

# Disrupted

The Migration Issue

*The  
Winter  
2019  
Issue*



# A big thanks.

## Editor-in-Chief

Katie Washington

## Design

Marissa Conway

## Editors

Jennifer Brough / Charlie Gorham / Carina Minami / Marianne Roaldi / Louise Scarce

## Article Contributions

Najwa Abukhater / Dr. Christine Agius / Nafeesah Allen / Dr. Sally Clark / Dr. Natalie Hudson / Aleksandra Kusnierkiewicz / Laurie Lijnders / Mary McLoughlin / Dr. Anwar Mhajne / Maxine Mueller / Rachel Popik / John Trajer

## Art Contributions

Julie Audouard / Carmela Caldart / Christina Claes / Susanne Greven / Taylor Miller / Opeyemi Owa / Gabrielle Rocha Rios / Patricia Santos / Vidushi Yadav / Elvia Vasconcelos / Gloria Sophie Wille

## Poetry Contributions

Idreas Khandy / Robin Ladwig / Alice Merry / Byul Ryan-Im

## Cover Art

Gloria Sophie Wille / Amphitrite: It's all white, Ma (I'm only bleeding)

The name of the dress "Amphitrite" derives from the Greek Goddess of the Sea as well as the oldest sea going yacht, now under UK and German flag, with the same name. The subtitle „It's all white, Ma (I'm only bleeding)“ is an allusion to the Bob Dylan song „It's alright, Ma (I'm only bleeding)“. Through distorting the title of the song by onomatopoeically mocking the German accent, it is diving into the effect of „whiteness“ in the foreign policy of Germany and the EU. The orange triangle/flag in the background is a tribute to the rescue ship „Aquarius 2“, chartered by the private NGOs SOS Méditerranée and Doctors Without Borders. The knitted dress „Amphitrite – It's all white, Ma (I'm only bleeding)“ is a satirical almost cynical view on Europe's foreign policy, especially regarding the distress rescue on the Mediterranean Sea. It is a hand knit/crochet piece with over 1.500 hand embroidered pearls and beads – each one representing a human being who died in the Mediterranean Sea, seeking refuge in the EU during the summer of 2018.

The project itself drew from the feeling of powerlessness facing the foreign policy of the EU and the hope for change through the upcoming elections in 2019. Parts of it were also the feeling of numbness towards the screaming voices of hatred on Social Media this summer and the question to myself: Is human empathy a dying tree and my longing for global female solidarity just a drop in the ocean?

# About us.

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Originally founded in the UK in 2016, CFFP is a research and advocacy organisation dedicated to making foreign policy more transparent, more democratic, and more feminist.

## *our story*

Originally founded in the UK in 2016, The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP) is a research and advocacy organisation dedicated to making foreign policy more transparent, more democratic, and more feminist.

Disrupted is biannual print journal published by CFFP UK which aims to provide a space for disruptive feminist conversations around a wide variety of themes under the foreign policy umbrella. We value both emerging and established voices and use a variety of mediums to shake up the foreign policy status quo.

## *our mission & vision*

Our mission is to promote a people centred foreign policy. And our vision? To see a intersectional feminist framework adopted in foreign policy, globally.

# Letter from the Editor-in-Chief.

*Katie Washington*

*Issue  
no. 3*

"For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realise, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy—a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect."

(Jhumpa Lahiri in: *The Namesake*, 2003).

The aim of this journal is to disrupt mainstream foreign policy. Through highlighting both experienced and emerging voices from across the globe, we seek to understand, challenge, and critique foreign policy.

This issue focuses on the theme of Immigration, Refugees & Trafficking, which was chosen by our members and supporters. Our contributors challenge the problematic, and often racist, Western-centric approaches to immigration, refugees, and trafficking, and unpack the complex connections between gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality that are embedded in the lived realities of the people impacted directly and heavy-handedly by current foreign policy on the issue. It brings together the voices of academics, practitioners, students, and individuals who are currently living in "perpetual wait" waiting for asylum claims to be formalised. Alongside our written contributions, you will find artwork and poetry engaging with this theme. A feminist foreign policy brings all voices to the table, through whichever medium they choose to express themselves, challenging the academic and un-inclusive paradigm it is embedded in. However, the views and opinions expressed in this issue represent the respective contributors and not CFFP as an organisation; our goal is simply providing a platform for those voices, particularly those that have previously been marginalised, for open discussion and debate.

After much consideration, we have recently made several changes to *Disrupted*, namely transitioning from a print-journal to a digital journal. You will still be able to purchase copies of the journal at our events, but to improve accessibility, we have decided to manage *Disrupted* primarily online. This means that we can focus our efforts on reaching more people, readers and contributors, and ensuring we are providing a much-needed feminist critique to foreign policy.

Thank you for supporting this publication. *Disrupted* is a volunteer-run CFFP UK project and in alignment with our overarching organisational goals, we are proud to lead the way in making foreign policy more feminist, more transparent, and more intersectional. With your support, we're amplifying a different and more nuanced conversation that can better inform policy decisions and begin to alleviate global inequality.

We hope you enjoy and learn from this journal, but we also urge you to consider contributing to our next issue. From articles to artwork, we are always looking for new contributors and we are eager to hear (and see) new voices and fresh perspectives.

**Katie Washington**  
Disrupted Editor-in-Chief



# In this issue.

- 07** **Is it worth it?**  
*Najwa Abukhater*
- 11** **Border Practices, Gender, and Australia's Approach to Asylum**  
*Dr. Christine Agius and Dr. Sally Clark*
- 18** **The (Indian Diaspora) Female Search for Love: Black Feminist Theory as a Paradigm to Deconstruct the Importance of Romantic Love in the Domestic Lives of Women of Colour Abroad**  
*Nafeesah Allen*
- 24** **Move to Babylon**  
*Alice Merry*
- 25** **Forced Migration, Human Trafficking, and the Issue of Consent: What Role for a Feminist Foreign Policy?**  
*John Trajer*
- 32** **Violent Connections and Gendered Harms: A Feminist Analysis of 'Israel's' Asylum Regime**  
*Laurie Ljinders*
- 41** **More than Wool**  
*Idreas Khandy*
- 43** **Resistance and Relationships at the US-Mexico Border: Reconceptualising Power and Security in U.S.A. Policy**  
*Mary McLoughlin and Dr. Natalie Hudson*
- 49** **An Ode to Former Livers**  
*Byul Ryan-Im*
- 52** **Deconstructing Western Solutions to Sexual and Gender Based Violence of Protracted Refugees**  
*Rachel Popik*
- 58** **LGBTQ Refugees from Syria: A Catch 22**  
*Anwar Mhajne*
- 65** **Learning to be Queer: Queer Refugees and the Burden of Proof: How Asylum Processing Hierarchises Sexual Experiences and Construes a Limited Concept of 'Legitimate' Queer Identity**  
*Aleksandra Kusnierkiewicz*
- 71** **A Platform for the Unheard Voices**  
*Hanna Maxine Mueller*
- 75** **Disruption**  
*Robin Ladwig*



# Is it worth it?

by Najwa Abukhater

*Najwa Abukhater is a refugee from Palestine. She has been living in Europe for two years as a refugee, waiting for her claim to asylum to be finalised. Back in Palestine, she worked as a teacher and a translator, and volunteered with women's organisations. She wrote this piece as a way of articulating her frustration with the asylum process and the ways refugees and migrants are treated in Europe. It is her first time writing in English and sharing her experiences with a general audience. The accompanying illustration was created by Elvia Vasconcelos, who worked with Najwa to visually accompany her article.*

**The 7th July 2018 marked the first anniversary of my stay in the Red Cross Centre of Eupen, Belgium.** After a sarcastic "happy anniversary" remark, I was asked "is it all worth it?". The question didn't take me by surprise, but my immediate reply – a quick "no" – did. It woke me up from the trance I'd been living in, kept me thinking for days, and encouraged me to open my mind to the other refugees I had been living with for a year without knowing much about their lives. In the following days, I repeated the same question in my interaction with others in the Centre, receiving, more than often, a variation the same answer. This led me to thinking there was some kind of a pattern or a connection, an element that's creating this common feeling or a shared opinion, that no, it is not "all worth it".

I decided that my answer was probably a result of having it easy – I didn't have a harsh or a dangerous journey to Europe. But what about the others? What about the thousands of refugees who crossed deserts, seas, forests and mountains to reach "the safe haven, the warm heart of the enlightened, humane, civilised world"? Why did so many of the refugees within the Centre give a similar answer to mine?

It didn't occur to me when I first encountered this question that I would encounter stories, which

would become a part of my own journey, a journey of discovery, opening a small window to look at the world from a new perspective and through the eyes of people who have seen so much, lost so much, but still, for some reason, keep holding on.

### **The life of a refugee**

Living in a refugee centre was one of the hardest experiences I've faced in my entire life; it has successfully taken so much away from me: My dignity, hope, strength, independence – but it has also given me a valuable lesson in life: a new insight into a multi-layered system based on prejudice, control, discrimination and degradation of minority groups. A system, practiced within most of the institutions related to the asylum procedures; hiding under the umbrella of the free and humane European system. A revelation that contradicted and abolished all I knew and learned about Europe, along with my hopes of finding my freedom and a better life here.

The conditions and daily routine in most refugee centres are similar, but here I will share my personal experience in the past year and a half. During this time, I lived in a small room, cramped beyond its capacity, while enduring long and complicated legal procedures, facing deprivation of my basic human rights like dignity or privacy, and under the constant surveillance to ensure I followed the rules that are only being applied to keep refugees contained until a decision of acceptance or denial has been made.

I felt that I had no purpose in life but to wait for the divine answer "positive", while being crushed over and over again by the "negative", before the decision makers decide to take pity on my situation, and give me a way out of this degrading situation I've been thrown into for committing the crime of being from a war-zone, and for daring to dream of a better life and a brighter future.

Being treated not even as a second-class citizen, more like a non-citizen at all. No permission to work to provide for myself, no permission to study until I receive the legal documents that recognise my acceptance into the system. For one year and a half I've been watching my independence and freedom seeping out of my hands, because I've been forced to depend on the state-aid and then became subject to condemnation for being a burden.

Month after month, year after year, all we are allowed to do is watch the world and everything in it move forward while we're in a catatonic state of body and mind, turning into lifeless, aimless and dreamless objects, because all we're supposed to do each day is eat, sleep, wake up the next morning to eat again and then sleep or not sleep and keep waiting for the answer.



### **Is there a place for the rogue ones?**

When I sit in my room at night, my imagination spins out of control. I pretend that I'm a rebel, someone who dares to break the rules. In this dream, I'm different, I don't just sleep and eat, I do other things to pass the time, to be productive. But, the reality is; I'm just like everyone else stuck in the asylum system, just waiting for the answer; the day I dream of: being accepted into the outside world, being recognised legal, being treated like a citizen, a former-refugee, integrated and civilised.

I've heard stories of rebels, the real rogue ones, the ones who live and work outside the reach of the law. People who have been denied a refugee status in Europe, but still had the courage to escape the hand of the system and live illegally without any documents. I was still new to Europe when I started learning about the means of survival, so the existence of such defiant people in this kind of system wasn't easy to comprehend. Then I met one of them, I heard his story and the stories of others like him.

When I asked him: "Is it worth it?" the answer was "yes, I'm free". This answer came from someone enduring harsh living conditions, long, merciless and poorly paid working hours, lack of access to medical care due to the non-existing documents, no work insurance, on top of all that living in fear of being caught police, or immigration authorities. So what kind of freedom was he talking about? These people don't have it easy, but living outside the perimeters of the state control seems to give them a kind of freedom to be envied, helps them to take agency in own lives and futures. They don't care about papers or documents, being legal isn't a concern for them anymore. They managed to break free of the mental prison of waiting and control.

### **Why did we leave home?**

Every refugee has a story and a reason for fleeing their country. What binds all these stories together is a weight, a heaviness that keeps building up inside us, building up walls and prisons of anger, fear, weakness, deprivation. We escape eventually from the geographical borders of our countries, enduring deadly journeys and facing the unknown, not knowing all the way that we're actually carrying our prisons inside of us.

The freedom the man referred to was freedom from the inner demons and prisons of the past as well as from the mental and physical control of governmental systems. I haven't managed to obtain this kind of freedom yet because I'm still carrying my demons within me, I haven't yet let go of my past and its horrors. Once I do, breaking free of the state control will be an easy task.





IS IT WORTH IT?

MAJORITY REJECTED GETS

ASYLUM APPLICATION NO 11111111 EYES [ ] NO

LEAVE or GO TO PRISON

FARA FROM GAMBIA 5 YEARS

MAYA FROM SYRIA 6 YEARS

BASHIRA FROM AFGHANISTAN 6 YEARS

NAJWA FROM PALESTINE 2 YEARS

ERGI FROM ALBANIA 10 YEARS

DAVID FROM SENEGAL 7 YEARS

SAMIR FROM ERITREA 5 YEARS

TEODORA FROM SERBIA 7 YEARS

ASHA FROM SOMALIA 7 YEARS



# Border Practices, Gender, and Australia's Approach to Asylum

*by Dr. Christine Agius and Dr. Sally Clark*

**In assessing its two-year term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (2013-14), Australia highlighted the protection of women in conflict and promotion of women in peacebuilding as part of its achievements (Australian Government, 2015).** Despite this, Australia continued to pursue foreign policy objectives at odds with the protection of women by its pursuit of punitive asylum seeker policies. Australia's human rights record with regard to asylum has been widely criticised by international organisations such as the UN, peak medical associations, and human rights activists, including the impact of its asylum regime on women and children, who have been subjected to mental, physical and sexual abuse (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2017). In this article, we examine the gendered impact of Australia's asylum policy in two ways: first, by highlighting the incoherence between this policy and Australia's claims to protect women and children, and second, how Australia's border practices reflect gendered ideas of security and sovereignty. We then consider how a feminist foreign policy can account for, and challenge, the hidden gendered outcomes of forced migration and state practices.

## **Exporting the border and fracturing rights**

Like other states of the Global North, Australia has pursued aggressive border security policies designed to stop potential asylum seekers before they reach the border. This strategy has been at the forefront of Australia's approach to asylum since 2001 when Prime Minister John Howard's Liberal-National Coalition government instituted a collection of legislative measures known as the 'Pacific Solution' in response to the Tampa crisis. The 'Pacific Solution' externalised asylum by denying asylum seekers physical access to the Australian territory through a variety of measures. These measures included the excision of external territories from Australia's migration zone, primarily Ashmore Reef and Christmas Island. Additionally, under Operation Relex, navy personnel intercepted boats carrying

asylum seekers in international waters. Significantly, offshore processing was introduced, where asylum seekers were intercepted and transferred to remote detention centres located on the 'declared countries' of Nauru, and Manus Island, PNG, for refugee status determination (RSD). By denying access to the Australian mainland and instead conducting the processing of asylum applications in these locations, the government was effectively able to classify individuals as 'offshore entry persons.' This removed any legal responsibility for their future resettlement in Australia (Karlsen, 2010, 14-15) whilst undermining procedural safeguards in both the Refugee Convention and in Australia's domestic law. In 2008, the Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's government dismantled some of the more unpalatable aspects of the Pacific Solution (such as removing children from detention and placed those on Temporary Protection Visas on to bridging visas). He kept the excised borders, with Christmas Island still in operation as a site of offshore detention. Under pressure due to the increase in the number of boat arrivals in 2010, the Labor government resorted to increasingly punitive measures. In 2012, under the guise of 'saving lives at sea', Labor's Prime Minister Julia Gillard revived the Pacific Solution, removed the entire Australian mainland from the migration zone, and unsuccessfully tried to strike bilateral deals with East-Timor and Malaysia for processing and resettlement. Rudd, after ousting Gillard as Labor leader, then reopened centres on PNG in 2013 and refused resettlement for boat arrivals. Most significantly, Tony Abbott contested the 2013 election on a platform to 'stop the boats', and, when elected, quickly established Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB), a militarised response to border protection. OSB removed all resettlement rights, instituted a boat turn back, and created the Australian Border Force, which combined Australian Customs and Border Protection Service with immigration.

### **Gendered impacts: how gender underwrites Australia's asylum policy**

The human rights impact on those asylum seekers detained offshore has been widely charted, despite efforts to ensure secrecy and silence. Whilst the humanitarian consequences of such practices are broadly known, there has been little consideration of how such policies produce experiences that are differentiated by important signifiers such as race, class, sexuality or gender. Women who are caught up in exclusionary mechanisms and non-arrival regimes are subject to an array of abuses that are both common to forced migrants and unique to their status as women. In these liminal spaces where asylum seekers must wait, suspended without rights or status, violence is a common occurrence. Previous scholarship has tended to view these experiences from the standpoint of a universal, undifferentiated 'male' subject. When women are included in such narratives it is often only through their familial connections as mothers of detained children (Rivas & Bull, 2018: 309). Research demonstrates that whilst both men and women become much more vulnerable in transit, women



appear at greater risk of opportunistic as well as systematic gender-based violence in these spaces (Mountz, 2011; Gerard & Pickering, 2012). In many accounts, abuse is perpetrated by state officials such as border guards, customs officers, law enforcement, or adjacent migration agents, service providers, detention centre operators, aid workers, or other asylum seekers. Those entrusted to protect often abuse or permit abuse; private security company Wilson Security, for example, which was contracted to protect asylum seekers on Nauru and Manus Island, failed to disclose around 16 cases of child abuse and sexual violence to the Australian Parliament (The Guardian, 2016b). In 2016, The Guardian published the Nauru Files, in an attempt to account for and give visibility to over 2,000 cases of sexual abuse, torture, self-harm, child abuse, assaults, and hunger strikes at detention facilities in Nauru between 2013-15 (The Guardian, 2016a). The UN Special Rapporteur of the human rights of migrants, François Crépeau, (alongside many others) critiqued Australia's offshore detention as cruel, punitive and unlawful (The Guardian, 2017).

The very policies and conditions that make violence and abuse possible require greater attention to bordering practices and gendered ideas of the state. This extends to the national discourse around asylum seekers, ready associations with threats to the border, and the need for a 'tough' response. This was articulated by Howard in 2001 who declared: "We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come" (Howard, 2001). Control of the border has been interpreted in militarised terms, especially under OSB, and efforts to outsource asylum processing speaks to a gendered understanding of the state and sovereign practices. Australia has relied on private security companies to do much of the policing work and control detainees in regional sites that it has made deals with. The power imbalance here is significant to note, especially in the 2014 deal to relocate refugees to Cambodia, a poor nation which cannot guarantee human rights (Amnesty International, 2014; Clark, 2018). Australia also uses offshoring and outsourcing to avoid direct responsibility for abuses, which can be blamed on the governments and organisations that manage the sites. These add up to masculinised forms of statecraft, protection of borders, and regional hierarchies (Agius, 2018: 81).

### **Can a feminist-inspired foreign policy work?**

A feminist-inspired approach to foreign policy might inform ways of redressing not only the impact on women but the ways in which asylum policy can be enacted in terms that are less masculinised. However, the disconnect between seeking to protect women and enacting policies that undermine those forms of protection requires more than resources, representation, and rights, which are the central tenets of Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2018). Such

goals can be contradicted, for instance, when Sweden hardened its migration policy in the wake of the so-called European 'migrant crisis' in 2016 or continues to sell arms to countries like Saudi Arabia (Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, 2016).

A feminist approach would seek to address the underlying conditions of inequality and insecurity that produce the problem in the first place. This includes a more comprehensive effort to address international violence and insecurity, which is one of the major reasons why people risk their lives fleeing to other countries for safety. Whilst this is easy to identify, it also demands a more complex approach to how we understand the relationship between sovereignty, borders, power, rights, and international relations. The Australian case demonstrates that gendered ideas of statehood play out in overtly masculinised forms – the hard, militarised protection of the border, offshoring, outsourcing, and exerting power in the region, and the need to appear 'tough' in order to protect 'vulnerable' borders is inspired by a gendered view of international politics. Australia's approach engenders a purposeful fragmentation and dislocation of rights and responsibilities. A feminist perspective would work some way towards rethinking the way in which such binary understandings of the world structure human relations and rights, but more importantly, reconfigure them towards different priorities. For Australia to justify its commitment to protecting women, it must be more attuned to the gendered implications of its policies and the unique consequences that it has on women displaced by conflict and violence. Key recommendations should focus on aid (which has been cut and also used towards asylum processing), conflict prevention, rethinking its current goal to be a major arms exporter (Australian Government, 2018), and adherence to commitments to human rights and international law, which have taken second place to Australian insecurities.

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# The (Indian Diaspora) Female Search for Love: Black Feminist Theory as a Paradigm to Deconstruct the Importance of Romantic Love in the Domestic Lives of Women of Colour Abroad

*by Nafeesah Allen*

*This piece is adapted from an unpublished post graduate research thesis entitled “Narratives of Women of the Indian Diaspora: Case Study of Identity Formation in women of the Indian Diaspora” for Indira Gandhi National Open University. Pseudonyms are used for all respondents. (Allen, 2013).*

**In 2013, I interviewed eleven women of Indian origin, born in six different countries, now living in seven.** They represented various generations of emigration, as well as different ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. We talked about their relationships with their Indian heritage, as well the customs and traditions practiced in their new homes. Conversations about home quickly became conversations about love – familial and romantic. All verbalised anxiety about whether or not she was “Indian enough” to be loved. In other words, each doubted she could mimic performative aspects of her particular ancestry authentically enough to gain approval from family and romantic partners. bell hooks’ 2002 text “Communion: The Female Search for Love,” is a useful paradigm to analyse the concerns they expressed and to understand how women of the Indian diaspora construct their ethnic identity around romantic love. hooks’ work offers insights into why women of colour and marginalised women everywhere grapple with their identity when asking who they can love and with whom they can share a life. hooks, as a pillar of Black feminist literature, opened the door for postcolonial and third wave feminism, paradigms that table conversations about women in power to seriously consider

domestic life and love. hooks' text is useful here, because it deconstructs the tensions within interviewees' own narratives about both the complicit role women play as amplifiers of traditional patriarchal culture and their empowering role as change agents in modernising societies. This framework so clearly applies to the experiences of the women in this study that I would argue that policy makers and scholars need to take seriously the importance of love and the domestic lives of people in transit to better improve social integration, assimilation, and national belonging among diaspora communities.

**“We learn in childhood that the roots of love lie outside our capabilities, that to know love we must be loved by others. For as females in patriarchal culture, we cannot determine our self-worth. Our value, our worth, and whether or not we can be loved are always determined by someone else. Deprived of the means to generate self-love, we look to others to render us lovable; we long for love and we search.” (hooks, 2002: xvi).**

Since childhood, the expectation, the idea, and the experience of amorous relationships triggered questions about respondents' ability to conform to gender roles expected in her specific Indian diaspora community. From a very young age, respondents remember being taught about the importance of marriage and their parents' expectations on the subject. Kiran, who was born in Kerala and raised in New York City, said “Every day, my parents would impose the Indian identity, which is you're not a complete woman unless you're married and have children”. Similarly, Maria, the French-born daughter of parents from Pondicherry said, “My mom, she was pushing me to have an Indian wedding. Very early, when I was a teenager, I told her that it would never happen”. Kiran's attempts to actualise and Maria's attempts to rebel against parental ideals of romantic love were met with disillusionment from suitors and relatives but were key to their own narratives of self-discovery.

**“There was an emotional cost to not fitting in.” (hooks, 2002:29).**

Jamaican-born Preeti self-identified as a “coolie.”<sup>1</sup> The term is used in the English-speaking Caribbean as a racial slur, but Preeti used it to proudly acknowledge she is the descendant of indentured labourers. She was once invited to a dinner date by an Indian-origin man. When she arrived, his parents would not shake her hand and whispered about her. Then, her suitor said, “This won't work, because you're not pure. So, you have to leave'... And he said, 'I don't know how to delineate a pure Indian from a light-skinned Indian.' And I [Preeti] was very hurt. I was very, very hurt and I said to him, 'how does [your mother] know?' And he said 'well, mixed-Indians tend to look more Hispanic than

Indian”.

Since then, Preeti feared that the gap between her humble Indian origins and the elite origins valued in Jamaica would bode poorly for a happy marriage. She resigned, “God, Himself, would have to come down and say, ‘You need to go find an Indian man, because that’s who you are going to marry.’ And it’s not because I don’t think they are suitable...I don’t want to have to worry that my children are not going to know their grandparents, because of me”.

**“Liberated women did not “fall in love,” we chose to love – that was different from falling in love. Choosing meant that we exercised will, power, and agency. Falling implied a loss of power, the possibility of victimhood.” (hooks, 2002: 37).**

Kiran, Richaa, Shanta, and Ravina married men of Indian origin. The latter two were still married at the time of interview. These women had the agency to choose their partners. Each did so out of romantic love – not obligation. Speaking with Trinidadian-born Richaa, for example, I got the sense that her marriage to a Delhi-boy also made her feel culturally validated; her marriage was proof that she was “Indian enough”, Living out Preeti’s fears, however, Richaa said her mother-in-law thought her son should have married someone else entirely. Richaa was too dark-skinned and not “Indian enough” for her in-laws. She had grown up in the Arya Samaj tradition, reciting prayers and performing rituals that, in India, were exclusively for men. Though she lived in New Delhi with her husband, she did not give up her Trinidadian religious practices and that presented insurmountable challenges for her, now defunct, marriage.

**“Men do not wound women only when they act violently and abusively. They wound us when they fail to protect our freedom in every aspect of our daily lives.” (hooks, 2002: 72).**

Shanta’s disputes with her mother-in-law began when Shanta and her husband moved from New Delhi to Luxembourg. Her in-laws enforced Indian traditions through harassing phone calls and unexpected visits. Shanta’s husband became violent.

*My husband is a bit of an angry man. I don't blame it on him. Maybe it's because his mother is also a bit strong, angry. I started to go against the control my in-laws tried to have over me. Things worsened and worsened, and one day we had a bad incident when my husband raised hand on me... I was not really ready to tolerate that. I called the police... I am sure that it was just in a bout of anger that he did it...*



*That is not acceptable from a man who understands the importance of independence and respect of a woman. He, himself, knows it. He has a sister. Leave his sister, he has his own values.*

Had Shanta lived in India, she might not have called the police. But, abroad, Shanta was empowered to fight against pseudo-traditions that she felt threatened her husband's love and jeopardised her own safety. Her reporting to the police stood defiantly in the face of the silent prevalence of domestic violence within South Asian communities abroad.

**“Part of the process of becoming a feminist was to critique and change our sexist ways of seeing one another. Sisterhood wasn't just about what we shared in common – things like periods, obsessive concern with our looks, or bitching about men – it was about women learning how to care for one another and be in solidarity, not just when we have complaints or when we feel victimized.” (hooks, 2002:130)**

All eleven narratives show that women of the Indian diaspora often experience a clash of national and social identity, particularly around the idea of courtship and marriage; not to mention the familial approval both entail. Through experimenting with amorous partnerships, each underwent a process of socialisation – defined as a process through which people are made to take on the ideas and behaviours appropriate to life in a particular society (Indira Gandhi National Open University, 2009: 50). While some relationships persisted out of love, I would argue that, among the women in this study, marriages persisted as long as the women's quest for cultural validation persisted. Despite being liberated economically, many were trapped by fear of being alone in a foreign country or stigma of being divorced in their diaspora community, or in India.

Whilst much has been written about Indian women's experience as subject to patriarchy, little literature has sought to find the parallels between such experiences and that of, say, asylum seekers, African-American women, and indigenous women – who also struggle to understand their multiple identities in societies that largely subjugate or ignore them. There is a thread of solidarity that connects these experiences. Where immigrant and diaspora women, perhaps, where immigrant and diaspora women, perhaps, have had limited access to analytical tools that discuss their roles in adoptive spaces, native minority women usually have developed paradigms to critique the tension. Black feminism, post-colonial feminism, and even third wave feminism all serve as well-established roadmaps to investigate the intersectionality of identity and gender in a globalized world.

In conclusion, where foreign policy advocates for political power as a tool for women's empowerment, well-researched paradigms from the social sciences could offer more pragmatic pathways to transformative change in women's private, domestic lives. Anyone hoping to propose better processes of inclusion and empowerment among women would do well to understand how women's sphere of influence defines and distributes love.

1. According to Merriam Webster, the term "coolie" refers to an unskilled labourer or porter usually in or from the Far East hired for low or subsistence wages. (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/coolie>) The term is considered derogatory when said by a non-Asian origin person to a person of Asian origin. The term is sometimes considered a term of fraternal endearment when said between peoples of Asian origin.

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Don't  
pretend  
to ignore.



# Move To Babylon

by Alice Merry

Why did you move to Babylon?

- For glory
- For glamour
- For gluttony and/or greed

To make a living from these glitter-topped streets.  
To multiply tongues over tongues!

Please select your family status:

- Sweet, like figs and honey
- Rough, like popcorn and money
- Long, like fingernails and sun beams

Any special dietary needs:

- The moment at the start of a good day when you forget to look in the mirror
- The moment at the end of a yesterday when your house rests waiting
- The moment at the end of a sad day when you curl up like a: seed in its shell,

a banana in its skin.

Plans to leave:

- Once in a deep blue moon
- Tongue tired of towers
- I'll trace back: shoelaces and plastic spoons.



# Forced Migration, Human Trafficking, and the Issue of Consent: What Role for a Feminist Foreign Policy?

*by John Trajer*

**The global migration debate hinges on questions of labelling and categorisation.** Regardless of whether this debate is conducted in public, political, or judicial settings, it is deemed imperative to distinguish between border-crossers as eligible or ineligible claimants of state protection and assistance. This formulation often finds expression in a number of mutually-exclusive dichotomies – ‘bogus’ vs. ‘legitimate’ asylum-seekers, trafficked vs. smuggled persons, forced vs. voluntary migrants. This contribution raises the contention that these oppositional relationships between supposedly deserving and undeserving migrants in the context of cross-border mobility ultimately rests on the perception of movement as coerced or consensual. Where the irregular (smuggled) migrant is understood to cross borders entirely of their own volition, the refugee is compelled to travel to escape harm in their country of origin, while the trafficked victim is understood to have been transported against their will for the purposes of her eventual exploitation in the country of destination. As this paper will demonstrate, the construction of women migrants as forced or non-consenting in their mobility has perverse effects on their access to state protection and assistance, particularly in the context of human trafficking.

While “international law does not recognise a general category of forced or involuntary migrant,” (Aleinikoff, 2003: 10) the international protection regime established by the 1951 Refugee Convention contains the most widely-recognised definition of a forced migrant in international law, and thus remains an important source of state obligations towards non-citizens claiming asylum on its territory. In addition to the restrictive scope of grounds covered by the 1951 Convention definition of a refugee,

women have historically been excluded from protection under this instrument when persecuted on account of their perceived gender. While refugee law has long been understood to poorly respond to the protection needs of women, the human trafficking legal framework inaugurated by the UN Trafficking Protocol (2000) offers an alternative definition of forced migration which purportedly privileges the safety of women and children. Trafficking is defined under this framework as a “deceptive and coercive process” of recruiting and transferring a non-consenting victim into exploitation (Stoyanova, 2017: 315). While feminist debates have concentrated on the controversial inclusion of the consent element and the question of whether women can legitimately consent to sex work (Elliott, 2014), this preoccupation with forced prostitution at the expense of a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between gender, trafficking and human rights has been instrumentalised by states to construct trafficked women as vulnerable and passive victims in relation to the law. The professed need to ‘rescue’ vulnerable women betrays “an oversimplified perception of victims” (Shin, 2017: 2-3), reflecting “a gender essentialism that fails to take into account multiple and contradictory subject positions” (Lansink, 2006: 51). Importantly, it has also legitimised the expansion of destination states’ criminal and immigration law apparatus to constrain the mobility of migrant women. This highlights “the potential for law to be complicit in reinforcing gender inequalities and in limiting migrant women’s agency” (Mullally, 2014: 175) while treating the mobility of trafficked women as a threat to their own well-being (rather than criminalising the act of exploitation itself). Such has justified a policy of “voluntary return and reintegration” to the country of origin at the expense of opportunities for victims to regularise their migration status in the host state (Anderson, 2014: 364).

The rest of this paper considers how feminist approaches can address this issue. Feminist rights-based theory has made significant progress in elucidating the relationship between gender and human rights violations and thus in addressing protection gaps for women as forced migrants (Pourmokhtari, 2015). The recognition of gender-based persecution in international human rights law (including when perpetrated by non-state actors) has facilitated access to refugee status and subsidiary forms of protection for women migrants, while the UNHCR Guidelines on Trafficking have played an important role in highlighting how trafficked women can qualify for refugee status under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Furthermore, where the trafficking regime established at the UN level deploys tools derived from criminal law to address trafficking as a transnational threat to state security and border control, feminist theory has been instrumental in transferring the referent of security to the trafficked woman (Lobasz, 2009). By advancing an understanding of women as victims of human rights violations both as a cause and consequence of trafficking (and thus going beyond an exclusive focus on forced prostitution), these approaches have helped develop increasingly gender-sensitive and victim-centred

trafficking instruments at the regional level.

Despite the progress made by feminist rights-based approaches, this author argues that they have nonetheless struggled to undermine the fundamental architecture of the trafficking legal framework that continues to hinge on the problematic opposition between consent and coercion, particularly in defining victims in opposition to ‘consenting’ (smuggled) migrants. In the context of human trafficking, the feminist split on “liberalist” and “paternalist” stances towards the capacity of women to consent to sex work overlooks other manners in which women are exploited and the root causes of their vulnerability to trafficking (Elliott, 2014: 8). Furthermore, it deflects attention from other issues deriving from the coercive definition of trafficking, namely how it excludes those who have migrated voluntarily and found themselves in exploitative situations in the host state, or those who have been subjected to forms of violence and abuse by smugglers who they have employed to facilitate their movement across borders.

By foregrounding the victimisation of trafficked women, feminist approaches can therefore risk reproducing “gendered notions of agency that frame men as actors and women as victims—those acted upon,” (Lobasz, 2009: 339) privileging the dominant perspectives advanced by the state-centric trafficking regime rather than advancing “a critical feminist politics concerned with constructing more inclusive legal responses that acknowledge the intricacies and diversity of women’s lives” (Carline & Pearson, 2007: 73). This creates issues of identification, where women migrants (often from the Global South) can only access assistance and avoid immediate deportation if they conform to pre-established stereotypes of passivity, “perform[ing] the real victim script” of the vulnerable, coerced, neo-colonial subject to pass as a credible victim rather than an irregular migrant (Serughetti, 2018: 28). In this sense, foregrounding the victimised status of trafficked women has not fully overcome the problem of gender essentialism identified in relation to the ‘rescue’ paradigm advanced by the UN Trafficking Protocol.

The final part of this paper makes the argument that a feminist foreign policy can more effectively address the consent issue detailed above, and thus respond to the inability of legal definitions to capture the nuances of female migrants’ experiences and agency. While states are unlikely to abandon the consent-derived definition of human trafficking (which has gained considerable traction in international and regional legal instruments), this author believes that gender-sensitive foreign policy approaches can address some of the structural factors underlying the migratory trends of women that are obscured by excessive engagement with the notions of coercion and forced migration, such as economic deprivation, gender inequalities, and more flagrant human rights abuses such as violence

against women. In recognising that trafficking across borders is often initiated on a voluntary basis (Lansink, 2006: 46), states can address many of the same ‘push factors’ that motivate women to migrate in the first place, whilst achieving the goal of reducing pressure on their immigration systems (Ruchti, 2017). Such a foreign policy approach must be complemented by addressing the ‘pull factors’ and domestic demand for the exploitation of women which underpin the whole operation of trafficking in women, namely unregulated forms of feminised labour (beyond sex work alone) grouped collectively under the term “commercialized intimacy” (Ruchti, 2017: 77).

Furthermore, in assessing current trafficking foreign policies from a feminist perspective, it is important to go beyond commentaries that have focused almost exclusively on US foreign policy and standard-setting under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (Moxley & Noyori-Corbett, 2016). More attention should be focused on advancing a feminist foreign policy in other key destination countries for trafficked women, as well as for key global actors in migration management, namely the European Union (EU). While a comprehensive analysis of the EU’s different counter-trafficking programmes and networks of cooperation is beyond the scope of this article, there is a need to acknowledge how the indiscriminate nature of EU extraterritorial border controls (Moreno-Lax, 2017) has a disproportionate impact on women’s experience of “transit” and increases the risk of exploitation, underlining the need for access to safe migration pathways for migrant women (Alison and Pickering, 2014). Furthermore, while certain instruments of cooperation between the EU and countries of origin for trafficking victims acknowledge the need for gender-sensitive approaches, these have given way to various modes of “coercive governance” through EU external counter-trafficking policies, where trafficking has been integrated into the criminal law-focused framework of the ‘fight’ against ‘illegal’ migration (Berman and Friesendorf, 2008). In sum, only through acknowledging the drivers underpinning the migratory trajectories of women and girls in foreign policy, rather than the ill-defined voluntary or coercive nature of their movement in the context of immigration, can destination states truly address issues of gender equality in relation to migration and tackle the root causes of the exploitation of migrant women.

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# WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE EXPATS WHILE OTHERS ARE IMMIGRANTS ?

We distinguish between "expats" and "immigrants" because expats move for just a temporary period of time but plan to return to their home countries. They don't aspire to citizenship of the state they've moved to.

This also applies to maids in the Gulf states, or in some cases to asylum seekers escaping a current war in their home country - yet you don't call them expats, do you?

Well, an expat must also be legally employed to live and work in the country where they are based.

This is also true for construction workers in Qatar, or all kinds of seasonal workers, and it still doesn't gain them the term expat. Why?

But expats aren't actually economic migrants - they just want to gain experience abroad, it's not a financial necessity.

Most of us who move overseas to work do so in hopes of bettering our lives - whether the draw is money or experience. So what is the difference *really*?

# COLONIALIST SEMANTICS

# Violent Connections and Gendered Harms: A Feminist Analysis of 'Israel's' Asylum Regime

*by Laurie Lijnders*

**In a world marked by feminist foreign policy, asylum policies would be based on feminist principles, critical of existing structures and categories and open to challenging and correcting historical injustices and inequalities.** Instead, around the world, governments have patriarchal, racist, capitalistic and militarised response to people seeking asylum. 'Israel'<sup>1</sup> is no different. Through exploring the everyday experiences of Eritrean women, this piece explores the relationships between gendered violence that affect women in contemporary border and asylum regimes, and their exposure to structural gendered violence in 'Israel'. Angela Davis urges us to explore connections among discourse, institutions, identities, and ideologies that are often considered separate (Davis, 2016: 104). Asylum harms in 'Israel' need to be understood through the inherent epistemic violence as a result of gender binaries in society at large (Davis, 2016: 105), global migration regimes and systemic social injustices and human rights violations deeply rooted in settler colonial history. This is evident in the occupation of Palestine, the illegal blockade of Gaza (Amnesty International, 2018a; Human Rights Watch, 2018a), forced evictions and demolitions of Bedouins and their homes (Amnesty International 2018b), the institutional discrimination of Ethiopian Jews and other minorities, violence against women, and labour rights abuses against foreign workers (Kavlaoved, 2018). 'Israel's' racist asylum regime of intentional hostility fits into the nationalist agenda to "contain" the border and control the country's demographics.

This piece draws upon my doctoral research and explores the biographical narratives of forty women from Eritrea from different ethnic, class, religious and educational backgrounds. Each of these women respond to violence and the everyday struggles for survival in their own way. Their personal experiences differ within, and are in response to, the larger social and political structures of power.



This paper also relies on extensive activism with refugee communities from Eritrea and Sudan in 'Israel' and the United Kingdom over the last eight years. In this piece, I focus on the experiences of women in relation to men, rather than looking exclusively at the experiences through a non-gendered lens with its tendency to lean towards the experiences of men. This choice allows for an expanded understanding of the existing hierarchies and complexities of the asylum system (cf. Davis, 2016: 105).

Women asylum seekers experience intersectional discrimination and violence in 'Israel' based on their gender, race, class and social status as asylum seekers. In this piece, I frame the 'Israeli' asylum regime as a form of violence and the settler colonial state as a "system of oppression" (cf. Abu-Assab and Nasser-Eddin 2018). Although the majority of asylum policies in 'Israel' are, in theory, gender-neutral, in practice their application is "filtered through a system of gendered relations of power and inequalities", which impacts women and men differently (Freedman, 2015: 138). Out of the 37,000 people from Eritrea and Sudan living in 'Israel', an estimated 7,000 are women (Drori-Avraham, 2016: 3; Kav Laoved, 2014: 3).

Since 2005, people from Eritrea and Sudan arrived in 'Israel' through non-authorized border points along its southern border with Egypt (Ravid, 2018). People seeking asylum have limited access to basic human rights under the Prevention of Infiltration Law (2013; 1954) and receive no support from the 'state'. Instead, they rely on community, faith support, services offered by grassroots movements such as the Eritrean Women's Community Centre (EWCC), and civil society organisations (Drori-Avraham, 2016). People experiencing the asylum system receive temporary protection from removal, renewable every month for several months. Women from Eritrea and Sudan, like men, have no access to health (Physicians for Human Rights Israel, 2018), and welfare services (Aid Organizations for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel, 2014).

Gendered violence, sometimes leading to femicide of Eritrean women, is the result of patriarchal structures in the Eritrean community. This is amplified by the radical ruptures from the everyday experienced in Eritrea and along the migration route, which is further compounded by distress and insecurity due to the asylum regime in 'Israel', facing a lack of access to welfare services or protection from institutionally racist police. In November 2018, twelve-year-old Eritrean girl Silvana Tsegai, was murdered by her mother's ex-boyfriend (Lee, 2018). Her death follows a dozen women killed by their partners since 2010. The Eritrean Women's Community Centre (EWCC) estimates that seventy percent of women from Eritrea in 'Israel' experience economic, sexual, verbal and physical violence. Patriarchal structures in society are reinforced by the asylum regime and play a role in shaping gender

relations within families and communities (cf. Abu-Assab and Nasser-Eddin, 2018). There is a connection between public violence of the asylum regime and private violence experienced by women in the domestic sphere, such as intimate partner violence and femicide (cf. Davis, 2016: 106). Many women, due to a lack of rights and support in the settler colonial 'state', turn to men in search of support and protection from men in their communities. The lack of available support for asylum seekers in 'Israel' sees many women remain in abusive relationships.

The structural violence and oppression inherent in the 'Israeli' asylum system and bordering practices exacerbates the harms women experience before and during their migration processes. In Eritrea, women experience various forms of persecution, human rights abuses, and sexual violence in the military and society at large (Baillit, 2007, Human Rights Watch, 2018b). Along the route to seek asylum, many women are faced with human trafficking, torture, sexual violence, extortion, and imprisonment (Lijnders and Robinson 2013; Reisen, Estefanos, and Rijken 2012). Sexual violence shape women's present lives, affecting how they remake their world (Scarry 1985) and how they experience a racist asylum regime and relations with partners, children and the wider community. While a small number of women have been recognised as survivors of human trafficking upon seeking asylum(?), the majority receive no state support for violence experienced before or during their migration to 'Israel' and the ongoing structural violence.

'Israel's' ever-changing policies of indefinite detention and "self-deportation" of single men to third countries such as Uganda, Rwanda, or home countries Eritrea and Sudan, have a disproportionate impact on women and their children. Although women, for whatever ethical or public pressure or perceiving have not been impacted by this policy, they are indirectly hurt in their everyday aspect of life. Many women rely on the support of brothers or other men in their community and lose their support when the men comprising this same support system are detained or "self-deported" (Drori-Avraham, 2016). Single men experience geographical limitations on residency in 'Israel' (Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, 2017), further influencing women's support systems. Although married men and fathers are in theory free from being detained and are not encouraged directly to self-deport, numerous men have abandoned their wives and children, leaving mothers single-handedly caring for their children due to the pressures placed on men in asylum seeking communities through other policies. Some women have been asked or sometimes forced into marriages to save men from the threat of detention and deportation. Economic abuse by intimate partners is often experienced by women stuck in the asylum regime.

Many people seeking asylum live in poor housing conditions. Due to legal precariousness in the workforce, women often work in the informal sector and experience exploitation (Kavlaoved, 2014), working long hours. A new government policy put in place in May 2017 called for the deposit law to require 'Israeli' employers to deduct twenty percent of asylum-seekers' wages and deposit the money into a designated fund. The funds are to be returned only upon leaving 'Israel' (Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel, 2018). This essentially serves as another way to encourage self-deportation. The policy forces women to work increasingly longer hours, leading families to barely survive, especially single mother households. Although an amendment to the law reduced the deduction percentage for women, among other groups such as survivors of trafficking and men older than 60, to 6 percent, the harm had already been done, and deducted funds will not be returned retroactively. State-induced poverty and economic violence is yet one of more policies of oppression and coercion used by 'Israel'. Poor housing and lack of income have specific impacts on women who seek refugee status (Freedman 2015: 173), often finding themselves as the main carers for children.

The state of 'Israel' operates a non-transparent, biased, and arbitrary Refugee Status Determination (RSD) system (Physicians for Human Rights – Israel et al, 2018). Only eleven people from Eritrea and Sudan have been granted refugee status (Physicians for Human Rights – Israel et al, 2018). People seeking asylum in 'Israel', and those with refugee status, are excluded from citizenship. "Voluntary" departure, family reunification, resettlement of highly vulnerable groups by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and sponsorship programmes remain the very limited opportunities people have to leave the country. Many have sought semi-legal or alternative ways to leave 'Israel', often increasing their vulnerability to male violence. For some women, marriage has become the only way to regularly move across borders, rather than travelling irregularly with all the added risks. Many of women left their children in Eritrea and Sudan, hoping to be able to reunite once in 'Israel'. However, within 'Israel', there are no options for family reunification, which causes families wishing to reunite having to cross the border irregularly. When the Israel-Egypt border closed in 2015 with a high-security fence, this became no longer possible. Many mothers have been separated from their children, and sometimes partners, for prolonged periods of time. Many women do not only care for their families in 'Israel', but also in Eritrea and the wider diaspora, adding to the economic struggles they undergo.

The complexities of the asylum regime are extensive and can only be briefly expressed within the parameters of this paper. The aforementioned policies all serve to further amplify control over women's bodies in the name of securing a nation-state. Policies of withholding rights are deliberate

actions sustaining inequalities and reinforcing exclusion by 'Israel' to create and maintain precariousness in the everyday lives of asylum seekers. These systemic practices have specific gendered consequences intruding on and affecting women and their families' privacy and intimate space (cf. Canning 2017; Cochrane 2018).

1. Throughout this piece Israel is placed between inverted commas, to assert its history of settler colonialism and ongoing occupation of Palestinian territories.

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# More Than Wool

*by Indreas Khandy*

Don't be a fool  
Cashmere, it is not just wool  
It is also a place full of peo-pool

It ain't a cash-cow like See-ri-ah or E-rock  
You are out of your depth and off the mark  
Don't come at it with your blatant white half-truths

Sit down and pay attention  
Let Ladi Shahi<sup>i</sup> disentangle your mind  
Else, your imperial privilege will keep you blind

Kashmir, not Cashmere  
Nation colonised  
By Empires White & Brown

Sold, sold, sold  
Beasts, Birches, and Souls  
Eighteen Forty Six

Nineteen forty seven  
The white folk Mountbatten  
In a bureaucratic fix



## Disrupted: The Migration Issue

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Let the Vandar Rajii<sup>ii</sup>  
Clad in socialistiii<sup>iii</sup> hide  
Swindle the world

Lock, stock, and 700, 000 smoking barrels  
Amid the noise of democracy  
Play the judge, the jury, and the executioner

As London chants, "Long live the Queen"  
Delhi shouts, "World's largest democracy"  
Cashmere remains, "a nation caged by tyranny"

i Ladi Shah is a label taken on by an artist who uses versified satire to address social and political views. Historically, Ladi Shah was any troubadours who travelled from village to village and used satire to criticise the powers that be, and also deliver news about the happenings around a certain locale in the absence of mass-media.

ii Literally means 'Rule of the Monkey', but here it means a selfish 'usurping' state compared with the Hobbesian State of nature by Manzoor Fazili. See Fazili, Manzoor A. Rysh Waer: The Valley of Saints ...: Sheikh Noor-ud-din Ryshi (RA). Srinagar, Kashmir, India: Gulshan Books Kashmir, 2015.

iii Refers to the Nehruvian socialist idea of the Indian state.

# Resistance and Relationships at the US-Mexico Border: Reconceptualising Power and Security in U.S.A. Policy

*by Natalie Hudson and Mary McLoughlin*

**From the most recent deployment of U.S. military troops to the border to confront the caravan of immigrants making their way through Central America to the execution of policy that separates children from parents, the sea change of enforcement thinking, and practice of the Trump Administration is the antithesis of a feminist foreign policy.** In fact, the public performance of the current government is effectively distracting most Americans from any meaningful discussion on immigration reform and reforming national security policy as part of a broader foreign policy agenda that would acknowledge the complex challenges of forced displacement. However, after spending two weeks in El Paso in May 2018 with a team of students and conducting 50 interviews as part of the Moral Courage Project, it became clear that many activists and organisations on the border are, in fact, engaging in and advocating for such reform. Both U.S. and Mexican activists along the border are pushing for a normative renegotiation of current policy and practice – one that is guided by broad cosmopolitan norms of justice, peace and human rights. Such norms work to deconstruct conceptions of borders as hard lines in need of protection, rejecting the narrative of a national security crisis and redefining how power and security affect the everyday.

Specifically, our research highlights the everyday forms of resistance and advocacy in El Paso that expose how immigration policies and practices consistently marginalise and silence gendered, sexualised, and racialised dimensions of current government practice and discourse. Through our fieldwork, we engaged with many activists and organisations whose convictions/voices were silenced

voices and found their work to be a clear disruption of mainstream foreign policy ideas, challenging the militarised immigration policies that prioritise the abstract ideal of national sovereignty and a “secure border” over the security needs of the people who actually live in those spaces. A feminist foreign policy would start by reversing this prioritisation of national security over local safety by mitigating the *distance* – and *power* differential/hierarchical relationship - between armed forces and the people they are said to protect. This would begin by building trusting relationships that collectively aim to maintain communities where everyone feels safe.

In this paper, we will highlight the disconnect between the function of border patrol and the lives and work of local activists. The militarisation of the border not only fails to deliver security, especially for marginalised members of society, but are *themselves significantly implicated in producing* insecurities (Wibben, 2018). *Whilst the militarisation of the US-Mexico border* is certainly not new (Levario, 2015), it ranks as the third most militarised border in the world today, and it continues to feed mistrust and abuse by enforcement agents and border communities. Our research and activism at the border offers us a practical way forward in U.S. foreign policy practice and national security discourse in these spaces (see: Enloe 1989, 2000; Ticker 1992; Stern 2005).

While the state ought to function as a provider of safety at the border, the force required to impose a rigid boundary over a fluid space implicates the state as a source of insecurity for those displaced by the racialised hegemony stratified by the border. For members of Latinx communities at the border, both documented and undocumented, the presence of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and border patrol agents increases fear and insecurity among an already vulnerable population. Largely, this unease occurs because federal enforcement agents are addressing the perceived threat of immigration within communities that are not themselves threatened by immigrants. The national agenda, fuelled by xenophobic rhetoric of a border under attack, cannot accommodate the local reality of a border in flux. Federal enforcement agencies respond to immigrants as foreign agents threatening American sovereignty with their illegal entries, whilst the people who live in the borderland recognise that their communities transcend the lines drawn by borders. Sandra Spector, an activist who works with asylum seekers, traces her familial lineage in Texas back to before Texas was annexed by the US. She states, “my family has been in Texas before it was Texas. In other words, in 1848, we ended up on this side, on the United States. The line moved, we didn’t.” Spector argues that Border Patrol is “trying to guard the border, but they don’t understand for us, for people from there, it fluctuates.” Border Patrol fails to respond to the needs of people at the border because it values hierarchical orders between an American and Mexican space based on racist American exceptionalism and completely

disconnected from the lived experience of the individuals living in that fluid space. In its current iteration, the masculinist US immigration policy is rooted in white supremacy: a militarised and disconnected security force reifies the border against the fabricated threat of the non-white migrant who is cast as the antithesis of the American. The very *delusion* of this policy is fed by the racism enabled when Border Patrol is expected to protect national sovereignty at the expense of Latinx communities at the border rather than to relate to the Latinx communities at the border as extensions of the Americans they serve.

The “nation” the Trump administration seeks to secure is guided by a hegemonic masculinity where a militaristic mindset serves the façade of “national security” rather than the interest of those within those national boundaries. This dehumanising disconnect has been further *institutionalized* with the 2017 passage of Senate Bill 4 (SB4) in Texas, a law that deputises local governments and law enforcement agencies to do the work of federal immigration officers, effectively mirroring the distanced security agenda of ICE and Border Patrol. Gloria, a law clerk who works with asylum cases asserts, “Before the whole SB4, the city knew our community was made up of mixed families. There was an agreement between the local police and the sheriff’s department. They agreed that they would never ask for papers when they showed up for crimes. Ever since Trump came in, there’s been rogue officers that pretend that they’re border patrol.” Law enforcement cannot offer security to this community, which does not feel secure enough to call on them. Nayeli Saenz-Sceuz, a community organiser and rights educator, was undocumented and abused by her husband who threatened to “call immigration and separate me from my kids or that he would drag me across the border and leave me.” She, like other abused women that she now works with, felt too insecure in her immigration status to call the police until her life was in danger. Saenz-Sceuz explains that in El Paso “there is immigration, ICE, there are state troopers, etc. I think we have every single kind of law enforcement in our area,” but the community is only safe when “culture connects you with law enforcement” and “they respect us, and you respect them.” Local law enforcement agencies cannot serve both the local community and national security with the distancing between the constructed threats to a nation and the actual danger faced by its people.

What is lost in these policies and practices, even among the most well-intentioned government security officers, is the ability to build trust and establish reflexive relationships with community members. This is where feminist insights are critical, mandating that we take seriously the security needs of those most marginalised groups and the various ways power is at work (Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond 2016). Whilst border patrol may seem more empowered than ever before, they have become

manifestations of brute state force rather than agents with responsive and mitigating power. Because border patrol can no longer practice discretion on a case-by-case basis, they have been severely limited as human beings in effectively responding to the communities that they serve, damaging and even eliminating local relationships and erasing the humanity of both officers and local communities. Prior to Trump, the ability to use discretion allowed government forces to better adapt their responses to the actual insecurities of the communities that they live and work in. Current policies have virtually eliminated the practice of using individual discretion (for example, for a noncitizen who has not committed a crime and poses no threat to public safety) forcing some officers to respond in ways that ironically give them more power-over the people but less power-with and power-through. Additionally, such redistributions of power have created new spaces and even incentives for border patrol to draw upon deeply embedded cultural oppressions of the other, particularly along racial, gendered and classed lines.

Despite the problems with current iterations of border enforcement, our research in El Paso shows that a different future is possible – where relationships matter, the invisible is made visible, women’s voices are heard, power (at the border) is re-conceptualised, and human security, as reconceptualised in this paper, is possible. Feminist foreign policy can help us get there.

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*by Gabrielle Rocha Rios*



*SR*

# An Ode to Former Livers

*by Byul Ryan-Im*

I was a student, once.

I graduated from a prestigious university and shook hands with its founder when I received my diploma.

Now my hands grasp at others' unwanted clothes;  
Cling desperately to donated gifts for my children;  
Shove aside other mothers who might win these prizes instead of me.

I was a teacher, before.

I taught English to Syria's brightest and used up the electricity marking books late into the night.  
Now strangers speak to me slowly, like a baby, asking "Do...you...understand?"  
And I fool myself that I'm sleeping when night falls  
And there is no light but the stars' to see by.  
Really I am doing the same as in daylight, just on my back.

I was a neighbour, back then.

I made baklava and brought it to Aleema when she was ill.  
We car-shared on school runs.  
Now I live next to strange men who shout and fight late into the night, whilst I clutch my children;  
Next to foreign women who pull my hair and accuse me of cutting in the lunch line.

I was a woman, long ago.

I wore make up, I went shopping with friends in Damascus.  
I brushed my black hair before a dressing table mirror.  
Now I wash with wet wipes.  
I search for donated shoes that fit; style is a rare and happy coincidence.

## Disrupted: The Migration Issue

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I queue to use portable toilets filled hourly by thousands of ill and unwashed strangers.  
Those that bother to use them, at least.

I was a wife.

Ahmad brought me bracelets from the market on his way home from work.

He got grumpy when I woke him in the morning but smiled when he heard me singing.

He hugged our children,

And kissed me before he left,

And went out humming, as he always does.

As he always did.

Now I tell my name to the English girl before me and shake my head when she asks for my husband's.

She nods and tries to look understanding. But what can she understand?

This girl, barely more than a teenager,

Never having known war, never having loved, never having had to run from chaos to strife, never  
having lost?

What can she know?

But then I remember, and I forgive.

For I was her, once.







# The Irony of Seeking Protection: Deconstructing Western Solutions to Sexual and Gender Based Violence of Protracted Refugees

*by Rachel Popik*

## Introduction

**By the end of 2017, 13.4 million people were living in protracted refugee situations, living under conditions where their most fundamental human rights were being neglected (UNHCR, 2018: 22).** Existing cultural and structural violence is amplified for refugees, as they become entrapped in the national security infrastructure of receiving nations, confined to camps where victims are disempowered, and perpetrators may commit sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) with impunity. Human Rights Watch (2000) echoed this, saying “women who flee their homes in search of sanctuary from violence too often find that there is no meaningful refuge—they have simply escaped violence in conflict to face a different type of violence in the refugee camps”.

Whilst there is no comprehensive data on global SGBV incidences, refugees commonly report physical or sexual abuse at the hands of smugglers, police, security staff, or other refugees (Amnesty International, 2016). In being subjected to such violence, victims’ bodies become battlegrounds on which perpetrators inflict their anger, power, and control. Dadaab and Kakuma camps in Kenya serve as salient examples, where hundreds of women refugees are victims to a pervasive culture of sexual violence (Mwangi, 2012: 29-32). International attempts to stem this violence have achieved limited success, failing in both content and form: to address SGBV effectively, solutions must address root causes through programs co-created with refugees themselves.

### **Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Dadaab and Kakuma Camps**

There are over 400,000 protracted refugees in Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps, which were set up to be temporary solutions to the influx of refugees from other east and central African states (UNHCR, 2018a; UNHCR, 2018b). Almost 30 years later, the camps have become permanent homes for many, leaving refugees living in perpetual uncertainty. The Kenyan government, citing national security concerns, has a policy of “encampment”, preventing refugees from leaving the camps (Refugee Law and Policy: Kenya, 2016). Confined to these camps with people who do not share their culture or language and separated from ancestral homelands and communities, these refugees are unable to establish and maintain identities on their own terms, let alone heal from the trauma of displacement. The incapacity of men to fulfil the culturally designated responsibilities associated with traditional positions of gendered power may help explain the rise in domestic violence and rape: as an attempt to regain the power to which they feel entitled (CASA Consulting, 2001: 22-23).

When violence in Dadaab was at its peak, sexual assaults occurred daily (Kagwanja, 2000). In 1998, 60% of the 164 reported rapes took place in the bush as women were collecting firewood in Dadaab (CASA Consulting, 2001: 63). A woman interviewed in Kakuma recounted her rape: “I was returning home from collecting firewood when a man attacked me [...] He struck me on the head with a blunt object and I passed out. He then raped me and left me by the roadside” (Abuya, E O, 2010: 141). Despite the many, interwoven, and complex forces underlying attacks such as this one, the international response tends to focus on surface-level characteristics, remedying the symptoms and not the illness.

### **Current International Response**

Attempts by the international community to rectify the problem have far fallen flat. Programmes created by experts in countries far away from the intended beneficiaries have resulted in limited impact due to a sole focus on “giving” women equal access to protective rights. While equal access is a necessary step in preventing violence, it is not sufficient to address the deeply rooted causes in social, economic, and political structures.

Attempts at reducing SGBV in Dadaab and Kakuma through firewood programs exemplify this pattern. In the early 2000s, UNHCR began providing firewood to women to reduce the risk of SGBV (Refugees International, 2003). While gathering firewood provides an opportunity for rape to occur, it is not the cause of rape. A UNHCR report (2001: 3-4) of the Dadaab Firewood Project found that while the project reduced incidences of firewood-related rape, there was an accompanied increase in non-firewood related rape during the same period. In recent years, the solutions have evolved, and non-profits have

started to provide women with solar cookstoves to reduce the frequency of firewood collection trips, hypothetically reducing rates of SGBV. We can expect similarly poor results to the earlier technocratic solutions for the same reasons: it is not enough to tackle SGBV within the existing hegemonic framework. Sustainable solutions to the problems of SGBV will not be possible without seriously challenging the hegemonic systems that perpetuate them. The international community needs to employ a feminist framework, which enables long term solutions that address root causes, and recognise that Dadaab and Kakuma have become people's permanent homes.

### **Feminist Foreign Policy Offers a More Effective Solution**

The 2003 UNHCR guidelines for prevention and response to SGBV highlighted the importance of creating spaces for the participation of women, men, girls, and boys in planning, implementing, and monitoring and evaluating programs, thus publicly recognising the need to involve protracted refugees (Tappis et al. 2016). By doing so, the socio-cultural norms that allow SGBV to occur can be transformed. However, the attempts made to implement these guidelines have not gone far enough.

Feminist foreign policy offers a path forward from this problem. Both the postcolonial feminist school and feminist foreign policy agree that the solutions to systematic oppression should emerge from regional knowledge and not be imposed from the outside. There will never be adequate prevention and prosecution of SGBV without actively involving those who are affected, both victims and perpetrators, in the process of dismantling the oppressive systems that allowed abuse to occur in the first place.

While the current situation in camps like Kakuma and Dadaab has become untenable, it provides an opportunity for radically rethinking how we address protracted refugee situations. By redesigning the processes that governs the identification, design, and management of programs to combat SGBV committed against protracted refugees, international programming can be both more equitable and effective. Rather than attempting to design on behalf of individuals, solutions should instead be co-created with community members whose lived experience can infuse the process with local knowledge. These experiences are critical to identifying how structures of power manifest themselves in the lives of protracted refugees. Systems of power are constantly evolving, so as we seek to change these structures, only local knowledge can help guide responsive, adaptive solutions. Engaging refugees in developing solutions is a process that engenders respect and dignity, allowing voices to be heard, needs to be met, and people to be seen.

### Conclusion

Displacement and resettlement shatters cultural and personal identities and “too often refugees are viewed as powerless victims of violence and persecution” (Nicholson, 2010: 98). The untenable situation presented by refugee camps like Dadaab and Kakuma provide an opportunity to rebuild oppressive social structures in a more equitable way, removing the patriarchal elements that oftentimes result in SGBV. Participatory, inclusive approaches focused on local knowledge simultaneously empower refugees and are needed to change the dominant systems. By including those most affected by SGBV, people are empowered, and solutions are more effective. These inclusive solutions give refugees the agency to establish their identities on their own terms, allowing communities to come together to heal from individual and collective trauma.

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# LGBTQ Refugees from Syria: A Catch 22

*by Dr. Anwar Mhajne*

**Since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, nearly 13 million Syrians have been displaced, most of whom are currently in Turkey (3.4 million) and Lebanon (1 million) (Connor 2018).** Academics and the media alike have extensively covered the Syrian refugee 'crisis'. However, this coverage has failed to sufficiently include Syrian lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex (LGBTI) issues and needs. Moreover, existing EU and host countries' policies towards refugees do not take into account the distinctive position of LGBTQI refugees who are prone to discrimination from multiple sides of the conflict, and within their own group due to their identity. An inclusive feminist foreign policy approach to refugee crises should pay sufficient attention and be sensitive to the needs of marginalised groups such as LGBTQI individuals. Foreign policy addressing the refugee question that does not consider and acknowledge the unique situation of LGBTQI people could exacerbate their marginalisation after they leave the conflict zone.

In addition to the many challenges faced by all Syrian refugees, LGBTQI individuals also face targeted discrimination and violence due to their sexual orientation, which creates barriers to seeking help and threats to their safety. In Syria, the Islamic State (ISIS) targeted LGBTQI individuals for public executions. Moreover, they were victims of punitive military recruitment procedures enacted by the Syrian government. Confronting oppression from multiple sides of the civil war, many LGBTQI persons escape Syria to find refuge in other countries such as Turkey and Lebanon. This discrimination follows them to their host countries where they continue to face the threat of rejection and violence from other community members as well as family members. In host countries, LGBTQI refugees face significant hardship and discrimination in accessing essential services, education, employment, housing, social assistance, and health care. Consequently, this discrimination forces LGBTQI persons to become reliant on sex work as a survival strategy or to get married early to hide their sexual identity (Freedman et al, 2017).



To survive in this discriminatory environment, these individuals need to hide their sexual orientation. Paradoxically, their access to international protection and UNHCR's resettlement program to third countries is contingent on their 'coming out' as lesbian, gay, trans, or bisexual. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) gives priority to Syrian LGBTQI refugees and puts them on the fast track for resettlement. However, this paradox results in difficulties providing aid and assistance to LGBTI refugee individuals. The number of LGBTQI Syrian refugees is unknown because a large number of them abstain from registration to protect themselves from rejection by their own families and other members of the refugee community in host countries. Additionally, publicly identifying as an LGBTQI individual may make it harder for these refugees to go back home after the conflict is over. Some LGBTQI refugees avoid contacting LGBTQI organisations or NGOs for assistance due to their fear of having this information revealed to their family and community members as well as their employers and extremist groups.

The restricted resettlement quotas of LGBTQI individuals in participating states in the UNHCR Syrian refugees' resettlement and humanitarian admission program hinders the resettlement process of this group as it limits Syrian LGBTQI access to international protection. Another problem in the resettlement efforts of LGBTI individuals is the shortage of accessible information to the public about applying to the resettlement program. Rather than disseminating the information via formal mediums of communication, LGBTQI Syrians in host countries such as Turkey and Lebanon are informed about their "vulnerable" refugee status, which qualifies them to be considered for resettlement in third countries, via informal networks of friends or UNHCR local implementation partners.

Another issue hindering the registration and resettlement of LGBTQI individuals has been the constant movement of refugees in these countries towards Europe. This movement made it difficult to reach LGBTQI Syrian refugees and send them for interviews at the resettlement commission. Moreover, the lengthy resettlement process, which takes roughly two years to conclude, makes it less appealing for some LGBTQI individuals to go with the UNHCR's resettlement procedure. Instead, a number of these refugees end up hiring smugglers to help them cross to Europe. However, smugglers became a less favourable option for Syrian refugees in 2016 when an agreement between the EU and Turkey was implemented in March of the same year regulating the influx of refugees from Turkey to European territories.

The EU-Turkey agreement declares migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek Islands will be returned to Turkey (Freedman et al, 2017). Additionally, according to the agreement, Turkey committed to crack

down on unregulated migration to the EU through its territories (Freedman et al. 2017). As a result, the number of migrants arriving on the Greek islands in April 2016 dropped by 90 percent in comparison to the previous month (Frontex, 2016). Accordingly, the number of LGBTQI Syrian refugees hiring smugglers to go to Europe has fundamentally plummeted. This made UNHCR resettlement program the only avenue for LGBTQI Syrian refugees to seek assistance in Turkey. The *drastic changes* in the legal framework regulating refugee entry to host countries adds to the insecurities of LGBTQI Syrian refugees because it makes the work of resettlement agencies harder as these agencies must not only adapt to these changes, but also inform the communities they work with of these changes (Freedman et al. 2017). It makes it harder for marginalised refugee groups such as LGBTQI individuals to access information on the new rules and procedures.

LGBTQI individuals who were marginalised in their home countries during times of peace become extremely vulnerable for social and economic exploitation as well as sexual and gender-based violence during times of conflict. Their marginalisation begins in their home countries and travels with the ones who were able to escape the conflict to their host countries. The already difficult war and displacement experiences become even more difficult for LGBTQI persons because these experiences are accompanied by the need to conceal one's sexual orientation and gender identity. Any comprehensive feminist foreign policy approach for addressing and responding to the issues of refugees and their resettlement process requires a deeper understanding of the unique 'vulnerabilities' of all refugee groups including LGBTQI individuals.

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# An Interview with Annika Milisic-Stanley, from the Joel Nafuma Refugee Centre in Italy

*by Jennifer Brough*

*Jennifer Brough, our Interview Co-ordinator at CFFP spoke with Annika Milisic-Stanley, the Program and Fundraising Coordinator for the Joel Nafuma Refugee Centre in Rome, Italy.*

## **Can you tell us about the Joel Nafuma Refugee Centre and your role there?**

The Joel Nafuma Refugee Centre is a drop-in centre in central Rome. It was founded in 1992, by a Joel Nafuma, a Ugandan refugee. We serve around 200 people every day and run a number of different services: Human services for the homeless, development/ livelihoods (language and digital literacy school, and an employment clinic), therapy (counselling and art therapy) and medical assistance, a safe space nursery for mothers and children age 0-5 (GBV/ social protection), service learning for students and interns, and cultural awareness-raising events.

## **Joel Nafuma is one of the few refugee centres in Rome. How many people pass through your doors each day and where have they come from?**

While we are not the only refugee centre in Rome, we are the only drop-in open at 08:30-14:00 where people can come in and just do whatever they want, even sleep or watch TV. We see around 200 people each day. They come from Mali, Guinea, Somalia, Eritrea, The Gambia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, Libya, Iraq and many other countries.



**Many refugees are often young men who are more physically able to undertake risky journeys across borders, leaving their families behind. Are the majority of the people who use the centre in this age and gender bracket?**

Yes.

**Aside from the financial instability when arriving in a new country, some migrants may have had perilous journeys or fled from traumatic scenes. The Centre offers practical classes, like language skills, navigation advice, as well as psychotherapy. Is there a lot of uptake in this service?**

Therapy services are available four days per week, and one day we have a doctor who is there for drop-in appointments. The art therapy session has around 10 members, and it is held once a week.

Occupational therapy is held by one psychologist, but uptake has not been high. We also have three counsellors who see clients regularly on an individual basis every week for depression, PTSD, and when the person has had a crisis, such as a death in the family. They are quite busy, so yes, there is uptake.

**In September, the Italian government approved Salvini's bill targeting forms of protection for migrants. How has the rise of anti-migrant rhetoric and acts at a political level affected your work and your clients locally? Do they want to stay in Italy amongst this?**

Our clients who are not clearly political refugees, but want humanitarian status, now find that they have to wait longer for their status decision. Of course, they are worried that they will not get Humanitarian Status cards anymore, but a different status with less rights and less access to the services that they really need.

Asylum seekers are now seeing huge cuts to the budget of their camps; whereas before they could access travel tickets, Italian classes, or stay in Rome, the camp authorities cannot issue them with assistance, and some will have to move to the countryside because it is cheaper. The decree affects the ability of asylum seekers to be placed in Protection System for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (SPRARs), which are the best kind of 'camp'. These cuts are already affecting their chances to find work and education, and it is very frustrating that for some of our clients, months of our work to integrate them into society will be ruined unless we find ways to fill the gaps ourselves. We see more homelessness as the administration closes squats and non-official camps in Rome.

We have not seen any particular impact from the rhetoric, as Italy has always had a sizeable number of racists/fascists, as well as those who fight fascism and racism. I think it has always been hard for people of colour/different cultures to live in Italy. I suppose what is different is that now, the rhetoric is more openly voiced and less 'fringe'. Many of our guests seem not to really notice the rhetoric, and don't follow the news. They are simply engaged in trying to survive, find work, or shelter. I emphasise that for every unkind Italian there will be one who is kind to them.

Many guests come to our German classes because they plan to shift, and most of the Francophone Africans would like to get to France. However, people have moved from Italy and then returned for documents/deportation reasons for as long as I have been working at JNRC, because of the Dublin Agreement. Italy has a deep economic crisis and high youth unemployment, and many Italians are also out of work now. Salaries are also very low. Additionally, many of our guests have relatives or friends in other EU countries so they move back and forth for this reason. Some of our guests, if they find work, and learn Italian and make friends do want to stay, however. It is hard to generalise.

### **Can you share how you would define a feminist foreign policy?**

A foreign policy that respects all human rights.



by Carmela Caldart





# Learning to be Queer: Queer Refugees and the Burden of Proof: How Asylum Processing Hierarchises Sexual Experiences and Construes a Limited Concept of 'Legitimate' Queer Identity

*by Aleksandra Kusnierkiewicz*

**What happens when the denial of your identity is preventing you from reaching safety?** What if your identity is the reason that you're being persecuted in the first place? Such experiences are the lived realities of queer refugees who, in their quest for asylum, get systematically neglected, forgotten, or abused. The suspension within the in-between creates the necessity to prove 'queerness' in accordance with fixed expectations on what constitutes 'legitimate' sexual and gender identities. Queer refugee, as a term, not only relates to LGBTQI+ individuals who face persecution based on particular identification, but also encompasses broader sexual and cultural differences (Raj, 2011: 177). How, then, is the 'queer' identity constructed and what does it reveal about the broader refugee legal system?

## **Proving One's Queerness**

Defining queer identity within the realms of international refugee law is marked by various limitations. Under Article 1A(2) of the Refugee Convention 1951, to claim valid refugee status, a prospective applicant must demonstrate persecution on the basis of a protected characteristic, which includes ethnicity, nationality, religion, particular social group or political opinion (Raj, 2011: 177). In the UK,

sexuality and gender identity are protected under the category of a 'particular social group' (Stonewall, 2018). This raises a set of issues related to proving one's 'queerness'. An analysis of the asylum processing system reveals that seemingly gender-neutral policies are pervaded with gendered and heteronormative assumptions (Lewis and Naples, 2014: 914; Dhoest, 2018). This is exemplified in the statement of Uche Nnabuife, an asylum applicant in the UK, who comments:

"They should just tell me, but I have tried my best. Because I'm not too feminine. Because they think that maybe I should be wearing a skirt or have a handbag, then that's when they will believe me." (Lewis, 2014: 960).

Uche's experience reveals the pervasiveness of linking gender with sexual desire, deeming the combination of his gender performativity (the expression of gender identity) (Butler, 1990: 25), and homosexual orientation inviable. His narrative is symptomatic of a growing understanding amongst gay and lesbian asylum applicants in the UK that the only way to prove their identity and establish a viable asylum claim is through adopting essentialist expectations surrounding their gender and sexuality. David Murray, whose research focuses on the integration experiences of sexual minorities in Toronto, further claims that refugees need to learn the terms that define them within the refugee system and follow 'an authentic LGBT identity'. This identity is associated with a normative Euro-American sexual identity formation related to expectations of stable identification, public openness, and self-awareness (Murray, 2011: 132).

Rachel Lewis demonstrates how the pervasive disbelief towards refugees' sexual identities contributes to abusive practices. The use of pornographic evidence in queer asylum cases is on the rise as it is often perceived as the only way to establish a credible claim (Lewis, 2014: 959). The burden of proof pushes vulnerable individuals to uncomfortable extremes, where their mental health, history of abuse, cultural conditioning, and rights to privacy are disregarded in the name of performing a visibly acceptable/normative identity.

Clearly, the dominant discourses on what constitutes queerness affect the asylum processing procedure by separating 'genuine' sexual identities from 'fake' or 'unstable' ones, inevitably deeming them either 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate' (Raj, 2011: 177).

### **The Liberation of the West**



The refugee system, permeated by culturally essentialist claims, represents a greater political project. It is rooted in Western hegemony and thrives on constructing a hierarchy of nations in which the “West” is seen as a land of hope, freedom, and acceptance, and the “East” as a source of oppression and backwardness (Lewis and Naples, 2014: 914). Sima Shaksari argues that this division is one of the makers of a system in which certain bodies are protected, and others are constructed as disposable. As a result, queer, transgender, and coloured asylum seekers are failed by a system that is not properly designed to protect them (Shaksari, 2014: 1012). Under this system, the importance of protecting individuals from oppression without essentialising their countries of origin remains marginal.

This has an especially negative impact upon the credibility of queer women’s asylum claims. In cases of lesbian and bisexual women, the court often disregards the interrelation of gender and sexual identity. This means that an applicant’s experience of sexual abuse, domestic violence, or assault is considered unrelated to her sexual orientation; it is rather viewed as an intrinsic result of her female gender and deemed inevitable in the specific cultural context of ‘the Third World’ (Lewis, 2014: 964). Comparatively, a queer man’s experience of abuse would be much more likely considered a legitimate threat of persecution.

Moreover, the dichotomy between the liberated ‘West’ and the backward ‘East’ disregards the reality of racialised queer refugees and trans people who often continue to face persecution and abuse even after being granted asylum. The postcolonial system of power relies on mainstream constructions of geography which localise the sites of violence and rationalise who are the victims and the perpetrators. However, such imperial logic disregards the reality. Shaksari evokes a story of an Iranian transgender refugee woman who committed suicide in Canada as a result of continuing discrimination; or reminds us of three black transgender refugee women were killed in the U.S. in 2013 alone (Shaksari, 2014: 999). Oppression continues to affect queer refugees, against the developmentalist logic; however, their stories are disregarded as they directly challenge the liberal narrative of the West. As Raj highlights, “refugee voices become mute within the colonising space in which they seek asylum” (Raj, 2011: 177).

### **Queering Asylum Processing for LGBTQI+ Refugees**

The interrogation of the asylum processing system raises broader questions as to what is a genuine ‘queer identity’, and whether it could ever be enclosed within a legal framework. Adopting queer theory to our analysis of queer bodies’ positionality within the global refugee system compels us to question its heteronormative and limiting assumptions. Queering asylum processing for LGBTQI+ refugees would reveal that identities are contextual and fluid: what constitutes them in one context may not be

viable or recognisable in another.

Understanding the fluidity of refugee queer identities uncovers valuable personal experiences, and allows for adapting new ways of knowing, feeling, and being. A decolonial approach serves as one of the strategies for unlearning the culture-specific essentialising assumptions of what constitutes oppression. Scholars like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak or Maria Lugones remind us of the need to move beyond understanding individuals simply as “oppressed” (Spivak, 1993; Lugones, 2010). The liberation of the individual is hence a necessary mission of decolonial liberation struggles.

Moreover, for asylum law, shifting to an analytical use of the term ‘queer’ (instead of ‘homosexual’ or ‘gay/lesbian’) could help avoiding essentialising assumptions. (Raj, 2011: 181). Only with such commitment to justice and visibility could the handling of asylum claims become more inclusive, diverse and ethical. By questioning the universality of a ‘queer identity’ in international law dealing with the rights and protection of refugees, the understanding/construction of sexuality and discrimination can become more fluid and inclusive of the array of lived realities of queer identity.

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# A Platform for the Unheard Voices

*by Hanna Maxine Mueller*

**Since Myanmar's first democratic election in 2015, the reality of its population has changed irreversibly.** From the availability of affordable phones with Internet access to daily-banking accounts, the luxuries of the globalised economy are slowly flooding local markets. Whilst progress has been made, remnants of colonial and military rule consistently undermine efforts to transform Myanmar into a federal nation defined and lead by its diverse population. Land contestation and ethnic military conflicts are constant reminders of the nation's past.

Conflicts over citizenship have plagued Myanmar dating back to colonial rule. Rather than examine the citizenship experience of ethnic minorities, it is interesting to see that even segments of the Burmese majority remain unable to access their rights as citizens. In my research, I examined the daily citizenship struggles of informal residents in Yangon's periphery. I discovered that those few citizens who possess sufficient financial and social capital are able to access the state, whilst others are left to fend for themselves in a quasi-stateless environment. These trends question the position of the traditional state as the sole granter of rights.

## **From Informality to Vernacular Governance**

Before addressing the implications of informal settlements for the citizenship rights of its residents, it is important to understand that informality does not represent a new form of social organisation. Rather, formality is the "new mode", "introduced to organise urban society in the 19th century" (Roy & Alsayyad, 2004), and later exported worldwide through colonial domination. As such, informality reflects western belief systems of state and society interactions. Whilst the scholarship has moved towards expanding our understanding of informality (Nogueira, 2017), these approaches have further obfuscated its definition and distanced itself from the actual experience on the ground. Those



practices, commonly determined as informal, actually encompass the social relations of a given cultural context (Hodder, 2016). In order to understand the significance of informal practices, it is necessary to explore how social relations are embedded in the state. By examining governance through the lens of 'vernacular governance', as introduced by Sundaresan (2018), one is able to address how social and *traditional state* practices become synergised to create a new form of governance. Since the state is not the sole bestower of rights, my research has focused on the daily experiences as an indicator of citizenship rights. By incorporating Myanmar's traditional form of history, oral history in story form, the research draws greater attention to the unheard voices of the urban periphery.

### **The Unheard Voices**

Most of the residents that I spoke with in Yangon's South Dagon Township were ethnic Burmese who fled in the aftermath of *Cyclone Nargis* in 2008. Met by the lack of affordable housing in Yangon, they were redirected to the periphery of the city, often with the illicit consent of government officials. Here they claimed their citizenship rights by buying land illegally, constructing illegal houses, and creating self-sustained social institutions. Whilst these communities are located on illegally obtained land, the *practices* they pursue to secure their livelihoods do not differ greatly from those pursued by other city-dwellers. Where most of Yangon's residents experience the state as an incoherent entity, informal residents of the urban periphery have little to no contact with the state. Due to their remote location, the settlement does not have access to government services such as electricity, water, sanitation, schools, etc. Most services are still obtainable; however, they are more difficult to access and are more expensive. Residents find alternative means through which to gain access to such services, usually through vendors from within the community. Although these settlements are to some degree integrated into the fabric of the city, they function as micro-economies (Forbes, 2016).

The difference between the community in focus and those located in the city centre is their ability to access official documentation, such as ID cards and household registration forms, from local ward offices. These documents are necessary to register children for public schools, to register to vote, and to obtain formal employment, amongst others. However, most residents were unable to obtain official documentation in their current place of residence. Whilst a few residents complained that the requested bribes were too high, most were not aware of alternative mechanisms of obtaining documents. Rather than struggling with a deficient or incoherent state, they are rendered 'quasi stateless' in the face of an absent state.

Much of the global population is faced with the same struggles as those in my research. An integral part of claiming one's rightful belonging in a city is the ability to collectively bargain through patronage networks and bureaucratic intuitions. Due to Myanmar's political history and the country's military-oriented government, mechanisms of social pressure have yet to prove worthwhile. Communities consisting of migrants face larger vulnerabilities because they do not possess the social networks to access the bureaucratic machine. Communities are able to obtain a livelihood, albeit an insecure one, and they are unable to gain those rights which are exclusively granted by the state, such as the right to political participation.

Whilst the government acknowledges that there is a housing need (Gomez-Ibanez, 2012), many informal communities are deemed illegitimate residents of the city. They are denied their citizenship rights due to the illegality of the land they live on. Although measures of insurgent citizenship allow for residents to obtain specific services, they are not commonly provided by the government and are not acknowledged as rights. The result is an inconsistency between the laws of the nation, under which all citizens are equal, and the experience of differentiated citizenship. Those with political ties or sufficient financial and social capital are able to gain access to some of their rights. Most informal residents, however, are rendered 'quasi-stateless'. They become stuck in a reinforcing cycle in which their illegality denies them access to the state, which in turn pushes them to the margins of society. For these reasons, addressing long-term housing shortages and providing legal emergency shelters needs to be a key priority of city administration if citizens are to enjoy equal rights. Denying communities land on which to settle has far reaching consequences, not only for their integration into the city, but also for the overall wellbeing of the entire urban population.

Whilst this research focused on the daily struggles of informal residents in Yangon's periphery, it simultaneously challenges the western perception of state-society relations and questions the state's sole authority to grant rights. The postcolonial state does not grant rights as does a western state (Desai & Sanyal, 2011), either because it is not able to or because it chooses not to. As a result, informal residents in many countries have created networks of political patronage in order to access the state (see: Ghertner, 2015). Such networks have not yet emerged in Myanmar. For precisely this reason, there is a large potential to examine how state-society relations diverge from traditional norms and whether alternative mechanisms can be created through which citizens can access their rights without direct dependence on the state. The question we are left with is: to what degree should the state be involved in shaping society and granting rights? And, what are the potentials for a vibrant and equal society if the traditional state embraces the notion of an ever-evolving vernacular state?

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# Between the Lines

*by Robin C. Ladwig*

Disruption is my identity.

I am a case of borderline.

With time, it gets comfortable to sit on the fence.

My home is the borderland.

When the blossom of my sexuality began to thrive, I became overwhelmed by the attractiveness that enveloped me. All these beautiful bodies striving my universe. Sweet words running down like milky rain along my pale innocent skin. A taste of life's richness touched the tip of my tongue. And with evolving love came happiness.

Cut.

The milky rain mutated into acid and burnt my skin. My universe shivered while all the bodies I had desired became forbidden fruits. Exiled from my own paradise as punishment for feeling love that is abnormal. It is just a phase and you will make up your mind soon enough. You cannot be either-or, decide, come to us, or come out as them, but not both. So, I became a flower growing on the border wall with unimpeded views stretching across limitless land.

Disruption is my identity.

I am a case of borderline.

With time, it gets comfortable to sit on the fence.

My home is the borderland.

Raised as a girl in a world full of wolves in sheepskin, I felt like wearing my own mask. My genitals determined the rules which I was expected to live by, and how I may be permitted to behave. In a room abounded with doors of opportunity, only a few remained open for me because nobody revealed the secret code for the others. The boys club allowed me to play with them while I was blind to see that they were playing me. Having no escape or protection from female alliance. Falling deeper into the gap.

Cut.

In reality, it is not a gap. It is more of a portal to another much more embracing space. It is both and neither at the same time. It provides me with a sacred new world for myself and others. We are here, in between, above, and underneath you. Cis-people like to pull me to one side because they trust their natural

instinct of reading me as one of two. But in the end, we are just naked humans without any labels other than simply being alive. There is so much more space on the fence.

Disruption is my identity.

I am a case of borderline.

With time, it gets comfortable to sit on the fence.

My home is the borderland.

Born in a country in which control and fear coexist simultaneously with community and solidarity – the wind changed its direction after the wall went down. Embodying family of the past and future whilst living in the present, I had a house but not a home. The consciousness of living in a safe country with the freedom of a privileged bordeaux passport made my skin even itchier. I became too big for these shoes and walked away.



Cut.

Leaving to an even more privileged country where my middle-class background drops to upper lower class. Be never good enough, neither for the bottom of society nor the elite, not even average. Losing my language and my voice the more vocabulary I learnt. I never owned my land or rooted in my family ashes-drained soil. I feel borderline in neverland. And so, I slowly dig myself with my toes in the tears-drunken earth of the borderland and laugh fate in its face.

Disruption is my identity.

I am a case of borderline.

With time, it gets comfortable to sit on the fence.

My home is the borderland.



*by Gloria Wille*

# Contributor bios.

## **Najwa Abukhater**

Najwa Abukhater is a refugee from the west bank-Palestine. She has been living in Europe for 2 years, where she awaits her asylum claim to be finalised.

## **Dr. Christine Agius**

Christine is Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations at Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia. Her research interests cover Nordic politics and security, identity, gender, and critical security studies.

*Twitter: @ChrisAgius13*

*Instagram: @chrisagius13*

## **Nafeesah Allen**

Nafeesah Allen is currently a PhD candidate at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg, South Africa.

*Twitter: @theblaxpat*

## **Julie Audouard**

Julie is a graphic designer & illustrator currently based in Amsterdam. She also works in Visual Design at IMA I Influencer Marketing Agency.

*Instagram: @j.audz*

## **Carmela Caldart**

Carmela is an illustrator from Brazil, who now lives and works in Barcelona. Her work centres a lot around the female experience, trying to shed light on the inequality and injustices that still exist today.

*Instagram: @carmelacaldart*

## **Christina Claes**

Christina studied Cultural Anthropology with a focus on Gender and Disability Studies in Hamburg and Berlin. Her research interests concern particularly the representation of cultural figures, collectives and stories in the public discourse, as well as the political potential of comics. Christina regularly contributes to zines and exhibition projects that engage with social justice and queer feminist issues.

*Instagram: @craestor*

## **Dr. Sally Clark**

Sally Clark attained her PhD from Swinburne University in 2016 where she also lectures across the Politics and Sociology departments.

# Contributor bios.

## **Susanne Greven**

Susanne is a German female artist, yoga teacher, and single mother who is engaged in feminist and left wing actions.

## **Dr. Natalie Hudson**

Natalie is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Dayton, where she also serves as the Director of the Human Rights Studies Program.

*Twitter: @NFloreaHudson*

## **Idreas Khandy**

Idreas Khandy is a PhD politics student at Lancaster University, UK. His research focuses on nationalism, sovereignty, and consent. The case study for his research is Kashmir.

## **Aleksandra Kusnierkiewicz**

Aleksandra is a third-year International Relations student at King's College London. She spent a year abroad at the university of Sydney. She's a passionate writer investigating gender and sexuality politics, women in militarism, migration and geopolitics. She's interested in performing arts, literature and poetry writing.

*Twitter: @alekkus*

*Instagram: @aleksandra.kusnierkiewicz*

## **Robin Ladwig**

Robin is a genderqueer pansexual individual who holds a Master of Arts in Gender Studies from University of Freiburg (Germany) and have a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work. She is also a registered nurse in Germany. Currently, she is studying a Business Certificate at Canberra Institute of Technology (Australia).

## **Laurie Lijnders**

Laurie Lijnders is a PhD student at the Centre for Gender Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London where she explores how women from Eritrea make sense of and resist human rights violations in Eritrea, border and asylum regimes, and fascism and racism in Israel and beyond as well as patriarchal structures in their communities. Laurie also works at the social policy think-tank ROTA (Race on the Agenda), supporting refugee communities in London.

## **Mary McLoughlin**

Mary is an undergraduate student at the University of Dayton studying English and Human Rights. She is the opinions editor for *FlyerNews*, the student newspaper and on the editing staff of *Orpheus*, UD's Art and Literary Magazine.

*Twitter: @marymcloughlin*



# Contributor bios.

## Alice Merry

Alice works as a researcher and project manager in a UN agency, based in Lima, Peru.

*Twitter: @alicekmerry*

*Instagram: @alicekatem*

## Dr. Anwar Mhajne

Anwar Mhajne recently received her Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Cincinnati in the US. Her current research focuses on gender, politics, and religion.

*Twitter: @mhajneam*

*Instagram: @au111z*

## Taylor Miller

Taylor Miller completed her BFA and MA in Art & Visual Culture Education at the University of Arizona. As a PhD student at the University of Arizona, her research interests include the contemporary cultural and political geography of Palestine, and the aesthetics and critical spatial practices of the Israeli occupation. Her transdisciplinary projects incorporate photography, poetry and critical architectural and urban theory.

*Instagram: @tk\_miller*

*About the photo: It is part of a project which explores the metamorphosis of the southern Tel Aviv neighborhoods of Florentin and Neve Sha'anani since the closure of Holot Detention Center in the Negev Desert and how former detainees are (or are not) reintegrated into the social fabric of Tel Aviv. In dialogue with the photo collective Activestills, Taylor documented a large-scale wheatpaste installation. It was a project that documented hundreds of consenting asylum seekers; reaffirming their presence and positioning their bodies and hopes for acceptance squarely into the gaze of the Israelis inhabiting central Tel Aviv. But even this demonstration of creative, nonviolent solidarity, outreach and resistance against the government's oppression was too much for some Tel Aviv inhabitants to bear. The images in their current form have been whitewashed over, so as to cover up the migrants' bodies and stories. This active violation of the art installation took an even more vicious turn; someone had gauged out the eyes of the photographed men and sliced many of their faces beyond recognition. This act of scratching, erasing and cutting at the migrants was an act by someone who didn't just disprove of public art. No, this was the deed of someone—perhaps of many—who actively hates, excludes and punishes.*

## Maxine Mueller

Maxine who is from Germany, recently graduated from the London School of Economics with a Master's in Urbanization and Development.



# Contributor bios.

## **Opeyemi Owa**

Opeyemi was born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria. She recently graduated from St. George's University, School of Medicine, Grenada. Her art focuses on the many ways the human face can be represented. Frequently used mediums include granite pencil, ink pens and acrylic paint. She is passionate about art, Nigeria, the marginalized, public health and evangelism.

*About the paintings: These three pieces represent the consequence of an absence of policies and laws that empower and protect girls and women. The effects of an absence of these policies and laws reach far beyond race, geographic location and age. It takes away the podium where issues that affect women can be voiced and rectified. By taking our podium, it stifles our voices ultimately robbing us of our identity and individuality.*

## **Rachel Popik**

Rachel is a human rights professional focusing on gender-based violence. She has over five years' experience working in both the non-profit sector and federal government. She has lived and worked in West Africa as well as consulted for organizations in Rwanda, Ghana and Ethiopia. Rachel is currently pursuing a Master of Public Administration specializing in Human Rights, Gender, and Identity at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies.

*Twitter: @RachelPopik*

*Instagram: rachelpopik*

## **Gabrielle Rocha Rios**

Gabrielle is a Brazilian-American currently living in Washington, DC, pursuing a PhD in International Psychology.

*Twitter & Instagram: @g\_rocharios*

## **Byul Ryan-Im**

Byul is has volunteered for various human rights groups in the U.K., Greece and Thailand. In Greece she spent six months volunteering with refugees on the islands and mainland. Recently, she completed an internship with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Bangkok, Thailand, where she now lives and works.

## **Patricia Santos**

Patricia was born and raised in Brazil, but now resides in Berlin. She graduated in Social Communication with major in journalism (BA) in Rio de Janeiro and MFA in Media Arts and Design at Bauhaus Universität Weimar, Germany.

*Instagram: @santozoe*

*About the photos: She is a Keeper is a series of women working as housekeepers in New York, Paris, Lyon, Berlin, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo. Focusing on women from diasporas were not a coincidence but rather a matter of structural barrier: the process of upward social mobility is one of the many challenges of integration into society as a immigrant.*

# Contributor bios.

## **John Trajer**

John is currently an LL.M. researcher in Comparative, European and International Laws at the European University Institute (Florence), with a focus on European and international legal obligations towards victims of human trafficking in the context of transit migration.

## **Vidushi Yadav**

Vidushi is an animation Artist, illustrator, visual Designer, and user Experience Designer from Jaipur, India.

*Instagram & Twitter: @vidushiy*

## **Elvia Vasconcelos**

Elvia is a design researcher, sketchnoter, wannabe hacktivist, compulsive drawer and dressmaker.

*Twitter: @ElviaVasc*

*Instagram: @sketchnotes\_are\_awesome*

## **Gloria Sophie Wille**

Gloria is a Crochet Couture designer and artist. In her work, she combines classical crochet and knit patterns with contemporary designs to develop a new form of fashion perspectives. She uses crochet as her weapon of choice to provoke, to hold a mirror up to society... and sometimes just for creating a utopian fairytale. Gloria Sophie Wille draws her inspiration from music and current, as well as historical events.

*Instagram: @gloria\_sophie*

# Publication info.

**Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy UK**

72 Trinity Road

London, N22 8XX

Email: [disrupted@centreforffp.org](mailto:disrupted@centreforffp.org)

Disrupted: The Migration Issue

Published 7 March 2019

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