to the United States and argues that, through their performance of these very iconic, quintessential US-American characters, the performers manage to make themselves visible objects of affection while at the same time maintaining their anonymity.

In contrast to Guterman’s very country-specific study, Emma Cox’s publication *Theatre & Migration* (part of Palgrave’s intriguing and provocative *Theatre & series of short books on current intersections between the theatre and wider topics*) spans four continents and discusses the subject of migration and the cultural narration thereof from a more international perspective.

In the first of three sections, “Politics and Mythopoetics,” Cox discusses the notion of space in relation to Sara Ahmed’s reading of the crucial difference between migrant and stranger and points out that “[o]ftentimes, theatre of migration pays attention to imagining the contact zone between those who arrive and those who lay claim to ownership or custodianship over a territory” (4–5). She reminds us that the contemporary theatre of migration has its roots “in the popular itinerant and immigrant theatres of the nineteenth century,” when transnational theatre groups and theatre-makers moved across countries in the wake of European economic expansion and other geopolitical developments (7–8). “If theatre of migration can both shape and reflect a society’s imaginings of its ‘others,’” Cox argues, “then these imaginings are always already caught in an echo chamber of archetypal, often heroic, narratives” (9).

Cox specifically steps away from comparing “iconic narratives of exile” with contemporary theatrical productions, but is interested in “the cultural and political uses of mythic or canonical material” and how it bears upon “the way we tell and hear migration stories” (5). The diachronic and international approach enables her to trace patterns in performance methods and narrative devices and to acknowledge the different contexts of migration that inform the global migration debate as well as local cultural productions engaging with the topic.

In the context of theatre and performance, the study examines “what migrants are meant to mean under contemporary capitalism [...] when belonging is rationalised (and rationed) via an arsenal of passports, visas, body scanners and biometrics” (10). At a time of increasing global mobility, Cox points out that it is capital that moves more freely around the globe, “while human movement, even in its increasing numbers, is subjected to closer scrutiny and codification” (10). In this first part, Cox speaks of the “‘mythopoetics’ of migration” (10) to discuss the “accumulation of visions of foreignness that have collided in the globalised, bureaucratized present” (10). She is interested in how “economic and political conditions of contemporary mobility” coincide “with transhistorical ideas about value or status” (11).

In the second part, “The Migrant Nation,” Cox traces theories of nation and national identity such as Anderson’s Imagined Communities, Robin Cohen’s Global Diasporas (2008) and Giorgio Agamben’s recent writing to ponder ideas of community, collective identity, and belonging. The section focuses on Australian and New Zealand productions and on the two countries’ debates on their citizens’ own migrant histories versus the perpetuated “myth of autochthonous origins” (36). Cox returns to seminal plays such as Jack Davis’s No Sugar (1985) to point at the forced relocation of Aboriginal Australians and to several contemporary plays by Noëlle Janaczewska to demonstrate how playwrights explore topics of nation-
alism and claims to indigeneity (and the consequential right to remain, to be a citizen) in the view of increasing migration. Especially in her discussion of citizens’ ethical responsibilities towards the disenfranchised, Cox offers a very differentiated look at the public and at the audience.

The final section of Cox’s book, “The Migrant City,” explores “the contemporary global city” as the space “where past, present and future meanings of migrant and native identity are (to be) tested and contested” (54). Concentrating on the case studies of London, Cape Town and Toronto, Cox explores utopian and delusional concepts of ‘the city’ and leads into a timely reading of London’s 2010 Olympic Games opening ceremony. She remarks on the ceremony’s claim to a culturally diverse heritage and links the presentation of London as an ‘arrival city’ to the ceremony’s episodic mode of storytelling, an approach that also “appears frequently in theatre of migration.” She argues that this narrative device serves to emphasise “commonality over individuality” (63) and that it enables the construction of a grand, mythical narrative of migration.

Cox’s study is refreshingly inclusive in its approach and reads like a long essay on migration and theatre, with a globalised perspective on the international discussion, and rooted in contemporary theory on migration and national belonging. In the foreword to Cox’s volume, theatre maker Peter Brooks identifies migration as “one of the most basic human yearnings” (xi) and, in view of the current crisis, ends his preface on a call for action: “The solutions will have to be creative solutions” (xii). Returning to Guterman’s take on staging the hypothetical and the ensuing possibilities of reconsidering the border and, by extension, migration scenarios, these two publications invite us to consider theatrical performances that dare to reimagine how we could think about borders and about crossing them.