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Henrice Altink and Sharif Gemie, eds., *At the Border: Margins and Peripheries in Modern France*. French and Francophone Studies. Series editors Hanna Diamond and Claire Gorrara. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008. xvii + 199 pp. Notes, index. \$85.00 (hb). ISBN 0-7083-2076-7.

Review by Christopher Fischer, Indiana State University.

Border studies, as Henrice Altink and Sharif Gemie inform the reader in their introduction, have gained increasing currency in the last twenty years. *At the Border*, a compilation of essays derived from presentations at a 2002 conference at the University of Glamorgan, seeks to add to this growing body of literature. The contributors come at the topic from a diversity of disciplines including geography, history, sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. This variety at times strains the coherence of the collection, especially as “borders” is defined quite broadly, a fact indicated by the more nebulous, but more inclusive subtitle, “Margins and Peripheries.”

Gemie and Altink’s introduction to the volume serves several purposes. First, the authors place their work within the growing field of border studies, along the way offering a succinct overview of the field’s development. Second, the editors briefly sketch out the changing meaning of borders in Europe more generally, from Roman times to the heyday of national borders following World War I to their slow erosion under the twin pressures of globalization and Europeanization. Third, the editors seek to lay out some basic definitions as well as their approach to border studies. The two see borders as primarily social constructs, “inherently contradictory, problematical, and multifaceted” (p. 6). Borders thus remain open to revision and reconceptualization, sometimes driven by the neighboring states, sometimes by the populations of border regions. Moreover, the authors seek to expand the terrain of border studies by arguing that borders should be considered “a continuum . . . running from the apparently ‘real’ to the more obviously metaphorical” (p. 2). This open approach suggests the inclusion of many different types of social and cultural divisions within the confines of border studies; the wider definition also serves to frame the quite diverse contributions to the volume.

Alistair Cole’s “France as Periphery” leads Part I entitled, “France’s Geographic Borders.” This contribution shows its age—it is both pre-Iraq war and pre-Sarkozy—in its meditation on the challenges posed to the French model of the nation-state by among other forces Europeanization, globalization, the reinvention of the French state, and a fractured political landscape. While Cole does not deny the problems faced by contemporary France, he also contends that France over the course of the Fifth Republic has been able to adjust to many of these challenges. François Roth shifts from France as periphery to France’s periphery. Roth argues that a firm border between France and Germany only slowly emerged over the course of the nineteenth century with the rise of Prussia and defeat of France in 1870, though Roth notes that the border did not definitively take shape until the Saarlanders again chose Germany in 1955. Marianne Durand considers the shifting meanings of maps of Algeria, tracing how the French, then later Algerian nationalists, sought to reconceptualize Algeria and its relationship to the wider Mediterranean as well as its ties to the Arab and Muslim worlds.

The second section is the most coherent and hews most closely to the themes laid out in the introduction. Didier Francfort's "From the Other Side of the Mirror" traces the current vestiges of the old French-German border which split Lorraine during the Kaiserreich. Francfort points not just to physical evidence (e.g., grand German train stations along the border, sometimes abandoned and often repurposed), but less concrete markers such as religious and social welfare laws delineated by this internal boundary. Francfort is less successful in extrapolating the enduring political meaning of the old border in terms of trends such as voting patterns. Scott Soo shifts to the other side of France, exploring how Spanish refugees from the 1930s have commemorated their flight and subsequent treatment in France. Though with an admitted need for further research, Soo's suggestive piece argues that former refugees have sought to reclaim their culture and past in the home—a so-called "memory environment"—while also seeking more public commemoration through the work of associations. Laure Teulières keeps attention focused to the south, in this case examining how in the early twentieth century people in the Midi, especially near Toulouse, used national and regional identities, as well as concepts of "Latinity," to comprehend and respond to challenges such as immigration. Long on theory, one wishes Teulières had both offered more concrete examples and, more importantly, considered how the various meridional identities played off one another.

The third section of the collection, "The Margins Within", reveals the limits of this elastic conception of borders. Basing their research on a small set of interviews with French university students from the Maghrebian community, Dawn Morley and Judith Broadbridge argue that these students remain appreciative of elements of Maghrebian culture such as dialectal Arabic and Berber. Despite a slow process of assimilation, they also argue that the perceived linguistic, cultural, and religious differences will continue to mark the community as distinct. Cathérine Levy's "Insecurity and No-go Areas" explores, and critiques, neoliberalism and its supporters in France. Here, Levy suggests that a more differentiated social security system, combined with more flexible labor laws, have served to undermine class solidarities by creating a more divided mass of working poor and unemployed. Moreover, state police and regulatory agencies—propelled by a sense of social insecurity—seem increasingly more interested in conducting surveillance of the working class rather than monitoring wages or investigating working conditions. Owen Heathcote focuses on yet another border in his study of the evolving representations of gay sexuality and gay sexual violence in French literature, literary studies, and several films.

The individual contributions may well be of interest to scholars in their respective subfields. The introductory overview of border studies serves as a useful roadmap for a neophyte in the field. Less clear, however, is what this collection of border studies—broadly defined—tells us about modern France. Perhaps it is enough to see the various ways in which the French have negotiated, and continue to reconceptualize, their place in a changing world through the understanding of their borders, or through the processes of in/exclusion of various groups vis-à-vis the French national community. On this front, it is disappointing that only Cole's piece deals substantially with France's shifting place in Europe, and Europeanization's effects on the very notion of borders. More centrally, the push to have a "continuum" of borders is here shown to have some clear limitations. While it is true, as the editors suggest, that a number of metaphorical borders do exist, national and regional boundaries, whether politically, socially, or culturally constructed, pose a specific set of problems for scholars that differentiate them from other boundaries such as gender, sexuality, or class. Therefore, pushing "borders" to include social boundaries, or including marginal groups, potentially undermines the analytical value of studying borders.

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

### Part I: France's Geographic Borders

Alistair Cole, "France as Periphery? The Challenge of Change"

François Roth, "The Making of the Eastern Frontier: The French-German border, 1815-70"

Marianne Durand, "Algeria and the Mediterranean Frontier: A Hostile Horizon?"

Part II: Between the Centre and the Margin: the French Regions

Didier Francfort, "From the Other Side of the Mirror: The French-German Border in Landscape and Memory: Lorraine, 1871-1914"

Scott Soo, "Between Borders: The Remembrance Practices of Spanish Exiles in the South-west of France"

Laure Teulière, "Otherness, Invisible Borders and Representations of Identity in the Midi, 1920s"

Part III: The Margins Within

Catherine Levy, "Insecurity and No-go Areas"

Dawn Marley and Judith Broadbridge, "The Maghrebian Community in France: Defining the Borders"

Owen Heathcote, "Solidarity in Pariahdom? Oppression and Self-Oppression in Gay Representations in France"

Christopher Fischer  
Indiana State University  
cfischer@isugw.indstate.edu

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