

BOOK REVIEW

Hassan Ould Moctar. *After Border Externalization: Migration, Race, and Labour in Mauritania*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024. 232 pp. Figures, Tables. References. Index. \$80.50 Hardcover. ISBN: 9781350376786.

Hassan Ould Moctar's *After Border Externalization* aims to investigate and decipher the aftereffects of border externalization and the ways in which the socio-historical landscapes are informed by and continue to be shaped by the process of border externalization. Over the course of its eight chapters, divided generally into three sections, it grapples with this topic quite effectively. In the first section, drawing on Bialasiewicz (2012), border externalization is described here as the outsourcing of migration and border control to countries outside of the EU. One of Moctar's key contributions comes to light through his analytical framework: in order to resist the Eurocentrism prevalent in these border externalization policies, he outlines a non-Eurocentric conceptual framework situated within scholarship from those like Samir Amin (1988) and Achille Mbembe (2021). This allows for a rehistoricization of the border and to push against neocolonial dynamics, a reframing which now emphasizes the agency, interests, and political logics of non-European states themselves.

In the second section, the author examines Mauritania as an empirical case to demonstrate this process of border externalization. As Moctar argues, Mauritania is particularly unique as the nation-state has been "tied to notions commonly associated with borders and boundaries," stemming from its history as a French colony, as well as its strategic positioning due to its "geographic location as well as its ethno-linguistic composition" (5). Located on key West African migration routes and relatively close to Europe, Mauritania is thus able to present itself as a partner in preventing migration. Chapter Three provides an in-depth analysis of the historical evolution of territorial organization, centering on shifts from precolonial fluidity to colonial rigidity and its postcolonial consequences. By tracing three interconnected dimensions of territorial organization (spatial boundaries, group identity, and human mobility) through each period, it effectively shows the ways in which these borders and general bureaucratic control were introduced, and how they fundamentally altered traditional social structures. This leads to the assertion that the EU border externalization policies are deeply entangled with these enduring legacies of colonial territorialization. In the next chapter, there is a continued discussion of the colonial conditioning within these processes, but it continues to the examination and analysis of the border policies within Mauritania itself. These policies were initially centered

on defensive security measures to curb migration to Europe, but they soon evolved into “softer” preventative form”—one which sought to stop the migration at the source. Moctar underscores the paradoxical relationship between these externalization efforts and the rise of authoritarian politics in the nation-state, while also noting the shifting geographic imaginary of the EU (that is, the imagining and organization of the borders), one which is now moving away from a focus on the Mediterranean to an “expanded Sahelian periphery” (94).

With migrant agency, experience, and “illegalization” being placed at the forefront, the third section (Chapters Five through Eight) explores that precise intersection of colonial legacies and modern territorial organization in a very dynamic and tangible way (127). For instance, the exploitation of migrant labor as well as racialized violence are powerfully detailed through the comments and stories of those like Brahim and Youslem. As seen in this portion, the use of a multi-sited ethnographic approach allows readers to see how this process not only is produced on the ground but how border externalization is lived. Within the examples, it is highlighted the extent to which EU externalization does not operate in isolation, but rather it is embedded in broader context with consequences ranging from surveillance to racial exclusion to social control. Chapter Seven, in particular, highlights the complexity that arises at the intersection of migration control, racialization, and economic exclusion through the informal economy, specifically in Nouakchott. One of the intriguing suggestions from this analysis is that the lived experience of those in that space of the urban margins reveals a certain “latent universalism, one in which the tension between individual agency and the structures of control is lucidly articulated” (166). This addition furthers the culturally informed lens this analysis is seen through, ensuring that this study stays rooted in lived realities and worldviews, rather than imposing external theoretical frameworks as Moctar outlines in his introduction. In essence, this third section is powerful as it shows that, in a way, Mauritania has now become both a hub of EU border infrastructure and, critically, a site where migrants are able to navigate and assert their own agency.

Ultimately, from Nouadhibou to Nouakchott to Rosso, Moctar makes it clear that border externalization is heavily imbued with social, historical, and political histories which continue to shape not just migration policy but policing operations as well. This pertinent work provides a broad yet solid foundation on border externalization and offers readers the opportunity to reconsider the role of African states in border politics, and all the components of the text fluidly link to craft a clear narrative. It is especially useful for those interested in domains such as postcolonial studies, political science, and African border and migration studies.

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