



# ***Borders re/make Bodies and Bodies are Made to Make Borders: Storying Migrant Trajectories***

**Sutapa Chattopadhyay**

University of Regina and Maastricht University  
sutapa.chattopadhyay@uregina.ca  
s.chattopadhyay@maastrichtuniversity.nl

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## **Abstract**

The concept of borders continues to be notoriously obscure, due to its conceptual complexity, historicity and political situatedness. Equally contestable are concepts such as migrant and migration. Conceptually, I draw from Harsha Walia's (2013) *Border Imperialism* and border studies that center on the context-particular histories of European colonialism and imperialism. Central to the article is the interlacing of geopolitics and the everyday in ways that show the explosion of borders and peculiar dissection of borders on particular migrants. Borders re/make bodies and bodies are made to make borders in the variety of ways across different sites. In the first half of the manuscript, I argue that these compelling conceptual and methodological approaches are pivotal to challenging Eurocentric representations of migrants and positivist research traditions, while in the second half I forge an understanding of the biopolitics of borders. My research findings are developed from 10 in-depth narratives mainly collected from Bangladeshi migrants in Madrid and Rome. Alongside participatory (action) research (P(A)R) methods and migrant narratives, I recall my own precarious work experiences and identity as a migrant, in Europe, which are parallel but quite distinct from the experiences of the participants. This research has deepened my understanding of migrants and borders and de-centered my conceptualizations prior to this field work. Notably, I strive to meet two challenges: provide a critical discussion on my use of feminist-informed methodology, and forward an analysis of the situation of migrants from

the Global South in Europe through their voices by emphasizing the need for ethnographically-informed works to foreground significant aspects of migrant trajectories and their everyday lives.

### Keywords

border imperialism; borders; migrant trajectories; bare bodies; feminist-informed methodologies

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### Banal Borders

*Borderlands, the ultimate Achilles' heel of colonialism and imperialism*

(Dundar-Ortiz, 2014)

Attending to the pervasiveness of borders, a long list of adjectives are used to problematize borders: diffused, prosaic, invisible, moving, cognitive, imperceptible, impregnable, and dispersed. In spite of an increasing interdisciplinary and multi-dimensional focus, interpretations of borders, bordering and border-making are not always sensitive to histories and geographies.

Due to the long-established geographic interest in borders and boundaries, it is contrary to reason to settle upon one defining theory of borders (Bauder 2016), nor is it possible to comprehensively address the range of questions that characterize the growing field of border studies or tackle the vigorous conceptualizations of borders. The post-Cold War clarion call for a border-less world that ruptures the notion of the spatial fixity of symbolic borders rather connotes ideas of globalized spaces, spaces of flows, de/re-territorialization, hybridity, and postmodernity (Paasi 1998). Consequently, the interests of neoliberal thinkers, policy makers and corporate strategists towards global economic and political integration prompts scholarly analysis of vanishing borders (Ohmae 1995). However, the reverse is true from the current vantage point, as sovereign states claim monopoly control over the mobility of people. Though building walls is no solution to halt boundary crossing, wealthy nations still augment their efforts to erect hard walls under the justification of fighting the global “war on terror” (Anderson et al. 2011; Bauder 2016; Jones 2009; van Houtum 2009) and for economic protectionism (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini 2011; O’Dowd 2010; DeGenova 2002). These re-bordering moves have censured the neoliberal rhetoric of a borderless world – especially in the aftermath of September 11, renewing the emotional significance of borders to security studies (Neal 2009)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> These heterogeneous overtones broach the dialectical movement of significance and functionality of borders. “Dialectics”, Bauder (2016, 9) writes is a “cringe-worthy term” - a critical analytical tool that advances a variety of contradictions (Harvey 2014, 213) often brushed aside as “inconveniences”.

“Border” is a polysemic, multidimensional and fuzzy concept that is studied and perceived variously by disciplines other than geography (Brunet-Jailly 2012). Therefore, geography does not have an exclusive hold on border studies, rather, geographers are contributing to and drawing from other disciplines and ideologies when addressing issues of borders. Here, attention has been paid to the diffusion of border security (Vaughan-William 2010); the movement of borders into cyberspace (Deibert & Rohozinski 2010); the performance of the border in urban spaces (Jiron 2010); the actions of non-state actors ranging from vigilantes to entrepreneurs who do “border work” (Doty 2007; Rumford 2008); borders as sites of cultural encounter with the “other” (Rovisco 2010); the relationship between citizenship and border (Balibar 2009); and the material manifestations of borders, particularly the relocation and reconstitution of unconventional border sites (Mountz 2010). Moreover, the scholarship on borders evolves from geographically-oriented social theory that problematize boundaries, territories, space (de Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1974) and place (Tuan 1977).

I argue, following Walia’s (2013) context-particular viewpoints, that although borders appear as lines on maps or mechanisms that emerged in the scramble for resources in occupied territories due to colonial-imperial relations and settler initiatives (Federici 2014; Wolfe 2006), borders are social facts that divide and rule people. Increased surveillance outside and inside sovereign states, indeed, indicate that borders are ubiquitous (Balibar 1998) and are written on human bodies: bodies carry borders but also make borders. Borders are not only related to the politics of delimitation or classification of culture, but also to certain expressions of identity, memory, and the politics of representation<sup>2</sup>. B/ordering separates but also brings together. Respectively, borders are open to contestations at the level of the state and everyday life. State borders are scalar and function in complex ways in relation to local, regional, state-bound, and supranational processes. Borders are made functional by immigration agents, police, and guards who operate in a very powerful interlocking system of control and enjoy exceptional powers of b/ordering at checkpoints, work places, and public spaces to harass, organize, incarcerate, detain and deport – links to Agamben’s (2005) analysis on “state of exception”. Walia’s (2013) thoroughgoing observations and her function as a social activist connects border studies to social movements, direct action, critical race theory and radical practice (Cox 2015; Pulido 2007; Nagar 2006; Chomsky 2003; Davis 2003) to the significance of migrant and refugee narratives (Bauder 2016; Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2016; Coutin 1993); to utopian imaginaries drawing upon alliances such as Idle No More, No One Is Illegal, Solidarity city, and sanctuary city movements (Cox 2007; Grass and Bourdieu 2002); and to case analyses of social injustice and exclusion (Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2016; Burrige 2009; Gregory 2004; Chatterton 2002).

The manuscript focuses on two major themes: 1) how feminist research methods are sensitive to ethnographic research on migration; and 2) how my

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<sup>2</sup> This is precisely why I have expanded on my shared identity with migrant participants (see section).

application of these methods yielded narratives, that alongside with my reading of key texts, has led me to consider the biopolitical border as inscribing bodies with borders and borders with bodies. Throughout the manuscript, I address a sequence of questions: Are borders mere lines? Are borders processes, practices, discourses, symbols, institutions, grids or networks through which power manifests? Are they an aggregate of social, cultural, and political processes that question the banality of borders as innocuous lines sketched on the earth (Parker et al., 2009)? Thus, my overarching aim with this piece is to contribute to the critical geographical discussions of borders.

### **Feminist-informed Methodologies**

This section reflects on the resonances between my research approach to Walia's (2013) methodology in *Border Imperialism*, which activates many qualities of critical feminist scholarship. In *Border Imperialism*, Walia (2013) organizes her knowledge of political action and practice using a variety of formats, such as poems, dialogues, personal experiences and blogs, combining scholarly contributions with activists and those who engage with anti-oppressive social justice research from their respective class-race-ethnic identities or privileges. Simultaneously, she challenges participatory research led by academics who do not necessarily engage participants directly in the research process or professional practice that does not result in social change. Her genuine skepticism of activist and academic collaboration towards a symbiosis of theory/action/practice, on the one hand, questions if it is possible to dissolve academic privilege for ethical research and monopoly on who holds knowledge. On the other, she attends to the significance of social justice knowledge as produced by academics. Through her involvement with *No One Is Illegal* she enriches her experiences to challenge individualistic notions of leadership.

My involvement in this research and the methodological choices I made flowed from my politics and the way I was situated in the field. I am a migrant from the Global South, who enjoyed the benefits of a scholarship towards the completion of a doctoral degree from an American university. For more than a decade, I worked as a faculty member at several universities in the United States (US), Europe and Canada, have undergone different kinds of professional challenges due to raising a young family and relocation/s. Often being hired in short-term positions while trying to stay research-productive without the institutional support (enjoyed by tenure-track faculties) at the interface of rapid neoliberalization of academy and diminishing importance of human geography – has been my struggle. Keeping in view my trajectories, I involved myself in this research to hear from illegalized migrants who were being challenged by the violence at borders and due to internal economic protectionism<sup>3</sup>. This article is an

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<sup>3</sup> The concept “migrant” is a contested term criticized by several scholars. Some prefer mobility as well-suited to capture the global movement of people, while others suggest that migrants are seldom problematized as moving subjects with legal papers in elite positions like expats, skilled migrant workers, diplomats, and migrant entrepreneurs. Instead the word migrant is used consciously for illegalized mobile subjectivities who

outcome of my preliminary surveys that was useful in establishing a network with migrants and leftist radical groups who are involved in solidarity initiatives that counter migrant repression. Interviews with the non-migrant groups are not included due to the lack of space. Broadly, this research aims to combine the field surveys with action and reflection in order to learn from migrant concerns, stories, and everyday experiences to understand the immediate social environments in which there are located, to address particular questions raised by them, and then consider how these questions can inform my research in raising relevant policy changes.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Frerican (1968) reliance on marginalized groups' awareness for political participation (*conscientizacao*); Gandhian non-cooperation and passive resistance movement in India representing a new epistemology of people's action (Sivananda 2007); and Swantz's initial use of participatory research following the integrated knowledge of poor communities for local development projects in Tanzania (Hall 2005) introduced community-based research as social transformatory methods. Feminist attention to social inequality and the development of alternative methods over masculinist and Eurocentric essentialist research re-analyzes the politics of representation, counters capitalist modes of flexible academic research production, and prioritizes a commitment to activism within and outside the academy to carve out the niche for collaborative, community-based, local, participatory research (Nagar 2006; Domosh 2003; McDowell 1999; Mies 1983; Maguire 1987). This creates room for multiple interpretations of singular socially-constructed phenomena by both researchers and the researched. Such perspectives have opened up spaces for different forms of knowledge through methodological innovation and political action engaging poststructuralism, Marxism, critical race theory, post-colonialism and autonomist theories (Fals Borda 2006). Participatory (Action) Research (P(A)R) is a methodologically advanced technique based on the orientation to inquiry which adapts and responds to research participants' needs in specific situations recommending actions for positive change. Feminist scholars have suggested various directions to achieve emancipatory action-oriented research and have synthesized scholarship and activism, necessarily making that research feminist. They have incorporated aspects of critical theory, and put together subject and object into a methodology with and for women and men, while championing context-specific goals for revolutionizing a research process and effecting change (Stacey 1988) by putting the participant "first". Some of the limitations of field

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are variously classified as undocumented, non-status, illegal, *sans papiers*, unauthorized, irregular, and smuggled. Defamatory adjectives are regularly attached to migrants by the popular media, as illegitimate, threatening, criminal, impure, overpopulating, polluting, victimized, unwanted, terrorist and the "other". Related are the associations of migrants with organized crime, economic drain, and national security threats, challenging the power of the sovereign state to control its borders through the instrumentation of strict immigration enforcement, residence controls, and the close collaboration of civil society and the state (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010). I have continued to use the term migrant, throughout the manuscript, following Bauder's (2016) and Mudu and Chattopadhyay's (2016) acknowledgment of precarious migrants as political subjects or autonomous entities who exercise rights and agency even as they live and contribute to the sovereign state's economy but face vulgar state repression due to a lack of citizenship status.

surveys that this methodology attempts to correct can be ignoring the importance of historical context, place, difference and power stemming from a lack of recognition of the tenuous relationship between researcher and subjects who are victims of double exploitation from colonialism and capitalism. Precisely for these reasons, I have used P(A)R and narratives in my research. Like Fals-Borda (2006), I acronymously represent PAR as P(A)R. since it is too early for me to suggest policy changes, as my surveys are on-going.

My research draws from these methodologies that are sensitive to particular migrants. I opened a dialogical space or a mutual knowledge-sharing forum between myself and participants to problematize the current migrant situation in Europe and to move toward suggesting relevant policy changes in future research. Emancipatory, ethical, and participatory field work is one way to develop new epistemologies for movement building, and for imagining possibilities of freedom from any oppression by prioritizing participant voices (Coutin 2007). The field is a platform where knowledge is situated, shared, and mutually-constructed (Haraway 1988). Arguably data collection is embedded in unequal power relations and privileges, which I could not avoid; nevertheless, I tried to consciously write “with” rather than write “for” the participants. P(A)R and narratives are tools to re-politicize participation by re-engaging with wider structures and processes of inequality to alter spaces of empowerment and action.

I also followed a narrative approach because feminist participatory, collaborative and action research involves the participants directly in narrating their life-challenges. Broadly, narratives are situated knowledges (i.e., participant autobiographies, trivial challenges and perceptions). Narrative collection and analysis are methods that “explain, organize experience and embody social spaces, such as family, home and community, thereby making visible the unseen personal realms of participant lives” (Chattopadhyay 2012, 9–10; Cortazzi 1993; Bruner 1990). The use of these methods deepened my context-specific and history-specific connections with migration geographies. Participants’ day-to-day struggles broadened the scope and horizon of my thought processes and perception of the world in which we live today. Understanding how the participants and I are placed in grids of power but also how we can influence knowledge construction together was crucial. I strive to write in solidarity with the oppressed and disempowered. Reflexive or reflective research is far from self-indulging, hence, I entered the field staying aware of my privileges and positionality (expanded below).

Concurrently, I fear that even those academics who cry out for egalitarian-solidarity research can reproduce dominant liberal styles of representation, or incoherent structure full of informal and unrecognized power relations. But synergistic leadership is possible through reflexive and socially-grounded research with a wide range of people adopting radical methodologies as represented in *Border Imperialism* (Walia 2013), which I have extended to understand borders through participatory engagement and migrant stories.

### ***Shared Identity and Self-reflective research***

My interviews were open-ended, I asked broad questions and inquired further based on the participant responses. I have explored: 1) migrant trajectories to Europe and their everyday challenges for not having legal status to stay or work and 2) the functionality of borders.

I established connections with academic activists working on squatting in Europe at an annual geography conference (Association for American Geographers), which was held in New York in 2012. I leveraged these links to connect with radical squatters and migrants in Spain and Italy. At the time, I was living in southern Netherlands. Madrid-based activists helped me contact three Bangladeshi men who were frequent visitors of a squatted Social Center called *Casablanca*, now evicted.<sup>4</sup> After the first interviews in Spain, I continued my surveys in Rome between early 2013 to mid-2015. My choice of study area was based on the established connections with activists and scholars working on squatting and migration. The interview participants were Bangladeshi and other South Asian migrants. Altogether I collected 10 in-depth narratives. I interviewed five Bangladeshi Muslim men and a woman who were young to middle-aged. In the detention center I heard an extant narrative from a Pakistani migrant and a group of men from Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and sub-Saharan Africa. Apart from the interviews in the squats and detention center, other research subjects were encountered by chance in public locations – cafes, streets, parks, or at tourist attractions. For instance, I had a long chat with a youth residing in a residential hostel at a park. I prioritized acquiring detailed narratives above quantity of interviews.

For over a decade, research and scholarship has expanded on restrictive and repressive immigration laws that have rendered people illegal (Dauvergne 2005; Coutin 2002; DeGenova 2002). Without work permits, illegalized migrants are deprived of having a stable job in the formalized sector, and are therefore harassed and policed, exploited by employers, victimized by ordinary citizens, and denied political voices or access to social protections and benefits. Illegalized migrants are disadvantaged without their “rights to have rights” and are perpetually excluded from the social fabric (Basok and Piper 2010, 97). Hence, a self-critique of my own privileges was urgent in the research process as it strengthened my commitment to feminist action and self-reflexive research (Reinharz 1992, 196).

I am a woman who was raised by a Hindu-Brahmin family in Kolkata in a Muslim neighborhood, attended a Catholic Irish Missionary school and then journeyed through different parts of India and eventually North America and Europe for higher education followed by academic work. I have had legalized statuses that allowed me to work in the West and the social protection, rights and

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<sup>4</sup> Squatted Social Centers are empty, previously unused or dilapidated spaces (such as buildings, factories, gardens) that are occupied, organized and self-managed so that people can make use of them for a variety of needs like housing, child care, recreation, growing vegetables, political organizing, holding workshops to mend different things like bikes, or for art.

benefits that none of my participants enjoyed. All participants had an illegalized status. Many of them entered Europe with a visa or a short-term work permit, but became illegalized after that expired, while some entered the Southern European countries with a student visa or as asylum seekers or crossed the Mediterranean Sea from North Africa without legal documents.

The participants and I shared some common history and cultural similarities. I grew up in Kolkata, the first colonial capital in 1757 under the British. One of the most important legacies throughout the period of British rule was the sketching of political boundaries across their colonies. Bengal was partitioned twice, once in 1905 in an attempt to weaken the Hindu-led nationalist movement, and again in 1947 when the British exited. The harrowing toll of human life and resources due to the partition of India and Pakistan is still inconceivable. Nationhood bitterly meandered through Hindu-Muslim identities established on differences of beliefs, views and history which still exists. Prior to partition in 1947, Bangladesh was a part of Bengal in India. Bangladesh joined Pakistan owing to common religion, although culturally and politically she reserved closer ties with (West) Bengal. Seeking to assert regional and political identity, East Pakistan or Bangladesh separated from West Pakistan in 1971, followed by a bloody war with Pakistani forces (Jones 2008; Sarkar 1973). From the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries onwards, the Bangladeshis were variously problematized as 'Bengalis' interchangeably Bangladeshi, 'Mohammadan' or 'Musalman'. Bengali was a preferred terminology for the Hinduized elites in Calcutta, although Bangladesh, today, is the largest Bangla-speaking nation. Bengali, means Bangla, is the language spoken by Hinduized and Islamasized Bengali on both sides of the border (Grossman 1999). Nonetheless, contemporary scholars have struggled to come to grips with such terms and the ethnic, national, and racial identities that have existed, been imagined differently, and are subject to change over time. The tangled conceptualizations of Bengali nationality are constantly constructed and re-constructed due to increased communications and constant mobility of Bengalis. The flexibility or hybridity in the definition of Bengali can also be place-specific or culture-specific or both.

Almost always interviews were conducted in Bangla or Hindi with a mix of broken Urdu. The participants were always collegial and willing to talk. I was careful of my interrogation style, dress, gestures and boundaries to avoid uncomfortable circumstances. I enjoyed being an insider and outsider due to cultural similarities. The participants wanted their voices to be heard, hence my ethical recompense is to amplify their stories through writing and public speaking, informing a wider population of their challenges and plights. The migrant narratives challenged my previous understanding of "self" that are implicit to a Cartesian-objective understanding of subjectivity in general (Young 1990, 310), and the scholarly analysis of the politics of border making in particular.



### **Positionality**

Walia's self-determination followed from her personal challenges as a third-generation migrant reflecting upon her previous generations' struggles due to the partition of Pakistan and India in 1947. I grew up in India. Both of my grandfathers were forcibly relocated from Bangladesh to India, and experienced similar horrors of resettlement with a loss of generational lands, assets and livelihoods. The tales of my grandparents, the current struggles of migrants and my own precarity, made me reassess my identity and cultural/historical shared histories with South Asian migrant participants. Hence, I contest the rationalization that objective research is the only way to problematize participant challenges. Likewise, I am not convinced that I could have produced reliable information if I was not reflexive of my own identity, positionality and situated knowledge with the participants (Jackson 2000). No knowledge is innocent or outside the matrix of power, privilege and history. To boot there are many truths; there is nothing universal about any truth as we are all grounded in a "particular place", we speak from a "particular history", a particular training and ideology, a "particular experience", and a "particular culture" "without being contained by that position" (Hall 1992, 258). Here I aim to counter the over-generalized claims of essentialist science that affirm researchers as "all-seeing and all-knowing" (Rose 1997, 305), advocating for self-reflexive field work, and the importance of researchers' position to justify the need to privilege certain voices over others, and to highlight our position in the social structure and institutions. Therefore, I took an intersectional approach. Intersectionality links social categories (gender, class, caste, race, ethnicity) as they apply to overlapping and interlocked systems of discrimination, revealing grounded differences among these categories. These convictions are recalled in Walia's *Border Imperialism*.

Positionality has been a key strategy that helped me re-contextualize my observations and interpretations, as it involved my representations of self, power and politics (Cloke *et al.* 2000). McDowell (1992, 409) writes: "we must recognize and take account of our own position, as well as that of our research participants, and write this into our research practice". Rose (1997), England (1994), Madge (1993), Moss (2002), and others have emphasized their positionality to explain, "what occurs subsequently and to provide new positions from which to speak"; this move to the personal contributes "to a never-ending spiral of relativism" (Parker 1992). Yet personal does not mean that the researcher dominates the inquiry or weakens the content of the research with inauthentic information or less insightful analyses (Harding 1987).

### **Moving Borders, *Nomos* and Bordered Lives**

The number of unauthorized migrants who have died attempting to cross the borders to Europe is transhistorical and has reached frightening heights (van Houtum and Boedeltje 2009). Borders are rooted in historically contingent practices that were related to national ideologies and identities. The site of the

border is therefore not only the borderland but the complex nation-building processes, and nationalist practices that can have material manifestations. The notion that the state is a territorial container with absolute rights over sovereign lands makes borders volatile. Although maps represent borders as fixed spatial units (Agnew 2009) or territorial categories of state identity, borders on maps are active realities (Walia 2013). Mapping is an enterprise of the state that desensitizes landscapes; though maps are mute they communicate histories of colonial territorial control and iteratively reproduce boundary marking practices towards the maintenance of the hegemony of empires. “Map of a border is sur-real, it’s not a border,” but a gap, difference, or mechanism to “other”, “order”, and “control” the free lands and people (van Houtum 2015, 52; Foucault 2007). van Houtum (2015) points out his dilemmas in marking where the border starts or ends in the Schengen zone. The permeability of borders can work differently; for example, the border between India and Bangladesh are barb-wired or un-demarcated transition zones (Jones 2009).

With new technologies associated with border control, “[b]orders are no longer at the border but rather dispersed” (Balibar 1998, 217-18). Seemingly simple questions like “where is the border?” or “whose border?” or why border? entail increasingly complex answers since bordering practices are not an exclusive domain of the state and its agents (van Houtum and Boedeltje 2009), but rather an extension of zones of control and surveillance through the introduction of biometric passports, finger printing, and other technical devices (Amoore 2006; Home Office 2009); onshore or offshore security practices (Salter 2008; Sparke 2006); cognitive bordering of categories (Jones 2009); relationships between “traditional” borders and the borderless globalized-networked-homogenized world (Paasi 2009); and borderwork (*i.e.* the business of bordering). The border is also an ambit of claim-making to national belonging or citizenship enforced by a range of citizen and non-citizen agents (Rumsford 2008).

Borders manifest themselves in innumerable ways in daily lives through state-related practices and institutions such as language, culture, myths, heritage, politics, legislation and economy. These practices condense in the contested idea of citizenship that brings together and implies a wider reproduction of territoriality, sovereignty and control challenging the static notions of state (Paasi 1998). Borders resonate across the space, scale and time of an apparently globalized world of mobile people and things. Sovereign practices of the state (Raley 2008; Nield 2006) and spaces of security imply a constant circulation of things or goods from one point to another, while disciplinary techniques restrict the mobility of human beings by stopping, halting, and prohibiting them (Foucault 2007, 65). Moreover, borders are constantly characterized by the bordering actions (movements, policing, securitizing) and other actions that are rapidly diffused and proliferating through the physical manifestations, material realities, and everyday productions that function to include and exclude a range of people located somewhere along the spectrum between citizens and non-citizens. Many scholars have written on the movement of borders in two directions simultaneously: offshore (externalized),

raising questions about sovereignty, security, and geopolitics (Walters 2004), and onshore (internalized), to sites inside sovereign territory (Coleman 2007; Bigo 2000). Public spaces, such as airports, shopping malls, city squares, train stations, are zones of surveillance of “frisk society” where bordering practices take shape, even onshore or in the territorial interior (Urry 2007).

Borders can be “engines of connectivity” as they connect and divide not just proximate, but global entities (Minghi 1991) – calls for a revision of any conventional understanding of borders. For van Schendel (2005), borderlanders are able to “jump” scales (local, national, regional, and global), and therefore do not experience the national border for themselves; as a “local” phenomenon, a nation-state “edge”, or transnational staging post reconfigures borders as gateways. Rumsford (2008) uses James Scott’s (1998) “seeing like a state” to problematize “seeing like a border.” Follows the functionality of borders in several important ways, i.e., borders are found “wherever selective controls are built” (Balibar 2002, 84-85). Seeing like a border does not equate to looking or watching at the border from a tower from outside the sovereign state but to how everyday bordering processes permeate daily existence, implicating social and political life. Bordering activity is “designed to enhance status or regulate mobility; gated communities, respect zones, ‘resilient’ communities of CCTV watching citizens” (Rumsford 2014, 41). Seeing like a border accounts for the perspectives of those who shape and enforce the border (Johnson *et al.* 2011, 68), and might also include border controls and detention policies that are designed to keep a certain population passive and their labor available yet cheap, disposable, and exploitable (DeGenova 2002), as follows in the next section.

### ***Expendable lives***

Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini (2011) write on the Greek and Italian internal surveillance (*i.e.* fencing or preventing) and external border control (*i.e.* regulations at the territorial edge, or gate-keeping or straining the unwanted). These excessively regulated labor markets contradict legal relaxations and discrepancies once illegalized migrants are inside the sovereign territories. Illegality results in prejudicial labor market competition, giving financial leverage to employers who often break laws to hire illegalized migrants in the pursuit of profit (Home Office 2007). Restrictive immigration laws ostensibly intends to deter migration nonetheless sustain it by surreptitiously subordinating the status of particular migrants (Anderson and Ruhs 2010, 175). Laboring classes have stayed integral and indispensable in the processes of capitalist wealth making in spite of being historically subordinated under the dictates of capital and power, which is central to capitalism (Marx 1990, 899). Barkan (2009, 26) writes, “life once politicized as necessary for the accumulation of capital, becomes expendable at the moment when it no longer assist in the circulation of value”, and those expendable are “left to die with impunity” argues Tyner (2014, 45). The following narrative collected from a Pakistani migrant suggests the preparedness of migrant workers to offer labor though the regulatory system stifles their legitimate income-earning

possibilities. This makes labor within capitalist social relations almost always “labor for and against capital, leaving both inextricably ensnared in a contradictory and conflict-ridden condition” (Holloway 1995, 163–4).

... since we are without papers, we know the police can deport us, not that everyone is deported, but if a bad cop gets us, then we are harassed. So, we are under constant fear [...] We ward caution even when getting from one place to another using the public transportation like the tram or bus or the subway. So many of us choose not to travel even short distances.

Many times our goods are confiscated [...] For goods worth 10 to 15 Euros, the minimum amount of penalty charged by the police is 150 Euros, this can be as high as 250 Euros. Sometimes we are kept in the prison cell all day or night, that has no temperature controls [...]. We pay higher penalties and then released. These random arrests are done by the patrolling state police. The police takes our fingerprints, then we are released after the paper works is finalized by state prosecutors [...] The police often jokes that harassing people without documents, like us, are part of their job. [Pakistani, male, 28 years old, Rome (Italy), Interviewed in July 2014]

The narrative discernibly depicts the invisibility and pervasiveness of borders in daily existence of migrants. I argue that borders are invisible because on a daily basis we fail to realize - many ways in which borders restrict our freedom, mobility or existence in the wage system. Tyner (2014) suggests that a classic labor market preserves itself by “letting die” some of its workers (see Mitchell 2003; Marx 1990). Migrant narratives, interspersed in this manuscript, show how migrants are not only detached from their labor power but an ultimate enfeeblement of their potentialities is underway through the debasement of their moral and physical conditions by “direct extra-economic forces”; this exceptional exploitation creates a moment that transforms “living labor” to “dead labor” (Tyner 2014, 43; Marx 1990, 376). This moment is not attained through direct violence but by systematic erosion of life (Marx 1990, 899). Agamben clearly endorses formalist notion of the state refining Aristotle’s and Arendt’s projects of liberation in his analysis of the “paradox of bare life”, which provides an insight into the structural violence and the calculated valuation of sovereignty. Bare life is reminiscent of Benjamin’s divine violence, denotes the lives that transcend to a liminal position, i.e., the lives in between mere life and a good life. Bare life is the distinction between *zoe* (i.e., “a particular life” or “living common to all living things” or “biological existence”) and *bios* (i.e., “life of a citizen” or a “collective or qualified life” or “political life of speech and action”). *Homo Sacer* is life in exclusion. Marxist arguments resonate with Agamben’s problematization of the *Homo Sacer*. “Living labor [...] ceases to be anything more than a means by which to increase, and thereby to capitalize, already existing values” (1990, 988).

### ***Storying Migrant Trajectories***

Most of the detainees I interviewed at the Center for Exclusion, (acronymously CIE), in Ponte Galeria, Rome, had crossed borders by boats. Some came with valid visas but could not renew them after expiration or were caught working without permits while peddling narcotics, or petty plastic goods and the like.

At the detention center, nothing resembled Bentham's architecture of ordinary prisons nor Foucault's analysis of dispersed power and gaze. Power was dispersed yet contained. As the series of sky-high iron gates opened one after another and we entered the residential units of the CIE, it felt like stepping into an agonizing limbo. During our visit, we were escorted and constantly supervised by the staff from the psychological unit called *Auxilium*. *Auxilium* is a private organization that oversees the physical and mental health of the detainees. The staff members were highly directive yet relaxed—a softened approach of supervision. Under constant watch, I felt constrained while greeting or talking with the migrants. *Auxilium* staff members made constant efforts to highlight the migrant detainees' freedom of movement within their confined spaces and their satisfaction with the facilities. Though there was a psychological clinic in place, no treatment for any serious health issues or physical or mental health was provided. The migrant detainees had nothing to do for the entire day besides watch the telly, talk to each other or play soccer. What repeatedly came up from the voices of the migrants and social activists was the pessimism about future prospects or anything decisive about life or a positive change. The most devastating effects of their confinement were their alienation from the rest of the world, constant physical inactivity, trauma from an unknown future, mental stress and slow death. From speaking in-depth with a Pakistani migrant and a group of men from West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, it felt like they were slowly giving up any hope to live – live a modest and respectable life. According to me, detainees were left in no-man's land without any clarity or formulation of their daily lives or future. Rarely do the detained migrants see family members or interact with humans outside the boundaries of the CIE. The men's unit was separated from detained women's unit. Although the men often rioted and sought to destroy the residential blocks, setting fire to everything, and through self-immolation acts to passively counter to oppression, the women's side of the detention center was full of optimism. At least, I felt so, carefully observing the beautiful murals of love, life and hope. [Field notes, June 2015]

The detention center is clearly experienced as a violent place for the people locked inside, but their broader social environment can feel hostile as well. The state-sanctioned migration management discourse portrays migrants as “security threats” and potential dangers, though most of them are not involved in any criminal activity, while obscuring the violence on the migrant’s body through the geopolitics of regionalization and the legalization of violence (Mountz 2010). Here, I am not referring to violence that necessarily inflicts pain but to structural violence that prevents people from achieving desirable social goals or basic needs. Under normal circumstances, direct violence seems to outrage us because it is visible. When undesirable outcomes result from no other actor but the legitimate state actors, then violence becomes direct or structural, and neither type of violence can be argued to be inherently worse. Nevertheless, violence needs to be contextualized to specific social contexts (Galtung 1969), such as the camp or urban ghetto or therapeutic/psychological institutions.

I was introduced to a Bangladeshi migrant by squatter activists at Casablanca Social Center (Madrid, Spain). He narrates how eleven men and two brokers crossed the Sahara (from Libya to Algeria then to Morocco) with limited food or water for twelve days. At times, they camouflaged themselves behind the sand dunes, sometimes squatting in deserted buildings or with local villagers. In Morocco, he boarded a *paterna* (inflated rubber boat) to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Spain.

[...] although we were thinking that we were close to the sea but we were not, we walked all night and still could not see the sea. Suddenly, we spotted a rubber boat, which made me scared of drowning. You know, even if anyone had given me a big sum of money I would not have boarded that *dinghy* [...] but I had no choice. I had no idea that the passage to Spain would be so treacherous. If we voiced our fear, we were shown daggers by the traffickers. No fuss was tolerated. They wanted to rid us, quickly, in the fear of being caught by border patrol. A broker is a broker! They are mafias, selling human bodies [...]. The boat probably had a capacity to carry 10 or 12 people, but 78 of us were squeezed in it like slaughter animals. We had to abandon our shoes, shirts or any other objects, even documents (passport, previous employment proofs, education transcripts and alike). I think that the dinghy started roughly around 12 am and exploded after sailing for 7 hours or so. Some of us fell in the sea and struggled to hang onto the empty oil container of the boat. We sailed like that for several hours. I was almost paralyzed being hypothermic and thirsty. Right then, we spotted a ship and showed hand signals but it sailed off. In half hour, Spanish speedboats came by and lifted all those who were in the water, but those on the boat were taken back to Morocco. A small group of us were brought to a camp in Melilla. We received medical attention, food and water. I stayed there for 11 months.

There were people of many national origins, some detainees had stayed back in the city of Melilla for five years or more (Bangladeshi, male, age 23, Madrid, Spain, Interviewed on June 2013).

Migration is not always planned or voluntary but forced by circumstances. Crossing over boundaries of wealthy countries, migrants pursue dreams of a better future or a safe haven but, most times, their hope converts into despair – facing violence from traffickers but also from law enforcement officers. At the border zones, they are faced with both direct and structural violence. Those detained in airports, camps, or jails, or those who do not have legal access to work or travel, like ordinary people, are the victims of structural violence that is highly dynamic and prosaic. Forcible detention and deportation are regulatory devices in the calculations of the state's politics, legitimized through security concerns, and immigration enforcement in an effort to manage migrants with or without documents. Detention is a form of structural violence that is covert, yet natural and legitimate as a part of our natural surroundings. Since *hominess sacri* are included within Western democracies, modern politics ventures out for new and more sophisticated mechanisms of exclusion, such as detention (Agamben 1998). Therefore, violence is tied to geographies of colonialism and imperialism and current neocolonial economic practices of domination while ports of entry have transformed into penal archipelagos, as explained in the excerpt from the following narrative.

The place where I was detained is a big area that hosted many people. Eight of us shared a room; there were bunk beds and common toilets. There was a big clearing or a common space in between the rooms. Our rooms had iron doors. The interior looked like cages with many doors, all electronically operated. Powerful halogen lights were lit all night. A box was given to keep our belongings. Many people were there in these camps, about 1,000 or 1,500 or more. At the interview, we were asked all details; my guess is that they were intending to deport us. About 41 Bengalis were detained in the camp. None of them admitted their citizenship background in the apprehension of being deported. Many detained migrants were neither deported nor sent to Madrid but continued staying in the camp for several months. Some lives in Melilla for years. [...] For close to a year, neither could I contact my family nor could they find my whereabouts. In between my father died. [...] I got no information on how long would I stay in the camp or if I would be deported. But, decision had to arrive from Madrid. After months, I do not know what happened, but 10 of us were flown to Madrid and released with an expulsion order with which we could live but not legally work! [Bangladeshi, male, 23 years, Madrid, Spain, June 2013]

The physical and mental degradation from lack of hope for possibilities in the future or subsistence opportunities is what Marx reminds us of the workers under capitalism. The profound impact on migrants' physical and mental state in detention centers and outside with an expulsion order became evident from their stories. The vulnerable looks on their faces, their perpetual marginalization, constant fear of detention and impending deportation separates them from their native counterparts. Agamben (1998, 110) highlights how the legal power of the "ban" triggers the simultaneous attraction and repulsion that signifies the sovereign exception and the emergence of bare life. The exiled or banned are included in the sovereign's power, but excluded from the space of the state.

Adorno, like Agamben (1998, 114), contends, in the most profane and banal ways, that bare life is not only a referent, but an outcome of the violence of the sovereign. Lemke (2005, 6) argues that Agamben holds an inexplicable construction of sovereignty that functions by the suspension of law in regard to its decision about "exception of rule". While Foucault separates biopolitics from sovereignty, Agamben shows a structural connection between biopolitics and sovereignty by situating biopolitics in the center of sovereignty leading to a renewed disjunction between bare life and legal existence. Foucaultian biopolitics is conceptualized at the threshold of political life in contrast to Agamben's model of power and the model of legal structures assumed for interdiction and repression that resting on problem of sovereignty" (Foucault 2000, 137). Foucault's biopolitics states self-governance of relations between humans, and between them and their surroundings. Biopolitical relationality and mediated practices are not authoritarian because of contestations and struggles over technology, politics of the constructions of knowledge and truth, discrimination, living conditions, change and resistance are all produced within biopolitics and not simply an imposition of governance (Foucault 2000; 1991). Nevertheless, the sovereign has the monopoly to decide when, where, to who law is applicable, which signifies that laws and norms do not apply to the sovereign exactly as it does to its subjects. Hence the sovereign is both inside and outside the juridical order. "Nowhere this exception is more salient than in the presumed right over life and death, in the legal distinction between 'killing' and 'letting die'" (Tyner 2014, 43-45). Likewise, Foucault suggests that the sovereign cannot grant right in the same way as it inflicts pain, and according to Marx ([1969] 1990 Tyner 2014, 44) this right "can never be higher than economic structure of the society and its cultural development conditioned thereby". Further, Foucault rationalizes knowledge-power as agents of transformation of historical and political dimensions of human life with the historic transition of the economy of power from seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Relying on the Foucaultian conceptualization of histories of prison and panopticon, Agamben's (1998, 123) camp takes a very precise and methodological approach to the "hidden paradigm of political space of modernity" (1998, 166). The camp is not just an abstract space that is surrounded by iron gates and material boundaries, it is not even exactly like the *Nazi* concentration camp or the urban quarters, but the camp is a very particular space that methodically re-produces lives



in the threshold position between *zoe* and *bios*. It is a realistic representation of the nature of modern politics or a form of power. Metaphorically the camp is about regulating mere biological existence without any mediation, and holistically refers to antagonistic policies and norms that are executed on expendable bodies within democratic forms of governance but is legally optimized to improve life of governable subjects (Muhle 2007; Agamben 2000, 40).

Agamben takes “exception” to the obliteration of the society, which is catastrophic. However, a re-analysis of the mechanisms of law, the dialectical link between law and bare life, mechanisms and functionality of law and the limits of law in particular sites, such as camps (Neocleous 2006) – would be constructive.

## Conclusions

The manuscript started with a connection between Walia's (2013) conceptualization of borders and other scholarly representations of border. I then departed with the thorough explication of my rationale behind the use of feminist P(A)R and migrant narratives of their everyday lives and border-crossing experiences. The latter is linked with geopolitics of border making, and biopolitics of borders and everyday.

The EU, the camp, and the b/ordering or policing mechanisms are the new “biopolitical nomos” devices through which the EU has transformed itself into a killing machine or state of exception where migrants are slowly transformed into *homines sacri*. Our contemporary state of exception is unevenly experienced, for the calculated valuation and management of life and death ensures that survival operates on an uneven “playing field” (Gatlung 1969, 171). The playing field could be anything from *nomos*, i.e. camps, detention centers and prisons, job markets, or city squares. The bare lives of migrants are kept in perpetual states of illegality and precarity, especially for detained migrants who are not deported but are released from detention centers with an expulsion order. They constantly remain in their states of exception with neither the right to live like ordinary citizens nor the right to work. Instead, capital wages a concealed civil war against workers, only exacerbating existing contradictions and generating new opportunities for crises and labor subordination (Holloway 1995; Marx [1969]1990), like the Italian labor market's dependence on the Asian and African illegalized migrant agricultural laborers and domestic helpers (Palidda 2013). This creation of a cheap army of socially-reproduced migrant workers is a key source of primitive accumulation that obscures the unpaid, slave-like labor-capital relation upon which capital accumulation is premised (Federici 2009) and precedes the ‘other-ization’ of migrants.

To conclude, van Houtum (2010) and Walia's (2013) complementary analysis on bordering, ordering and othering people from blacklisted countries (countries that were once colonized) raises physical boundaries (or ban) enforcing a global apartheid. Hence, my problematization that bodies carry borders, and are also involved in the making of borders.

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