Dilley, Roy and Thomas G. Kirsch (eds.). 2015. *Regimes of Ignorance. Anthropological Perspectives on the Production and Reproduction of Non-knowledge*. Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books. 215 pp. Hb.: 95.00/£60.00. ISBN: 9781782388388.

As a meditation on Foucault's power-knowledge concept, Dilley and Kirsch present an edited volume on the 'problem of ignorance' (p. 1) to argue that 'every "regime of knowledge" simultaneously is a "regime of ignorance"' (p. 23). They theorise ignorance not simply as a 'residual category of knowledge' (p. 4), but rather as 'a constellation of discursive practices and power relations' that gives rise to generative 'epistemological gaps and forms of un-knowing' (p. 2). The book includes eight single-authored chapters that along with the introduction investigate the 'mutually constitutive' (p. 15) properties of ignorance and knowledge. Instead of an 'episthemophilic other' (p. 188) who is assumed to 'naturally' desire knowledge, *Regimes of Ignorance* introduces the wilfully ignorant individuals (Marchand, High, Borneman, Kirsch), as well as the state (Dilley, Coleman) and scientific (Caduff, Lynteris) regimes that prefer to remain unknowing if it suits their purpose.

The ethnographic method that, Dilley and Kirsch argue, is crucial for excavating these idiosyncrasies, also brings to the foreground the general paradox of studying ignorance, namely, the more one examines it, the more the conception is undermined (p. 7) be it the case of the strategic use of ignorance in the training of fine woodworking (Marchand) or the therapeutic process of 'not knowing' by the registered sex offenders in Germany (Borneman). The authors insist that the native categories of ignorance be taken seriously as in the case of the Waorani claims to embodied non-knowledge of shamanistic practices in Ecuadorian Amazon. High demonstrates that the embodied refusal to know these dangerous practices can be interpreted as a strategic defence against unwanted attention in a place, where people are more concerned with moral implications than whether or not something is true (p. 101).

Kirsch too challenges the often taken for granted 'natural epistemophilic impulse' (p. 192) to determine the truth about secrets and argues instead that people often do not feel concerned by what others may be concealing from them (p. 192). By examining the secretive storage of magical potions by the Pentecostal church healers in southern Zambia, Kirsch traces the ambiguous boundary between privacy and secrecy to bring 'insights into the secret as a cultural category and a discursive operation on non-knowledge' (p. 189). In his ethnographic example, by keeping the herbal medicine at the rear of the house, the church healer turns privacy into secrecy that is only possible if 'epistemophilic others' who desire to find out the secret, are imagined (p. 202). Secrecy, Kirsch argues, thus entails an absence, a zone of 'not knowing', that is constructed as a target to be overcome by the alleged others (p. 204).

Furthermore, the book shows that even supposedly neutral scientific knowledge can be characterised by the productive force of ignorance (p. 45) with quantitative evidence being shaped by cultural expectations. Caduff, for example, investigates a group of American microbiologists working on emerging infectious diseases to show how numeric evidence, such as the fatality rate in the case of the H5N1 virus, is constructed based on selectively chosen ignorance, which is rooted in the individual scientists' perceptions of

the constantly changing nature of the viruses. The complexities of evidence production are further ignored by those utilising the numbers (p. 45), leaving the actual scope of epidemics unknown and even overrepresented by the international health organisations (p. 44). Similarly, Lynteris demonstrates that the individual scientists', exemplified by the Cambridge educated doctor Wu Liande, understanding of the native culture coloured their interpretation of the pneumonic plague epidemic in northeast China in 1911. By examining the archive, Lynteris insists that the 'native knowledge hypothesis' (p. 51), which assumed that the native Mongol and Buryat population was familiar with the plague in the marmots that they hunted, was inspired by what he calls 'medical materialism' (p. 53) that still informs the way the plague in Inner Asia is understood (p. 53). Lynteris argues, however, that the natives were actually ignorant of the plague, but this ignorance did not constitute simply a lack of knowledge but a 'capacity for not-knowing' (p. 59), a purposeful act.

Dilley and Coleman in turn seek to theorise the role of ritualised ignorance in the context of colonialism. Through archival research and psychoanalytic theory, Coleman revisits the participation of King George V in a local coronation event in Delhi to show how imperial bureaucracies were characterised by 'routine ignorance' (p. 164), which took on a context-specific ritualised form. The fetishistic image of the Crown replaced, according to Coleman, the regime's false knowledge of the native subjects of India in an intimate and affectively ritualised manner that ensured that the representational, cultural and political power was kept intact (p. 171, p. 174). Dilley also consults the archive to explore how 'non-knowledge' was created though contradictory pressures within the French colonial regime in 20th century West Africa. He argues that the French state could maintain its imagined 'moral high ground' only while remaining ignorant of the true conditions of its colonial subjects (p. 156) and invested much labour in creating 'zones of ignorance' (p. 156) around such issues as the children born of the relationships between the white French officers and their African common-law wives (p. 139), and the practice of slavery that was in contradiction with the Third Republic's ideals. Dilley shows that mixed-race children were removed from their mothers and brought up to be French with few genealogical facts entered in colonial records, leaving the state, if not the children themselves, in ignorance about their heritage (p. 143). Moreover, Dilley argues, the regimes of ignorance were sustained and developed by often liberal-minded philanthropists who sought to improve the condition of the disadvantaged mixed-raced children (p. 144).

In the end, the book offers an ethnographically-informed thought exercise that brings home the idea that ignorance and knowledge are interconnected. Even though the editors insist that ignorance is not to be theorised only as the absence of knowledge, the use of the term 'non-knowledge' in the title and by the contributors makes this provocation somewhat redundant. Nevertheless, the *Regimes of Ignorance* succeeds in an effective portrayal of the subjects and regimes, which, far from being the eager epistemophilics that modern thought envisions, choose purposeful ignorance instead.

KARINA VASILEVSKA-DAS
University of California, Berkeley/UCSF (USA)