

REVIEWS Books and Other Publications

M. Benguerna and E. Mangone (Eds.). *Beyond the Borders: The Mediterranean between Cultures, Migrations and Life-world*. Fisciano, Italy: ICSR Mediterranean Knowledge, 2016 ISBN 978-88-99662-00-4, 180 pp.

How does one “rethink the boundaries” that separate the European Union (EU) and the countries surrounding the Mediterranean basin? How does one reclaim a new territoriality that transcends the current militarization, balkanization, and racialization of movement across the basin and the antithetical identities that underpin them? What does it mean for scholars to come together, strategically, in order to rethink the geopolitical contexts in which they act and live in view of reclaiming their humanity in relation to a viable and sustainable life-world? What epistemic frameworks – and their concomitant forms of representation – would bring together such an endeavour? Mohamed Benguerna and Emiliana Mangone, the co-editors of this collection, identify these questions as a pertinent framework in their introductory chapter.

The chapters focus on the relationships between a European space and a Mediterranean space which have become so fragmented, distanced, and antagonistic, that the viability of a transformed and transformative human culture negates its own historical trans-cultural and trans-geographic heritage. The collection must be understood over the backdrop of the current “closure and death” that characterises the relationships between these two regions and the toll of human tragedies that make the Mediterranean Sea a huge cemetery for tens of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers who do not make it through a border regime of unprecedented complexity. The collection laments the state of despair that has befallen the Mediterranean basin. It calls for a reconstructive project that

would promote a life-world that carries with it hope, meaning, and political redemption.

The collection foregrounds what Peter Mayo referred to in his 2007 paper “Gramsci, the Southern Question and the Mediterranean,” as “the major challenges for social solidarity facing people of this region, namely the challenge posed by massive migration from the South to the North in the context of the intensification of globalization.” Mayo’s point is reflected in Mohamed Benguerna’s chapter that unpacks, in a rather informal and at times disjunctured fashion, the modalities under which research “collaboration” protocols between countries such as France and Algeria, erect hierarchical borders that curtail the capacity of scholars to build a meaningful “life-world” that could open-up opportunities for new modalities and relationalities to emerge.

Divided into three parts, the collection includes eight chapters, in addition to two chapters by the editors. The chapters engage a heuristic notion of the Mediterranean in relation to cultures, migration, and the life-world. These capture three sets of questions: meaning and positionality, movement and relationality, and social practice and transformation.

The first part problematizes concepts such as otherness, encounter, and cultural diversity. Respective chapters by Emiliana Mangone, Pierpaolo Donati, and Andrea Salvatore and Antonio Barbieri, unpack the challenges that underpin the construction of otherness (Mangone), the possibilities and limits of its semantic and legal translation into alternative forms of citizenship (Donati), and the articulation of a coherent and meaningful life-world (Salvatore and Barbieri).

The second part of this collection engages questions related to migration and movement across the Mediterranean space. Roberto Cortinovis discusses the responses of the EU to the widening phenomenon of migration into its space, pointing to geopolitical and socioeconomic implications. Folco Cimagalli more particularly focuses on the implications of migration for EU “integration” policies. He critiques the absence of community engagement in the EU’s policy frameworks concerned with welfare and support to migrants.

The third part offers a critique of social practices that curtail the emergence of a transformative culture. Giuseppe Masullo unpacks the binary gender regime and how it constructs masculinity, femininity – and sexuality more generally. He examines how these terms – and the different socio-cultural articulations that define them – mediate debates and controversies between “Western” and “Islamic” parties, demarcating boundaries between cultures.

Quite differently, Carmel Borg and Peter Mayo, problematize the politics of feelings, national affiliation, and colonial appropriation that takes place through the curating of museum-based collections. Focusing on the particular case of Malta, they advocate for the promotion of “community museums” that “would serve as an antithesis to the dominant narratives in the traditional and still surviving Maltese museum milieu” (p. 148).

Finally, Anna Milione introduces the case of early school leaving in southern Italy with the aim of finding ways to promote school attendance. Her study raises crucial questions regarding dynamics of trust in the school system in deeply divided and pluri-cultural societies. Her aim is to trigger a wider discussion into learning communities and how they could contribute to mitigating the effects of social fragmentation.

The collection is very eclectic in its approaches, conceptual, methodological, and in terms of research sites. Comprehensive and in-depth editing would have attended the many typos, cumbersome phrasing, and ambiguities of language; more in some papers than in others. What is regrettable is that the collection does not reflect the plurality and diversity of scholars across the region, which the collection celebrates. It rather remains limited mainly to Italian scholars who work in southern Italian universities, with two exceptions (Algeria and Malta, respectively). On this point, I add in haste that I recognize the difficulties involved in expanding participation in such exchanges across languages, geographic areas, and academic traditions, as is clearly explained in Benguerna’s chapter, pp. 13ff.

Notwithstanding, this volume should be considered as a first exploration and a work in progress. Subsequent colloquia

should expand the scope of breadth of the discussions, beyond what the co-editors of the present collection have done. One final observation, of a symbolic kind, concerns the “sunset over the sea” photograph appearing on the front cover. With a project calling for a new dawn to rise over the Mediterranean, a photograph of a sunrise would have rather been more appropriate.

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