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A Radical Journal of Geography

Darshan Vigneswaran, *Territory, Migration, and the Evolution of the International System*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. ISBN: 9780230391284 (cloth); ISBN: 9780230391291 (ebook)

Questions of migration, territory, and state borders are at the core of critical geography, international relations, and the social sciences more generally. There is a rich literature critically discussing current migration policies, techniques of migration management, immigration detention and deportation, and border securitization and controls in North America and the EU in particular. *Territory, Migration, and the Evolution of the International System* contributes to this debate. It presents a modest critique of authors who write in favor of open borders and ponders “what sort of regulatory system might replace a border control regime” if ‘open borders’ are not an option (p.3). Alternative ways of imagining migration control and spatial ordering are pursued by examining territorial strategies and ‘mental maps’, that is, “the tools that political actors use to develop strategies to govern migration” (p.19). The book maintains that it is possible to understand the novelty of the territorial strategies of migration management by analyzing mental maps and patterns of territorial change historically. The aim is to create a “narrative that emphasizes persistent variation in territorial forms and state capacity to simultaneously deploy multiple territorial strategies” (p.6), one that purposefully resists a linear version of history and understanding of the territoriality of the sovereign state as the norm.

The book offers an original and captivating analysis of territorial strategies across time and space. It constructs narratives of the medieval Italian city-states, the British Empire in India, and an integrated Europe that fittingly illustrate how migration and human mobility have always been at the core of governmental strategies. In the medieval Italian city-states the key territorial strategy was centralization, “an effort to establish a single ruler as sovereign over urban space, to create a political community that saw the city as its homeland

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and to banish those who disturbed the peace” (p.31). Using the banishing and exile of Dante Alighieri as an example, the book outlines how the main concern of the Italian rulers was regulating the movement of landed aristocrats to the city. Yet open borders were considered important for the health of the city’s markets and the admission of strangers was often permitted, even in cases where they proved to be a security threat. The second historical study analyzes the British Empire in India as a long-term attempt to manage the movement of people, the main focus being the first century of parliamentary control (1757-1857). Migration issues were at the core of questions of state development and territorial expansion. The British Empire actively controlled the migration of British nationals to India and strove to institutionalize particular ideas and moral understandings among its colonizing class. Members of parliament in London used “a ‘mental map’ that pictures India as a corrupt, dependent but nonetheless a ‘promising’ place to formulate a strategy of expansion that would introduce English principles of governance to Indian jurisdictions” (p.54). The moral justification of the colonization was based on the idea of the superiority of the colonialist. The Empire was a project of expanding markets, yet expansion was not the only territorial strategy at the time but was accompanied by the centralization of Britain’s landed elite in London. These examples lead to the argument that “individual states can use several territorial strategies in concert” (p.75) and that “variation in territorial strategies is not the exception in human history but the norm” (p.78).

The third case is European integration and migration management. Integration is presented as the key territorial strategy of Europe, the other corollary strategies being centralization, expansion and exclusion. According to the argument, this post-national model of regional integration is to a great extent based on political ideas and techniques similar to the modern state-building process. Integration is defined as “a political project focused on the control of populations through specific means of designing, transforming and regulating social space” (p.92) and as a territorial strategy “to incorporate populations into state

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mobilization process” (p.101). Following this rationality, migrants are understood as a population that can be disciplined and incorporated into the state’s projects and labor markets. In EU policy strategies, migrants and the mobility of labor are considered important for the functioning of economy. The other side of the coin, unfortunately not discussed adequately in the book, is that non-economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are considered burdens on the state economy. Their mobility is strictly regulated. Yet, as explained in the book, the function of a border is not merely to exclude unwanted populations; border control provides a means to map and control human mobility across state territory. Borders “are an attempt to bring mobile populations within the ‘gaze’ of state institutions, by channeling their movements, discovering their presence and categorizing them on the basis of their likelihood of retaining a formal status in the system” (p.101). This is a very important point, displaying that the rationales and techniques of border control evolve with changing territorial strategies. It also highlights the fact that cartography and statistics are important means of calculating and governing territories, populations and migration.

Interesting narration and the sophisticated manner of relating historical analysis with current concerns are strengths of the book. The curiosity of the reader is first captured with a story about asylum seekers who tried to travel to Australia by boat in 2001. Sailing in international waters, these irregular migrants were rescued by a Norwegian freighter, with the help of the Australian navy. The book explains how Australia refused to permit the passengers to claim asylum on its soil, sending them to a detention center on the island of Nauru. The Australian government employed the practice of de facto ‘neo-refoulement’, that is, the “geographically based strategy of preventing asylum by restricting access to territories that, in principle, provide protection to refugees” (Hyndman and Mountz 2008). As recent geographical literature has shown, extra-territorial control and maritime operations have become a common strategy for regulating unwanted migration in Australia and Europe. When this strategy is evaluated from the perspective of the narrative of sovereign state territoriality,

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it might appear to be a novel way to manage migration, but *Territory, Migration, and the Evolution of the International System* shows that extra-territorial migration control is, ultimately, not so fundamentally novel or exceptional as a territorial strategy. As the book emphasizes, state strategies to control the mobility of people are diverse and—it is argued in the book—determined by political thinkers’ ‘mental maps’. Mental maps are defined as “cognitive images consisting of a series of shorthand descriptions that synthesize and summarize a vast array of complex geo-spatial processes into thematically organized and relatively stable understandings of space” (p.20). According to the book, meanings and experiences attached to a place—as a locale, an identity, and a location—are understood as key elements of the mental maps of political thinkers. From the perspective of geography scholars, the idea of mental maps as providing the meaning of places is particularly interesting. Place imaginations and the mental maps of rules are multiple, controversial and changing, something that is exemplified by the struggle that the member states have over European migration policy.

The book is an interesting read for anyone who wishes to understand how international and national migration control creates a field of political power games. The study of global history usually focuses on the history of the ruling class, and this book is no exception. It sets up the question of what sort of regulatory system might replace the current border control regime that many critical scholars consider as immoral, but, unfortunately, the answer is not to be found in the book. Moreover, the question of the rationales of border and migration control appears in a rather different light when studied from the perspective of vulnerable migrant populations. Hence it is very important to keep generating interdisciplinary discussions on current and past migration regimes.

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Hyndman J and Mountz A (2008) Another brick in the wall? Neo-refoulement and the externalization of asylum by Australia and Europe. *Government and Opposition* 43(2):249-269

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