

Anna Tybinko reviews Belachew Gebrewold-Tochalo's edited collection *Africa and Fortress Europe. Threats and Opportunities* (Ashgate, 2007).

Published in 2007, shortly after the bombings in Madrid (2004) and London (2005), *Africa and Fortress Europe* was written in the wake of a political paradigm shift. Both terrorist attacks were perpetrated by groups from Northern or Eastern Africa with Islamist backgrounds, thus Europe felt compelled to secure its external borders in new ways and African migration was cast as a threat, especially in media coverage. More recently, the so-called “migrant crisis” or “refugee crisis”¹ has reached new heights. In 2015 alone, over 1.3 million people applied for asylum in the 28 member states of the European Union (EU). The majority of these asylum seekers traveled via the Mediterranean from parts of the Middle East and Africa. In light of this proliferation of migratory flows from Africa to Europe, this edited collection is an important go-to for general readers wishing to familiarize themselves with the early years of this trend. However, as the editor Belachew Gebrewold makes clear in the introduction, this not a ‘migration reader’; rather, it is an interdisciplinary examination of contemporary African migration to Europe through the lens of threats and opportunities.

Contributions include chapters by scholars of political science, international relations, economics and statistics, in addition to professionals working for European Union (EU) institutions or security agencies. Given that a number of the contributors are practitioners in the field, the diversity of opinions and perspectives which emerges can be useful for contextualizing the public nature of the debate on migration to Europe prior to the current crisis. In this sense, it certainly fulfills the project’s claims for primacy as “the first of its kind about the current African migration to Europe and the EU’s attempts to protect itself through virtual or real fortress building” (Gebrewold-Tochalo 16). On the other hand, often opposing views, precisely regarding the question of “fortress Europe”, can make it hard to engage with the study as a coherent whole.

The volume is broken down into two parts, the first focusing primarily on the political and economic instability of specific African regions as what are termed “push factors” for migration. Contributions by Dustin Dehéz, Dirk Kohnert, Cheryl Hendricks and Stephan Klingebiel offer a highly technical breakdown of the various governmental and inter-governmental actors at play. A particularly thoughtful piece by the editor himself both provides an overview of migration theories while also signaling a gap in current research which generally fails to account for how cultural globalization has imposed an idea of “backwardsness” on young Africans.

The second part looks at Europe’s responses to an uptick in attempts by Africans to enter Europe, whether through established immigration procedures, or through “irregular” (i.e. illegal) means. It opens with an essay by Brigadier General Ilkka Laitinen, Executive Director of the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union, or Frontex. In what reads as more of a report than an argument, Laitinen simply dismisses the notion of a “Fortress Europe” with the claim that this is not the EU’s intention—despite weighted statements like “one important aspect of the protection of the area of Freedom, Security and

¹ The *New Keywords Collective* explains how mass media coverage has frequently vacillated between these two terms. The BBC, for example, announced that it would simply refer to all people on the move who had not yet completed any legal process as “migrants” so as not to presume that they are “legitimate” asylum seekers. This decision to defer this (imagined) eventual decision to the “appropriate” authorities unfortunately reproduces presumptions of illegality in the discourse surrounding human mobility.

Justice is the control of the external border” (Laitinen 128). From this angle, any notion of European fortress-building is a misinterpretation of Europe’s attempts to increase the free movement and security of its citizens. Unfortunately, Laitinen is the only contributor who discusses this construction, leaving the reader with a one-sided take on what is seemingly one of the collection’s key topics. This oversight also happens to accentuate the fact that the book’s very structure also reifies exclusionary practices by moving thematically from “push” to “pull” factors and finally to securitization.

As a whole, the collection addresses the entities of Africa and Europe in fairly simple geographical terms and offers a broad contextualization of African migration to European countries in the Schengen area. For example, the chapter by Andreas Exenberger, an economist who specializes in the history of globalization, goes as far as to posit that “to some extent, *Homo sapiens* have clearly been a *Homo movens*” (Exenberger 108). While his is one of the few chapters that question the criminalization of movement that terms like “migrant” can imply, this wide-scope approach is perhaps emblematic of one of the collection’s main pitfalls: in addressing broad categories like “Europe,” “Africa,” and “migration,” there is an inherent lack of clarity about what this language truly *means*. From the perspective of the humanities, several essays would profit from engaging with critical theory; wielding terms like “globalization” without any reference to the significant body of literature on the topic renders the intended argument almost unintelligible. Even for those within the fields of political science and economics, this tendency is problematic.²

A notable absence of Southern European voices in the second part seems careless, as many of the chapters point out the significance of offshore sites belonging to countries such as Italy and Spain in these flows of intercontinental movement. And, in fact, it is the extreme and sudden externalization of European borders to these “far reaches” of Europe that has garnered the title “fortress Europe” in the media. Nonetheless, information-packed entries and the breaking down of complex sociological questions into basic terms make this collection valuable for those wishing to understand the general dynamics of African migration to Europe.

² See Bilgic, Ali. “Africa and Fortress Europe: Threats and Opportunities.” *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 36, no. 121, Sept. 2009, pp. 470.