

**Natasha King**, *No Borders: The Politics of Immigration Control and Resistance*, London: Zed Books, 2016. ISBN: 9781783604685 (cloth); ISBN: 9781783604678 (paper); ISBN: 9781783604708 (ebook)

There are few topics in the public eye that are more captivating or contested than those of borders. Natasha King seeks to contribute to this extensive discussion with her book, *No Borders: The Politics of Immigration Control and Resistance*. The book lays out a scholarly account of an agenda for action concerning border control (cf. Anderson et al. 2009). King's "activist research" is bound up with the question of how to "*resist the border, in a current reality in which borders proliferate*" (p.8). Adopting an anarchist lens, King unravels what a no borders politics entails in relation to resisting the border and state altogether, and the subsequent development of understandings relating to autonomy, resistance, and citizenship. She draws on two poignant case studies of "brutal intensity", namely, Athens and Calais, and the no borders movements in these locations. King writes of elusive ambiguities and inherent tensions within a utopian no borders politics, offering scholarly direction as to how such an imagined world can exist.

King begins the development of her thesis with a chapter entitled "What Is a No Borders Politics?". Despite the minimal discussion on what a border is and its various manifestations in scholarship, King attempts to explain the essentials of a no borders politics. Within this provocative claim, King rightly identifies the contradictions between what she terms the "autonomy of migration" and the "acts of citizenship" approaches towards a no borders politics. Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, "autonomy of migration" was first used by Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2007), understood as the self-sovereignty of the individual in an "irreversibly porous" world, where persons seek to determine both their mobility and their agency *outside* of the remit of the sovereign. "Acts of citizenship", building on Foucault's notions of governmentality and operating within the state's structures, centres its attention on challenging the reigning neoliberal structures; it is the collective and dynamic process of transition from subject to citizen through specific moments or "acts" of refusal (Basu 2007;

Isin and Nielsen 2013). For King, refusal is a form of hopeful resistance and the imagination of alternative realities. It is at once “a rejection – no borders! – but also an assertion – freedom of movement!” (p.26). This Janus-faced expression sets its attention towards not only the end of borders, but inevitably the death of the nation-state (p.25).

King’s understanding of resistance draws heavily on Foucault’s words: “Where there is power, there is resistance” (1978: 95). How this power is given agency in one particular modus is through the “autonomy of migration”. For King, autonomy of migration “*precedes* any form of control or domination” (p.31) in relation to the state’s explicit imposition of power and control. One abstract understanding for King, regarding how such imaginaries would exist, is through what she terms the “mobile commons”, “an ‘other way of being’ to the state...[which] functions as a means through which people can pursue the freedom of movement” (p.34). Borrowing the sentiment from Papadopolous and Tsianos (2013), the transmigratory ontology of the “mobile commons” is a “social space” and immaterial resource anchored in reciprocity. It is performed and enacted *through* migration, serving as the reality and revelation of the those seeking mobility, the means through which to escape sovereignty and resist capitalism (Papadopolous and Tsianos 2013: 192). The utopian ideals proffered by King, supported by less-than-convincing examples, seeks a community of interdependency that is (re)produced through mobility, not limited by space or confined by borders.

The alternative approach King posits to achieving a no borders politics is through “acts of citizenship” and its accompanying agency. She acknowledges that the enormity of the task requires “tension and change [from] within ‘the system’” (p.47) and not solely escape from it. The contradiction of seeking liberation from the state inevitably involving engagement, representation, and transformation from within the hierarchical structure is aptly referred to by King as the “fundamental dilemma at the core of a no borders politics” (p.50) – the concomitant refusal of and necessary compliance to the state. In the following chapters, King proceeds to paint a picture of what a no borders politics can look like, using Athens and

Calais as two vignettes to support her vision, looking specifically at the “300” in Athens, the “No Border Network” across the world, and “Rue Victor Hugo” in Calais.

After spending a year living in Athens in 2011, King writes of its importance as a “flashpoint on the map of European migration” (p.80) and key transitory space for emigrants from North Africa and the Middle East. The Greek state took on “the role of European incarcerator” (p.82), which was exacerbated by the Dublin Regulation.<sup>1</sup> Coupled with a crippling economy, migrants became increasingly marginalised resulting in resistances such as the “300”. This mass hunger strike in Athens and Thessaloniki witnessed 300 North African men fighting for rights and representation as ethnic minorities. King understood this provocative protest as being centred in the tension between acting against the state and the submission to its resolute rules and customs. The realisation of such a movement is topographically present in what King terms “anarchist space”, diametrically opposed to the “hegemonic political space” that is produced through nation-states and sovereignty (Antentas 2015: 1108; Springer 2011).

On a larger scale, King discusses the role of the No Borders Network, a loose term that collates movements across the world that “share an affinity with the broad notion of ‘no borders’ and the freedom of movement” (p.68). The context-specific and ambiguous No Borders Network supra-organisation carries no guidelines or leadership, but is structured around what a no borders politics looks like *in situ*. King highlights the activist group “Calais Migrant Solidarity” (CMS) to exemplify the “No Borders” camp in Calais, describing the occurrence as “a major opportunity to *radicalise/politicise* the struggle for the freedom of movement” (p.69, emphasis added). Yet radicalism and its tainted links to terrorism is strangely ignored throughout the book. Indeed, there is no reference to terror (most notably in the case of Calais is the absence of the January Charlie Hebdo shootings and the November Paris terrorist attacks in 2015; cf. EUROPOL 2016), likely excluded due to the difficult questions they raise regarding a world of no borders, principally whether security or mobility

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<sup>1</sup> The Dublin Regulation is an EU law introduced in 1997 (and revised as recently as 2013) that “states that asylum seekers should have their cases processed in the European country *in which they are first registered*” (Brekke and Brochmann 2015: 146, emphasis added).

is a “greater” right? Moreover, the absence of a discussion of securitisation and biopolitics following 9/11 seems curious. Following the increasingly militarised border, migration has been restricted and sovereignty has been changing from the ruling of territory to population, yet King fails to discuss militarisation explicitly (see Topak 2014).

Calais, like Greece, forms part of Schengen’s supranational border, and is an ideal locality from which to enter the UK furtively<sup>2</sup>. The migrant camp (or “Jungle”) in Calais exemplifies the make-shift communities and spaces that “build up wherever the struggle for the freedom of movement results in the forced immobilisation of travellers” (p.105). Invaluable ethnographic encounters over a five-year period provide King with insights into such political spaces. King draws on Giorgio Agamben’s scholarship on spaces of exception, where a sovereign power suspends individual rights as a means of legitimising the its authority. She applies this directly to the camps of Calais, acknowledging that as much as the “jungles are spaces of exception...they are also self-organised spaces of autonomy” (p.107). Despite this connection, King fails to draw further on Agamben’s reflections on “the camp”, “homo sacer” and “bare life”, each of which could have provided invaluable insights into sovereignty and its manifestations (Agamben 1998).

Nevertheless, King provides empirically rich and insightful case-studies throughout the book such as “Rue Victor Hugo” in Calais. This house of activism was a CMS centre for eight months in 2013-2014, a communal house both for those intending to cross the border into the UK and for those involved in the work of CMS. Catering for both of these groups proved difficult as migrants treated “Rue Victor Hugo” as a transitory space, contrasted with CMS activists who saw it as an instrumental space of resistance. King acknowledges the pitfalls of such a project and the challenge of creating an environment that protects those most vulnerable, seeking equality and collective autonomy. The house of “Rue Victor Hugo”, in a fashion similar to authorities preoccupied with “security”, policed those who were able to enter the house. This stringent and racialized regulation was undertaken primarily by “white

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to acknowledge here that King’s publication came before the United Kingdom’s “Brexit” vote to leave the European Union which is likely to only add to the complexity.

Europeans with papers denying access to largely black Africans with so little” (p.113), echoing the very situation such anarchist visions sought to evade.

*No Borders* provides currency and clarity to a timely topic with many implications for future research. Within the book, King proffers notable and novel insights into understandings of anarchism and autonomy. The case studies of Athens and Calais reinforce King’s vision to challenge sovereignty and statehood, inviting in a world without borders. The book is, however, lacking in three key areas. Firstly, King’s entire claim is rooted in the refusal of the border, yet very little discussion is provided on how a border is understood regarding its behaviour, manifestations, and becomings. Secondly, the absence of the burgeoning literature on securitisation, terror, and biopolitics raises concerns amidst an increasingly militarised border system in Europe. Finally, a no borders politics is a *reaction* to the effects of border struggles, rather than the discernment of underlying causes and questions of mobility, inequality, and segregation. Post-colonial Middle Eastern instability and capitalism’s pervasion throughout society may be more appropriate themes to unravel in the context of a no borders politics. Nevertheless, King succeeds in presenting a cogent and thought-provoking account of the no borders movement, which is likely to only grow in significance in the coming years.

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