

Troubling borders: A brief reflection from Engenderings

To start off the new academic year, two of our blog editors write on the issue of borders, drawing on the refugee crisis from a British and Canadian perspective. Annette and Julia both participated in the #RefugeesWelcomeHere march on Saturday September 12. Here they reflect on some responses to the refugee crisis and the importance of the politics of borders for a feminist politics.



On

Source: [Sisters Uncut](#)

Saturday September 12, British people called a national day of action to say “Refugees welcome here”, with tens of **thousands of people** marching through London alone. Marching were several organisations and campaigns, like Syria Solidarity Movement, the Refugee Council, Refugee Action, Amnesty International, Stand Up to Racism, BARAC, Stop the War Coalition, Migrant Rights Network, War on Want, People’s Assembly Against Austerity, Movement Against Xenophobia, Unite Against Fascism, Love Music Hate Racism, Black Out London, Emergency UK, Student Action for Refugees, London2Calais, British Syrian Medical Society, Avaaz, Black Dissidents, LatinsX and Sisters Uncut. The official organisers of the march called for faster processing of refugees from particularly dangerous areas such as Syria, to put pressure on governments like Hungary and Germany in taking in refugees, and in general **advocating** for a “Europe-wide consensus on providing help where it is so desperately needed, relieving pressure on the Mediterranean countries.”

Annette:

To me it is clear that the solidarity of the refugee crisis supersedes traditional channels, charities and campaign groups. All over, people attending the protest were demonstrating against a more general issue with borders, nationality and migration, as demonstrated by chants like

“Unemployment and inflation, are not caused by immigration – Bullshit – Come off it – The enemy is profit”

“One solution – Revolution!”

“No borders – No nations – No deportations!”

“If they won’t give us justice, then we won’t give them peace!”

For example, I was marching with Sisters Uncut, a direct action group focused on preventing the closure of domestic violence services, who also have been involved in the Yarl’s Wood women’s detention centre **protests**. The link between the state and violence against women extends to migrants and refugees from the difficulty in acquiring asylum seeker status for **LBT women**, the torturous conditions of detention centres that imprison women who are fleeing from violence in their respective home countries, to the reality they face when they are living in the UK, with uncertainty regarding entitlement to long-term stay, family reunions and welfare benefit. The



issue between the tory cuts to domestic violence shelters are **impacting migrant women** in particular, as such shelters and refuges are often dependent on their users to be receiving benefits in order to financially be able to protect them.

Thus, as one of the protesters in the Sisters Uncut says in an **interview** last week:

it is positive that there does seem to have been a shift in consciousness but it should not take a picture of a dead child for people to be moved into action. People have been dying on borders for centuries and Britain has benefited from moving capital and business all around the world. We are in protest against that glaring hypocrisy too. People just want to live and survive across these racist borders.



Julia:

While many politicians and bureaucrats would have us believe in the permanence and strength of borders, they do not apply to everyone equally. The act of closing borders to refugees seems a reflection of global coloniality at work.

I'm a Canadian student in the UK, with a visa that permits me to live, work (a limited number of hours), and study at the LSE, where there are **over 7000** international students. In fact, it appears that there are more international students at the LSE than there are currently **Syrian refugees in the UK**, although the UK has pledged to accept **20 000 over the next 5 years**. The privilege of being an international student in the UK attests to the malleability, or perhaps immateriality, of borders; it reaffirms that some migrants – but not those refugees fleeing for their lives – are more permissible than others.

Canadians head to the federal voting booths on October 19th. Not surprisingly, the issue of refugees has become an important issue in election campaigns and debates. The photograph of a Syrian toddler who had washed ashore circulated the globe via news and social media, drawing an emotional response around the world; Canadian news agencies focused on the fact that **the toddler's family was hoping to seek asylum in Canada**. Like in the UK, **Canadians have also demonstrated** in rallies across the country challenging Harper's government's lacklustre response vis-à-vis the Syrian refugee crisis.

Interestingly, this is the same government that has **cut funding to key women's groups in Canada, slashed Status of Women**, and has dodged the endemic issue of **missing and murdered Aboriginal women** by refusing to launch a federal inquiry into these deaths and disappearances. Perhaps borders exist within settler Canada itself, which separate liveability and lives that matter from those that do not. Borders not only limit and control the access of some people to certain spaces, but also act to silence issues that call into question the status quo. This too is entrenched in global relations of coloniality, and is also reflected in Canada's foreign policy pertaining to refugees and asylum seekers.

During the #RefugeesWelcomeHere march, I marched alongside many different groups, from different political and activist affiliations. Banners reading slogans like "Tories Out, Refugees In" seemed to parallel some of the discontent that has been expressed across Canada. In addition, many anti-austerity groups, including the **Student Assembly Against Austerity**, participated in the march. Ultimately, the issues seem to come down to broader, political, systemic and structural problems that exist across the world.



Yet despite all this, Stephen Harper's Conservatives seem to be faring better than expected in **recent polls** on the Syrian refugee crisis; Canada's Conservative base seems more determined to "protect" borders. This bears remarkable similarity to the right-wing politics of David Cameron's Tory government. Looking ahead to the Canadian elections, it remains a pivotal moment to challenge and break down the borders that other, that isolate, and that are governed by hatred, racism and coloniality.

Conclusion

As Gloria Anzaldúa has taught us, the politics of borders go beyond the mere institution of invisible and visible national borders. Borders are constructed through and of our identities, as gendered, queer, racialised, nationalised human and non-human beings. The protesting of border makers and of borders themselves are important for the immediate relief it can give those who flee political violence. Other borders include those set between who is recognised as a 'refugee' and an economic 'migrant', borders that render certain subjects permissible only when their vulnerability trigger the impulses of western, white saviourism. A holistic approach to protesting the borders that control our minds, actions and politics of everyday life – whether we are in physical places of violence or at mitigated peace – disrupts and troubles the "Borders [that] are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them" (Anzaldúa 1987).

Annette Behrens is in her second year working on an LSE funded doctorate at the Gender Institute. She uses anarchist, intersectional and feminist theory to explore and conceptualise the gendered imaginary of prefigurative politics. Annette's further research interests include epistemology, political ideologies, radical democracy, transnational feminism(s), post-anarchism, queer and affect theory.

Julia Hartviksen's doctoral project explores the materiality of femicide and other forms of violence against women in Guatemala's Northern Transversal Strip. Her research interests include critical feminist political economy, feminist international relations, violence against women, feminist historical materialism, extractivism, and masculinities. She holds a Doctoral Fellowship from the SSHRC Canada and a LSE PhD Studentship, and is a Visiting Researcher at the Women's Institute of the University of San Carlos, Guatemala City.

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