


BOOK REVIEW

The Criminalisation of Irregular Migration in Europe: Globalisation, Deterrence, and Vicious Cycles

by Matilde Rosina. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. XXIII, 333 pp. € 103.99.

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Irregular migration is one of the most significant phenomena of the 20th and 21st centuries, a life-changing process for countless migrants seeking better lives elsewhere, a thorny and complicated reality for transit and destination countries, and a transnational issue for the international community. As a result, it has become a polarising element of political debates in many destination countries (see Mudde, 2019), yet many aspects of its related policies remain understudied. Matilde Rosina's monograph, titled *The Criminalisation of Irregular Migration in Europe: Globalisation, Deterrence, and Vicious Cycles*, aims to fill this gap by exploring the goals and effects of irregular migration criminalisation. Is the latter effective in stemming irregular arrivals, deterring new irregular flows, and fostering repatriations? The author convincingly argues that 'no' is the answer. To address these important questions, she analyses two highly-relevant case studies – Italy and France – as developed nations experiencing high numbers of irregular arrivals and adopting a criminalisation approach. The volume is structured into seven large chapters which are here discussed.

Chapter 1 introduces the topic by presenting both qualitative and quantitative accounts that provide useful context, and then offers an overview of the three main theories employed in this research (realism, neoliberalism, and transnationalism), as well as the triangulated methodologies (policy evaluation, interviews, questionnaires, and datasets). The author specifies that her book is centred on IPE and criminology as disciplines of interest, and the case study justification is logically-sound. Chapter 2 is a solid theory and literature review chapter. The tripartite theoretical framework may have benefitted from other disciplinary works (see Echeverría, 2020) and international relations literature that gave birth to two of its component, but it is otherwise very well presented. The following discussion on the policy gaps hypothesis is analytically-strong and conceptually-interesting. On a related note, a short digression on Australia would have further nuanced this section (and the following chapter), since it represents a noticeable exception to the cited literature. Chapter 3 delves into the book's core concepts. While it does not draw on the original international security literature, the strategy of deterrence in the context of irregular migration criminalisation is presented accurately and effectively. The relevant framework comprising legal costs, perceptions, and social costs is equally good, as are the negative implications that are discussed afterwards.

Chapter 4 is a long, well-written, and empirically-rich chapter focusing on the Italian case study. Although some relevant publications are not included (e.g. Ceccorulli and Labanca, 2014; Abbondanza, 2017), it is also well-sourced. It begins with a solid account of Rome's irregular migration policies, followed by a useful outline of its administrative and criminal procedures concerning irregular migrants. It then provides a quantitative context through two previously-unpublished datasets, an important feature of this book for which the author is to be

commended. The chapter then outlines the main finding of this research, namely the ineffectiveness of criminalisation in stemming irregular arrivals and fostering more returns. A short discussion on the broader costs of irregular migration reception sustained by Italy (3 billion euros a year in 2017, according to the estimates by Villa *et al.*, (2018)) would have strengthened the analysis even more. At the same time, the author nuances the analysis by shedding light on migrants' own perspectives and by showing that the criminalisation approach can be counterproductive for both the State and the migrants, resulting in an overall unsustainable policy.

Chapter 5 applies the same theoretical, methodological, and analytical frameworks and research questions to the French case study. A comparably-long and empirically-rich chapter, it emphasises the many similarities and few differences with Italy (for additional insights on the securitisation process adopted by the two countries, see D'Amato, 2019). The latter are particularly interesting in a comparative perspective, and comprise the noticeable influence of the European Court of Justice (which led to the partial abrogation of criminalisation in France), the relative disinterest of public debates in the criminalisation of irregular migration itself, the use of imprisonment as the most used type of sanction, and the lack of reliable and official data on irregular migration in France. On the other hand, the ineffectiveness of criminalisation in reaching its official goals – and its multifarious counterproductive effects – are entirely comparable to the Italian case, which led the author to accurately describe its maintenance as due to electoral and bureaucratic purposes.

Chapter 6 is the key component of the book's comparative endeavour. While it is not within the scope of the volume to assess the broader aspects of the two States' irregular migration policies (and the inherently more challenging nature of seaborne arrivals and maritime rescue operations, compared to border crossings on land), the chapter provides a useful, accurate, and much-needed analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data concerning Italian and French approaches. Chapter 7, lastly, summarises the book's premises, goals, and findings, while providing interesting and relevant theoretical implications and potential policy alternatives.

Overall, as discussed above, Rosina's book successfully tackles an important gap in the literature by attesting that the criminalisation of irregular migration does not stem irregular flows and does not facilitate repatriations, based on the evidence from Italy and France. Further, her book sheds light on many understudied (and often counterproductive) effects of criminalisation, namely its internal and external incoherence, long-term unsustainability and (in)utility, as well as the negative repercussions for both migrants and public offices in destination countries. While the research is empirically-oriented, it provides some interesting theoretical implications too, and it does so in a clear and well-researched manner. This makes it accessible not only to academics, but also to migration professionals, policymakers, journalists, and students.

All of this makes *The Criminalisation of Irregular Migration in Europe* a valuable new source for all those with an interest in irregular migration, criminology, and policy studies. More so, the significant contribution it makes to this specific and sensitive branch of policy studies raises new and fundamental questions concerning the state of irregular migration policies more broadly. In a world increasingly characterised by growing and chaotic multipolarity, in which irregular flows are bound to get stronger, what can destination (and transit) countries do in order to manage effectively *and* humanely their borders? What role can the international community play in this respect? Clearly, these are broad and difficult questions, which inevitably call for new research in the future. To that end, this book provides us with highly-significant and promising new insights.

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