

Nations, Shadow Borders, and the Production of Gender in the Present

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Abstract

How do borders, real and imagined, influence conceptions of gender? This paper answers this question by analyzing written materials produced by The Outlaw Ocean Project, namely “The Secret Prison that Keeps Migrants Out of Europe.” This is achieved by making sense of how bordering tactics impact people fleeing their homes in Africa on their dangerous journey to Europe. In doing so, it engages an intersectionality lens when analyzing the processes and consequences of externalized border technologies that emerge from laws, surveillance, and ransoms. Finally, this paper adds new perspectives to migration and border scholarship by specifying how African border-making are places and processes that reproduce gender.

Keywords: *Migration; Shadow Borders; Struggle; Gender; Africa*

Introduction

How do borders, real and imagined, influence conceptions of gender? This paper answers this question by analyzing migration accounts described by an investigative journalism not-for-profit. To accomplish this, bordering tactics impacting people fleeing their homes in Africa on their dangerous journey to Europe are examined. Piecing this puzzle together expands migration and border scholarship by showing how shadow borders emerging from laws, surveillance, and ransoms reify conceptions of gender and other social and political identities.

Mass migration is the defining phenomenon of the twenty-first century. Today, 1 out of every 29 people live in a different country from the one they were born in (Metha 2019). This situation is resulting from international geopolitical and economic restructuring, war, and environmental degradation. People are consequently on the move searching for employment, educational opportunities, and security. Fostered by modern infrastructure, nations and cities worldwide are increasingly tasked to accommodate more people from new places than ever before. People who move to a country other than their home nation or usual residence are immigrants (Bolter 2019). Even though many nations rely on immigrants to undertake the undesirable and invisible labours required to maintain the political-economic structures supported by national institutions, those same marked bodies are often seen as deviant and thus pose threats to societal norms. Such paradox brings to the fore a profound ideological

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crisis about “who matters” in many contemporary nations (Hall 2021). It also highlights that we live in a world of supposedly separate “countries”—partitioned into “national” states.

Nations, however, are not natural or permanent givens. Instead, they are politically contested and historically conditional social constructs. They are products and consequences of several standardizing, universalizing, and bureaucratizing processes coordinated by states and their agents (Anderson 1983). As imagined communities, nations are produced and maintained through projects of nationalism, which promote the standardization of languages, educational curricula, military conscriptions, holidays, taxation, and war. Such projects help make the political unit, the state, congruent with the nation’s cultural unit (Anderson 1983). Nation-building thus modifies the assortment of diverse people within the boundaries of a polity into a uniform and unified national whole—which has come to be defined by its borders more than any other way (De Genova 2016).

To be sure, borders defining political territories existed long before the rise of nations approximately 500 years ago. Throughout history, they were determined by physical variations in the earth’s surface, such as bodies of water, forests, deserts, and mountain ranges. Or they were constructed as walls and moats to keep others out. While contemporary nations continue to rely on natural and human-constructed barriers, other forms of borders, often less legible, such as passports, visas, and policing, have been institutionalized by governments worldwide. It is these physical, material, and social processes that reinforce the ideological image of a world composed of “nations” and “national” states, to which all territory—and importantly, all people—must consistently and exclusively correspond (De Genova 2016). In this way, borders are a constituent of nation reproduction and, therefore, the social construction of “the migrant.”

Borders also give meaning to the so-called “migrant crisis”—a term coined in 2010 to describe people headed to Europe from sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, fleeing poverty, violence, and climate change impacts (Urbino 2021). But, as a phenomenon tied to multiple political territories, one must ask, *whose crisis? And what utility, if at all, does such term carry?* Nick De Genova argues that “the crisis” signals a problem of Europe’s borders, with its root cause commonly attributed to troubles “outside” of Europe (2016). Thus, Europe uses the term as a device to authorize exceptional governmental measures to enhance and expand immigration policing and border enforcement (Tazzioli and Garelli 2017). In other words, the so-called “migrant crisis” is a term strategically deployed to reconfigure tactics and techniques to control the movement of bodies.

The European migrant crisis also highlights how borders, like nations, are spatial in nature and imagined. For instance, the performative tactics used to control bodies signal the border-making process (Ramsay, 2020). Or said differently, mobility enforcement gives meaning to the term “bordering” when engaged as a verb. Borders are thus produced through socio-political activities and come to look like natural and inevitable results (Almustafa 2022). For example, people on the move navigating the occasionally deadly violence of border enforcement authorities—which perpetuate precarity and social inequality—are the precise processes that reify borders as natural and permanent givens (Andersson 2014). While scholarship has thoroughly examined border-making tactics in the Western world, there is still much to learn about borders in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania (Fassin 2018). This paper, therefore, details contemporary border-making strategies in an African context *to specify*



how borders are real and imagined. In doing so, it unpacks several externalized border technologies that emerge from laws, surveillance, and ransoms.

This is achieved by examining accounts described by The Outlaw Ocean Project. This non-profit journalism organization produces investigative stories about the diversity of environmental, human rights, and labor abuses occurring offshore worldwide. By analyzing written materials produced by Outlaw Ocean, namely “The Secret Prison that Keeps Migrants Out of Europe,” this paper makes sense of the ways bordering tactics impacts people fleeing their homes in Africa on their dangerous journey to Europe (Urbino 2021). *Moreover, in following De Noronha, who argues that race is reproduced through immigration controls, this paper also engages an intersectionality lens when analyzing the processes and consequences of border tactics (2019).* Such a strategy shows how borders influence conceptions of gender and other social and political identities. *In sum, it argues that border-making and, therefore, nations are places and processes that reproduce gender.*

Lastly, while this paper focuses on the (im)mobilities of bodies on and near the African continent, it is essential to acknowledge that the West is not at all absent from this story. On the contrary, as will become apparent in what follows, Europe’s pull both engenders and prohibits the mobilities of the people examined in this essay. In other words, nearly all migrations that today seek their futures in Europe have been overwhelmingly shaped by an irrefutably colonial past (Mehta 2019).

Next, attention is briefly turned to the literature on borders and gender to contextualise its contribution. It then tells the story of one person’s excursion from Guinea Bissau to the Mediterranean Sea. Their journey shows how convulsively reactive tactics to control movements reifies conceptions of “nations,” “borders,” “immigrants, and “gender”—social constructions and processes dictating which bodies get to live and die (Mbembe 2008).

Gendering Border Struggles

Anthropologists have historically viewed borders as territorial limits defining political entities (states) and legal subjects (citizens) (Alvarez 1995). Whereas sociologists have principally considered boundaries to be social constructs establishing symbolic differences (between class, gender, or race) and producing identities (national, ethnic, or cultural communities) (Lamont and Molnar 2002). Living in a world comprised of nations, all bodies thus represent the articulation of borders and boundaries (Kearney 1991). While these domains of research developed into distinct fields, investigating borders and boundaries together thus enables scholars to inscribe politics and the state onto bodies, particularly for those on the move.

The significance of borders and boundaries certainly change over time. For instance, shifting concerns around security, sovereignty, the economy, and identity shape bordering processes (Andreas 2003; Blom and Stepputat 2005; Hanson and Splimbergo 1999; Wilson and Donnan 1998). Ruben Anderson sees the changes in border controls across Europe during the past half-century as “both radical and without genuine precedent” (2014). And as hinted at in the introduction, borders manifest as physical obstacles and enforcement tactics in everyday life. For instance, everyday bordering tactics are control processes carried out by anyone, anywhere—government agencies, private companies, and individual citizens (Yuval-Davis et al., 2018). Such tactics, for example, occur from border officer gazes, employers demanding official paperwork from workers, or ordinary people stereotyping racial minorities as “not belonging” (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018). Everyday bordering is thus not only about people’s mobilities, but also about who controls movement. It is in this way that borders “have been

transported to the middle of political space” and are “implosive, infinitely elastic, and, in effect, truly everywhere within the space of the nation-state” (Balibar 2004). But what do such processes entail?

Bordering tactics require the screening of bodies to make visible “that which is hidden from view, opening up new visualizations of the unknown—the potentially risky body” (Ammore and Hall 2009). Risky bodies are believed to contain no life as such (Mbembe 2019). They are, strictly speaking, bodies at the limits of life, trapped in uninhabitable worlds and inhospitable places (Mbembe 2019). People recognize risky bodies—according to Sara Ahmed as a form of danger—by reading the bodies of others and identifying them as not belonging or being out of place. Recognizing someone out of place allows for demarcation and the enforcement of the territories where people dwell (Ahmed 2000). In other words, risky bodies are produced in relation to purified spaces of the community, the sanctified life of the good citizen, and the purified body of the child (Ahmed 2000).

In these ways, borders are better understood as socio-political relations rather than just fixed objects. Though it is the social relations required for bordering tactics that are the very processes that make borders appear *thing-like* (De Genova 2016). In other words, bordering is constantly *objectified* through repetitive discourses and practices (Maury 2022). Therefore, mobility struggles make borders into facts and lend them the fetishized quality of undisputable truths (Spyer 2013). What is at stake in these border relations, which are relations of *struggle*, is the interpretation of borders as seemingly fixed and stable thing-like actualities with a resemblance of objectivity and intrinsic power (Brambilla and Jones 2020). As new border technologies are constantly emerging, scholars need to untangle contemporary border struggles to further demystify border powers as natural and permanent givens.

This paper therefore provides nuanced insights about novel border struggles. It does so with the intent to illustrate how seemingly intangible political social relations are processes that work to objectify borders as natural objects. Just as important, this paper investigates migration controls from an intersectionality lens to provide rich and complex accounts of gender-making (Crenshaw 1989). While there is no shortage of literature examining the relationship between gender and borders, much of it tends to equate gender with women. This paper alternatively pays attention to the socially constructed binary of men and women and other social and political markers that are often ignored (Jane et al. 2010). Moreover, research investigating borders from a non-gendered perspectives regularly presents border crossing as a positive phenomenon (Jane et al. 2010). However, recent scholarship that genders borders show that crossing territorial and other borders can lead to more and less freedom (Jane et al. 2010). The following accounts exemplify this latter perspective by showing how bordering tactics generate and prohibit freedom. In doing so it offers the connection between gender and bordering as a generative framework for the study of nations and human (im)mobility.

Shadow Borders

In 2015, a million people from the Middle East and Africa came to Europe. That same year, the European Union (E.U.) formed the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa to provide aid money to developing countries, such as paying for green-energy job instruction in Ghana and COVID-19 support in Sudan. However, much of the “aid” is used to pressure African nations to implement harsher immigration practices and fund agencies to enforce them. For example,



in 2015, E.U. officials forced Niger to adopt a statute pronouncing overnight bus operators and guides who help migrants move north as human traffickers. Moreover, in 2017, deals were struck between Italy—with the E.U.’s blessing—and Libya affirming “the resolute determination to cooperate in identifying urgent solutions to the issue of clandestine migrants crossing Libya to reach Europe by sea” (Urbino 2021). These externalized bordering tactics were expanded in 2018 when the E.U. helped the Libyan Coast Guard get U.N. authorization to spread its jurisdiction a hundred miles off Libya’s coast—deep into international waters. Migrants apprehended by the Coast Guard were frequently taken to detention centers (prisons) in Libya. To be sure, the E.U. does not pay for building these facilities or the guards’ remunerations. Though the Trust Fund implicitly backs a lot of their operation. For instance, it pays for the vessels detaining migrants, the buses that bring them to prisons, and remunerates for the toiletries, clothes, and blankets they receive when arriving. Furthermore, the fund pays for cadaver pouches migrants are put in when they die and for the training of Libyan authorities in how to care for corpses in a religiously considerate manner (Urbino 2021).

These outsourced bordering tactics are what the Ocean Outlaw Project refers to as shadow borders. The very term hints at how borders are indeed not fixed objects. Instead, it also illustrates how borders are processes of social relations between governments, and as illustrated below, ordinary people. To illustrate how borders, real and imagined, reproduce conceptions of gender, the following narrative describes how one seemingly “risky” body navigates externalized and reactive bordering practices emerging in the form of *laws, surveillance, and ransoms*.

Law

Aliou Candé was raised on a farm adjacent to the Sintchan Demba Gaira village in Guinea Bissau. As an adult, he subsisted on the farm with his family and resided in a clay house with his wife, Hava, and their two young sons. Aliou relished listening to foreign music and watching European soccer clubs. He spoke French and English and was learning Portuguese with the hope to live in Portugal one day.

Aliou laboured his land to produce cashews, cassava, and mangoes—crops that account for around ninety percent of Guinea-Bissau’s exports. Because of climate change, local weather patterns had nevertheless begun to shift. For instance, heavy rains made the farm accessible only by rafts for a lot of the year. And dry spells were lasting longer than they had years prior. All the while, Aliou’s four skinny cows began to produce little milk, if any at all. A changing environment also resulted in a higher number of mosquitoes, which spread disease. In the case of his son who contracted malaria, the journey to the hospital took a full day, and he almost died on the way. As a pious Muslim, Aliou felt he was failing God when it came to providing for his family.

This all transpired as two of Aliou’s brothers regularly sent money and pictures of lavish restaurants they had eaten at in Spain and Italy, where they were respectively living and working. These photographs and remittances instilled in Aliou the possibility of bringing home a fortune for his family. Aliou’s family also encouraged him to travel north as most people of his generation went abroad to succeed. As a result, on September 13, 2019, at the age of 27, the shy and sturdy husband, father, brother, and son embarked on a trip to Europe carrying a Quran, a diary, two pairs of pants, two T-shirts, and 600 euros.

The borders determining Europe, its nations, and defining its political economies pulled Aliou from his family in Guinea Bissau. And those same borders left Hava, who was pregnant with their third child at the time of Aliou's departure, fully responsible for her children's reproductive care. In other words, borders are a source of hierarchies of mobility, which makes it challenging for many women, such as Hava, to leave their places of predicament in the first place (Med Alarm Phone 2019). Moreover, it is especially likely that they will experience systematic forms of gender-based violence if they are able to leave (Med Alarm Phone 2019). In this way, borders can be seen as expanding, intensifying, and contracting around people, reflecting, and reproducing gender norms, particularly in relation to which bodies take on life-making work and economic labour.

Just as borders influence gender by determining which bodies move and which are left behind, European border regimes also manifest in the numerous other countries of "transit" (De Genova 2016). When Aliou reached Agadez in Niger after hitchhiking on cars and hiding on buses across Central Africa, these tactics were indeed employed against him. For instance, the E.U.'s 2015 African Trust Fund pressured Niger to adopt Law 36, a decree that harshly criminalises anyone who helped Europe seek bodies with thirty-year prison sentences. This law singlehandedly dissolved the "Saharan Gateway" moniker that Agadez was widely known as. In this way, laws are seen as a bureaucratic process of shadow borders. They are, in other words, a clear way in which borders are intangible and permeable processes. Moreover, as outcomes of shadow bordering technologies, laws not only police bodies seeking to transgress continental and national lines, but also bodies who are willing to help them "get there."

Law 36 thus forced Aliou to consider other perilous routes, where hunger, thirst, exposure, abandonment, and other lethal risks were possible. As he wandered the Sahara with half a dozen others, Aliou sometimes slept in the sand on the sides of the road. He told his family that "the heat and dust was terrible through cell phone communication" (Urbino 2021). Aliou reportedly told one of his brothers after sneaking through a portion of Alegria controlled by bandits—everyday border enforcers—"they will capture you and beat you until you're released" (Urbino 2021).

When Aliou arrived in Morocco in January 2020, he learned that the passage to Spain would cost three thousand Euros. One of his brothers subsequently urged him to return home over the phone. While his brother's voice functioned as a form of everyday bordering, Aliou, set on financially supporting his family, repealed such a plea. Instead, Aliou told his brother that he could take a cheaper boat to Italy in Libya. After arriving in Tripoli eleven months later, Aliou lived in Garagresh, a migrant slum. His great-uncle, a tailor for four decades, had lived in Libya undocumented for years. He found Aliou work painting houses. And like Aliou's brother, the uncle's pressure to give up his plan to cross the Mediterranean functioned, albeit unsuccessfully, as a form of everyday bordering. "That's the route of death," he told Aliou (Urbino 2021).

Surveillance

Human catastrophes at sea have unquestionably transformed the maritime borders of Europe into a macabre deathscape (De Genova 2016). Although transgressing the Mediterranean carries a risk, at 10 p.m. on February 3, 2021, Aliou and a hundred and thirty others nevertheless made their way to the Libyan coast with smugglers. An inflatable rubber boat was used to launch them from shore. Excited by the departure and future possibilities, some



people on board broke into song. Two hours after the boat left Tripoli, it was out of Libyan waters. Aliou felt hopeful as he straddled the side of the dinghy. Despite being separated from his family by borders, he told others onboard that he would bring them to Europe when he arrived.

Nearly twenty hours after their departure, everyone onboard noticed an airplane overhead. It circled them for about fifteen minutes and then flew away. According to the ADS-B Exchange, which tracks aviation traffic, the plane was a white Beech King Air 350 surveillance aircraft leased by Frontex (Urbino 2021). As part of the EU's border protection against Russia, Frontex was established in 2004. Though in 2015, it began to lead a "systematic effort" to capture migrants (Urbino 2021). Since then, it has become one of the most valuable border agencies in the E.U. Over half a billion euros are spent on the agency's drones and charter aircrafts to maintain near-constant surveillance of the Mediterranean. As soon as it finds boats with "risky bodies" heading north, it sends photographs and location information to local government agencies and other partners in the area to aid rescue efforts but does not usually inform humanitarian vessels (Urbino 2021). Instead, according to an anonymous Frontex official, the agency streams its surveillance footage to the Italian Coast Guard and Italy's Maritime Rescue Coordination Center, which in turn notify the Libyan Coast Guard (Urbino 2021). After receiving the coordinates, the Libyan Coast Guard races to the boats to capture the migrants.²

As mentioned above, in 2018, the E.U.'s African Trust fund helped expand the Libyan Coast Guard's jurisdiction far into international waters. In just two years, the European Union invested close to a million dollars in updating the Libyan Coast Guard's command centers, two state-of-the-art vessels, and training its officers. Refitting these two boats is a prime example of constructive cooperation between an EU member state, Italy, and Libya (Urbino 2021). Moreover, these social relations—mainly relaying migrant vessel coordinates that are detected through surveillance technologies—reifies the power of shadow bordering tactics. And even as such situations occur in the seemingly fixed body of water separating the African and European continent, these relationships also illustrate the less legible or imaginary aspects of border-making.

A boat appeared on the horizon about three hours after the plane was spotted. When the vessel approached the boat of migrants, one dinghy passenger said, "everyone started crying and holding their heads, saying, 'shit, it's Libya.'" (Urbino 2021). The boat approaching the migrants was a cutter that the EU unveiled earlier that year. It rammed the dinghy three times. Then the Coast Guard officers ordered the migrants to climb aboard. One hit Aliou and several of the others with the butt of their rifle. Another whipped them with a rope. The prisoners were taken back to land and loaded into buses provided by the E.U. before being taken to a secret prison called Al Mabani.

Women Interlude

The Ocean Outlaw Project does not capture stories of women's struggles across sea borders (Med Alarm Phone 2019). Although such perspectives are frequently presented in literature, as outlined in the following subsection, women are almost always portrayed as subordinate, exploited, and passive victims who lack individual stories and political agency. Such erasure is

² Over 80 thousand migrants have been intercepted by the Coast Guard and other Libyan authorities in the past four years (Urbino, 2021).

thus another way in which stories concerning borders reproduce gender and other social identities. For instance, it is evident from Aliou's journey that "the migrant" is envisioned as young, able-bodied, and male. Due to missing perspectives, the following narratives told by the activist project WatchTheMedAlarm Phone are meant to briefly reveal a few struggles that women face when crossing the Mediterranean.³

Intended to keep them safe, when women cross the sea, they are often seated in the middle of rubber boats. However, the middle is where seawater, fuel, and bodily waste gather and create a toxic mixture that causes injuries. Sitting in the middle also makes them more at risk of being trampled and suffocated when panic breaks out. Furthermore, due to religious determinations, many women wear long and heavy clothes which makes it more difficult to stay above water if they fall into the sea. Being pregnant and caring for children also increases women's risk of dehydration. Lastly, women are exposed to patriarchal forms of violence during their entire journeys, including at sea. As a result, more women than men drown when attempting cross bodies of water (Med Alarm Phone 2019).

Ransom

On February 5, 2021, Aliou arrived at the prison controlled by a militia termed euphemistically as the Public Security Agency. Across eight cells segregated by gender, fifteen hundred migrants were being held by gunmen. Aliou often urinated in a water bottle or defecated in the shower since there was only one toilet per hundred people. The detainees were marched into the courtyard twice a day in single file, where they were forbidden to look up at the sky or speak. Instead, guards placed communal food bowls on the ground for them to eat in circles. In addition, in the prison there were more people than resources, so detainees alternated sleeping on thin floor mats—one lying down during the day and the other in the evening.

At Al Mabani, laughing, whispering, and speaking in native tongues could lead to beatings. And those who caused trouble were kept in isolation rooms with no bathrooms for days on end. The guards would tie the detainees' hands to a rope and beat them in such places. According to one detainee, "it is not so bad to see a friend or a man crying while being tortured. But seeing a six-foot-tall man beating a woman with a whip..." (Urbino 2021). Although both men and women were tortured, they were not treated equally. As an example, several former detainees reported female captives were frequently raped by the guards. "The women would come back in tears," another detainee said (Urbino 2021). In another incident, after two women escaped from Al Mabani, guards beat a female captive in a nearby office as retaliation.

Migrants, asylum seekers, and victims of illegal trafficking can be held indefinitely under Libyan law without access to a lawyer. In the country, there are approximately fifteen detention centers, of which Al Mabani is the largest. For a ransom of twenty-five hundred Libyan dinars, or about four hundred and forty euros, the guards offer to release detainees. In addition, guards walk around with cell phones during meals, allowing detainees to call relatives who can pay. The only option Aliou had was to sit and wait since his family could not afford to pay such a ransom.

³ WatchTheMed Alarm Phone is an activist project that provides a 24/7 hotline for people in distress in the Mediterranean Sea. For more about the Alarm Phone and WatchTheMed, see alarmphone.org/en/ and watchthemed.net/



While the fixed nature of prison walls is undoubtedly a form of shadow bordering, so are the ransoms. Albeit difficult to detect, the ransoms determine mobilities by inscribing debt onto captured bodies (Maurer 2006). In other words, debt, and therefore, ransoms, is a social relation between the guards, prisoners, and their families. In this way, ransom consequences extend well beyond the prison confines and explicitly penetrate the everyday lives of families elsewhere. Furthermore, the sexual abuses experienced by female detainees unable to pay the ransoms (and even those that can) are another way that shadow borders reproduce gender. As the anecdotes above illustrate, being held captive in prisons for ransom are spaces fostering the production and maintenance of sexual-based violence against women.

Certainly, the EU acknowledges the brutality of migrant prisons and asserts that “these detention systems must be abolished” (Urbino 2021). According to a vice-president of the European Commission, in 2020, “the decision to arbitrarily detain migrants lies exclusively with the Libyan government” (Urbino 2021). The European Parliament, however, clarified that the EU still has a responsibility: “If the E.U. did not finance the Libyan Coast Guard and its assets, there would be no interception, there would be no referral to these horrific detention centers,” and therefore no ransoms (Urbino 2021). In a similar vein, the German ambassador to Libya portrayed himself and his country as being faced with an impossible task: “Libya is no longer a transit country, but rather a victim left to meet a crisis the world has failed” (Urbino 2021).

In the early hours of April 8, Aliou awoke to the sound of several Sudanese detainees trying to escape. In fear of being punished, Aliou and a dozen others confronted the group. The guards were alerted when the Sudanese ignored the veteran detainee’s appeal, resulting in a brawl between the prisoners. As one witness noted, the guards were laughing and cheering, filming the fight with their phones through the grilles. Several hours later, the guards returned with semi-automatic rifles. They fired for ten minutes without warning through the bathroom window into the cell. Leg injuries were sustained by two teenagers from Guinea Conakry. During the fight, Aliou, who was hiding in the shower, was struck in the neck. Upon staggering along the wall and splattering blood, he fell to the ground and died.

Aliou’s family learned of his death two days after it happened. “Heartbroken,” Hava, Aliou’s wife, pledged she would not remarry until she had finished mourning. In the wake of heavy rain, the farm’s conditions have worsened. Consequently, Aliou’s youngest brother, Bobo, will likely soon try to travel to Europe on his own. Despite Aliou’s death at the border, “what else can I do?” he said (Urbino 2021).

Conclusion

This paper analyzes an investigative media story developed by The Outlaw Ocean Project to reveal contemporary border[s](ing tactics) that occur on and near the African continent. In doing so, it acknowledges that borders indeed exist as fixed objects, such as a deviation in the earth’s surface, as a barbed-wire fence, or as a line on a map. However, it shows that they are also intangible and permeable processes of social relations that exist in the form of laws, surveillance, and ransoms. These latter processes reify borders as natural and permanent givens and illustrate where border’s seemingly intrinsic power emerges from. Such power not only determines movements, but also which bodies get to live and die. Unpacking the distinctions between borders’ fixed elements and their social processes thus specifies how borders are *real and imagined*.

This paper also demonstrates how investigating reactive tactics to control bodies through an intersectionality lens provides complex accounts of gender-making in different contexts. As borders create social hierarchies of mobility, many women cannot leave their places of difficulty. Such immobilities reproduce gender norms and inequality, influencing which bodies undertake reproductive or economic labour. The hierarchy also works to reify the narratives of bodies on the move only as young, able-bodied, and male. Erasing women from such stories not only reproduces gender but is also inaccurate. As women (and others) struggle to cross borders, they are subjected to systemic forms of gender-based violence, which occur not only in the sea or in secret prisons but throughout the entire journey. It is in this way that this paper illustrates the powerful connection between gender and bordering as a generative framework for the study of nations and human (im)mobility.

It is clear that more work needs to be done to examine the relationship between gender and borders. For instance, perspectives capturing the nuanced and complex experiences that female bodies face while navigating shadow borders is vital. Such stories will help demystify migrant women as subordinate and passive victims lacking agency. Moreover, by revealing women's strength, resilience, and resistance, such scholarship can generate new movements against the increasing securitisation of borders and the criminalisation of migration.

To propel future movements, the following two points must be considered. First, migrants' worth cannot be defined by their economic contribution because it does nothing to challenge the kind of system they contribute to (Goodfellow 2019). Second, the capitalist state should abolish all borders as an elementary and defining characteristic. That is because the state uses bordering technologies to legally and politically produce the social and spatial differences that capital uses to capitalise upon and exploit (De Genova 2016). Taking such steps can thus lead to a more egalitarian and just future.

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