

Book Review

Invisible Barriers: Exposing Inequality and Discrimination in Contemporary Migration Policies

Undesirable immigrants : why racism persists in international migration / Andrew S. Rosenberg. - Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2022. - xxii, 359 p. - (Princeton studies in international history and politics). - ISBN 978-0-691-23873-9 ; 978-0-691-23874-6 (pbk) ; 978-0-691-23875-3 (ebk)

Between 1901 and 1973, Australia restricted non-white immigration. The ‘White Australia’ policy, as the approach came to be known, aimed to curtail the immigration of people of colour and at “securing a white Australia” (NMA 2023). Today, immigration policies are no longer explicitly discriminatory based on race. And yet, racial discrimination persists in contemporary immigration laws, Andrew Rosenberg argues.

Can we still speak of immigration policy as including racial bias? How can we measure such bias, and why does it persist? These are the provocative questions at the roots of Rosenberg’s book *Undesirable Immigrants: Why Racism Persists in International Migration*. The author, an Assistant Professor of political science at the University of Florida, argues that abolishing explicitly discriminatory immigration laws is not sufficient to dismantle the racial hierarchies embedded in today’s international system.

The book takes a structural approach, intentionally going beyond the rhetoric and stances of individual politicians, the media, or segments of the public, to retrace the construction of ‘undesirable migrants’ to the legacy of colonialism, slavery and racism. Rosenberg combines this structural approach with a constructivist understanding of ‘race’ and with a quantitative methodology to demonstrate that a racial bias still permeates today’s immigration policies. While reconciling such aspects is conceptually challenging, the decision is driven by the desire to employ “the power of measurement” (15) to uncover (racial) inequalities. It is also driven by the desire to show that race and racism can be studied through positivist and quantitative approaches, and readers will indeed find multiple sections offering

Book Review

reflections on how this can be done.

The book can be divided into two sections. In the first, Rosenberg theorises the role of racism in today's "colour-blind" international system (11). After setting the scene for the book in the Introduction, Chapter 2 delves into the theoretical debate. Here, Rosenberg draws from international legal theory to retrace the history of the concepts of sovereignty, free movement and border controls, to argue that states' right to control migration has not always been an inherent feature of state sovereignty. Instead, this belief only emerged in the 19th century, following growing immigration from the Global South. The discussion is taken forward in Chapter 3, where the author links today's structural racial inequalities to colonialism. Through colonialism, the West "created the conditions that produced the undesirable migrants that they now restrict today" (62). Chapter 4 anticipates and responds to possible critiques, outlines the author's constructivist understanding of 'race', and discusses methodological difficulties. Overall, showing excellent command of debates across disciplines, the author argues that we have moved from a situation of clear, overt racism, to one where this is hidden, but no less present.

The argument is then developed empirically in the second part of the book. Chapter 5 Represents the core of the empirical argument. Here, Rosenberg estimates the amount of migration that we should expect to see, in a world with no racial discrimination, by developing a 'baseline' model of migration for every pair of states in the world between 1960 and 2015. He then compares this to actual migration trends (including regular migrants and refugees, but excluding irregular migrants). The difference between the predicted and observed migration flows is used to estimate racial bias. The baseline model is based on a push-pull, rationalist model of migration, that takes into account geographical distance, migrant networks, economic and political conditions, colonial and cultural links, and civil wars. Overall, through the analysis, Rosenberg argues that "citizens from poorer, postcolonial, and non-White states migrate less than conditions suggest", and that this indicates the existence of a racial bias negatively affecting the ability of people from the

Book Review

Global South to emigrate (190). It must be noted that the push-pull model of migration and the assumption of rationality have been challenged by the literature (see de Haas 2011), and that the author himself notes that racial inequalities correlate with economic disparities. Still, the analysis is instructive in proposing a novel methodology to study the impact of racial (and economic) inequalities on migration flows. Rosenberg concludes the chapter by arguing that Western countries' immigration policies have become more restrictive, following inflows from those they deem as 'undesirable' migrants. Based on his analysis, a 1 per cent increase in the ethnic distance between immigrants and citizens is paralleled by a 7 per cent rise in the restrictiveness of migration policies (165).

Continuing the analysis, Chapter 6 discusses how colonialism constructed people from postcolonial states as 'undesirable' and how this contributes to persisting inequalities today. Opening with a discussion of the author's constructivist ontology, the chapter then focuses on the consequences of colonialism for the Global South from a political and economic viewpoint. It finally tests the hypothesis that, when states receive more immigration from former colonies, they adopt more restrictive policies, suggesting that this is particularly true for strong liberal democracies.

Chapter 7 moves beyond the Anglo-European sphere, to investigate the increase in border fences in the Global South. Through statistical analysis, Rosenberg finds a correlation between the number of international organisations joined by postcolonial states and the likelihood of constructing a border fence. Drawing from Gramsci's concept of hegemony, the author argues that the hegemonic model of the Western nation-state has moulded the development of postcolonial states. Specifically, the involvement in an international system that is imbued with Anglo-European hegemonic structures has promoted the expansion of border controls in postcolonial states, which in turn have employed restrictive immigration policies as symbolic measures to 'perform' sovereignty and gain legitimacy in the international arena. States from across South and Central Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Gulf all used border fences to assert their independence and power, and

Book Review

make their boundaries visible.

Building on the above evidence, the concluding chapter provides reflections on the future. It explores possible scenarios related to pandemics and climate change and offers theoretical reflections for the discipline of international relations more broadly. The author concludes that, while colonialism will continue having a persistent effect on inequalities, states did not always understand sovereignty as including border controls. This leaves space for a potential reconfiguration of the meaning of sovereignty and, therefore, for some optimism.

Overall, Rosenberg's book seeks to theorise the role of racism and the legacy of colonialism in today's immigration policies. Drawing on a range of arguments including constructivist, postcolonial, hegemonic and institutionalist ones, the book engages with a wealth of debates in the international relations and international political economy disciplines. While the discussion could have been more concise at times, the author shows excellent command of different literatures and must be praised for aiming to bridge the debate between mainstream and critical theories.

Ultimately, arguing that racial bias persists in international migration despite the end of explicitly discriminatory measures, Rosenberg's book makes an important contribution to the disciplines of international relations, international political economy and migration studies. The theoretically oriented argument and the methodological effort to quantify inequalities in migration flows, offer insightful reflections on contemporary migration policies and the legacy of colonialism.

References

de Haas, Hein. 2011. The Determinants of International Migration: Conceptualising Policy, Origin and Destination Effects. Working Paper 32. Oxford: International Migration Institute. <https://www.migrationinstitute.org/publications/wp-32-11>

Book Review

NMA (National Museum Australia). 2023. White Australia Policy.

<https://www.nma.gov.au/definingmoments/resources/white-australia-policy>.

Matilde Rosina

Lecturer in Global Challenges

Brunel University London

Matilde.rosina@brunel.ac.uk