Das, Veena and Didier Fassin (eds.). 2021. Words and Worlds. A Lexicon for Dark Times. Durham, London: Duke University Press. 319 pp. Pb.: $28,95. ISBN: 9781478014164.

Book review by

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Words and Worlds offers the reader insights into key elements playing a role in and contributing towards "gloomy" times – political and social. According to the authors, the idea to put together such a reader is the outcome of a conversation following the elections in the US of 2016. While printed in 2021, many perspectives shared by the contributors are still – or even more so relevant today – e.g. the failure of western military and aid in peripheral areas of Europe and the US (de Waal in the chapter on *Power*, p. 124f), or the global COVID pandemic arose which, by coincidence, broke out just before this reader was published.

Although the type of subjects this book touches on are of somewhat dystopic nature, it is nonetheless a compelling, as well as fetching, reading experience. The book's structure and chapters are in accordance to the words to be defined in this lexicon, specifically knowledge, democracy, authority, belonging, toleration, power, war, revolution, corruption, openness, resilience, inequality, and crisis. Each definiendum is a contribution of a different author, and on the basis of different theories as well as regional examples such as the US, Germany, India, Sudan and more. The book challenges the settled ideas and assumptions of these terms. It is offering a fresh perspective that emphasizes the interconnectedness of key aspects within the analysis of the current state of politics.

Dark times are unfortunately still apparent today, almost seven years after the birth of this book, and needless to say, we are still "witnessing a flourishing of authoritarian leaders" (Bargu in the chapter on *Authority*, p. 61). However, the authors work towards offering a brighter prospect and find a way to "take contemporary crisis as an opportunity to develop some new and different political horizons" (Pugh in the chapter on *Re-*

silience, p. 242). While the designation of this book as a "lexicon" may be somewhat confusing, *Words and Worlds* is a thought-provoking exploration of thirteen key components of politics and social realms. There is a wide array of analytical approaches, overall anthropological, but also juridic, economic or political.

The book's aim is to encourage its reader to see that if we want to overcome the rise of populist, nationalist, and xenophobic parties, we must step away from the notion of formulating a definitive interpretation, as there cannot be one way to achieving this. As Sanders and Sanders (p. 206) propose with regards to the highly recent topic of "openness": "There are no simple formulae by which to achieve [this] and no enduring solutions. What works at one time and place seems suspect at another". Hence, the selection of topics in this book hint at the complexity of a possible solution which can, however, never be universal. All aspects must be taken into consideration, while simultaneously each topic has also to be viewed critically, and with all its facets.