

## BOOK REVIEWS

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Anna Triandafyllidou and Thanos Maroukis, **Migrant smuggling: irregular migration from Asia and Africa to Europe**, *New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 256 pp.* (ISBN: 9780230296374)

“Drowned just a short swim from shore, the 13 desperate migrants who plunged from overcrowded smuggler ship after it ran aground off Sicily”<sup>1</sup>

Headlines like this have featured European newspapers in recent times. What has emerged is that migration is often connected to illicit activities of migrant smugglers. This has called for a fight against irregular migration.

Anna Triandafyllidou and Thanos Maroukis work on this topic at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. In their book “Migrant smuggling: irregular migration from Asia and Africa to Europe” (2012), they argue that a more effective border security system fails to reduce ‘irregular migration’ flows towards the EU. On the basis of interviews with migrants, smugglers, and ‘experts’, they look into the migrant smuggling business and address topics like the situation of the migrants and their relationship with the smugglers. A description of various “irregular migration systems” (p. 67) that exist for migrants to travel from Africa and Asia to Europe, as well as a description of relevant European policies, provide interesting reading. The distinction between “migrant smuggling” and “human trafficking” allows a differentiation between voluntary and forced migration respectively.

Unfortunately, the book has to be criticized with regard to the author’s modernist perspective when it comes to history, culture and national identity: First, the authors fail to place the phenomenon of irregular migration within its historical framework. They neither question the legitimacy of today’s global structures, nor Europe’s struggle against migrants. With statements like “(...) the legitimate desire of states to control their borders (...)” (p.29), they clearly position themselves and legitimize the restrictive migration management of the EU, as well as its position in the global system.

Second, the authors base their argumentation on an assumed superficiality of European cultures vis-à-vis African and Asian cultures. The homogenization and assumed inferiority of the migrant’s cultures result in statements like this:

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<sup>1</sup> Dailymail: 30/09/2013, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2439311/Bodies-13-immigrants-wash-shore-Italy-boat-smuggling-200-migrants-Africa-runs-aground.html>, accessed: 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013.



“But it is not a matter of freedom of choice. All subjects for different reasons have no freedom of choice. The Nigerian girl who ends up as a victim of sex-trafficking ‘willingly’ (to the extent that her family allows her to have a will of her own) came into an initial agreement with the trafficker. But her freedom of choice, or better, her sense of belonging, is dictated by her culture. It is more about belonging than it is about choice.” (p. 193)

Here, Nigerian culture is homogenized and criminalized, as it appears to be paternalistic and to totally restrict the individual, in this case ‘the Nigerian girl’.

Third, the hierarchical perception of cultures and nation-states goes hand in hand with the homogenization and “othering” of migrants. These are reduced to certain characteristics, for example their nationality, gender or culture. An example that illustrates the reduction of the individual to her nationality is the following sentence:

“(…) only a few nationalities seem to be organized well enough to overcome relatively quickly and efficiently any unexpected obstacles in the course of the journey” (p. 141)

Homogenizing tendencies can also be traced back to a gendered representation of the migrants. In terms of ‘migrant smuggling’, ‘the irregular migrant’ who uses the help of smugglers is portrayed as a healthy young men who wants to enter Europe in order to improve his economic situation. Men who migrate for other reasons, as well as women at large, are not taken into consideration here. In terms of ‘human trafficking’, the analysis is exclusively focused on women. These are portrayed as mere victims – of the smugglers as well as of their own cultural background – who are too weak to represent themselves. It is probably due to this that their representation is based on so-called ‘expert-interviews’. This denies the affected women the right to speak for themselves.

Given these shortcomings, the book must be read carefully. The way in which irregular migrants are portrayed can lead to their criminalization. Together with the smugglers, they appear to threaten the well-being of European welfare states which legitimizes oppressive actions to keep them outside. The danger is that the reader adopts the represented perspective, including the assumed inferiority of the migrants’ culture, and the legitimacy of global (economic) imbalances. Nevertheless, if read from a critical point of view, the book can provide interesting reading about relevant European policies, and the various irregular migration systems that exist for migrants to travel from Africa and Asia to Europe.

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