Externalising Migration Governance Through Civil Society

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BOOK REVIEW

Dini, Sabine and Giusa, Caterina (2020)

Externalising Migration Governance Through Civil Society.

This short book offers a sharp analysis of the instrumentalization of Tunisian civil society for European migration externalization. Dini and Giusa ask: What did democratization do to the logics of European migration externalization in Tunisia since 2011?

Their analysis unveils three interlinked processes at play in post-revolutionary Tunisia: the shift of European migration cooperation from a focus on state actors towards civil society actors; the instrumentalization of civil society work on migration as a means to gain domestic legitimacy for mobility and population control; and the resulting domestication of dissent and muzzling of Tunisian's contestation potential against European externalization. With its detailed analysis of civil society activities on migration in Tunisia, the book speaks to a burgeoning literature on migration control in the Mediterranean that seeks to decentre the traditional view away from European state actors, towards the role of development donors, civil society and citizens, as well as origin or transit state authorities (Bustos et al. 2011; Gazzotti, 2018; Natter, 2018; Roman, 2019).

Before 2011, European migration externalization efforts relied on cooperation with an authoritarian state apparatus. With the fall of Ben Ali's regime, Tunisian bureaucratic processes have become more complex, and authorities – aware of the generalized rejection of migration securitization by Tunisian citizens – more reticent partners for European migration control. At the same time, for European actors, Tunisia's emerging civil society has become the domestically legitimate partner to work with after the revolution (Deane, 2013). As a consequence, democratization has shifted the locus of migration cooperation from state to societal actors in Tunisia. However, Dini and Giusa convincingly demonstrate that European cooperation with civil society pursued one main goal: to legitimize the containment of mobility. Drawing on Foucault's governmentality approach, they showcase how Tunisian civil society has become a tool for European actors' externalization agenda, contributing to 'produce the consent of the governed thought' (p.16) on the ground.

Although Tunisia's civil society has been regularly mobilizing against European externalization attempts and Tunisia's complicity in it, the actual projects implemented by the same civil society actors on the ground in fact undercut such efforts. Discussing projects on emigration prevention, voluntary readmission and forced return, as well as detention of immigrants and asylum, the book offers a *tour d'horizon* on how civil society actions have indirectly legitimized a discourse that frames migration as undesirable. This is achieved through civil society projects that highlight the risks involved in irregular migration or the role of Tunisia as a 'safe' migrant destination and that promote the image of the 'good' citizen as the sedentary citizen (Bakewell, 2008; Pécoud, 2015). Such intertwining between responsible citizenship and immobility is particularly strong in the democratization context, where the responsibility of each citizen to contribute to the polity is constantly emphasized. Acting as intermediary between EU funders and target groups such as potential irregular migrants, Tunisian families or asylum seekers in Tunisia, civil society's role is essentially to 'sweeten the pill of sedentarisation' (p.56).

As Dini and Giusa argue, turning civil society into a visible actor in migration cooperation creates an impression of domestic legitimation and societal involvement in migration control. Simultaneously, though, actual migration control measures are invisibilized – through secrecy around official documents or the geographical distancing of

visa processing and return procedures – to avoid their politicization and contestation in the public sphere. Such dialectic between the visibilization of civil society work on migration and the invisibilization of migration control practices is effective to silence discontent and domesticate broader popular dissent. As they write: civil society cooperation 'manages to produce consent of the dominated to the migratory order by intertwining migration issues with the support to an "active and responsible" civil society' (p.43).

As a result of this dialectic, the subversive potential of Tunisian associations to challenge the current migration regime and to politicize the call for freedom of movement is stifled. Such dynamic – in which the inclusion of civil society in policy processes is used to display an image of inclusiveness, while effectively channelling dissent of migration control – is however not unique to Tunisia and its democratization context; it has also been evidenced in Morocco (Hibou, 2005; Natter, 2020; Norman, 2016) and beyond (Cavatorta, 2012; Lewis, 2013). The final reflection of Dini and Giusa on what the deliberate exclusion and silencing of such an 'uncivil' society means for the future of migration and its control is thought-provoking, but could have been more forcefully connected with other research on 'uncivil society' in the Middle East, North Africa and worldwide (Abdel Rahman, 2002; Englehart, 2011; Glasius, 2009).

Ultimately, the book shows that only by zooming into the complex processes and practices of actors on the ground can we understand how democratization poses new obstacles but also opportunities for migration externalization. Such insights feed into the growing literature on how power politics on migration control play out between the multitude of local, transnational and international state, societal and development actors involved on migration – particularly in democratizing contexts (Acosta Arcarazo & Freier, 2015; Blair, 1997; Chung, 2010). The rich empirical material presented throughout the book not only brings in these diverse voices, but also makes for a pleasant read – which will be of particular interest to scholars of migration and its politics in Europe, Africa and the Middle East, as well as scholars of (transnational) civil society more broadly.

PEER REVIEW

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