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Ignorance and Change: Anticipatory Knowledge and the European Refugee Crisis

Edina Lilla Mészáros

BOOK REVIEW

Adriana Mica, Anna Horolets, Mikołaj Pawlak, Paweł Kubicki (2021). **Ignorance and Change: Anticipatory Knowledge and the European Refugee Crisis**. Routledge, 270 pp. ISBN: 9780367569228.

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The year 2015 saw an unprecedented influx of third-country nationals to the European Union (EU), giving rise to deep ideological divides between member states. The contradictory approaches towards the migratory movement were the result of sharp differences concerning the labelling of the phenomenon. While decision-makers in some EU countries perceived it as a refugee crisis, others framed it as an ordinary migratory event involving mainly economic migrants who were not in peril—they were not fleeing persecution and war-torn areas—but rather were in search of a better life and economic benefits. How this event was comprehended at the level of every member state and the EU as a supranational entity was of major importance as it culminated in contrasting policies at the community and national levels. While some member states were willing to welcome

and integrate refugees, others were reluctant to share the burden, adopting a zero-immigration policy. Furthermore, several appeals for securitization were launched, mainly by national decision-makers (i.e., the Visegrad states), framing migrants as threats to national identity, culture, welfare, security, and religion.

In **Ignorance and Change: Anticipatory Knowledge and the European Refugee Crisis**, the authors endeavour to examine the phenomenon of forced migration from a unique angle: that of ignorance studies. Through the prism of three case studies—Hungary, Poland, and Romania—the authors disclose the interplay between projection and ignorance during the 2015 migration deadlock. A dual approach takes shape within the book, as examining the interaction between projections of possible

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futures and ignorance enables the reader to understand not only the dynamics of the processes at domestic level but also how autochthonous perceptions and subsequent policies related to the refugee crisis interact with those elaborated at the EU level. The authors are mainly interested in revealing what ignorance **does**, rather than deciphering what ignorance **is**, through the three specific case studies.

Poland, Hungary, and Romania were primarily chosen as case studies due to them being new EU member states, hence having the status of “weak regulators of EU asylum policy” (p. 11) in comparison with the “strong regulator” capacity of older member states. The book is preoccupied with shedding light on the factors that have influenced this change in perceptions concerning the management of the migration stalemate, the subsequent framing in media, and the elaborated policy actions. The manner in which future policy actions were projected as regards the refugee crisis constitutes a main difference in inquiries into the three target countries’ stances. The authors identify a clear reformulation of the envisaged policies tackling the migrant crisis in the cases of Poland and Romania. In Poland, the initial projection of acting in accordance with the mandatory emergency scheme, which disposed the relocation of refugees from Italy and Greece to other EU member states, was changed because of the intensive politicization of the refugee stalemate by the government, which ended up refusing the quota established under the relocation scheme. In Romania, exactly the opposite happened, with the initial refusal being followed by a tacit approval of the quota. In Hungary, no oscillations could be observed: the Hungarian central decision-makers were consistent in their rhetoric and actions, refusing to share the burden with the other member states by

rejecting the mandatory relocation scheme from the very beginning.

Accordingly, these three case studies are relevant because the unforeseen event, the migration crisis, has led to the exposure of distinct patterns of ignorance, which differ from those identified in Western EU member states regarding asylum and refugee issues. Though the three countries mainly experienced the refugee crisis as a media spectacle only—the refugees did not transit Poland and Romania and chose not to stay for long in Hungary—projections of future policies followed: the decision-makers from these countries elaborated prospective policies to manage the crisis. In setting the main research objective—to identify different forms of projective knowledge that emerge following unpredicted events, such as the 2015 migration emergency—the authors argue that contemporary society is mainly characterized by unexpected events and crisis and not necessarily by unintended consequences and risks. This creates new opportunities for the study of a large variety of dimensions of ignorance, such as cognitive, epistemic, strategic, or incentivized. Politicization and mediatization are regarded in the book as key elements in both the production and reproduction of the effects of ignorance in the refugee stalemate in Poland, Hungary, and Romania.

The main conundrums launched within the study are set to be unravelled by addressing three main research questions. The first inquires about the status of unexpected events and crises as opportunities for change in contemporary regimes of ignorance. The second investigates the alteration of ignorance as a consequence of inflating unexpected events and crisis. The third and final research question addresses the failure of current crises to produce substantial change in regimes of ignorance. Together with the introduction and the conclusion, the authors

have structured their work in eight chapters, starting with a definition, classification, and in-depth theoretical framing of the key term in use: **ignorance**. The authors do not use the traditional meaning of ignorance (i.e., lack of knowledge); rather, they see ignorance as a catalyst that, once revealed as a consequence of unforeseen events and crises, creates an opportunity for change and even the total reset of old policies and elaboration of new ones. Accordingly, unexpected events and crises have the capacity to expose ignorance; hence, they can constitute learning opportunities that might induce change in regimes of ignorance in which they give up a path dependency. While ignorance is the dependent variable of the research, the European refugee crisis of 2015–2016 plays the role of the unforeseen event (the independent variable) meant to produce measurable change in regimes of ignorance. However, the change in the regimes is not necessarily imperative. It is more than refreshing that the book **Ignorance and Change** does not align with those theoretical or empirical research that simply wishes to examine the 2015 migration stalemate in terms of crisis, economy, security, threat, identity, or rhetoric. The volume analyzes how ignorance was produced, reproduced, and revealed in the context of the 2015–2016 refugee crises while also focusing on the abundance of public and policy discourses contesting the framing of the crisis itself.

Following the detailed analysis, the authors reach the conclusion that the 2015–2016 refugee stalemate, perceived as an unforeseen event or crisis, has contributed to changes in regimes of ignorance. They identify changes concerning the dynamics of elaborations of new projections with regard

to asylum and policies related to refugees in the three target countries. While Hungary has already defined its future policies at the early stage of the crisis and has remained devoted to them in the long run, shifts can be observed in Poland and Romania. However, while in Poland, this change of vision is a consequence of an intensive politicization process, in Romania, it could be seen as a deliberate choice driven by political and geopolitically normative reasons.

Overall, **Ignorance and Change** is a unique and ambitious inquiry by four scholars who wish to break out of the usual patterns that tend to offer a traditional perspective in investigation of the 2015 refugee crisis. This book would definitely be useful to scholars, specialists, students, and officials, as well as anyone interested in finding out whether unforeseen events and crises, such as the 2015 refugee crisis, could produce meaningful change in regimes of ignorance.

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