



Introduction to the Special Issue: Border Imperialism

Overview of the Entries (from the desk of the editor, Levi)

Unlike most special issues, this collection emerged from neither an academic conference, nor networking with established, senior, or permanent-track scholars. In fact, it has been three years in the making. Slow scholarship, indeed. For most—without the luxury of a permanent post; for several—graduate students; and for some—without either citizenship or an idea what country they would be on within the next six months. In fact, at the outset, most contributors were postgrads and/or contingent, with the vast majority doing more community organizing, activist, teaching, and unpaid socially reproductive work than what neoliberal higher education would ever allow—or a hiring committee would ever see “best fit” value in. There is some devastating, very cruel, irony in that statement/reality. Along the way, a total of six authors had to withdraw. Had external circumstances, “life happening” (sometimes good things, sometimes heartbreaking) beyond each’s control not ultimately resulted in their departure, all of which were on good terms with relationships remaining positive, this series would have been far more diverse. That is both regrettable, and inexcusable. Blame rests with the editor. But none of this takes away from the radical, insightful, boundary-pushing, and transformative work offered by the authors (who still comprise a diverse ensemble) that do appear. Fortunately, I also know some of those voices not present in this line-up will be heard in the pages of *ACME* in the months to come.

The piece immediately following this introduction, by Elise Hjalmarson and Levi Gahman, offers a broad overview of border imperialism, as well as touches upon some of the complexities and realities that surround it. In the second article, Amy Cohen presents the experiences of Mexican and Caribbean migrant farmworkers (under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program) who travel each year to work in the orchards and vineyards of the unceded Syilx Territories of the Okanagan Valley (British Columbia, Canada). In doing so, she draws upon critical studies of citizenship, migration, and resistance to illuminate the daily struggles that temporary farmworkers face in Canada due to state practices of neoliberal exploitation, racialization, and criminalization. Cohen argues that the concept of border imperialism provides an accessible framework for understanding the global forces that displace people in the Global South/Majority World and impel them to participate in transnational labour migration. Her piece adeptly demonstrates, from migrants’ experiences and perspectives, how borders operate beyond the site of the physical boundary line and are at work within local communities; psychologically, emotionally, and materially—producing, exclusion, segregation, and vulnerability. Cohen’s analysis also asserts that it is vital for migrant rights groups to be worker-led when devising strategies to combat the injustices of state discourse and colonial borders. Intimating that the static bifurcation that is often thought to exist between reformist and revolutionary approaches is reductive and oft-fictive, Cohen contends that prioritizing the well-being and autonomy of migrants in many cases means engaging with the state and its functionaries. Ever-mindful of ongoing settler occupation, Cohen also highlights how state-based solutions to migrant struggles may undermine Indigenous communities’ efforts towards self-determination. In this way, her piece stresses the importance of taking into consideration the incredible power the (capitalist) state has in structuring the lives and struggles of both temporary migrants and Indigenous people. According to Cohen, demanding full legal status for all workers in Canada is an essential intermediary step that would have immeasurable positive impacts. Ultimately, Cohen’s article prompts two questions, the first: What role can academic-activists (community organizers) play in the undoing of border imperialism and how can research and scholarly writing contribute to such a project? Second, given the dynamics Walia (2013) articulates in how borders organize the lives of migrants, Cohen queries what practical strategies ensure migrants themselves are guiding local advocacy while also directing the broader movement for migrant justice.

The third article in the series, penned by Sutapa Chattopadhyay, reveals how the notion of the border continues to be notoriously obscure due to its conceptual complexity, historicity, and both the political and place-based situatedness of differing borders. Noting, too, that the terms migrant and migration are equally

ambiguous yet generative. Drawing from participatory action research (PAR) and in-depth narratives collected with Bangladeshi migrants in Madrid and Rome, Chattopadhyay recalls her own precarious work experiences and identity as a migrant in Europe, which run parallel to but remain quite distinct from the experiences of the participants. The piece is structured to at once forge an understanding of the biopolitics of borders and to assert that subverting both Eurocentric depictions of migrants and positivist research traditions is needed when undertaking activist work with migrants. Chattopadhyay, pulling from critical border literature and engaging Walia's (2013) notion of border imperialism, principally argues that borders are employed to (re)create bodies while said bodies (classified and categorized) are used to further entrench borders. That is, she contends that borders, the state, and socially constructed labels (e.g. "citizens," "foreigners," "illegal aliens," i.e. Others) are co-dependent. She goes on to suggest that these inscriptions occur in a variety of ways, across an array of contrasting geopolitical sites and socio-cultural circumstances. Central to her piece is the interlacing of international relations with everyday lived experiences, as well as how the propagation and perforation of borders affect migrants. The political aim of her article is thus to deepen understandings of migrants and borders while de-stabilizing mainstream conceptualizations of what conventional fieldwork and research is and can be. Notably, Chattopadhyay is striving to meet two challenges that may prove useful for academics and activist-scholars to consider: One, to provide a critical discussion about the use of feminist and reflexive ethnographic methods in foregrounding the realities migrants face in their everyday lives, and; two, to amplify, on their terms, the voices of migrants from the Global South/Majority World in Europe while shedding light on the conditions they face.

Enrica Rigo, writing about the plight of women who cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe, next weighs in prompting readers to consider further, and more critically, asylum as a terrain of political struggle. Her proposed framing of asylum expands and goes against the grain of what can be found in most European, specifically Italian, critical migration scholarship. A corpus of work that has mainly framed migration and borders within the category of citizenship and its transformation. Rigo's piece displays how disputes about the ambiguous distinction between economic and forced migration within radical scholarship has left the issue of asylum long overlooked. Applying Walia's (2013) insights to a European context, she argues that border imperialism is useful towards deconstructing the centrality of citizenship as grounds for political subjectivity. In addition, Rigo demonstrates, via studies in critical legal feminism and critical migration theory, how border imperialism is beneficial towards recognizing asylum claims as circumstances for transformative praxis, particularly within the current "refugee crisis." In doing so, her intersectional analysis shows how migrant women are doubly affected by the violence of border imperialism—at once as migrants, and because they are women. More expressly, Rigo explains that although the dominant rhetoric depicts Nigerian women as potential victims of trafficking, over the past five years there has been a growing number of deportations and a widespread use of punitive measures against them. The article also discusses how the hegemonic narrative of the "victim," framed as being deprived of subjectivity and in need of being saved, pervades both legal discourse and many acts of well-intentioned solidarity. Rigo's analysis thereby explicates how gender roles and hierarchies are mirrored by border regimes, whilst simultaneously suggesting that gendered and sexualized experiences of the border are also central to the resignification of asylum claims. Moreover, her research also prompts queries about official statistics and released data regarding border crossings. That is, Rigo questions to what extent officials and sanctioned record-keepers consider how many times the same person crosses the same border, as well as how long she is stuck, in chronic waiting, in the border machine before her claim is recognized? Put simply, Rigo's work challenges those who are read it to do one simple thing: to choose to take the side of those who cross borders.

The fifth entry in the series, offered by Geoffrey Boyce, Sarah Launius, and Adam Aguirre, makes several interconnected arguments. First, drawing upon their experiences in the state of Arizona (United States of America), they unpack the ways that anti-immigrant initiatives in the USA orient principally around attacking the social reproduction of undocumented residents and their relations. Reflecting on contemporary social movement campaigns in the city of Tucson, Arizona, they argue that both expanded notions of "citizenship" and "no borders" frameworks fail to respond adequately to these conditions. The former because it is precisely the question of citizenship (or a lack thereof) that becomes the basis for targeting substantial violence at undocumented persons, and the latter because its champions commonly struggle to apply this ethic and principle in those everyday spaces and contexts in which anti-immigrant policy and policing unfold. Drawing on Joel Olson's theory of "democratic Manichaeism" and the autonomist Marxist concept of "class composition," Boyce, Launius, and Aguirre assert that this latter problem can be resolved via embracing the Manichaean logic implicit in the "no borders" agenda and a materialization of this logic throughout the fabric of everyday life. In the piece the authors elaborate how such a move will require an

embrace of conflict as an animating force, which in turn catalyzes a network of participants around that conflict, articulating forms of political community that explicitly reject “citizenship” as a qualifier of membership and participation. In light of the above, they suggest the value of establishing boundaries against those policies, practices, and individuals who would diminish human equality, and to identify ways to spatialize and defend these boundaries in everyday life through “community composition.” Their call then raises questions about the possibility of appropriating the border as an instrument of human equality and emancipation, rather than of violence and repression. The authors go on to note that, of course, such a move would require detaching the border from the state as a normative geopolitical referent, which raises additional questions about the appropriation of space via tactics like the blockade, which in other social movement contexts are being mobilized as part of an explicit project of decolonization and the affirmation of Indigenous rights and sovereignty. Ultimately, Boyce, Launius, and Aguirre’s entry raises two principal queries with respect to analyzing and confronting borders: 1) To what extent can the lessons of one context be applied to the other? And 2) What are the productive tensions or contradictions that emerge by thinking through these two political contexts and projects (Indigenous sovereignty and an abolitionist egalitarianism applied to struggles around citizenship and migration) together?

Stretching the issue in a productive and “close to home” (for those who labour in academia) way are Eli Meyerhoff and Elsa Noterman. They take to task neoliberal higher education in the US for its inextricable link to colonial worldviews/practices. By bringing formulations of “slow scholarship” into conversation with decolonial studies, resurgent Indigenous knowledges, and Black radical thought, Meyerhoff and Noterman argue for a formulation of scholarship that works to overcome the “academic project” itself—not simply neoliberal education—but to create our own minor counter-institutions for collective study. In underscoring this, Meyerhoff and Noterman consider who does/does not have control over their (and others’) experiences of time-space and how unjust inter-temporal, inter-spatial relations are integral to maintaining the university’s status quo, i.e. how the spatio-temporal privileges of some are co-constitutive with the spatio-temporal privileges of others. Their considerations involve recognizing the naturalized image of the university as a kind of spatio-temporal map, which is premised on a series of dichotomous borders (“teachers” vs “students,” “instruction” vs “research,” “tenure-stream faculty” vs “contingent faculty,” “space” vs “time,” “value” vs “waste,” “campus” vs “community”). In aiming to “denaturalize” such a map, Meyerhoff and Noterman not only reveal these imagined borders to be historically constructed, but constantly destabilized through campus struggles. Overall, their analysis aspires to take the relay from historical struggles against the settler-colonial and white supremacist foundations of the university by arguing that it is critical to recognize and overturn the materially and ideologically bordered bases of the university. To this end, Meyerhoff and Noterman suggest that such a project requires becoming accomplices (rather than simply allies) with those who inhabit its borders (e.g. contingent faculty, indentured students, and exploited campus workers) and those who are exiled and excluded from it (e.g. incarcerated people), recognizing the conjoined relations of spatio-temporal privileges and oppressions, and thus the possibilities for mutual liberation. A committed reading of their piece will leave readers asking: “What can be learned from historical-contemporary decolonial movements about developing inter-temporally, inter-spatially reflective scholarship that is attentive to an ethics of care *and* that acknowledges (and works to dismantle) the inequities of the university’s “temporal architectures” and “spatial clockworks?”

Rounding out the series is a piece demonstrating the “rise and fall,” as well as the motivations, of the Caribbean Left in the Anglophone Caribbean through the experiences of Earl Bousquet of the Workers Revolutionary Movement, St. Lucia (interviewed by Amílcar Sanatan). Bousquet’s thoughts underscore how borders (material and imagined) often imposed by colonial powers illustrate the limits, challenges, and potential for radical political change in the Caribbean. The interview touches upon the efforts of young Caribbean revolutionaries’ approach to socialist and Marxist politics, in particular, the extent to which they attempted to construct a culturally relevant form of political models and cultures. Much of the discussion highlights the implications of Cold War geopolitics in the region, shedding light on how political activities in the Caribbean were proxy conflicts for larger political arrangements on a global scale. The ongoing political crisis in Venezuela and much of Latin America that has seen the reversal of Left-wing political party rule necessarily revives interest in 20th century interventions, invasions, and—border imperialism. The interview with Bousquet thereby rouses questions about what strategies Caribbean nations and communities can employ to build solidarity and resist that same old song of colonial aggression and border imperialism.

With that, this introduction along with the articles that follow are what we hope constitutes only a mere scratching of the surface of radical analyses, critical interrogations, and insightful applications of border imperialism—not to mention struggles for migrant justice—yet to come.