BOOK REVIEW

EurAfrican Borders and Migration Management. Political Cultures, Contested Spaces, and Ordinary Lives, by Paolo Gaibazzi, Alice Bellagamba, and Stephan Dünnwald (eds.), New York: Palgrave Macmillan – Series in African Borderlands Studies, 2017, 302 pp., 135,19 € (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-349-94971-7

This edited volume is a stimulating collection of essays for border studies. The objective of the editors is to shed “light on the processes that have made and unmade Europe’s southern border as an African reality” (p. 4) thereby casting an Africanist eye on borders and migrants between Africa and Europe, and the implications of their interaction. As such, the book carves out an important space of enquiry and is a welcome addition to the field of border studies. The volume convincingly explores what seems to constitute a “core blind spot” at the heart of border studies, namely an exploration of the border-migration nexus at Europe’s southern borders from “the outside in,” shedding light on borders as constructed and experienced in and by Africa.

The editors also aim to pave the way for a more continued dialog between Africanist and Europeanist border scholarship, highlighting possible points of encounter and exchange along a scholarly frontier, which has seldom been crossed until now. Building on this, the editors present, in their Introduction, what they call an “Afro-Europeanist perspective on EurAfrican borders.” Moving toward an Afro-Europeanist perspective, this interdisciplinary collaboration demonstrates the urgency of problematizing a epistemological “centric” perspective on EurAfrican borders (p. 13)—and I would also add on whatever border—by enlightening the entangled and complex nature of borders and the need for a more nuanced viewpoint on shifting EurAfrican borders. Within this framework, the editors employ the word “EurAfrican” with a capital “A” in order to give the term a quite different meaning. Indeed, they acknowledge the “legacy of asymmetric relationships and (imperial) imaginations informing in complex ways the current border and migration management in the Euro-African space” whilst shedding light on the “uneven but still entangled” trajectories that traverse “encounters that make and unmake the African edges of Europe” (p. 11). In this way, the book demonstrates that the externalization of European borders toward Africa is not taking place in a vacuum. Rather, African contexts matter!

The editors selected three keywords—places, actors, and lives—to investigate the political cultures of EurAfrican borders and to organize the chapters thematically. In so doing, the volume succeeds in rendering concrete the concepts outlined by the editors in their introductory chapter through the rich empirical work developed in its 11 case studies. From this point of view, the book can be regarded as a valuable example of operationalizing the critical potential of relevant concepts in interdisciplinary border studies. Specifically, the volume provides useful insights into the potential of the “borderscape” concept to examine the complex interplay between migration and b/ordering processes in-between Africa and Europe whilst grasping the multiple dynamics engendered by EurAfrican border regimes (Brambilla 2015). Martin Lemberg-Pedersen’s chapter, which is paired with the editors’ Introduction in Part I, greatly helps the readers to understand the potential of the borderscapes conceptual framework to deconstruct the still predominant “closed systems perspective” (pp. 32–34) in analyzing Europe’s externalized management of borders and migration.

Part II includes three empirical chapters concerned with particular border places. Specifically, the first chapter of this Part by Polly Pallister-Wilkins focuses on the fences around Ceuta...
and Melilla—Spanish enclaves on Moroccan territory. In the following chapter, Stephan Dünnwald explains European strategies for transforming Bamako, Mali’s capital city, into a border place to monitor, control, and govern irregular migration to Europe. The last chapter of Part II, by Clara Lecadet, complements Dünnwald’s contribution by describing migrants’ place-making produced by the southward moving EurAfrican border in Mali and precisely looking at three precarious settlements or “ghettos” set up in different parts of Mali (Tinzawaten, Gao, and Bamako) by West and Central African migrants expelled from Algeria.

The chapters in Part III focus on the plurality and diversity of actors involved in the making, unmaking, and remaking of EurAfrican border-space highlighting the significant heterogeneity of political cultures, border agencies, and border perspectives brought to, and emerging in, the EurAfrican “meeting-clash” at work in moving border sites. Focusing in particular on the historic Treaty of Friendship signed by Italy and Libya in 2008, Antonio M. Morone explains the Libyan state view on the EU’s externalized management of borders and migrations into the Country. The two following chapters address the work, visions, and moral concerns of consular officers operating the Schengen visa system in particular African countries: Francesca Zampagnini explores the political and administrative structure of the Visa Office of the Italian Consulate in Dakar, Senegal; Maybritt J. Alpes focuses on the French consulate in Cameroon. Moving the focus of attention away from state actors, the last chapter in Part III, by Paolo Gai-bazzi, addresses the case of Italian activists who, in the aftermath of a cycle of mass protests in 2010–2011 in Southern Europe and Northern Africa, liaised with Tunisian activists of the Jasmine Revolution. In so doing, this chapter contributes to unravel EurAfrican borderscapes as sites of multiple tensions between hegemonic, non-hegemonic, and counter-hegemonic imaginaries and practices.

Part IV includes three empirical chapters concerned with how border regimes produce a particular “politics of life” thereby demonstrating that EurAfrican borders should also be regarded “as a subjective, biopolitical reality and a form of embodied consciousness” (p. 21). Chapter 10 by Juliette Hallaire explores the mobility of Senegalese fishermen who became would-be migrants and actively participated in irregular sea migration from Senegal to Europe mainly from 2000 to 2008. In the following chapter, Laurie Lijnders describes the lived experiences of violent border crossings by Eritrean asylum seekers in their flight from the Horn of Africa to Europe but detoured to Israel via the Sinai desert, due to the EU’s blockage of the Mediterranean Sea in the late 2000s. Part IV closes with a chapter by Laura Menin on undocumented migrants’ everyday worlds and the making of “illegality” between Morocco and Italy.

As David B. Coplan points out in the Epilogue, “EurAfrican Borders” is “less an overarching concept than an attempt to delineate a general purpose and an intellectual and epistemological space” (p. 285). By “decentering” the analytical gaze on Europe’s southern border, the volume shows the potentials of a constructive dialog between Africanist and Europeanist border scholarship capable of revealing how EurAfrican borders “are not simply interesting observatories for empirical research, but also sites of conceptual reflection for considering, specifically, what borders are and do” (p. 23).

Reference

Brambilla, Chiara. 2015. Navigating the Euro/African Border and Migration Nexus Through the Borderscapes Lens: Insights from the LampedusaInFestival. In Borderscaping: Imaginations and Practices of Border Making, eds. Chiara Brambilla, Jussi Laine, James W. Scott, and Gianluca Bocchi, 111–21. Farnham: Routledge.
