

BOOK REVIEW:**Borderlands - Europe and the
Mediterranean Middle East****Author**

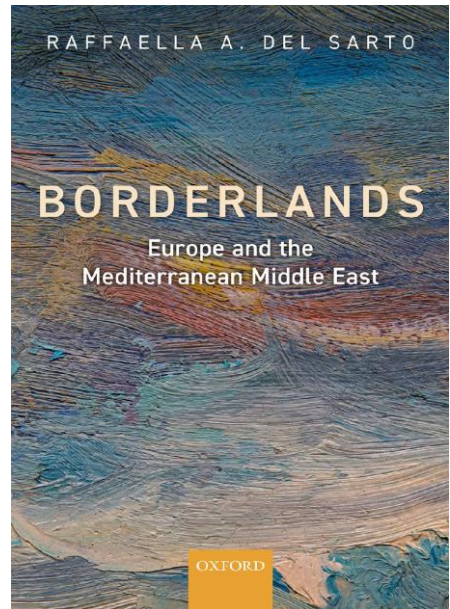
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In *Borderlands: Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East*, a monograph, Del Sarto aims to offer a different reading of the EU's relations with the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) which she interchangeably refers to as the Southern Mediterranean. Defining borderlands as “hybrid zones of crossover from one political, socioeconomic, and legal order to another”, she argues that in its policies towards the region, the EU “seeks to extend many of its rules and practices to the countries in the southern neighbourhood, thereby transforming them into Europe’s borderlands” (p. 2). The book fills a void in the literature on the EU-Middle East relations as it goes beyond spotting the norms-interest dichotomy in the EU’s approach towards the region and thus adds a new dimension to the critique of the EU’s normative power by her conception of “Normative Empire Europe”. The novelty in her criticism rests on a definition of this imperial foreign policy-making as one that refers to “a distinct ‘process of Europeanization’” (p.36) within which “the colonial and postcolonial policies of single member states vis-à-vis their southern neighbours became a common European project” (p.40). The core-periphery dichotomy is used in the book to refer to the imperial relationship between the EU and the MENA countries. The concept of borderlands is employed because the EU’s major bordering practices pertain first and foremost to its trade policies (common commercial policy as well as the common customs tariffs), and, second, to its

border control, migration and security practices, which have especially become prioritized after the Arab uprisings and the ensuing mass flow of refugees from the region to Europe. Del Sarto underlines the asymmetrical relations that the EU establishes with its Southern Mediterranean partners, and, attempts to show how its practices represent a continuation of the colonial policies of its member states. She further reveals how the EU expects the Southern Mediterranean countries to adopt EU values and standards, without giving them equal say in their partnership. On the other hand, she also draws attention to the fact that the EU's relations with the Southern Mediterranean countries are not unidirectional and that especially after the intensification of refugee flows to Europe from the MENA region, the agency of the countries in the region has increased due to the emerging complex interdependence between them and the EU concerning the management of the EU's borderlands.

Borderlands: Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East composes of seven chapters (introduction and conclusion included). In the introduction, Del Sarto states the major argument of the book as the EU following imperial (and inherently asymmetrical) patterns of behaviour in its relations with Southern Mediterranean countries, mainly through the imposition of its neoliberal values and norms on them, while at the same time being increasingly affected by them because of its migration concerns and thus being in a relationship of complex interdependence marked by various bordering practices (and not only material ones). She further defines the terms used throughout the book such as Europe (being comprised of the EU and its Member States) and the Southern Mediterranean or the Mediterranean Middle East (the EU's Southern partners included in the European Neighbourhood Policy).

The second chapter lays down the book's conceptual framework, further explaining the concepts used such as borders and borderlands that constitute the basis of the analysis. Underlining the ambiguity of the EU's relations with its Southern Mediterranean partners (the ambiguity arising from the EU's being a supranational entity and not a state, its invisibility compared to other influential actors in the region such as the US and China, and the role played by its member states throughout their bilateral relations with MENA countries), Del Sarto claims that this ambiguity can be solved through a borderlands approach. In her view, "a borderlands approach best captures the basic patterns and development of [the EU's relations with MENA countries as it] highlights how European rules and practices are expanded to the southern periphery and how interconnected the two regions become as a result" (pp.13-14). Thus, she argues that the borderlands approach manifests "the various functions that borders play while conceptualizing the European Union and its member states as an empire of sorts" (p.14). In this endeavour, she defines borders and borderlands as "social and political constructs" and refers to borders "as institutions that

govern inclusion and exclusion through the establishment and maintenance of different modalities of transboundary movement (pp.14-15). Here, she underlines that the EU's borders are still marked by the borders of the internal market (as the Eurozone and the Schengen area cover different member states and thus do not correspond to the EU's actual borders). She underlines that the EU's borders are fluid not only because of enlargement but also because of the various policy configurations as well as different constructions of identity in Europe (e.g. Norwegians, citizens of a non-EU country, defining themselves as Europeans versus the British who, during the UK's membership in the EU, had hardly defined themselves as such). Then she refers to the European empire and its borders, where she explains the EU's projection of its norms and values beyond its borders and criticizes the conception of normative power Europe, offering "normative empire Europe" as a concept that better captures what the EU does beyond its borders, especially in its Southern neighbourhood. She lists five features of the EU that match the conception of an empire in this regard: The first one is the various configuration of different cores and peripheries (in identity and policy terms) that constitute the vast territories that the EU covers. Second, she refers to the EU's fluid borders which are marked by continuous rounds of enlargement (and also loss of territory by Brexit). The third feature is "the strongly normative political discourse that the EU maintains"; i.e. the normative power Europe discourse, as it "is still reminiscent of the civilizing missions of past empires" (p. 27). Fourth, she emphasizes "the variable border geometry" constituted by the EU in its relationship with its peripheries and especially with its Southern periphery, arguing that this involves "their highly selective, gradual, and differentiated [integration] into the European order, with the aim of stabilizing Europe's borderlands" (p. 27). The fifth and last feature that del Sato puts forward is the EU's reliance on and co-optation of local political structures and elites in the periphery to export this European order beyond its borders (p. 28).

The third chapter is the place where Del Sarto lays down the major characteristics of Europe's colonial past to reflect on the EU's normative empire in the period between its establishment and the early 2000s, and, to show how this manifests itself in its policies regarding the Southern Mediterranean. In this regard, she refers to the "Eurafrica" project and argues that the EU's establishment (the establishment of the European Economic Community - EEC) is also the result of European (mainly, the EEC's colonial member states') concerns about finding alternative ways of exploiting the MENA region. Then she uncovers the Europeanization of colonial policies through the Global Mediterranean Policy and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). Here, Europeanization means that these policies were no longer confined to the former colonial EU member states' interests but have gradually become the EU's and its member states' interests as a whole,

reflecting the neoliberal market-oriented logic of the EU as well as its prioritization of security and stability (i.e., its interests) over its norms and values. Under the subtitle “the Crystallization of European Imperial Ambitions” she refers to the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) underlining the shift towards bilateral relations with the Southern Mediterranean partners as opposed to the regionalist one-size-fits-all approach of the EMP. She further demonstrates how the ENP and its tying of a stake in the single market for the EU’s partners to the fulfillment of its conditionality regarding respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law had been in line with its self-proclaimed normative power. On the other hand, she also asserts that despite this image of being a normative power, the EU continued its interest-driven policies on the region, again especially prioritizing its own security through the discourse of creating “a ring of well-governed countries” (Commission of the European Communities, 2004) around itself. Del Sarto concludes the chapter with the claim that from the initiation of the ENP onwards, the EU has increasingly been acting as a “normative empire” in its relations with the MENA countries, expecting them to follow its rules and practices and thus recreating “core-periphery patterns of interaction, a process that ultimately serves European economic and security interests”, and that surely resembles imperial patterns of behaviour (p.50).

The fourth chapter begins with a brief discussion of recent developments in EU-MENA relations with a view to setting the background for analyzing how the EU integrates its Southern Mediterranean partners into the European order. This is also the chapter where Del Sarto discusses the EU response to the Arab uprisings. The chapter reveals how the EU imposes its preferences concerning trade, border policies, security and migration on the MENA countries. Del Sarto argues that the EU’s trade relations with the MENA countries include their selective integration into the single market but only in terms that are favourable to the EU rather than the countries concerned. She further demonstrates how the EU externalizes and outsources its border control and migration policies, cooperating with the countries in the region in a manner that does not take into consideration the EU’s own norms and values. She reflects on how the security of the EU and its member states are prioritized in all these practices. Finally, she also shows how the EU collaborates with co-opted elites in these countries to pursue its policies and interests, a trait that is reminiscent of both colonial and imperial practices.

Under the title “Restructuring the Socio-Economic and Political Order in the Mediterranean Middle East”, the fifth chapter uncovers how the EU’s policies affect the countries in the region. First, Del Sarto looks at the socio-economic implications of the EU’s policies in the region which are mainly marked by the EU’s being the MENA countries’ biggest trade partner. Here, she contends that

the impact of colonial relations can still be observed as they remain the basis of the EU's trade relations with these countries. She refers to this relationship as a distorted and typically imperial one, "with MENA states importing high value-added manufactured goods and services from Europe while exporting raw materials, 'simple' labour-intensive or resource-based goods, and some agricultural products to the European core" (pp. 91-92). She further criticizes the Western neoliberal financial mechanisms (such as IMF funds) and especially EU financial aid provided to these countries only with conditions that work in favour of the global markets-oriented liberal logic rather than actually helping these countries. She underlines the negative impact of this hegemonic neoliberal economic development model on MENA countries' socio-economic structures such as rising inequality and unemployment. Regarding the political implications of the EU's policies, del Sarto reveals how authoritarian rule is strengthened in the MENA countries because the EU mainly works with authoritarian governments and the co-opted civil society in these countries in the realms of both trade-related policies and border control, security, and migration policies. She further elaborates on how the EU's outsourcing and externalization of its border and migration policies violate human rights, while at the same time strengthening the hold of the authoritarian regimes.

In the sixth chapter, Del Sarto uncovers the agency of MENA countries in their relationship with the EU. She demonstrates the complex interdependence between the EU and these countries which developed on the basis of colonial ties as well as geographical proximity. She underlines the increasingly more effective agency of MENA countries, especially in the realm of border controls, security and migration. She demonstrates how MENA countries openly reject the imposition of EU rules and norms in certain areas (e.g., the regulatory realm) and how they seem to agree on certain EU conditions (e.g., in the realm of democracy and political reform) in the first place but then "quietly" alter them according to their national preferences (pp. 127-128). She also stresses how the refugee deals have given considerable leverage to certain countries in the region in their relations with the EU. Finally, she highlights the "highly selective interpretation and application of rules and practices" on the part of both the EU and the MENA countries. This chapter is especially important as it provides a comprehensive account of the perception and response of MENA countries regarding the EU's policies, which is an understudied topic in International Relations and European Studies.

Finally, Del Sarto concludes with the seventh chapter where she lists the findings of her book. In her view, EU-MENA relations still reflect and build on Europe's colonial ties with the region, and today, this asymmetrical relationship is marked by the EU's imperial or quasi-imperial policies. She further underlines that the borderlands approach was suitable for explaining this

unequal and hub-and-spoke type of relationship. She also draws attention to the commonly criticized contradiction between the EU's discourse of normative power and its interest-driven policies that prioritize security and stability in the region, many times at the expense of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. She also shows how the EU and the MENA countries are tied in a complex relationship of interdependence and how both of them abide by EU rules and norms selectively and can alter them according to their own preferences. She concludes that the borderlands approach is especially useful in distinguishing "between Europe's ambitions to diffuse liberal norms on the world stage and the technocratic reality of transferring regulations pertaining to trade, efficient economic governance, and administrative practice to the periphery" (p.147) as well as in revealing how its border control, migration and security policies empower authoritarian regimes in the region.

All in all, it can be argued that Del Sarto's book fills a significant void in European foreign policy studies as it not only provides a comprehensive criticism of the EU's policies on the Southern Mediterranean and the normative power Europe discourse but it also offers a detailed account of how MENA countries circumvent and resist European rules and preferences, revealing the complex relationship between the EU and the countries concerned. Her notion of normative empire Europe fits well with conceptualizing this relationship and the application of a borderlands approach especially helps uncover the dynamics of this unequal core-periphery relationship and the fluid borders and borderlands of the EU produced and reproduced by its trade policy as well as border control, migration and security practices.

References:

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