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A Radical Journal of Geography

Olivier Clochard and Migreurop (eds), *Atlas of Migration in Europe: A Critical Geography of Migration Policies*, Oxford: New Internationalist, 2013. ISBN: 978-1-78026-083-9 (paper)

At the close of 2013, an [official launch](#) was held in central London for the *Atlas of Migration in Europe*. An eclectic group gathered at Garden Court—a respected barristers’ chambers known for its work in immigration and asylum law—reflecting the broad audience at which the *Atlas* aims. The panel of speakers for the evening comprised of contributors to the *Atlas*, representing a number of NGOs and activist groups from across the EU, along with a former detainee of the UK immigration detention system. Chairing the panel was the director and founding member of Migreurop, Olivier Clochard, an academic geographer based at the Université de Poitiers, France.

[Migreurop](#), formed in 2002 and based primarily in Paris, is a global network comprising 43 NGOs, alongside the support of associations, scholars, activists and independent researchers located throughout Europe, the Maghreb, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Near East. It is therefore difficult at times to place a finger on who or what exactly Migreurop is, and it’s tendency to publish in French has seen much of its essential work remain unknown or ignored elsewhere, notably in English-speaking academia. Migreurop states its purpose as being “to identify and communicate on the texts and practices of the European Union aiming to isolate or keep away from Europe those foreigners considered undesirable, and to oppose those policies”. It draws primarily from an activist background, though it’s strongly informed by the academic world, notably geography.

The network traces its formation to having developed from the ongoing struggles of the former Sangatte refugee camp—located near to the entrance of the Channel Tunnel in northwest France—which was closed in 2003. Developing out of this was perhaps the

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group's best-known work, the [*Carte des Camps*](#), a continually updated map depicting the “new policy spreading throughout Europe based on the administrative confinement of migrants either when arriving on EU soil, or pending their removal/deportation/expulsion” (p.149). This map (shown on p.82 of the *Atlas*) now expands far beyond EU territory, reflecting the development of agreements and use of pre-emptive detention in transit countries, particularly in North Africa and neighbouring countries bordering the EU to its east. This reflects perhaps Migreurop's most central focus: the use of externalization practices by EU member states and the outsourcing to third-states of the monitoring and control of migration flows, combined with the growing use of detention both within and outside the EU. The map has become an authoritative resource in locating such spaces of deterrence, detention, and expulsion, relied upon by academics, activists, and NGOs across the EU and beyond, and also featured in various media publications.

Migreurop's *Atlas*, first published in 2009 in French, and described as “a critical analysis of political asylum and immigration in the European Union”, is now available in English. It is divided into four sections, broadly considering: [i] global impediments to migration (through economic, social and legal segregation, reinforced by the militarization of borders); [ii] multiplying controls on migration (through various policies, agreements, and trans- and supra-national agencies); [iii] the use of detention and imprisonment, re-admission policies and practices of illegal refoulement as the basis of European migration policies; and [iv] the role and impact of EU controls in departure and transit areas. For each section, the *Atlas*:

“...brings together texts, maps, charts, graphics and photographs in an attempt to change the way borders are traditionally represented to contribute to an understanding of the displacement and externalization of controls, to reveal the

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infrastructure established to serve European migration policies and to illustrate the deployment of security measures around migration, based on observations in Europe and beyond” (p.5).

This extensive and unprecedented attempt to identify, map and make sense of the dynamic nature of European border and migration controls, both within the EU and beyond, could not be done to such a detailed and critical level by one person or collective. Migreruop has therefore drawn upon a network of over 50 contributors, including academics (geographers, anthropologists, sociologists and political theorists), cartographers, independent researchers, lawyers, activists, and NGOs. More than 100 colour maps and charts accompany the many interventions provided by each contributor, resulting in a unique, if at times mind-boggling, array of information, the outcome of a decade-long development of the Migreurop network. The use of ‘fieldwork’ (to borrow Migreuop’s terminology) makes this a strongly ethnographic production, based on grounded activism and collaboration with formerly and currently detained persons, migrants’ rights movements, critical cartographers and others, resulting in an excellent example of what Shukaitis *et al.* (2007) call ‘militant research’.

A key contribution to critical border and immigration studies of the *Atlas* is its central focus upon the extra-territorial processes of bordering and migration control conducted by the European Union and its member states. Examinations of third-country agreements, reproduction of detention policies, off-shore processing and holding centres, private investment in border militarization projects, and the role of trans- and supra-national agencies in migration management, amongst many other examples, highlight the global reach of EU immigration policy. The recent controversial announcement by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees that it would consider the use of off-shore processing of asylum seekers in North Africa, as a response to increasing numbers of

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persons making risky crossings of the Mediterranean (see Sherwood *et al.* 2014) is but one example of the ongoing practices of externalizing migration control in the EU, and the need to identify and counter such practices. A further contribution of Migreurop has been its definition, identification and locating of migrant ‘camps’. They note that:

“the notion of the ‘camp’ goes beyond the classic idea of a place surrounded by a wall and barbed wire. Camps of foreigners in the EU can have different forms: real prisons, ‘detention centres’ (*i.e.* for foreigners pending their removal) which often remain away from any judicial control, or, finally, places where undesirable migrants, constantly expelled everywhere, are more or less spontaneously brought together as an emergency solution (formal reception centres, transit centres, shelters, but also informal places such as ghettos, jungles, squats, *etc.*). This variety of places all have in common that the occupiers have generally no other choice than to be there” (p.149).

The ‘critical geography of migration policies’ presented within the *Atlas* can therefore be viewed in relation to much important work currently being conducted within academic geography, such as Alison Mountz’s (2010) *Seeking Asylum*, and the broader [Island Detention Project](#) (which she leads), or the work of the [Global Detention Project](#) based in Geneva. Migreurop launched its own [Open Access Now](#) project in 2011, which calls for “unconditional access for civil society and journalists to migrant detention centres in order to put an end to the lack of transparency around these sites”. Coupled with this, and developing the work of the initial map in locating sites of detention and removal, Migreurop has also created an online, interactive mapping tool [Close the Camps](#). The aim of this tool, launched in late 2013, is to “identify, describe and locate detention sites and to make practical information available to detainees and those who want to contact and/or

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support them...[allowing] all users to contribute to improving knowledge about migrant detention camps, which are often kept from public view”.

Migreurop demonstrate that the European border system, through its adoption of ‘risk management’ and use of surveillance, detention and extraterritorial measures, has led to the “conventional border model to be called into question” (p.5). The information contained within the *Atlas* and the accompanying maps therefore provide an effective example of counter-mapping. Whereas the ‘official’ maps of EU border management agencies such as [Frontex](#) “present migration as massive, unaffected, unidirectional and unstoppable flows towards imaginatively reactive and vulnerable states” (Van Houtum, 2010: 965), the maps and graphics presented here critically challenge such normative understandings of global migration and its management, as well as understandings of nation-state sovereignty. Importantly, the maps and charts contained in chapters such as ‘Wanderings and Encampments’ (p.126-129) show effectively the complexities and dangers, as well as the many forms of control and surveillance, faced by those undertaking lengthy and disjointed migrations towards Europe.

The maps, charts, photos and other figures contained within the *Atlas* are rich in detail, and as mentioned previously often convey unique and original information. Given the number of images, however, many maps are simply too small, making the deciphering of some information difficult. This is particularly the case when similar shades of colour are used to differentiate information.

Many interested in migration, both at the scale of the EU and globally, will find value in the *Atlas*. However, those already dedicated to researching the issues contained within, or looking for detailed and up-to-date information on EU policy, are unlikely to find the numerous short texts accompanying the maps particularly informative. For those less familiar, or those looking for a clear and concise introduction or reference point, the many short texts contained within the *Atlas* will be very useful indeed. The maps should

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also provide an engaging resource for those teaching migration-related courses. While the *Atlas* contains an almost unprecedented level of information on migration in Europe, a list of related or recommended reading would be useful, and could have been provided at the closing of each section, perhaps being grouped thematically.

The sobering final chapter on counting migrant deaths at the borders of the EU (by Migreurop core members Emmanuel Blanchard, Olivier Clochard, and Claire Rodier), is a reminder of the importance of such work done by the *Atlas* and its numerous contributors (see also Van Houtum and Boedeltje 2009). This brief contribution highlights the inherent problems associated with counting deaths, and questions why such a task should or could be undertaken. But it also offers an important insight that speaks to the broader project of the *Atlas* and of Migreurop: that by doing such work the “war on migrants passes from the domain of metaphors to a concrete reality, the consequences of which must be documented” (p.142). This meticulous documentation of European policies and practices in deterring, detaining and deporting those seeking entry to the EU does exactly that. As contributor Liz Fekete, executive director for the London-based Institute for Race Relations, stated at the launch event held at Garden Court, the *Atlas* “is a work of total devotion”.

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Andrew Burridge

Department of Geography

University of Exeter

a.d.burridge@exeter.ac.uk

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