

What Is Border Imperialism?

The world was born yearning to be a home for everyone.

—Eduardo Galeano, “Through the Looking Glass: Q & A with Eduardo Galeano”



For the past several years, Indigenous organizations in Australia have been issuing “Original Passports” to asylum seekers who have been detained or denied legal status by the Australian government. Most recently, in May 2012, passports were issued to two detained Tamil asylum seekers. During the ceremony, Ray Jackson of the Indigenous Social Justice Association said, “The Australian Government must stop imprisoning Indigenous people, and they must stop imprisoning asylum seekers. I am proud to welcome people in need into our community.” Indigenous elder Robbie Thorpe commented, “The Australian Government has no legitimate right to grant or refuse entry to anyone in this country, let alone lock up people fleeing war and persecution.”(1)

Such moments of solidarity between Indigenous people and migrants represent not only growing networks of understanding and alliance between marginalized communities, but also a fundamental challenge to the authority of settler-colonial governments and the sovereignty of Western statehood. Western governance and statehood is constituted through multiple modes, including the primacy of the border that delineates and reproduces territorial, political, economic, cultural, and social control. As activists Alessandra Moctezuma and Mike Davis write, “All borders are acts of state violence inscribed in landscape.”(2) Constantly being redefined, borders represent a regime of practices, institutions, discourses, and systems that I define as border imperialism.

In this chapter, I establish the broad theoretical groundwork for conceptualizing border imperialism and its four overlapping structurings referenced in the introduction. Border imperialism is characterized by the entrenchment and reentrenchment of controls against migrants, who are displaced as a result of the violences of capitalism and empire, and subsequently forced into precarious labor as a result of state illegalization and systemic social hierarchies.

Border imperialism is a useful analytic framework for organizing migrant justice movements in North America. It takes us away from an analysis that blames and punishes migrants, or one that forces migrants to assimilate and establish their individual worth. Instead, reflecting Thorpe’s words, it reorients the gaze squarely on the processes of displacement and migration within the global political economy of capitalism and colonialism. I argue that circulations of capital and labor stratifications in the global economy, narratives of empire, and hierarchies of race, class, and gender within state building all operate in tandem to lay the foundation for border imperialism.

An analysis of border imperialism encapsulates a dual critique of Western state building within global empire: the role of Western imperialism in dispossessing communities in order to secure land and resources for state and capitalist interests, as well as the deliberately limited inclusion of migrant bodies into Western states through processes of criminalization and racialization that justify the

commodification of their labor. Western states thus are major arbiters in determining if and under what conditions people migrate.

I use the term West not only to denote the geographic site of the global North (that is, Europe, Australia, and North America) but also to reference the dominance of Western political, economic, and social formations and ideologies that have led to the foundation of other settler-colonial states such as Israel, and that are increasingly adopted by neoliberal states in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Though political and economic governance are not uniform across these states, as Japanese scholar Naoki Sakai comments about the West as an ideology, “Unlike all the other names associated with geographic particularities, it also implies the refusal of its self-delimitation or particularistic determination. . . . In short, the West must represent the moment of the universal, which subsumes the particular.”(3) Border imperialism works to extend and externalize the universalization of Western formations beyond its own boundaries through settler colonialism and military occupations, as well as through the globalization of capitalism by imposing financial agreements and exploiting human and natural resources. Simultaneously, the reinforcement of physical and psychological borders against racialized bodies is a key instrument through which to maintain the sanctity and myth of superiority of Western civilization.

Displacements and Secured Borders

The itinerary was stamped in our palms at birth.

—Monika Zobel, “The Immigrant Searches the Map for Countries Larger Than His Palm”

Butterflies have always had wings; people have always had legs. While history is marked by the hybridity of human societies and the desire for movement, the reality of most of migration today reveals the unequal relations between rich and poor, between North and South, between whiteness and its others. As the Frassanito Network observes, “To speak of autonomy of migration doesn’t mean to remove from the center of the political debate the mechanisms of domination and exploitation which determine the migrants’ life.”(4) The International Organization for Migration and the United Nations (UN) estimate that there are a billion migrants around the world, 740 million of who are migrant workers inside or outside their own countries.(5) According to figures published by the UN High Commissioner

for Refugees, there are 43.7 million forcibly displaced people in the world, including 27.5 million people who are internally displaced within their own countries.(6) Half the world's refugees are women, and approximately 45 percent of forcibly displaced people are under the age of eighteen.(7)

The first defining process within border imperialism is displacements as a result of the coercive extractions of capitalism and colonialism, and the simultaneous fortification of the border—often by those very same Western powers that are complicit in these displacements—which renders the migration of displaced people as perilous. Large-scale displacements and the precarious conditions into which migrants are cast are not coincidental but rather foundational to the structuring of border imperialism.

Western imperialism is a major cause of mass displacements and migrations. Due to the dispossession of 750,000 Palestinians from their homelands in 1948 and the ongoing illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine, stateless Palestinians form one of the world's largest refugee communities, now numbering almost five million people.(8) Following two invasions and subsequent military occupations, the world's largest recent refugee populations come from Afghanistan and Iraq.(9) With decades of foreign intrusion, including the US and NATO occupations that began in 2001, these two countries have been subjected to the destruction of their infrastructure, privatization of their economies, interference in their governance, and military missions that have killed and tortured over one million people.(10) These interventions are best described as imperialist, defined by Said as “the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory.”(11) Border imperialism, then, represents the extension and imposition of Western rule, with the current dynamics of global empire maintaining unequal relationships of political, economic, cultural, and social dominance of the West over its colonies.

Border imperialism not only makes possible the transgression and violation of non-Western communities' autonomy in order to maintain the interests of Western empire, it also denies any accountability for its own victims. For example, despite its incessant rhetoric of humanitarian intervention, which political geographer Derek Gregory characterizes as the “velvet glove wrapped around the iron fist of colonialism,” the United States accepted only 328 refugees from Afghanistan in 2009.(12) This is a shockingly low number, and even more so considering the direct responsibility of the United States in displacing Afghans. Of a staggering total of 4.7 million displaced people in Iraq and Afghanistan, the majority of refugees crossed into bordering countries such as Pakistan and Iran.(13) Contrary to popular belief about Western generosity and openness to refugees, over 80 percent of the world's refugees reside in neighboring countries within the global South.(14)

Capitalism is another root cause of mass displacements and migrations. A salient example of the impact of capitalist mobility on migration trends in North America is the effects of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which has displaced millions of Mexicans, and the parallel fortification of the U.S.-Mexico border against migrants. Under NAFTA, the Mexican government was forced to eliminate subsidies to corn while corn produced in the United States remained subsidized, thus making US corn cheaper to buy inside Mexico than Mexican corn. As a result, over 15 million Mexicans were forced into poverty and 1.5 million farmers who lost their farms migrated to the United States to work in low-wage sectors.(15) Professor William Robinson summarizes this dynamic: "The transnational circulation of capital and the disruption and deprivation it causes, in turn, generates the transnational circulation of labor. In other words, global capitalism creates immigrant workers. . . . In a sense, this must be seen as a coerced or forced migration, since global capitalism exerts a structural violence over whole populations and makes it impossible for them to survive in their homeland."(16)

While such conditions push millions of Mexicans into low-paid work in the United States, the migration from Mexico into the US southwest (itself illegally annexed territory since 1846) is made perilous. Similar to the lack of hospitality toward Afghan and Iraqi refugees, displaced Mexican migrants contend with a heavily fortified border. "We never thought that we'd be in the business of helping to identify remains like in a war zone, and here we are," says Isabel Garcia, cochair of Tucson-based Coalición de Derechos Humanos.(17) Since millions of dollars were put into increasing border patrols and surveillance on the U.S.-Mexico border through Operation Gatekeeper, which went into effect the same year as NAFTA, the American Civil Liberties Union estimates that 5,600 migrants have died while attempting to cross that border.(18)

Geographer and critical race theorist Mary Pat Brady describes border deaths as "a kind of passive capital punishment," where "immigrants have been effectively blamed for their own deaths."(19) Women are particularly vulnerable to sexualized violence at the border. According to a representative of the Latin America and the Caribbean section of the UN Development Fund for Women, at least 60 to 70 percent of undocumented women migrants who cross the border experience sexual abuse.(20) The unfreedom for migrants and concurrent freedom of capital across borders is a defining element of the constant warfare of border imperialism. For example, immediately after 9/11, the Canadian and US governments signed the Canada-US Smart Border Accord to ensure that border restrictions on migrants would not impair the economic necessity of ensuring the free flow of goods, services, and capital across the border.

These instances highlight how mass displacements and precarious migrations are not random but rather largely a result of structural dictates. Within border

imperialism, the dual processes of displacement and migration are *manufactured* through the specific trajectories of colonialism and capitalism. Wark points to the injustice of the system that creates displacement and migration: “Migration is globalisation from below. If the ‘overdeveloped’ world refuses to trade with the underdeveloped world on fair terms, to forgive debt, to extend loans, to lift trade barriers against food and basic manufactured goods, then there can only be an increase in the flow of people.”(21) Border imperialism also illuminates the *management* of these migrations. Political geographer Reece Jones documents how, under the guise of fighting “illegal immigration” and “terrorism,” three countries alone—United States, India, and Israel—have built over 3,500 miles of walls on their borders.(22) Border controls are used to deter those for who migration is the only option to the plundering of their communities and economies due to the free license granted to capital and militaries.

Capitalism destroys land-based subsistence cultures and concentrates wealth and property into the hands of a select few. Production within capitalism is disconnected from human need, collective creativity, and the natural world—all of which become commodities to be bought and sold on the market. As the dominant global economic system, capitalism is based on a model of private property, production for profit, waged labor, and private ownership of the means of production and distribution. During the Industrial Revolution in late eighteenth-century England, peasants were displaced from their farmlands and forced to migrate to cities and work for scant wages in growing privately owned industries. Neoliberal capitalist globalization, as the current formation of capitalism, intensifies these processes of dispossession and impoverishment.

A central feature of neoliberalism is the increased mobility of capital across borders. The mobility of capital is aided by the multinational nature of corporations, which defy and evade labor and tax regulations through subcontracting, outsourcing, and transnational banking systems. Global economic regimes such as multilateral trade agreements and structural adjustment programs also facilitate the mobility of capital by imposing measures such as privatization, austerity cutbacks, and user-pay social services.

While guaranteeing capital flows, neoliberalism concurrently guarantees labor flexibility. Waged labor is ever-more synonymous with labor flexibility, which necessitates creating a pool of precarious workers. Precarious labor is characterized by poor wages, insecurity in the continuity of work, and lack of protection by even minimal labor regulations. Casual, part-time, and contract labor—which have been termed the “Walmartization” of labor—are increasingly stratified further from more formal and secure forms of employment, and instead are stratified toward indentured and sweatshop labor. The precarity of both labor and social organization are intertwined and cyclic: capitalism requires precarious and exploitable workers to facilitate capital accumulation, and creates those precarious lives

through hierarchies of systemic oppression along with its extractions of labor and land. As discussed later in this chapter, a fundamental feature of border imperialism within neoliberalism is to facilitate capital flows across borders while also ensuring labor flexibility by legalizing an exploitable migrant labor workforce.

Analyses of capitalism have generally ignored the central role of land and the colonization of Indigenous societies in the development of capitalism. In Karl Marx's theory of primitive accumulation, capitalist modes of production explicitly require conquest, enslavement, and the dispossession of communities from the lands on which they subsist. Glen Coulthard, an Indigenous scholar, explains that colonialism "forcefully opened-up what were once collectively held territories and resources to privatization (dispossession), which, over time, came to produce a 'class' of workers compelled to enter the exploitative realm of the labor market for their survival (proletarianization)." (23) Colonial and capitalist interests continue to expropriate Indigenous lands, dispossessing Indigenous nations of their territorial base and livelihood, particularly within but not limited to settler-colonial states. Within Canada, there has been a recent push to convert communally held reserve lands—what capitalists refer to as "dead capital"—into fee simple private property. (24) This privatization of Indigenous lands would ensure both the colonial state's interests in extinguishing Aboriginal title, and corporate capitalist interests in extracting and commodifying natural resources.

Such analysis reveals a critical connection between the Western state and capitalism, with the state serving as a key instrument to accumulate capital. Contrary to the suggestion by some analysts that the Western state's jurisdiction is withering under the power of multinational corporations, I would contend that the state is not *eroding* under transnational capitalist globalization. The state, along with its forms of governance including through border imperialism, is *evolving* to continue to meet the needs of capitalist expansion through more flexible means of governance and accumulation.

The state maintains an economic infrastructure for capital flows, including stock exchanges, tax regulations, and banking systems. The state also creates the political and legal framework that protects private property, enables the status of corporations as legal entities, sanctions the extraction and commodification of natural resources, and guarantees support for disciplining the workforce. Financial analyst Mike Konczal describes this succinctly: "When the state intervenes in the functioning of markets, it isn't to rectify injustices but instead to further create and maintain the rigor of the economy itself." (25) The Western state thus can be characterized as organizing, facilitating, and in many instances, enforcing capitalism.

The Canadian economy, for example, is largely based on the expropriation of natural resources internally, while the state-corporate nexus also profits from capitalist development projects imposed globally. Canadian mining corporations,

which represent 75 percent of the world's mining and exploration companies, are protected and enabled by the Canadian state in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, even though they have been responsible for, and in some cases charged with, environmental destruction, human and labor rights violations, and the forced displacement of surrounding communities.(26)

Likewise, multinational corporations are welcomed by the Canadian state to exploit and export tar sands, the world's most environmentally destructive industrial project that disproportionately impacts Indigenous nations. In a submission to the United Nations, the Indigenous Yinka Dene Alliance writes, "Canada has indicated that it is contemplating conduct that would infringe our Aboriginal Title and Rights. . . . [I]t is manifestly clear that the Canadian government has already reached a decision to push through this project regardless of the serious adverse effects on Indigenous peoples and lands and without their free, informed and prior consent."(27)

In settler-colonial states such as Canada and the United States, the encroachment on Indigenous lands is compounded by genocidal attempts to subjugate Indigenous governance and assimilate Indigenous cultures. Diné scholar Jennifer Nez Denetdale notes how Indigenous women have been intentionally targeted. "The rape and prostitution of Native women," she explains, was "integral to colonial conquest," as was "the imposition of a modern state formation . . . [which] re-configured gender roles to mirror American gender roles."(28) This annihilation of Indigenous societies is justified through racist civilizing discourses, such as the discovery doctrine and *terra nullius*, which uphold the political and legal right for colonial powers to conquer supposedly barren Indigenous lands.

The world over, Indigenous communities are at the forefront of resisting dispossession while facing the brunt of displacement, particularly from rural areas into urban centers. The forced privatization and neoliberalization of subsistence farming has resulted in the loss of rural land for millions across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. These displacements bring astounding numbers of people to the centers of capital in order to survive. Forced to endure grinding poverty and stigmatization, displaced people make up the mass in urban slums and low-income neighborhoods. UN figures reveal over one billion slum dwellers across the world in 2005.(29) Women are overrepresented in these statistics, forced into the informal economies of sex work, domestic work, and street vending. This is what border imperialism, embedded in colonialism and capitalism, engenders.

The Canary Islands, off the coast of Morocco, are a critical convergence of colonial displacement, forced labor, capitalist circulation, and border securitization within border imperialism. Spain colonized the Indigenous Guanches of the Canary Islands in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and imposed a plantation economy that used forced labor to produce sugarcane and cochineal as cash crops. Today, as the outermost region of the European Union, the islands are a major

gateway for African migrants into Europe. Migrants from the western regions of Africa—born of a legacy of slavery, civil wars fueled by Western geopolitical interests, and the colonial Scramble for Africa with its contemporary expression of landgrabs—flee to the Canary Islands in the tens of thousands every year. This is one of the most dangerous and heavily patrolled migration routes in the world, with a Spanish official estimating that 40 percent of those attempting the journey die en route.(30) Even according to conservative estimates cited by the Red Cross, approximately fifteen hundred migrants died trying to reach the Canary Islands in just a five-month period in 2005.(31)

Border securitization operates not at a fixed site but rather through structures and technologies of power across geographies. On the Canary Islands and elsewhere in Europe, the border is pushed outward to secure an external border around what has been called “Fortress Europe.” Created in 2004, Frontex is a European Union regulatory agency tasked with integrated border security and fortification of the European Union’s external border. As noted by Marxist philosopher Étienne Balibar, “Borders are vacillating . . . they are no longer at the border,” and surveillance measures, including military aircrafts, are employed offshore to deter migrants from leaving Africa.(32) Border imperialism therefore excludes migrants through the diffusion of the state’s jurisdiction *beyond* its actual territorial borders. The European network UNITED for Intercultural Action has documented 16,264 refugee deaths across Europe, most due to drowning at sea and suffocation in containers.(33) Like migrant deaths at the US-Mexico border, this number represents the human face of border militarization policies as people are forced to seek out more clandestine and perilous routes.

The ecological crisis is another recent manifestation of how capitalism propels migration. According to statistics by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, by the year 2020 there will be fifty million climate refugees displaced by climate-induced disasters including droughts, desertification, and mass flooding.(34) It is well documented that climate change correlates directly with carbon and greenhouse gas emissions, with the industrialized, consumption-based economies of the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada topping in emissions per capita and consumption per capita emissions.(35)

Tuvalu is one of dozens of low-lying Pacific Island nations threatened with total submersion as climate change and global warming cause ocean levels to rise drastically. Since 2007, the government of Tuvalu has been urging countries within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Kyoto and the UN General Assembly to heed the impending disaster in Tuvalu. Over one-fifth of Tuvaluans have already been forced to flee their country, many to poor neighboring islands such as Fiji, and others to New Zealand.(36) Despite having the world’s highest emission per capita at 19.6 tons of carbon dioxide per person, Tuvalu’s other

neighbor, Australia, has so far refused to accept Tuvaluans as climate refugees.(37) Border imperialism again denies justice to migrants who are its own casualties.

The effects of Western colonialism and capitalism have created political economies that compel people to move, and yet the West denies culpability and accountability for displaced migrants. Liz Fekete of the Institute of Race Relations sums up the argument against borderlines that normalize protectionism within the West: “This isn’t a separate world. Globalization isn’t a separate world. I’m using words like ‘First World’ [and] ‘Third World’ as easy ways into this argument, but they’re a lie—there is one world and there is one economic system. And that economic system is dominated by Europe, the United States and Japan. This economic system is creating these huge displacements of people, it’s rampaging through the world.”(38) Border imperialism, marked by forced displacements and precarious migrations from rural peripheries to urban cores as well as within and across state borders, is inextricably linked to the global circulations of capital and Western imperial dictates, even as the West seals itself off from these bodies.

Criminalization and the Carceral Network

all around, and creeping
self righteous, let’s say it, fascism,
how else to say, border,
and the militant consumption of everything,
the encampment of the airport, the eagerness
to be all the same, to mince biographies
to some exact phrases, some
exact and toxic genealogy.

—Dionne Brand, “Inventory”

The second defining process of border imperialism is the criminalization of migration and the deliberate construction of migrants as illegals and aliens. The celebrated multiculturalism of Western governments’ carefully handpicked (professional elite or investor class) diaspora exists parallel to what migration researcher Peter Nyers terms the “deportspora”—a vastly larger and more diverse group of migrants.(39) According to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement statistics, deportations under President Barack Obama skyrocketed to a total of 1.4 million people.(40) As researcher and author Anna Pratt writes, “Detention and

deportation and the borders they sustain are key technologies in the continuous processes that ‘make up’ citizens and govern populations.”(41)

Migrants, particularly undocumented migrants or asylum seekers arriving irregularly, are punished, locked up, and deported for the very act of migration. In order to justify their incarceration, the state has to allege some kind of criminal or illegal act. Within common discourses, the victim of this criminal act is the state, and the alleged assault is on its borders. The state becomes a tangible entity, with its own personhood and boundaries that must not be violated. Butler describes the policing of the state and its national subject as a “relentlessly aggressive” and “masculinist” project.(42) Within this concept of sexualized nationhood, borders are engendered as needing protection, or as cultural theorist Katrina Schlunke puts it, “vulnerable shores that must be kept intact and secured against the threat of un-negotiated penetration by strangers.”(43)

By invoking the state *itself* as a victim, migrants *themselves* are cast as illegals and criminals who are committing an act of assault on the state. Migrants become prisoners of passage; their unauthorized migration is considered a trespass, and their very existence is criminalized. In a telling representation, one of the principal detention centers in Canada is the Canadian Immigration Prevention Center (Laval). Migrants are not seen for their actual humanity but instead as a problem to be prevented, deterred, managed, and contained. They become stereotyped by politicians, media, and within popular consciousness as floods of people from “over there” who are “disease ridden,” “fraudulent,” or “security threats.” These narratives buttress moral panics about “keeping borders safe and secure” from poor and racialized migrants.

Migrant detention regimes are a key component of Western state building and its constitutive assertion of border controls. According to research conducted by the Global Detention Project, “Migration-related detention is the practice of detaining—typically on administrative (as opposed to criminal) grounds—asylum seekers and irregular immigrants. . . . Migration detainees often face legal uncertainties, including lack of access to the outside world, limited possibilities of challenging detention through the courts, and/or absence of limitations on the duration of detention.”(44)

Practices of incarceration and expulsion, often shared across Western states, demarcate zones of exclusion and mark those deemed undesirable. Philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault contends that “we should not . . . be asking subjects how, why, and under what right they can agree to being subjugated, but showing how actual relations of subjugation manufacture subjects.”(45) The words of Nader, an Iranian asylum seeker held in a Canadian detention center for six years, sheds light on such structures of subjugation: “The length of my detention has not been predicated on any evidence that I am a ‘threat to national security’ or that my release poses any ‘risk to the public safety.’ Yet I have endured the

psychological trauma of confinement and the emotional suffering and anxiety of being separated from my son, who has since been granted asylum in Canada.”(46)

Migrant detention centers are part of the expanding prison system. In the United States, undocumented migrants comprise one of the fastest-growing prison populations with over two hundred detention facilities, representing an 85 percent increase in detention spaces, and approximately three million detentions since 2003.(47) Detained migrant women in the United States report routine abuse by male guards including the shackling of pregnant detainees.(48) Australia’s off-shoring of detention centers to remote islands and the internationally condemned mandatory-detention-first policy has resulted in an average of three incidents of attempted self-harm per day as well as countless hunger strikes and prison riots.(49) Legal organizations and refugee groups have called this dire situation of six thousand detainees in Australian detention centers “a national emergency.”(50) Canada detains approximately nine to fifteen thousand migrants every year, more than one-third of whom are held in provincial prisons.(51) A new Canadian law has introduced mandatory detention for many refugees including children over the age of sixteen. Migrant women in detention in Canada report being denied basic services such as access to translation services that male detainees are provided.

Some miles away, Israel is constructing the world’s largest detention center. With a capacity of eight thousand people, this detention center is geared toward the incarceration of Eritrean, Sudanese, and other African asylum seekers who are deemed infiltrators under the recently amended 1954 Prevention of Infiltration Law. For “threatening to change the character of the state,” refugees can be detained without trial for a period of three years, and could even be held indefinitely.(52) As part of the Zionist logic to keep Israel an exclusionary national home for Jews, this law was originally intended to imprison Palestinian refugees who were returning to their homes after the 1948 Al-Nakba. The law therefore simultaneously criminalizes Palestinians who defy dispossession and the illegal occupation of their homelands by asserting their right to return, as well as African refugees fleeing Western imperialism and structural poverty. Drawing the links between these parallel forms of expulsion and exclusion, Palestinian commentator Ali Abunimah observes that to Israeli apartheid, “Palestinians and Africans are a ‘threat’ merely because they live, breathe.”(53)

The systemic lens of border imperialism sheds light on how state practices of migrant detention create huge corporate profits. Within weeks of 9/11, Steve Logan, a chief executive of the former prison company Cornell Corporations, which is now owned by GEO Group, told stock analysts, “It’s clear that since September 11th there’s a heightened focus on detention, both on the borders and in the U.S. . . . What we are seeing is an increased scrutiny of tightening up the borders. . . . More people are going to get caught. So I would say that’s positive.”(54)

Corporations that run private prisons and detention centers made over five billion dollars in combined annual profits in the United States over the past decade. According to Detention Watch Network, five prison corporations that hold contracts with the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement have poured twenty million dollars into lobbying efforts.(55) Arizona's controversial SB 1070, which legalizes racial profiling based on "suspicion of being an illegal immigrant," was drafted during a meeting between state legislators and the Corrections Corporation of America, the largest private prison corporation in the United States.(56)

This is part of what Naomi Klein calls "a privatized security state, both at home and abroad," as she outlines how the War on Terror has maximized profitability for security markets.(57) In this lucrative market of migrant detention and border securitization, the value of Israeli exports in security technologies has almost quadrupled.(58) A notable example is the contract for the border fence between the United States and Mexico going to a consortium of companies including Elbit. One of the world's biggest defense electronics manufacturers and Israel's largest arms manufacturer, Elbit also has a contract for electronic detection along the illegal apartheid wall in Palestine.(59) State securitization of borders and corporate profiting from migrant detentions are the practices of imperial democracies, which postcolonial feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty describes as those practices that are sustained by "overly militarized, securitized nation states," where "the militarization of cultures is deeply linked to neoliberal capitalist values."(60) The state and capitalism are again in mutual alliance: state criminalization of migrants directly feeds capitalist profits in ever-expanding security markets.

The "tough on illegals" narrative, which justifies increased border patrols, armed border guards, migrant detention, immigration enforcement raids in homes and workplaces, and vigilante programs like the Minutemen in the United States or deportation tip lines in Canada, is not new or unique. Such narratives and material practices are linked to that which predates them, including the "tough on crime" narrative deployed in the 1980s, and the more recent "tough on terror" rhetoric. These discourses have justified the oversurveillance and overincarceration of Indigenous people, black people, sex workers, homeless people, Muslims, and migrants of color.

Largely unnoticed, the imprisonment of women has skyrocketed over the past two decades. As the world's largest jailer, the United States, with only 5 percent of the world's population but 25 percent of the world's prisoners, has increased its incarceration rate of women by 832 percent over three decades.(61) The incarceration rate of black women in the United States has increased by 828 percent over a five-year period, and black women now constitute one-half of the US female prison population.(62) In Western Australia, the number of incarcerated women doubled between the years 1995 and 2001, with Indigenous women comprising 54

percent of the female prisoner population although constituting only 2 percent of the state's population.(63) In Canada, the representation of Indigenous women in prison has increased by nearly 90 percent over the past decade and has been declared "nothing short of a crisis."(64)

Though informed by different logics, the incarceration of all these "undesirables" is interrelated. Migrant detention centers, prisons, secret torture facilities, juvenile detention centers, and interrogation facilities are all part of the growing prison-industrial complex. As former political prisoner and prison abolitionist Angela Davis points out,

Homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness, and illiteracy are only a few of the problems that disappear from public view when the human beings contending with them are relegated to cages. . . . Taking into account the structural similarities of business-government linkages in the realms of military production and public punishment, the expanding penal system can now be characterized as a "prison industrial complex."(65)

Foucault further explains the expansion of prisons as the self-perpetuation of power: the constant creation of prisoners in order for the state to keep exercising coercive and disciplinary power. He describes this as the carceral network, an inescapable and increasingly internalized network of "discourses and architectures, coercive regulations and scientific propositions, real social effects and invincible utopias, programs for correcting delinquents and mechanisms that reinforce delinquency."(66)

The construction of illegals within border imperialism is part of a broader logic that constructs deviants in order to maintain state power, capitalist profiteering, and social hierarchies. Within mainstream narratives, criminals are never imagined as politicians, bankers, corporate criminals, or war criminals, but as a racialized class of people living in poverty. The word criminal becomes synonymous with dehumanizing stereotypes of ghettos, welfare recipients, drug users, sex workers, and young gang members. Similarly, the term illegals is imagined as referring to poor migrants of color, even though many white tourists often illegally overstay their visas. As Davis writes, "Regardless of who has or has not committed crimes, punishment, in brief, can be seen more as a consequence of racialized surveillance."(67) In North America, we can look to the countless police killings of Indigenous and black men, such as Dudley George and Oscar Grant, since the enduring violences of genocide and slavery, and also the more recent illegal detentions of over eight hundred Muslim men and boys in Guantanamo Bay to understand that these bodies are disciplined by being cast as suspicious even before any so-called criminal act has been committed.

Therefore, the social control and criminalization that delineates the carceral network and disappears undesirables is the frequently invisible yet entrenched racist colonial belief that incarceration is a legitimate response to communities that are constructed and characterized *innately* as being illegals, deviants, criminals, terrorists, or threats.

Racialized Hierarchies

The third constituent structuring within border imperialism is the racialized hierarchy of national and imperial identity, which anchors and shapes the understanding of citizenship and belonging within the nation-state as well as within the grid of global empire.

Racialization comprises the social, political, economic, and historical processes that utilize essentialist and monolithic racial markings to construct diverse communities of color. Whiteness, as a dominant and dominating structuring that is more than a fixed identity, is able to escape these markings of identity while determining the markings of its racial others. The enduring centrality of whiteness rests in white supremacy, which Challenging White Supremacy Workshop facilitators define as a “historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations . . . for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.”(68) Language such as “racial equality” and “multicultural diversity” are described by anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli as the optics of liberal democracies parading “social difference without social consequence,” thus becoming effective color-blind cloaks for the maintenance of a racial hierarchy that situates whiteness as pervasive and hegemonic within state building, global empire, and border imperialism.(69)

Racial profiling has received much attention in post-9/11 discourse, but must be understood within the broader phenomenas of global white supremacy and racialization that underwrite border imperialism. Racialization enables the conditions for racial stereotypes to be inscribed onto racialized individuals as an *inherent* marking of their racial community. Yasmin Jiواني of Researchers and Academics of Colour for Equity writes,

The racialization of these Others is maintained and communicated through a focus on the inferiorization, deviantization and naturalization of difference. While overt and explicit forms of racism are no longer condoned by the liberal state, colour-blind racism permeates institutional rhetoric and through the mediation of inferential referencing, cordial tonality and

culturalized modality, focuses on difference as the site of the abject and contemptible.(70)

For example, Islamophobia in the post-9/11 era is predicated on the ability to designate and vilify the “dual” citizen (such as Arab Canadian or Muslim American) as a potential terrorist threat, rendering every Muslim, Arab, and/or South Asian as an eternal other and outsider to the nation-state. The 2011 massacre in Norway by Anders Behring Breivik and 2012 shooting by Wade Michael Page in the Oak Creek gurudwara in Wisconsin were considered the acts of “lone” white men, rather than an indictment of whiteness, white supremacy, or right-wing libertarian culture. As commentator Juan Cole derisively blogs, “White terrorists are random events, like tornadoes. Other terrorists are long-running conspiracies. White terrorists are never called ‘white.’ But other terrorists are given ethnic affiliations.”(71)

Theorist Sherene Razack argues that race thinking not only depicts racialized people as deserving a different type of humanity but also constructs them as a different type of humanity.(72) This casting out *within* the nation-state is not new or unique; it is evident in the experiences of segregation, internment of Japanese Canadians and Japanese Americans, the War on Drugs, and reserve system. These lived experiences of otherness are shaped by imaginings about who is entitled to protection *from* the nation-state because they represent the national identity, and who faces violence *by* the nation-state because their bodies are deemed not to belong. The material structures of the Western state have killed, tortured, occupied, raped, incarcerated, sterilized, interned, robbed land from, pillaged, introduced drugs and alcohol into, stolen children from, sanctioned vigilante violence on, denied public services to, and facilitated capital’s hyperexploitation of racialized communities.

Dangerously, racism is increasingly legitimized through the rhetoric of rights, freedoms, and protections for women. From the earlier “yellow peril” myth that warned of migrant Asian men ensnaring white women with opium to the more contemporary justifications of the occupation of Afghanistan as a mission to liberate Muslim women, such putatively feminist causes have been perennially seductive, and many feminists are implicated in shaping these counters of racialized empire. Postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak bluntly portrays the cheerleading of civilizing crusades masked as feminist solidarity as “white men saving brown women from brown men.”(73)

Razack notes that three figures have come to symbolize the current War on Terror: the dangerous Muslim man, the imperiled Muslim woman, and the civilized European.(74) This racist and sexist construction is played out ad nauseam in the mainstream media with the dangerous Muslim man embodying the threat that Islam poses to all oppressed Muslim women, who lack the agency to accept or

challenge their heterogeneous cultures and religions, and thus must be rescued by progressive white civilization.

The architecture of these representations is an intentional ideology that normalizes racialization and justifies its impacts on racialized bodies. Far from supporting Muslim women, attacks on Islam as innately fundamentalist, conservative, barbaric, and heteropatriarchal have increasingly targeted Muslim women within the West for public scrutiny, hate crimes, and state surveillance. The most palpable example of this is the debates over, and in some cases the laws banning, the niqab throughout North America and Europe, which scholar Juanid Rana describes as a means to “discipline bodies into an imperial racial order.”(75) Muslim women’s clothing becomes a racialized and gendered marker that immediately identifies their bodies as not only outside the social boundaries of whiteness but also as disruptive to the disciplinary logic of adherence and assimilation to whiteness, along with its acceptable aesthetic of how one clothes the body.

Anxieties about tainting the nation-state’s normative heteropatriarchal whiteness are linked to the racist justifications for the violence of economic and military imperialism globally and the violence of settler colonialism locally. The racist denial and violation of Indigenous self-determination is part of the colonial project to, on the one hand, annihilate Indigenous communities through overt violence, and on the other hand, assimilate them through residential boarding schools and legislative control. In Canada, until 1985, Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men were entirely stripped of their legal status as “Indians” and lost all corresponding rights, such as the rights to live on the reserve, inherit family land, and be buried on reserve land. As Indigenous scholar Bonita Lawrence notes about such racialized and gendered policies of population control, “To be federally recognized as an Indian either in Canada or the United States, an individual must be able to comply with very distinct standards of government regulation.”(76)

In addition to sanctioning such state and societal violence within its borders, racism justifies imperialist wars abroad that kill, torture, and displace millions of women, children, and men. Theorist Gargi Bhattacharyya argues that the discourse of racialized empire “enables the cruelty and carnage of imperial adventures—because these people are not like us, are not people at all, and their otherness proves that they are lesser, unworthy, dangerous, and to be contained by any means possible.”(77) The logic of racism and inferiority that drives Western imperial wars is inextricably connected to the logic of racism and exclusion within the West. The racialization that anchors national identity and state building therefore comes full circle through an analysis of global racialized empire and border imperialism.

Labor Precarity

The very act of dividing the earth and the sea surface by tracing borders whether they are physical, virtual, or legal also allows for the appropriation of its resources. However, the resource which borders appropriate is not simply the portioned territory. Rather, it is also the subjective claim of people to freely choose the territory in which to settle and the kind of relation they wish to establish with this territory. In other words, borders transform people's claims to movement into a resource which can be appropriated and exchanged.

—Frassanito Network, “Borders Are There to Be Undermined”

The fourth and final structuring of border imperialism is the legalized, state-mediated exploitation of the labor of migrants by capitalist interests. While workers of color generally contend with underemployment, low wages, and long hours, workers without legal citizenship constitute a distinct category of labor in relation to border imperialism—what author Justin Akers Chacón describes as “displacement accompanied by disenfranchisement and often internal segregation in host countries.”(78) Workers without legal citizenship include undocumented/nonstatus workers as well as guest/temporary migrant workers. This section focuses on undocumented workers and migrant workers to draw attention to the constellation of neoliberal globalized capitalism, racialized hierarchies of citizenship, and state building within border imperialism.

The International Labor Organization estimates that there are eighty-six million migrant workers across the world.(79) To highlight one migration pattern, migrant workers are recruited from rural areas in South Asia and Southeast Asia to work in low-wage jobs in the oil economy, domestic sphere, and construction industry in the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates). Migrant laborers represent almost 40 percent of the total population in these countries, and in some countries make up to 90 percent of the total population.(80) These workers are rarely granted citizenship despite decades of residency. Additionally, they are forced to live in labor camps; face routine abuse including wage theft and, particularly for domestic workers, sexual violence; and disproportionately face death sentences in countries such as Saudi Arabia that practice the death penalty. Their working conditions are frequently fatal.

In the United Arab Emirates, approximately nine hundred migrant construction workers died in 2004.(81) Sahinal Monir, a migrant worker from Bangladesh in Dubai, told journalist Johann Hari,

To get you here, they tell you Dubai is heaven. Then you get here and realise it is hell. . . . You have to carry 50 kg bricks and blocks of cement in the worst heat imaginable. . . . You become dizzy and sick but you aren't allowed to stop, except for an hour in the afternoon. You know if you drop anything or slip, you could die. If you take time off sick, your wages are docked. . . . Nobody shows their anger. You can't. You get put in jail for a long time, then deported.(82)

His experience is representative of the precarity of migrant workers within border imperialism: impoverished people forced to migrate to centers of capital in order to survive end up enduring horrific working and living conditions that are supported, and in many cases facilitated, by the state.

In Canada and the United States, migrant workers are most commonly associated with the infamous US Bracero programs of the 1940s to 1960s, the current H-2A visa program for agricultural workers in the United States, and Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. The labor of these migrant workers has secured billions of dollars in profit for agribusiness and is a major subsidy to the economy. Temporary migrant workers are brought on state visas for short periods of time to work for a specific employer. The indentured nature of these state-mediated migrant worker programs, tying workers to their employers, has been described by workers as a form of modern-day slavery. Workers are paid low (often less than minimum) wages with no overtime pay. They labor long hours in dangerous working conditions, frequently leaving their families behind, and are regularly held captive by employers or contractors who seize their identification documents.(83)

Unlike temporary migrant workers who come on employer-lobbied state visas, undocumented workers have no legal authorization to reside or work in the country, and hence have no (theoretical) legal recourse in the face of violence and exploitation. Migrants, and often their children such as the DREAMer students in the United States, are undocumented either because they crossed the border irregularly, they failed an asylum claim, or their visas expired. It is estimated that there are a half million undocumented people in Canada, and eleven million undocumented people in the United States.(84) Many have worked, studied, lived, and built community in Canada and the United States for generations.

Despite differences in the two legal regimes, a defining characteristic of both is the lack of full and permanent legal status. This lack is exactly what makes the lives of migrant and undocumented workers insecure and precarious. They live in isolation with minimal access to basic social services, despite paying into them through their taxes, and are extremely vulnerable to employer abuse, since any assertion of their labor rights can lead to deportation by the state. As scholar Nandita Sharma argues, "The social organization of those categorized as non-

immigrants works to legitimize the differentiation of rights and entitlements across citizen lines by legalizing the indentureship of people classified as migrant workers. . . . Their vulnerability lies at the heart of the flexible accumulation process.”(85) In other words, the state denial of legal citizenship to these migrants ensures legal control over the *disposability* of the laborers, which in turn embeds the *exploitability* of their labor.

Despite antimigrant exclusionary rhetoric, it is not in the interests of the state or capital to close down the border to all migrants. Activist and academic David McNally observes that “it’s not that global business does not want immigrant labor to the West. It simply wants this labor on its own terms: frightened, oppressed, vulnerable.”(86) Consequently, the violence enacted on those bodies that have been *displaced* by imperialist and capitalist foreign and trade policy is further enabled through the deliberate making of migrant and undocumented workers as perpetually *displaceable* by colonial and capitalist immigration and labor policies. The state processes of illegalization of migrant and undocumented workers, through the denial of full legal status that forces a condition of permanent precarity, actually legalizes the trade in their bodies and labor by domestic capital. This strengthens the earlier contention that the state is evolving its structures to protect neoliberal transnational capitalism.

Capitalism’s drive to maximize profit requires a constant search for cheap labor and effective mechanisms to control workers. Historian Harold Troper notes that the denial of legal citizenship to temporary migrant and undocumented workers allows states to accumulate domestic capital via the “in-gathering of off-shore labor” in order to compete in the global market.(87) Theorists Carlos Fernandez, Meredith Gill, Imre Szeman, and Jessica Whyte write, “Without the border, there would be no differential zones of labor, no spaces to realize surplus capital through the dumping of overproduction, no way of patrolling surly populations that might want to resist proletarianization, no release valve for speculative access.”(88) Migrant and undocumented workers thus are the flip side of transnational capitalist outsourcing, which itself requires border imperialism and racialized empire to create differential zones of labor. These workers represent the ideal workforce, particularly in the recent era of austerity: commodified and exploitable; flexible and expendable.

Migrant and undocumented workers, especially women, are overrepresented in low-wage sectors such as garment and domestic work. Under the Live-In Caregiver Program (LCP) in Canada, for example, predominately Filipina migrant workers enter Canada as domestic workers. They are required to work for twenty-four months within a window of four years in order to qualify for permanent residency. During this period, the women must work only in the home of the employer whose name appears on the work permit. Although the program calls for a

maximum in the workweek, the live-in aspect of these jobs allows employers to call on the caregivers at any time.

This exposes the women to labor violations including unpaid or excessive work hours, additional job responsibilities, confiscation of travel documents, disrespect of their privacy, and sexual assault. As one migrant domestic worker remarks, "We know that, under the LCP, we are like modern slaves who have to wait for at least two years to get our freedom." (89) In addition to the supply of cheap labor provided by migrant women under the LCP, the program serves a critical function in the capitalist economy. By facilitating the replacement of domestic labor for middle-class and rich women through the LCP, the state is absolved of the responsibility to create a universal child and elder care program that benefits *all* women and families.

Within border imperialism, migrant and undocumented workers are included in the nation-state in a deliberately limited way, creating a two-tier hierarchy of citizenship. The common naming of migrant workers as foreign, illegal, or temporary automatically signals their nonbelonging. For sociologist Himani Bannerji, these expressions are "certain types of lesser or negative identities" that in actuality are "congealed violence or relations of domination." (90) She reveals how such terminology has little to do with how long these workers have lived and worked within the nation-state; rather, it signals their permanent positioning on the bottom rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. The noncitizen status of these workers *guarantees* that they fall outside the realm of the state's obligations; they can be paid less than minimum wage, prevented from accessing social services, and deported during recessions without the elite having to worry about unemployment rates or social unrest. For this underclass, their selective inclusion within the nation-state as well as legal (un)national identity as foreign or temporary normalizes the status of their unfree labor and exclusion from the state's regime of rights.

The noncitizen status of undocumented and migrant workers also makes them vulnerable to abuse and stigma within society. Poor and working-class people are socialized through the media to view these workers as "stealing jobs" and "flooding neighborhoods," a divide-and-conquer strategy that Saket Soni of the New Orleans Worker Justice Coalition describes as "wedge" politics that pits people against migrant workers. (91) Sharma similarly expresses this when she comments, "Categories of legality and illegality are therefore deeply ideological. They help to conceal the fact that both those represented as foreigners and those seen as Canadian work within the *same* labour market and live within the *same* society." (92)

The classification of migrant workers as foreign, which embeds labor exploitability, is concurrently maintained through racialization. As noted earlier, people of color are already otherized within the Western nation-state, especially within settler-colonial states where whiteness has been necessary for the state's

foundation. Subjugation and exploitation are normalized against those marked as racial outsiders, and then even more so against those legally branded as foreigners. As noted by political scientists Gargi Bhattacharyya, John Gabriel, and Stephen Small, “Capitalist expansion has depended so heavily on mythologies of race and their attendant violences that the double project of racial economic subjugation is a constitutive aspect of this expansion.”(93) Racialization within capitalism is therefore cyclic. Racism is itself a structuring discourse of both the labor market and the regime of citizenship, and is also an effect of the interrelationship between the state and the social, political, and economic segmentation of labor.

While media panics attribute large numbers of noncitizens to a “broken” immigration system, Western policymakers are touting the legalized exploitation and racism of migrant worker programs as the model of the future. These programs are a form of managed migration that fulfills capitalism’s needs for cheap labor, while concurrently retaining the racialized national identity of the nation-state by legally disenfranchising migrant workers. Therefore, within border imperialism, the state-capital nexus relies on the apartheid nature of citizenship status to expand a pool of disposable migrant and undocumented labor that lowers the wage floor for capitalist interests without disturbing the normative whiteness of the nation-state.

A Counternarrative

1,950 mile-long open wound
dividing a pueblo, a culture,
running down the length of my body,
staking fence rods in my flesh,
splits me, splits me
me raja me raja
This is my home
this thin edge of
barbwire.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

Border imperialism can be understood as creating and reproducing global mass displacements and the conditions necessary for the legalized precarity of migrants, which are inscribed by the racialized and gendered violence of empire as well as capitalist segregation and differential segmentation of labor. As I have described in this chapter, within the matrix of racialized empire and neoliberal capitalism, border imperialism is underwritten by, first, the free flow of capitalism and

dictates of Western imperialism that create displacements, while simultaneously securing Western borders against the very people who capitalism and empire have displaced; second, the process of criminalizing migrants through their construction as deviants and illegals, which also ensures profits for companies that receive contracts for border militarization and migrant detention; third, the entrenchment of a racialized national and imperial identity with its gendered contours that has specific embodied and material impacts locally as well as globally; and fourth, the legal denial of permanent residency to a growing number of migrants to ensure an exploitable, marginalized, and expendable pool of labor.

The constant imagining of the nation-state—the ideology of “who belongs”—is best understood within the context of border imperialism and its linkages to the incessant violences of both global racialized empire and the transnational circulation of capital. The physical, social, discursive, and metaphoric dimensions of border imperialism have an undeniable effect in producing a two-tiered apartheid system of citizenship. As Anzaldúa, a queer Chicana feminist, declares, “Borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirables out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior”—an emphatic call to reject the social landscapes and material complexes of exclusion and domination.(94)

Over the past century, the universalization and proliferation of the Western state as the defining political institution as well as citizenship as the defining political community is a consequence of Western imperialism. European powers drew arbitrary borders, dividing communities in order to serve political and economic interests. It is therefore critical to challenge state-centric framings, such as “Immigrants are American too” or “Refugees want to enjoy the freedoms of Canada,” that buttress the legitimacy of the state and its illegitimate foundations in settler colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and oppression. Such framings rely on a regime of state-sanctioned rights, state-perpetuated myths of tolerance and benevolence, and state-enforced assimilation into racialized social formations. Additionally, these framings invisibilize the nature of the neoliberal state as the political and legal jurisdiction that allows for the expansion of capitalism. Finally, they obfuscate the state’s role in perpetuating social, economic, and political violence, including the incarceration and expulsion of those migrants deemed “undeserving.” As Balibar reminds us, we must critically question “what the state is tending to become, how it is behaving, and what functions it is fulfilling.”(95)

In contrast to state-centric framings of migrant justice, two of the most popular slogans within radical migrant justice movements are “We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us” and “No one is illegal, Canada is illegal.” These slogans reflect an understanding of border imperialism as a key pillar of global apartheid, and borders as cartographies of anticapitalist, antiracist, anticolonial, and antioppressive struggles. As geographers Henk Van Houtum, Olivier Thomas Kramsch, and Wolfgang Zierhofer depict it, a “border is not so much an object or a material