

Maurice Stierl, *Migrant Resistance in Contemporary Europe*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2019. ISBN: 9780367524562 (paper); ISBN: 9781138576230 (cloth); ISBN: 9781351270489 (ebook)

In 2015, a boat in the Aegean carrying displaced persons from Syria went into distress. There were 45 people onboard, including 15 children. They contacted the NGO Alarm Phone, which is designed to receive contact from migrants at sea and put pressure on authorities to perform rescues. Not wanting to be forced to return to Turkey, those onboard the vessel waited until they drifted into Greek waters before they sent their GPS location to Alarm Phone. Alarm Phone then contacted the Greek coastguard and the migrants were safely brought to Europe (p.93). Maurice Stierl is a member of Alarm Phone and recounts in his recently published book, *Migrant Resistance in Contemporary Europe*, the significance of resistance to the “EUropean” border regime, not only through this NGO but through a multitude of migration struggles.

Migrant Resistance in Contemporary Europe presents a multi-sited ethnographic study of forms of migrant resistance to EUrope’s borders, focusing specifically on Germany, Greece, Italy, and the Mediterranean. Stierl develops the term “EUrope” to signify the distinction between member states and the “supra-national’ EU” and its institutions (p.8). The sites of study in Stierl’s book emerge not only as important locations of migrant resistance, but also as examples of the entangled and spatially discursive nature of EUrope’s borders. In this sense, Stierl elucidates how EUrope’s borders are not fastened to particular littoral geographies, but rather emerge in the interactions that exist between the protagonists of his research and the technologies in place designed to control and contain their movement. Across these sites of study, Stierl conceptualises resistance in three distinct forms: migratory *dissent*; migratory *excess*; and migratory *solidarity*. While acknowledging that migratory resistance is profoundly heterogeneous and mutable, constantly responding to different powers (p.170), through using these forms to analyse resistance, Stierl is able to illuminate distinct manifestations of resistance to EUrope’s borders. Rather than a summary of Stierl’s

book, I provide an overview these three themes of resistance – *dissent*, *excess*, and *solidarity* – before considering how this research contributes to debates within migration and border studies.

Stierl begins by analysing migrant protests in Europe, focusing in detail on migrant activist work in Germany to illustrate dissent as a form of resistance (Chapter 2). He explicates developments within the Non-Citizen movement, which emerged out of Berlin in 2012, following the Refugee March across Germany. The Non-Citizen movement was led by migrant activists without protection status, having neither citizenship or refugee status, who refused to live as excluded subjects in fear of deportation. Stierl draws on Rancière (2010) to articulate how, through taking up public space, and refusing the “names” and “spaces” assigned to them, these migrant activists politicised their exclusion (p.39). The name of the movement itself, Non-Citizen, was specifically chosen in rejection of the various names that are ascribed to precarious travelers upon entry to Europe, such as “asylum-seeker” (p.43). Stierl highlights events within the Non-Citizen movement to demonstrate how migratory dissent has the potential to reformulate conceptions of migrants as needy and outside of or beyond political community: “Migrant dissent ... often is confrontational, loud, antagonistic, and public, forcing government officials and European citizens to respond to those unwilling to remain in often extremely precarious and vulnerable situations” (p.57). Through dissent, precarious travelers within Europe carve out a public and political space, through which they challenge the occlusion and dispensability which Europe forces upon them.

Moving on to excess as a form of resistance, Chapter 3 examines the multiplication of borders *within* Europe. Despite the EU being conceptualised as internally borderless, this chapter illustrates the internal “border labyrinth” that “transient populations” have to perpetually negotiate (p.63, 68). The “delocalised” borders of Europe give rise to both instances of stuckness, such as when migrants are prevented from moving onward within Europe, as well as instances of forced mobility, such as when migrants are involuntarily returned under the Dublin Regulation that determines which state is responsible for examining an asylum application. Stierl’s ethnographic work in Greece allows him to

illustrate engagements with EUrope's internal borders through the narratives of the precarious travelers he met. Through these narratives, the complex mesh of borders becomes apparent. Stierl highlights the geographies of impermanent accommodation and camps and the way the protagonists of his research not only pass through these geographies, but often return to them. In detailing the journeys of several subjects, illuminating the complex way movement is achieved within EUrope despite the violent regime of mobility control, Stierl reveals how they "were able to subvert borders through a politics of *escape*" (p.62, emphasis added). Stierl frames these various escapes as excess: "*Excess*, commonly employed to describe a surplus or a behavior that goes beyond what is proper, permitted, or desirable, can by definition hardly be measured" (p.61). In this sense, Stierl explains the everyday struggles and practices of migratory movements within EUrope as excess, demonstrating the way they rely upon dynamic forms of resistance in order to transgress EUrope's internal borders.

Chapter 4 shifts the focus to the Mediterranean Sea, exploring the theme of migrant solidarity as resistance. The chapter focuses on operations that seek to secure the rescue of migrants at sea. The chapter first explores Boats4People, which was the "first collective activist attempt to physically venture into the Mediterranean" with the aspiration to prevent migrant fatalities (p.96). While this programme did not eventuate with the capacity originally imagined, it was replaced by a programme that has functioned for years to contribute to migrant rescue at sea. This programme, known as Alarm Phone, and of which Stierl is a member, is as a phoneline and resource that operates as a point of connection for those in distress at sea. Stierl illustrates Alarm Phone as "a rather novel form of transborder activism ... centring around networks connected through mobile lines of communication" (p.105). As explicated in the book, member states often either delay or avoid launching search and rescue operations for migrant vessels in distress at sea. Alarm Phone not only functions as a safe point of contact for those traveling at sea; it also works to put pressure on coastguards to effectuate rescue. Alarm Phone operates with approximately 130 activists in around 13 countries (p.106). The programme is reliant upon the trust of those engaging in precarious travel, which for obvious reasons is not always forthcoming. As such, the members of Alarm

Phone had to “be/come immersed in existing webs of interpersonal contacts, often composed only of close relatives, friends, and communities of travelers” (p.117), through which a “net” of communication could evolve. This does not necessarily mean migrant solidarity movements function horizontally or without problematic structures of power. Stierl raises interesting dilemmas within solidarity as a form of resistance, specifically around generating a collective movement that is sensitive to the differences in positionality and power of those involved (p.97). After all, those who seek in solidarity to change the conditions of this sea are always indelibly separated from those who have lost lives or loved ones to EUrope’s border (p.102).

Resistance to EUrope’s border regime actively challenges the very understanding of EUrope as a “transborder”, “humanitarian”, and “post-racial and postcolonial” political project (see Chapter 5). Stierl argues that while these borders are frequently violent and deadly in nature, migratory resistance is nonetheless constituent of “new possibilities”; this is because “they make encounters possible that are not meant to take place, that the border regime seeks to thwart, demonstrating that ‘[a]t the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom”” (p.184, citing Foucault 1982: 790; see also Chapters 6 and 7). Stierl’s *Migrant Resistance in Contemporary Europe* thus not only elucidates the complex multiplication of EUrope’s borders and the technologies of controlling “transient populations”, but also the ways in which resistance to EUrope’s border regime in turn shapes EUrope. Without suggesting that these migratory resistances can be read as whole, and without assuming that they have the capacity to change society for the better, Stierl demonstrates how, in their multiplicity, these “unruly movements” function as “*enactments of freedom*” (p.189, emphasis original). As such, the various forms of migratory resistance that transpire across EUrope expose new political potentialities, leading to future networks, mobilities, and communities.

While this book offers a great deal to theorisations of resistance as well as critical citizenship studies and “autonomy of migration” literature, what I found most exciting was thinking through how each of Stierl’s examples brings to light the messy entanglement of

EUrope's borders and the ever-changing spatialities of migration control. There is significant critical scholarship on the changing nature of borders and migration control. A number of scholars have explored the geographies and increasing capacities of policing and surveillance at EUrope's borders, and the way migration control expands in the absence of migrant rescue or frameworks of rights (e.g. Basaran 2015; Cuttitta 2018; Garelli and Tazzioli 2018; Riddervold and Bosilca 2017; Tazzioli 2018). There is also interesting work on migration governance that works through mobility, containing migrants by keeping them moving (see Tazzioli 2020). Yet, Stierl's ethnographic work, which is intricately interwoven with his theoretical analysis, exposes something distinct of the multiplication of EUrope's borders. EUrope's borders are revealed in this book as emerging in these moments of resistance, in the "transversal forces that bring to light the ways in which constitutive insides and outsides are made and unmade, often forged through violent enforcement" (p.135). Through this, we can understand borders as profoundly entangled and protean, not merely unfastened from specific geographies, but rather emerging in diverse ways for those who seek to challenge the exclusion enforced upon them.

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Andonea Jon Dickson

School of Politics and International Relations

Queen Mary, University of London

a.j.dickson@qmul.ac.uk

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