

PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/163332>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2021-03-01 and may be subject to change.

Book Reviews | Reseñas

- *American Crossings: Border Politics in the Western Hemisphere*, edited by Maiah Jaskoski, Arturo C. Sotomayor & Harold A. Trinkunas. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015.

The front cover of *American Crossings* features a photograph by Tomas Castelazo of the corrugated metal wall running along the U.S.-Mexican border under a hazy blue desert sky. A thin, tall metal tower hovers along the right-hand side of the photo, a grey-steel tube camera at its pinnacle pointing outwards across the line into ostensibly Mexican territory. Adding gravitas to the tableau, an artist has attached brightly coloured coffins to the sides of the wall, each labelled with a year and the associated number of deaths in attempts at crossing that year (2002, 371). The photograph presents an American border as a dead end space, a space of surveillance, obstruction, death. Dead end.

Fortunately for the reader, and as the editors themselves are at pains to solicit, the borders under investigation in *American Crossings* share a ‘complexity’ that belies this all-too moribund and static representation. Despite repeating the by now stale invocation that ‘in a globalized world, borders still matter’, they make a forceful argument that regional differences between the US and Latin America are key for understanding the specific socio-spatial trajectories of borders and borderlands in the area under study. Analysing borders in Latin America, they aver, shifts our attention to dynamics that depart from the canonical borderland elements defining border studies in Europe or North America. For the Southern Americas, such elements include a wide variety in terms of degree of international border disputes, extent of illegal trafficking and smuggling and their influence on international trade and border security, and the ways in which illicit practices impact political and economic stability. Also not to be underestimated, they say, is the scale of ‘limited state capacity’ in shaping the contours of particular borderlines, as well as the effects of the latter on border inhabitants.

According to Jaskoski et al., four relevant ‘domains’ have intersected to shape borderland interactions in the Americas since the end of the nineteenth century: national security, police security, economic development and identity construction. Rather than any evincing linear, cause-and-effect style articulation, they draw attention to ‘surprising interactions’ along and across these

elements as defining features of borders in this part of the world. Cameron G. Thies writes that it is not militarized border conflict but identity-based nationalist sentiments that keep international rivalries stoked in Latin America, the latter domain mobilized in the service of extractive, resource-based economic development. Thies finds this phenomenon exemplified in the long-standing militarized interstate dispute (MID) between Argentina and Chile, extending from 1873-1984. In her analysis of border disputes in the Southern Cone, Kristina Mani argues, on the contrary, that state actors engage more with technocratic issues than nationalist ones, thus enabling the depoliticization and subsequent resolution of border disputes. This process of technocratic depoliticization is revealed by Mani through the creation of a transgovernmental security cooperation network between Argentina and Chile during the 1980s and 1990s, one that succeeded in creating durable mechanisms for confidence-building and the resolution of territorial disputes between the two countries. As revealed in the contribution by Arturo C. Sotomayor, a somewhat startling consequence of the heightened technicalized 'judicialization' of border disputes has been a shift in regulatory authority away from regional governmental bodies (i.e., OAS) to that of more globally-orientated judicial bodies, (i.e., International Court of Justice, The Hague). Whereas disputes such as those over the Cenepa Valley between Ecuador and Peru in the mid-late 1990s were resolved by regional bodies such as the OAS, in the more recent period disputes such as those involving Costa Rica and Nicaragua over navigational rights in the San Juan river (2005), or the delimitation of a Pacific Ocean boundary between Peru-Chile (2008), have all been adjudicated by the ICJ. The broader, geopolitical significance of such a shift 'to Europe' for the resolution of Latin America's border disputes remains to be properly elaborated in a context of historical asymmetry and dependence between both continents.

In his contribution, Harold A. Trinkunas upends an influential doxa that reducing border conflict can lead to an enhanced security situation allowing for improved terms of international trade, thus allowing for greater regional and economic integration. In the instance of the border between Venezuela and Colombia, heightened border tensions are linked to increased economic openness between the two Bolivarian nations. As Arie M. Kacowicz demonstrates for the Tri-Border Area (Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay), a consequence of international peace and increased trade may be witnessed in the rise of security issues in borderlands as posed by smugglers and transnational terrorism. Adam Isacson and Peter Andreas are there to remind us, however, that the link between increased trade and crime is not unidirectional; illicit actors operating within a system of open borders may just as well enforce the peace in their respective borderlands. As revealed in the case of Ecuador-Colombia, Maiah Jaskoski effectively reveals how armed guerrillas associated with the FARC reinforce the international borderline as a means to ensure their smooth crossing, for economic as well as for military reasons. Finally, José Carlos G. Aguiar intriguingly showcases how the opening and liberalization of the Tri-

Border Area through neoliberal adjustment reforms has paradoxically led to novel regulatory structures to control cross-border transactions and prevent illegal crossings.

So, ‘surprising interactions’, indeed. Yet equally surprising, and at the same time disappointing, are the editors’ oft-repeated invocation of the neologism ‘weak state capacity’ to account for trade or security deficits within/across borders in the region. But ‘weak’ according to which/whose standard(s)? North American? European? The question merits posing, as it would seem that such a judgment would appear to vitiate one of the core impulses of the book, namely to provide a critical lens on borders in Latin America that is not beholden to a ‘Northern (academic) gaze’. At stake here is a (geo)politics of academic knowledge production, one which consistently portrays non-European (or North Atlantic) regions as ‘backward’ and in need of ‘catching up’ to the purportedly ‘strong’ standards of North-Atlantic state systems. We are no longer in the world of modernization theory à la Walt Rostow. We are now in a multipolar world, inviting us to grasp regional dynamics on their own terms, without recourse to such outdated teleologies. In this respect, *American Crossings* missed an important opportunity to engage with scholarship on borders emerging from a new generation of Latin American scholars working in/on Latin America.

Finally, it is a pity that the fourth border ‘domain’ canvassed by the authors (‘Borders as Imagined Communities’) remains anchored in national cultures located either side of the borderline. Again, a golden opportunity has been lost to explore how myriad imagined communities have developed and continue to thrive alongside, betwixt/between and athwart many borders in the Americas.

Olivier Thomas Kramsch, Radboud University, Nijmegen

Note

1. At a recent gathering of Latin America’s Dutch diplomatic corps in The Hague, I referred to this issue, mentioning Sotomayor’s contribution to this volume. Many Latin American embassy staff in the audience, including their senior legal counsel working precisely on those disputes cited in Sotomayor’s chapter, took umbrage at the suggestion that The Hague was gradually replacing their regional decision-making bodies. I had obviously touched a geopolitical nerve.

– *The Remittance Landscape: Spaces of Migration in Rural Mexico and Urban USA*, by Sarah Lynn Lopez. University of Chicago Press, 2015.

The body of literature on Latin American migration has been growing steadily over the last decades. Multi-sited research in anthropology and geography has illuminated the cultural, social, political and economic dimensions of migration and remittances. Mexico and the Andean countries are arguably the best covered regions in the debates on ‘globalization-from-below’ and on possible local development through the investment of remittances. Lopez’ study of Mexican