A Radical Journal of Geography

ANTIPODE

**Thom Tyerman**, *Everyday Border Struggles: Segregation and Solidarity in the UK and Calais*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2021. ISBN: 9780367559281 (cloth); ISBN: 9781003095774 (ebook)

*Everyday Border Struggles* exemplifies a different type of border scholarship; one not seduced by abstract theorisations of borders or those who cross them, but which remains rooted in how borders are personally experienced and resisted everyday. At its heart lies the question of how those privileged by the contemporary border regime can ethically relate to the struggles of the people it obstructs, fixes, devalues, denigrates, injures, and even kills. The answer provided is to first understand the quotidian ways borders segregate us from one another, to then look for ways to resist and dismantle them in our daily lives.

Readers may understandably prefer to hear about border struggles from the people who made irregular journeys, and overcame their obstacles, themselves. Nevertheless, Tyerman's highly reflexive and critical analysis as a person who practices everyday migrant solidarity while benefiting from racial and citizenship privileges will be useful for students and scholars similarly positioned.

The book also provides an important comment on the ethics of academic engagement in spaces of active struggle which researchers of borders and migration would do well to note. As Tyerman says, "academic work, despite its solipsism, is not and cannot be the sum total of our ethical political engagement" (p.13). In the face of the sheer urgency of the situation in Calais and the daily border violence he was witnessing, Tyerman's plans for his fieldwork quickly fell apart. He found himself unable to submit to an institutionally defined ethical code and be "objective" during his fieldwork, and instead threw himself into daily solidarity activism. Refusing to take the prescribed methodological distance from the border violence he was witnessing might be considered a failure by academic standards. However, his experiences being directly involved in the border struggles he writes about give his theory of migrant solidarity, and critique of the prevailing academic discourse on migrant struggles (Chapter 5), an exceptional potency.

The book begins with a wide-angle view on the contemporary border regime to show how it sustains the global hierarchy of wealth, power, and identity instituted through European colonial domination. The use of "border segregation" and "border apartheid" as straightforward and accessible concepts oppose more abstract terminology such as "bordering" or "producing

differentiation" which can "sometimes overlook the continuing centrality of racism to global bordering, and of bordering in the reconstruction of a racialised world politics" (p.9-10). Like other critical border studies scholars, Tyerman illustrates how borders do not just appear at the nation-state's territorial perimeters, or in the actions of immigration enforcement agents, but have become part of everyday life and are reproduced through the mundane interactions of ordinary people. The strength of the analysis is in consistently showing how such everyday encounters intimately embody "[g]lobal injustices and geopolitical inequalities' (p.90). For example, Chapter 2 does not simply explicate the United Kingdom's "hostile environment" policies which have weaponised civil society against migrants (e.g. by obliging landlords, healthcare workers, and other service providers to perform immigration status checks and share clients' data with the Home Office for the purposes of immigration enforcement), but exposes them as perpetuating global border apartheid. This is done through outlining the hostile environment's lineage in (post)colonial immigration policies, its entanglements with racist policing and racialised destitution in the UK, and some of its more visibly racist consequences: increasing prejudice against people of colour in the housing market, forcefully deporting Black British citizens during the "Windrush scandal", or further incarcerating people of colour in the UK's for-profit immigrant detention estate.

After narrowing the focus on border segregation from the global, pan-European, and British contexts in opening chapters, Chapter 3 introduces readers to Calais, where the rest of the book remains. After outlining the legal framework that has externalised the UK's border to this French port city, it describes the numerous ways the border there pierces the daily lives of irregular migrants waiting for their chance to cross. This includes through the violent and repeated evictions and destructions of migrants' homes; the denial of adequate food, water, healthcare, shelter, and other necessities; the calculated exposure to cold, wind, and rain; and the often gratuitous and sadistic violence of the French police. These elements compound one another to "make life unliveable" for the migrants, with the state's intention being that the ones already there leave by themselves while others are deterred from coming in the first place (p.97-98).

Beginning in Chapter 4 there is a noticeable shift in the writing away from the macro, policy oriented approach of the book's first half. The prose becomes grounded in the everyday bordering and resistance that occurs in Calais, and evocative vignettes recounting particular actions or experiences, many of which come from people on the move, appear more frequently. Tyerman also

shares personal stories from living at the border while searching for, and sometimes finding, ways to resist and contest it with others. These not only give life to the theoretical discussions of migrant solidarity in the rest of the book, but provide an embodied critique of the humanitarian interventions which later chapters distinguish from the politics and ethics of solidarity.

During the 2015-16 "long summer of migration" thousands of people, millions of pounds, and tons of donated materials travelled from the UK to Calais to help build "The Jungle" camp and improve its residents' quality of life. Underlying this impressive mobilisation was a steadfastly humanitarian politics which "fails to offer a radical form of resistance to the border" because of how it misunderstands border segregation (p.121). Most of the humanitarians coming to Calais declared themselves to be apolitical, motivated instead by the higher moral obligation to alleviate the suffering of their fellow human beings (Sandri 2018: 10). Humanitarian intervention frames the root cause of the violence, disdain, and deprivation experienced every day by migrants as the *lack of recognition of their humanity* (p.122) – for if, according to the supposedly universal humanitarian logic, everyone simply recognised migrants as humans their plight would not continue.

Framing migrants' humanity as an epistemological question – something to be debated, acknowledged or denied, rather than an ontological fact – that must be resolved *before* relating ethically to them, is deeply racist (p.124). It is also untrue that policy makers do not recognise migrants' humanity. As the story of the Jungle's creation illustrates (p.129-132), state "humanitarian security" initiatives are based on exploiting migrants' very human needs – e.g. to eat, sleep, drink, and shelter – so that their movements can be better policed (p.136). What the humanitarian framing of a lack of recognition misses is that border violence in Calais results from the decidedly political process of domination that, through colonial logics and histories, has created a hierarchical valuation of human life where racialised migrants matter less than white Europeans. By not seeing why "*some people, some humans, but not others* are made to live in [precarious] ways", humanitarians hamstring their ability to combat the state racism of borders (p.126-127). Furthermore, by perpetually re-establishing themselves as helpers against migrants who need help, humanitarians reinforce the social distinction (highly racialised and resulting from structural oppressions) between these two groups, and thus the very racist inequalities they claim to be against. Finally, in leapfrogging politics, humanitarians blind themselves to migrants' existing political struggles in the here and now against and across borders. By focusing on alleviating

symptomatic suffering through compassionate offerings rather than organising together with migrants against the border regime, humanitarians fail to recognise and relate to migrants as *fully and equally human* (p.190) – as having political subjectivities, aspirations, the will to resist, and the capacity to take action.

Given these critiques of humanitarian actors in Calais, the book ends on a disconcerting note. In the postscript Tyerman writes that, when he returned in 2020, the scale of humanitarian intervention had actually *increased* while the solidarity groups and activities he was involved with during his "research" period declined in the last five years. This implies that the ethics and politics of everyday solidarity so self-evident during his time in Calais, and which he and many others manifested in their actions against the border alongside displaced communities, failed to gain wider purchase. Why this is the case, especially considering that the violent intensity of the UK's externalised borders has not abated, remains a lingering question.

On the one hand, this may be attributable to the enduring power of humanism in motivating both humanitarian and solidarity actions. Despite having made strong empirical differentiations between the two, Tyerman still asserts his praxis of everyday migrant solidarity emerges from the "common humanity" he shares with people on the move in Calais. This common humanity he sees in others – and which others see in him (p.186) – is a far cry from the depoliticised humanity of humanitarianism. Not only does it recognise that "(post)colonial relationality", and the racialised inequality it creates, is the very condition of "common humanity" today, but it also understands that living together and ethically relating to one another requires "dismantling the racist structures of segregation and hierarchies of humanity" through a shared multi-racial struggle (p.188). However, I worry that even such a repoliticised concept of humanity does not provide a clear enough conceptual distinction, and may allow humanitarian activities complicit in border segregation to easily graft onto the discourse of solidarity.

On the other hand, as even the best motivations or intentions inevitably come up against the limits of collective structures, perhaps interrogating the organisational forms solidarity can (and cannot) take is more appropriate. The field in Calais is now dominated by corporatised NGOs who, in the humanitarian void of a lack of state provision, divide responsibility among themselves for providing food, clothing, shelter materials, Wi-Fi, and electricity to people on the move. Many of these self-appointed crisis managers began as informal, ad hoc, collectives in the Jungle, but have

since formalised and become much more concerned with fundraising, social media presence, volunteer recruitment, and avoiding risk. The drive to professionalise inevitably compromises solidarity as it makes groups more accountable to state oversight than to the very people they claim to be supporting. Actions also become oriented around self-preservation, self-promotion, and "continuing the humanitarian work"' rather than ending the situation which necessitates it. Therefore, the question of "how can migrant solidarity be institutionalised in a way that reflects critiques of borders and humanitarianism?" is one I would have loved to see addressed at greater length in *Everyday Border Struggles.* A number of grassroots solidarity groups are mentioned throughout, but more detail on their daily activities would be inspirational for readers looking to get involved. I would also have appreciated the author sharing more from his anti-detention work in the UK to shed light on the different forms everyday migrant solidarity can take outside the context of an exceptional borderzone like Calais.

However, even in self-proclaimed anarchist and no borders organising, the line between solidarity and charity, empowerment and paternalism, can easily blur in the messy reality of Calais (King 2016). Therefore, perhaps the best litmus test of solidarity comes in the response to criminalisation. Criminalisation of migration and solidarity, while no doubt posing a threat to solidarity work can also provide an opportunity to "abolish allyship" because it forces one to take sides and become "complicit in a struggle toward liberation" (Indigenous Action Media 2015: 88). Indeed this is voiced elsewhere by Calais Migrant Solidarity (2018: p.122) who state that being present "in those moments of conflict with the security services" was important to develop affinity with people on the move, because it made clear whose side they were on. *Because* borders divide us they force us to take a side. The structural antagonism they create and sustain also requires an antagonistic response. To enact a politics of solidarity thus begins with the choice to move from our complicity with the reproduction of borders to becoming an accomplice with those acting against them. Today, at least in the UK where the proposed Nationality and Borders Bill will even more severely criminalise irregular mobility and solidarity, this choice is being presented to us with more urgency than ever before.

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