According to the common-sense conception, nation-state borders are principally a matter of political separation, spatialized determinants of belonging that aim to distinguish clearly between those within and those without. A border is necessarily a political interpellation: on which side, if any, do you (legally, ethnically, linguistically, culturally) belong? The answer to this question univocally determines access to the congeries of politico-legal privileges and obligations that constitute modern citizenship. And yet, nation-state borders are not quite so simple, so clear cut—and not only because of the recalibrations of political sovereignty in the era of globalization. The peculiarities of borders are especially vivid in southeast Europe and the Balkans, where the vicissitudes and shifts of 19th, 20th and 21st-century political history have seen many collectivities change polities without changing locations. As Olga Demetriou demonstrates in her impressive new ethnography, *Capricious Borders*, borders are far more than principles of geographical and political separation. She focuses on the Muslims who reside in the Greek region of Western Thrace—the borderlands in Greece proximate to Turkey, as well as Bulgaria—to argue that borders and processes of bordering are also instruments of modern governmentality and biopolitics. Indeed, the 20th Century history of the Greek-Turkish border is also a history of minoritization, the process by which Western Thrace’s Muslim residents have been produced and monitored as a governmentalyzed minority.

Demetriou begins her narrative with an evocative vignette. As she crosses a bridge over the Evros-Meriç River, which constitutes the border between Western and Eastern Thrace, and, hence, Greece and Turkey, her mobile phone experiences a moment of disconnection as it switches between Greek and Turkish cellular networks. This blank moment encapsulates the “caprice” of the border, which her title telegraphs. The border is “at points digital, at others analogical, at times hermetically closed and violently guarded, at others no more than, and sometimes not even, a line on the ground (p.11).” Demetriou interprets this moment as both a metaphor and a provocation: What buried political histories and processes undergird and orient this seemingly insignificant, quotidian crossing, this digital shift from one national space to another? In pursuit of this question, Demetriou draws inspiration from Foucault’s concepts of governmentality and biopolitics—indeed, *Capricious Borders* represents one of the most thoroughly Foucauldian ethnographies of southeastern Europe, and, for that matter, anywhere else, to date. She marshals Foucauldian
methods and concepts to argue against the grain of essentialist readings of the Muslim minority—or, rather, minorities—of Western Thrace. In doing so, Demetriou pursues two difficult, complementary goals: a) to demonstrate that the Muslim minority of Thrace is produced through techniques and powers of modern governmentality and b) to illustrate how this minoritizing governmentality also induces moments of aporia, resistance, and dissonance, which she glosses with the Foucauldian concept of “counter-conduct.”

As a native of Cyprus herself—another context of capricious border making, as anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin has recently demonstrated—Demetriou is well-equipped to tackle the looming analytical and political questions that ground her study. She makes ample use of both ethnographic and archival/documentary data to support her argument. Space—the production of ethnicized places, the shifting contours of neighborhoods, the politics of real estate transactions—and time—the construction of familial genealogies and nativeness—are her double objects of inquiry. She weaves her argument through a series of poignant moments and objects: a free-standing Ottoman-era minaret in the provincial capital of Komotini; the linguistic jockeying among a Turkish-speaking Muslim mother, her young child, and a Greek taxi chauffeur; the curiosity of Muslim marriage certificates, which are necessarily produced by the local müftü (mufti, an authoritative, in this case state-appointed interpreter of Islamic law) in Arabic script, which few, if any, locals can read. The first several chapters of the book set the stage for these ethnographic vignettes by offering a welcome genealogy of the capriciousness of the contemporary border.

After centuries of Ottoman rule, Western Thrace was subject to multiple upheavals in the decade between 1913 and 1923, beginning with the Balkan Wars and ending with the Turkish War of Independence (though the district had witnessed an influx of refugees from other parts of the Rumelian-Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire for decades prior to this, as nationalism began to fracture the empire itself). The definitive moment in the creation of this capricious border occurred in 1923, when the Treaty of Lausanne ended the war between Greece and Turkey and established the boundary between them. Even more importantly, the Treaty of Lausanne mandated a population exchange between Orthodox Greek-speaking Christians previously resident in western Anatolia and Muslims previously resident in Greece. As a corollary to this exchange, two groups were exempted: Greeks of Istanbul/Constantinople and Muslims of Western Thrace. The establishment (literally établis in French) of these groups as exceptions to the population exchange was the precursor to the modes of governmentality that would produce an ethnicized population on and of the border.