

MATHANA

## SHIFTING GROUNDS – MIGRATION AND THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER

Book review: Krystian Woznicki, *Undeclared Movements*, Berlin, b\_books, 2021.<sup>1</sup>

In 2015, when then-Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that Germany would provide safe haven for one million Syrian refugees, the far-right pushback threatened the fabric of the German federal government.<sup>2</sup> In this context, and the subsequent rise of the far-right ethno-nationalist AfD party, the muted response to Merkel's successor announcement that there will be no upper limit on the number of displaced Ukrainians that would be accepted into Germany<sup>3</sup> brought into view a sharp contrast of securitized racial politics. Instead of the automated checkpoints and new AI-enabled biometric surveillance that Germany rolled out after the Summer of Migration,<sup>4</sup> Berlin's response to the invasion of Ukraine was to provide free train transport to those escaping conflict. But Germany was not alone in the securitization of borders. Countries along the southern and eastern flanks of the European Union tightened borders and increased security and military funding.

---

<sup>1</sup> See <https://krystianwoznicki.info>.

<sup>2</sup> See Matthew Karnitschnig, "Angela Merkel stands by refugee policy despite AfD gains", *Politico*, September 5, 2016. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/german-chancellor-angela-merkel-stands-by-migrant-refugee-policy-despite-afd-gains-mecklenburg-vorpommern-regional-elections/> [accessed September 27, 2022]; Aamna Mohdin, "How Germany took in one million refugees but dodged a populist uprising", September 22, 2017. Available at: <https://qz.com/1076820/german-election-how-angela-merkel-took-in-one-million-refugees-and-avoided-a-populist-upset/> [accessed September 27, 2022].

<sup>3</sup> "German minister: No upper limit on Ukrainian refugees", *Deutsche Welle*, April 16, 2022. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/german-minister-no-upper-limit-on-ukrainian-refugees/a-61494042> [accessed September 27, 2022].

<sup>4</sup> Mathana, "Biometrics and Body Politik: The Rise of Automated Surveillance in Germany", *Global Information Society Watch*, 2019. Available at: <https://giswatch.org/node/6172> [accessed September 27, 2022].

After the Summer of Migration in 2015, but before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Eastern Europe was already experiencing geo-political shifts. In 2021, Belarus displaced migrants of color, essentially forcing them into Polish territory. Poland responded by building a five and a half meter border wall that stretched for nearly 200 kilometers.<sup>5</sup> This measure expanded upon Poland's illegal 'pushback' policy that forced migrants back into unsafe Belarussian territory.<sup>6</sup> The racial politics of Eastern Europe were on full display when Poland would open its border to 2 million displaced Ukrainians.<sup>7</sup> This episode was a contemporary microcosm of how identity and origin play central roles to the unconstrained movement of people during crisis. If anyone had doubt about how racial politics underwrite Europe's "security" strategy, one must look no further to the EU's reaction to externally displaced Ukrainians following the Russian invasion. The transnational corridors that emerged in 2015 created demographic-based enhanced security that curtailed the movement of people who share little in common, beyond their "non-Europeanness". Contrasted with the EU's more "open-arms" policies in response to the invasion of Ukraine, the difference in responses throws into sharp relief the politics of provenance.

The roots of the issue go back far beyond 2015. From the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq past the Syrian war and the security deterioration in the Sahel to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, externally displaced persons have found refuge in Europe from many places over the past 20 years. Each crisis gives us a litmus test of racialized politics: "good migrants vs suspects". *Undeclared Movements* helps us put into context the evolution of migration in Europe and abroad.

## UNDECLARED MOVEMENTS

In *Undeclared Movements* (2021), Krystian Woznicki has managed to curate a timely, thought-provoking narrative around the rights and privileges that govern the movement of our bodies. With this compelling piece of work years in the making, Woznicki weaves together: social science scholarship, a multimedia historical archive, and a nuanced socio-political retrospective. What emerges across the pages of *Undeclared Movements* is

---

<sup>5</sup> "Poland completes Belarus border wall to prevent migrant crossings", *Deutsche Welle*, June 30, 2022. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/poland-completes-belarus-border-wall-to-prevent-migrant-crossings/a-62314260> [accessed September 27, 2022].

<sup>6</sup> "Poland: Thousands protest against migrant pushbacks at Belarus border", *Deutsche Welle*, October 17, 2021. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/poland-thousands-protest-against-migrant-pushbacks-at-belarus-border/a-59532143> [accessed September 27, 2022].

<sup>7</sup> "Poland welcomes more than two million refugees from Ukraine", *UNHCR*, March 18, 2022. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2022/3/6234811a4/poland-welcomes-million-refugees-ukraine.html> [accessed September 27, 2022].

an intuitive yet provocative blend of political theory and institutional critique that reveals a new type of “clash of civilizations”: one where the worst impulses of unchecked state power have usurped fundamental protections for the freedom of movement. Krystian Woznicki takes aim at the selective pillars of pluralism that “western” “democracies” have hid behind for the past two decades. The result is a provocative contemporary analysis that is part theory, part critique and part micro-gallery. *Undeclared Movements* is remarkable for both its provocative yet clearheaded approach to redefining the parameters of discourse regarding a feature of society that most take for granted. Drawing from first-person experiences, phenomenological evaluation and theoretical considerations from international relations, migration studies and national security theory, a new paradigm arises through which we see a critical mass of the trans-North Atlantic’s decline into a securitized zone-of-influence.

*Undeclared Movements* is more than a book that just provides an impassioned analysis of the securitization of migration pathways; it chronicles a story about how the West’s descent into fear-based policy-making impacted the lives of some of the world’s most vulnerable inhabitants. The book is also an exhibition of the physical manifestation of the creeping militarization of place and space. The middle portion of the book is a mural in book form: an evocative collage of art and photographs that transports the reader to the frontlines of protest. From the epicenter of a rankous G8, and with a journalist’s eye, Woznicki presents a front-row view of security corridors. The uniqueness of a physical book instantly draws in the reader. Bookended between two lightly illuminative pieces of writing is an image gallery of photos, maps, collages and artwork taken and crafted by Woznicki. This triptych of analysis, art and action takes the reader on a journey. What we come away with is a start realization that, one day, any of us could find ourselves as a suspect within a zone of automated security where our only “crime” is our presence.

## HOW WE GOT HERE

Connecting the dots between the attacks of September 11, anti-G20 protests in Hamburg and the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe, Woznicki weaves a narrative that creates the basis for a new way to see the world through the lens of what macro power structures have intervened to appropriate the mechanisms of human movement-management. Spearheaded by nations that once claimed to be bastions of freedom and bulwarks of democracy, the actions of the USA and the European Union invent new means of people management which have profound

consequences for not only those on the receiving end of enhanced scrutiny, but for the entire population of the “West”.

In this sense, *Undeclared Movements* is a somewhat postmortem critique of the liberal nation state; a system that we can see has actually been in decline for over twenty years. In a dramatic response to the attacks of September 11, the United States scaled back fundamental protections on civil rights and ushered in a new regime governed by a number of extraordinary measures framed as a state of emergency. Fourteen years later, during the 2015 so-called Summer of Migration, the European Union would follow suit by creating unprecedented security corridors within the supposedly-free-movement Schengen Area.

The book draws several long arcs and lays bare that ideological lineage of fear-based policy-making. Readers will note how adversarial approaches to human mobility bridge the attacks of September 11, 2001 to the 2015 “Summer of Migration” in Europe and demonstrate a racialized security impulse of policy-makers in both DC and Brussels.

The summer of 2015 marked a turning point for the movement of Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis seeking refuge from conflict. But those who sought passage to Germany found themselves in the crosshairs of a newly established security corridor. Ethnicity, religion and country of origin are among a litany of demographic properties that one might find has curtailed their movement.

In a system of governance where personal identity is correlated to the capacity of one’s individual agency, oversight of the forces that dictate personal mobility can become mechanisms of their own dispossession if not carefully checked. At the dawn of the 2020s, algorithms have become their own new form of border. Risk scoring, “threat” calculation, crowd mitigation, predictive policing, and many other forms of law enforcement that use algorithmic tools increasingly view humans as targets to appraise, and not people to protect. In fact, these automated structures are used to insulate those who have approved their privacy-invasive deployment in the first place.

## OUR BODIES IN PLACE AND SPACE

If a single-state or multilateral governance apparatus has the capacity and capability to declare the movement of one body to be illegitimate, it implicitly tracks that the same structures have declared other bodies to be “legitimate”. Any system that has the power to delegitimize human mobility for any subset or out-group demographic, could be reappropriated to expand the definition to demarcate creeping expansion of the individuals and groups that are not afforded equal protection. If

the movement of one's body within a given territory is predicated upon being allowed to traverse physical space, that right can be revoked. This theory of "non-co-existence" is therefore compatible with enclosure and extraction.

Where does the power that forbids human beings from moving from place to place derive its authority? If the response to an extraordinary event can be handled using extralegal prohibitions on the freedom of movement, then only a facade of freedom actually exists. From border crossings to sidewalks, trains to hospitals, the movement of people has become increasingly monitored and access controlled. The refugee camps in Greece show how the securitization of the movement of people dead-ends into open air prisons for those who lack legitimization of a trans-national bloc that would rather invest in mass detention camps than in resettlement infrastructure.

#### "SECURITIZATION-ILLEGALIZATION COMPLEX"

This phenomenon, as Woznicki points out, is a case – in many ways – of Europe's own making; but utilized by reactionary forces within pan-European political decision-making to instrumentalize specific ends. Through a combination of regulatory tools and extrajudicial applications of force, Woznicki cogently describes a "securitization-illegalization complex" that has created a new iteration of rights-shattering policies through a *violence of deprivation*. Coupled with new algorithmic automation, predictive policing and ubiquitous surveillance, this system has received little sustained pushback from elected policy makers.

International relations theory has long espoused the social benefits checks and balances within "consolidated democracies", but the past two decades have seen a steady decline in the protections afforded to the most vulnerable throughout Western nations. Securitization was funded, surveillance was ingrained, rights were eroded and the mindset of fear-based policy making found fertile ground throughout Europe. In his book, Woznicki uses a critical lens to examine two decades of waxing illegalization. From policy roots to police presence, the book articulates a theory-based view of the vast implications of state-led crackdowns on the movement of people.

As readers, we are left with many reflections of momentary privilege they may enjoy, but that are in no way guaranteed. What if behind the posturing of the rule-of-law sat a pervasive state of exception, where a conglomerate of institutions from within like-minded nation-states declare what human bodies are deemed either "legitimate" or "illegitimate", and endow certain "legitimate" bodies with the right-to-

mobility? If fundamental protections are granted by a nation state, then externally displaced persons are humans without an inherent guardianship of human rights. *Undeclared Movements* synthesizes existing critique, but also provides a new theoretical basis for us to see ourselves in relation to the world.

#### UNDECLARED, NOT ILLEGAL, MOVEMENTS

Walking around Berlin, one might encounter a hoodie with the words “Kein Mensch ist illegal” sprawled across the front. The “no one is illegal” campaign is a salient reminder that fundamental protections to life, dignity, and human rights are still not afforded to all. As the world watched populist ethno-nationalism explode around the world over the past years, firebrand politicians with proto-fascist tendencies have rallied around returning their countries to nostalgic, yet largely non-existent glory days. The high-stakes political struggle for the soul of the nation-state has played out as a sort of empire-building-in-reverse: protectionist policies, foreign skepticism, and the creation of trade barriers to stem the flow of goods. Through fear mongering, doomsaying and good old fashion xenophobia, notions of territorial supremacy have been clawed back from decades of liberal international trade and migration. But at least now, we have a book that gives us a new way to perceive how we got here.



Krystian Woznicki, Park Fiction, Port of Hamburg, July 8, 2017.  
From: *Undeclared Movements* (2020), pp. 198–199.