BOOK REVIEW

Alice Elliot. ***The Outside: Migration as Life in Morocco.*** Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021. 204 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $25. Paper. ISBN: 978-0253054746.

In migration studies, spouses and, more broadly, relatives of migrants staying in the region of departure are often called "left-behinds." *The Outside: Migration as Life in Morocco*, Alice Elliot's fine-grained ethnography of the rural region of Tadla in central Morocco, focuses on such persons. But rather than perpetuating the derogative view that the notion of "left-behind" conveys, she fully explores the subjectivities of all those affected by migration. Following Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad's recommendation to study conjointly emigration and immigration as a "total social fact," *The Outside* demonstrates that migration is part and parcel of everybody's life in the Tadla. Elliot first connected with and traveled to her fieldwork sites through acquaintances made in her hometown in Italy. While her research is firmly rooted in rural and urban Morocco, this connection also situated her within the web of relations between her fieldwork and Europe, be it by traveling with one of her friends to the Italian consulate in Casablanca, or by being a reluctant witness to transnational conjugal misunderstandings.

Speaking of *l-brra* (Arabic: "the outside") rather than of migration, Elliot argues, is a way to reconceptualize the experience of migration by building on her interlocutors' words. "*L-brra*" is characterized both by its vagueness and its ability to encompass distinct geographical locations, and by its very concrete effects, which the ethnographer pinpoints in ordinary circumstances as well as in life-changing decisions. Vividly written, the book builds on a rich body of material ranging from meticulous descriptions of bodily practices and material domestic arrangements to analysis of family and conjugal relations spanning years, including an interest in mundane conversations and in stories about migrants. *The Outside* is remarkable for the way it captures ways of speaking, such as the tone—ironic or not—used to speak of an absent husband; and for the careful references to original phrases and sentences in colloquial Arabic interspersed with words in French and Italian, sometimes in the same sentence.

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The book begins with a broad exploration of the way *l-brra* crucially affects the experience of time, interfering with key events such as marriage and reproduction, and permeating daily routines. Migration produces accelerations, as the frenzy of activity and bodily transformation of a spouse that surrounds a migrant's return illustrates. Such intensity is followed by decelerations, or even pauses. Even though *l-brra* remains unpredictable (because migration depends on legal and economic systems whose workings are beyond reach), expectations of migration generally translate into actions.

The Outside introduces a variety of figures, depicting men on their holiday trips back home as well as unmarried university students eager to contract a union with a migrant. But the most salient characters are the wives of migrant men, whom the author spoke to "in stolen pockets of time and space" (74). Elliot beautifully captures their ambivalent condition: their hopes of being "brought" to Italy as well their acknowledgement of the uncertainty of such projects; their suffering, for their life is deemed "not normal," as well as their pride in having achieved a desired status; their longing for their distant husband and their annoyance when a visit lasts longer than usual. Focusing on the lived experience of the absence of a migrant balances existing accounts which emphasize migrants' presence through, for instance, remittances and the building of houses. In patrilocal settings, kinship studies have classically emphasized how a married woman has to find a balance between the household of her husband that she joins and her paternal household; Elliot adds to this picture the migratory space as a third point of reference which the wife of the absent migrant also has to consider. This renders family arrangements even more complex and the wives' situations more precarious. The study of these women crucially shows how migration is not only a factor that transforms kinship and gender relations, but also a phenomenon that affects one as a gendered person. The book extends this demonstration to the migrant men, who appear to be in constant need of mobility, so as to reinstate their masculinity.

As it is inevitable for any anthropological endeavor to fully grasp the multiple dimensions of experience, not all the analytical threads are equally followed. For instance, bureaucratic requirements appear as a key component of *l-brra* as locally imagined. But while the author rightly indicates "the remarkable precision demonstrated by most people (…) when it comes to discussing *l-brra*'s bureaucratic systems" (31), the reader remains under the impression of bureaucracy as a distant force, almost out of reach, in the lives of her interlocutor. Since Elliot also hints at bureaucracy as part of daily life in Morocco (85), it would be interesting to reflect on this continuum — is bureaucracy not a *connector*, to use a term mobilized by the author (77)? That bureaucracy, in its materiality (papers, procedures, infrastructures) could be further explored as an operator of the intimate distance that the author forcefully conceptualizes, is one

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indication of the richness of a book which will resonate deeply with students of migration in Africa and beyond.

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