

Book Review

Hostile Environment: How immigrants became scapegoats

Maya Goodfellow

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Understanding how the state and media have curated the current perception of immigrants in the UK is a timely question. In the context of the past decade of increasing xenophobia and a lurch towards nationalism and populism across Europe (Bernhard and Kriesi, 2019), presenting a demystified understanding of immigration to the UK and the people who make this journey is a vital contribution to public discourse. This is the ambition of Goodfellow's work, seeking to demonstrate how immigrants are misrepresented in this brief yet wide-ranging text.

Much contemporary literature makes a distinction between immigrants and people of colour (Marquez and Moore, 2017; Verkuyten et al., 2019), yet Goodfellow's contention is that these share the common attribute of being targeted by both the state and media as 'problems'. Societal problems being framed as a result of immigration is a consistent and reliable tactic, even when it proves impossible to support with evidence. Examples include the Labour government of the late 1960s, which advanced claims of economic stagnation ahead if immigration was not stopped, despite Home Office research revealing that spending was far higher on native citizens than immigrants. This is one of hundreds of such instances that show how racism still plays a larger part than people are willing to admit. This book manages to approach the problematic use of the term 'racism' without singling out certain groups (read as working-class) for blame, while emphasising that the British version draws strength through the spectre of a different 'culture' and demands for a return to some idyll of Albion. The book's core strength is in its effortless summation of the history of migration to Britain, the immigration policies of the 20th and 21st centuries and the experiences of those involved at all levels.

The title of the introductory chapter, 'An Honest Conversation', neatly explains the whole book; one that attempts to eschew common-sense beliefs in favour of context and analysis. Humanising immigrants whilst discussing policy and statistics can be difficult, but in the first chapter Goodfellow outlines the 'cost', complexities and Kafkaesque bureaucracy of immigration by giving voice to immigrants through interviews. A notable standout is one individual, after having their study visa revoked and being detained, arriving at the airport then having their passport confiscated by the Home Office and then being forced to live 'in a country that didn't want them to stay but wouldn't let them leave'

for ten years. Chapters 2 and 3 survey immigration and the policies surrounding it through the 20th century, as well as addressing New Labour's complex relationship with the subject. Though the overview of 20th century policy is brief, it is still an impressive survey that homes in on several key moments that particularly challenge the 'rose tinted glasses' through which Britain perceives and remembers itself as a benevolent ruler of Empire, and latterly, as the centre of the Commonwealth. In a short space, the ability to voice the context and impact of Kelso Cochrane's murder, 1922's 'race riots' and both lead political parties' desire to curb immigration as a result of ideological, political and public pressures, is notable. In the third chapter, the attention turns primarily to New Labour's preoccupation with asylum seekers and refugees. Through interviews with key figures within the party, Goodfellow highlights how their policies were intoxicating to the public and media, presenting a distinctly racialised 'other', as a matter of protocol; a 'managed migration' that strips away identity and reduces immigrants to their (disposable) labour value alone. At this point, it is worth noting that there is a failure to include the experiences of Eastern European immigrants in this context, and their experience of the UK labour market after the Accession 8 joined the EU in 2004. This is especially troubling as Goodfellow is at pains to explore how race was previously seen as a class based category that the Irish particularly fell victim to. Admittedly, in a book of this size and scope, it would be very difficult to cover all bases, but nonetheless providing reason for excluding certain groups would ensure history (and the lived experiences of precarious groups) is not ignored.

By the fourth chapter, the central thesis of the book is reached; the way immigrants are framed as the cause of economic and social problems. Goodfellow collates academic and public research findings to create a collage of evidence that breaks down even the most steadfast arguments. From the bad economics involved in thinking that immigration depresses wages to housing issues that have been caused by the abandonment of social housing and the failure of successive governments to respond to the growing need for affordable housing, these problems are dealt with concisely, yet head-on. Taken particularly to task is the supposed phenomenon of welfare tourism used as camouflage for a failing benefit system and underinvestment in the NHS. Rather than acknowledge the real causes of failing services it is argued that social protections must be curtailed as a response to outsiders taking advantage. Beyond this, Goodfellow manages to explore the inability of political parties to point out evidence-based reasoning for dismantling the welfare state. Again, Eastern Europeans are absent from this section, apart from Roma people—who, themselves, are not technically Eastern European despite Romanian passports—who have been at the forefront of the minds of politicians and the media in their constructions of those that 'abuse the system'. The omission of this varied group does not detract from the argument built in the chapter on structural issues as the author is thorough in their arguments, allowing the reader to build and develop an understanding of the widespread mendacity of political rhetoric on immigration. The appraisal of the impact of racism on how immigrants are perceived that follows is balanced and insightful, drawing on the surprisingly resilient folklore of Britain as a white saviour. This insight is used as a means to understand the rhetoric deployed by politicians of all sides in suggesting native citizens are the anointed ones. As a text that offers no new insights to seasoned academic researchers of immigration and ethnicity, this section is a key strength; offering a straightforward understanding of the public's unconscious biases without being either accusatory or acting as an apologist. This was clearly a feat that both the Remain group in 2016 and the Labour Party opposition of 2019 failed to achieve, and as such not only provides an important lesson but also illustrates how surprisingly difficult it is to achieve.

Overall, the core problem the book faces is that at times it conflates ethnicity with immigrant status, and as a result misses a whole continent of people who have been on the receiving end of the demonisation of immigration. The wide audience that *Hostile*

Environment will undoubtedly attract is where its key strength lies. This publication will be of interest to students of Sociology and Politics as well as the wider public interested in understanding immigration policy's role in determining the position of immigrants in the UK. Above all, it will provide them with a strong overview and an ability to critically appraise misconceived perceptions of immigrants without alienating others.

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