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Discrimination and Delegation: Explaining State Response to Refugees

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BOOK REVIEW

Lamis Elmy Abdelaaty. *Discrimination and Delegation: Explaining State Response to Refugees*. Oxford University Press, 2021, 233 pp. ISBN: 9780197530061 (hardcover).

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This timely study investigates states' responses to refugees in terms of border control, encampment policies, and the provision of rights and focuses on states' decisions to either assert or cede their sovereignty when confronted with migration. Abdelaaty groups potential state responses to refugee entries in terms of inclusion, restriction, and delegation of responsibility to UNHCR. Based on this interpretation of state responses, the book raises two questions: Why are borders closed to some refugee groups while they remain open to others (i.e., discrimination)? And why do states sometimes assign their responsibilities to UNHCR (i.e., delegation)?

"Why would a state choose one of these courses of action?" is the main question posed by **Discrimination and Delegation**. Abdelaaty conceptualizes the decision of delegating responsibility to UNHCR as selective sovereignty. The book focuses on unpacking the parameters of selective sovereignty by proposing a two-part theory that integrates domestic and foreign policy. In this framework, **domestic policy** refers to the ethnic

ties between refugees and the host society, while **foreign policy** encompasses bilateral relations with the sending state. Abdelaaty makes four theoretical predictions: (a) if a refugee group is from the same ethnic group with the host society and there are hostile relations with the sending state, the receiving state will have an inclusive asylum policy; similarly, (b) if the refugee group is co-ethnic to the receiving state but there are friendly relations with the sending state, the receiving state will delegate its sovereignty to the UNHCR; (c) if there are no ethnic ties between the refugee group and the host state has hostile relations with the sending state, Abdelaaty anticipates delegation of asylum applications and camp management to UNHCR; but (d) if the relations between the host and sending state are friendly yet the ethnic ties are inexistent, the host state is likely to implement a restrictive asylum policy.

An intriguing aspect of the book is that the argument is neither country nor region specific. Abdelaaty claims that her theory ex-

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plains selective sovereignty all over the world. The investigation of this ambitious argument is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The author starts with a statistical analysis that combines 10 data sets for cross-national analysis: asylum application decisions in the 10-year period between 1996 and 2005 were used to create sending host country dyads; the Affinity of Nations Index, based on UN General Assembly votes of the states, was used to measure the relations between these states; and the Ethnic Power Relations and Minorities at Risk data set was used to measure refugee group affinity. Using these complex data sets, the author shows that foreign policy and ethnic affinity shape states' decision to admit, reject, and delegate refugees.

After convincingly elaborating the importance of foreign policy and ethnic affinity, Abdelaaty dives into three case studies to test her theoretical predictions: Egypt, Turkey, and Kenya. Egypt has a developing economy, is signatory of the Geneva Convention, and has a small number of refugees: 95,000 in 2010 (i.e., the reference year used in the book). Turkey is an outlier refugee-receiving country as it abides by geographical limitations to the Geneva Convention, meaning that only those coming from Europe are eligible for refugee status. Kenya is an important refugee-hosting country, as it hosts one of the biggest refugee groups—400,000 in 2019—and has one of the biggest refugee camps, Dadaab. What makes this case selection compelling is that some of the refugee groups are split among these three host countries—that is, Sudanese, Eritrean, and Ethiopian refugees are hosted both in Egypt and Kenya, and Iraqi refugees are hosted both in Turkey and Egypt.

In the case of Egypt, Abdelaaty investigates refugee policy towards Palestinians, Sudanese, Iraqis, and other smaller refugee

groups like Somalis, Ethiopians, and Eritreans. She persuasively shows that the Egyptian government delegates refugee status determination and treatment to UNHCR to deflect the responsibility of possibly antagonizing a country like Somalia. Abdelaaty also shows that as bilateral relations between states evolve, a host country's treatment of refugees changes. For example, the Palestinians were the most privileged refugee group in Egypt for almost three decades (1948–1977), with almost unrestricted access to education, health care, and the labour market. As the Egyptian government grew closer with Israel around 1978, the rights and resources provided to Palestinian refugees were retracted. Overall, even though there are cases that do not fit the theoretical predictions such as Palestinians between 1978 and 2010 predicted by the model to be delegated, the book clearly identifies a pattern in the Egyptian refugee policy and proves that Abdelaaty's theory holds significant explanatory power.

The Turkish refugee policy analysis focuses on seven refugee groups: Bulgarians, Iraqis, Iranians, Bosnians, Kosovars, Soviet refugees, and post-Soviet refugees. Abdelaaty's argument about ethnic affinity has strong explanatory power to understand Turkish refugee policy. She clearly shows that based on international political calculations, the treatment of the same refugee group changes from the Cold War to post-Cold War periods: as a NATO member, Turkey accepted Eastern Block refugees like Chechens; however, as relations with Russia improved, these groups were either defined as guests instead of refugees or were not admitted from the borders at all. Abdelaaty also details the tumultuous relations between UNHCR and Turkey and shows how the Turkish government strategically co-operated with the agency to deflect blame from the refugees'

home states when accepting the citizens of friendly regimes.

In the case of Kenya, Abdelaaty zooms into the political processes identified in the previous two cases studies. The chapter studies five refugee groups: Somalis, Sudanese, Ethiopians, Ugandans, and Rwandans. While the analysis of each group contributes to the theoretical framework, the case of Ugandan refugees is particularly striking as it is subject to frequent and sharp shifts depending on bilateral relations. During the positive relations between the Kenyan and Ugandan governments in the 1970s, refugees faced expulsion and political pressure. As relations worsened, the treatment of refugees improved, and they were given freedom of movement, social services, and access to the labour market. After a friendly government came into power in Uganda in 1980, Ugandan refugees' access to the labour market was restricted and political refugees were deported. While the theoretical predictions match with the inclusive–exclusive treatment of refugees, the theory falls short in explaining the delegation of the responsibilities of all the refugee groups to UNHCR in the 1990s.

Abdelaaty acknowledges that the events that created the refugee situations affected the bilateral relations, but she argues that refugee situations are not the constitutive factors to explain bilateral relations. For example, Turkey regularly and strongly condemned the Zhirkov government's treat-

ment of Turks in Bulgaria, opening its borders to this group, and this policy created tension between the two states. The author underlines that the hostile relations between Turkey and Bulgaria are not the result of the refugee crisis but rather of many other preceding factors. Refugee migration's effect on bilateral relations, however, requires a more comprehensive investigation in every case, as it is one of the main pillars of the argument.

Overall, **Discrimination and Delegation** is an impressive investigation of the intersection between international relations, ethnic politics, and refugee policy that keeps the international refugee governance structure in sight. It is an important read for graduate and undergraduate students as well as researchers and policy-makers engaged in the field of forced migration.

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