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The Memory Politics of Migration at Borderscapes

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Guest post by *Karina Horsti*, Academy of Finland Fellow at the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä. Karina directs the explorative workshops '*Borderscapes, memory and migration*', a collaboration of academics, artists, and activists. This is the first instalment of Border Criminologies themed series on '*The Memory Politics of Migration at Borderscapes*', organised by Karina.

Over the next two weeks, Border Criminologies will run a series of linked posts that examine the complexities of borders from the perspective of memory politics. Border zones and practices of border making are embedded in interpretations of the past: in history and memory making. Memories are evoked to explain, legitimate and justify bordering processes. However, the past could also be used to criticize practices of bordering and to expose the present as a temporary phenomenon, as something that will pass. Therefore, an engagement with memory could be a means to imagining alternative futures.

The series of blogs, which draw on a programme of workshops ‘*Borderscapes, memory and migration*’, brings together insights from critical border studies and memory studies. In this project, we examine bordering as a practice that disperses borders in physical and socio-political space. In addition, we adopt the perspective of memory studies that recognizes that public remembering is crucial for social power dynamics, as it reflects social or national narratives. Public memory institutions and rituals are signs of social recognition; by representing certain social groups, individuals or events, they highlight social importance. Nevertheless, collective memory is always unsettled and dynamic. It is negotiated at the juncture of hegemonic narratives and critical interpretations of the past. This is particularly crucial in societies where participatory culture affords different kinds of ‘mnemonic resistance’ against dominant narratives.



The eight blogs examine how memory politics play out at various borderscapes – in border zones between nation-states, city spaces, and social life. The first part of the series addresses how various technologies of memory, such as museums, memoirs, and objects engage with borders. [Randi Marselis](#) explores how sensuous museum experiences may promote empathy towards asylum seekers. The Royal Arsenal Museum’s exhibition *Flight for Life* in Copenhagen takes her to a refugee camp in Lesbos by the means of Virtual Reality technology. [Johan Schimanski](#) considers the memoir as a powerful technology for negotiating traumatic memories of deportation and detention in the public sphere. He examines the literary narratives of a Norwegian deportee Maria Amelie and shows how she resists in/visibility by writing and by encouraging others to write. [Carolina Sanchez Boe](#) and [Henry Mainsah](#) observe the traces left by the authorities, citizen activists, and migrants in Paris after the police destroyed a makeshift camp that had offered shelter to homeless migrants. They suggest that graffiti, discarded objects, and pieces of fences, render urban borderscapes and border struggles visible to citizens. Finally, [Saara Pellander](#) and [Noora Kotilainen](#) analyse how the post-war manufacturing of the figure of the refugee through visuals echo in the present day debates about refugees. They ask, where the outrage against asylum seekers’ smartphones emerged and argue that this image disturbed the historically normalized representation of refugees. The second part of the blog series examines how the past can be evoked in the understanding of bordering. The authors first examine the interplay of the past and the present in different geographical border zones: the Arctic Norway, Italy, and Morocco. [Karina Horsti](#) examines how the moralities of humanitarianism and human rights entangled in the local Norwegian’s response to the asylum seekers in the Arctic borderland. The story reveals how attentiveness to the suffering of strangers can be prompted by stories that have become collectively shared memories. Then [Sergio Goffredo](#) and [Susie Meret](#) trace the history of a ghetto that surrounds a migrant

reception center in Borgo Mezzanone in Italy. Transformation of the old NATO military airbase into a temporary refugee center has become a permanent facility as European asylum politics have turned Italy into a space of confinement, exploitation and deportability. The dialogue between [Anitta Kynsilehto](#) and Hassane Ammarin at the border between Algeria and Morocco reveals how the sealed border hinders the lives of the people in the region. They suggest a permit for humanitarian visits so that the politics between the two nations doesn't cause unnecessary suffering for the people in the border zone. The series ends with [Hanna Musiol](#) turning the critical gaze towards us as scholars and educators. She discusses the responsibility of universities in the present fortification of Europe and in responding to the so-called refugee crisis. She examines an initiative *Of Borders and Travellers* at her own department that welcomed refugees, and raises the question of how we can avoid the exploitation of migrant stories and the affective labor that it involves.

Note: The authors participated in the explorative workshops 'Borderscapes, memory and migration', which were funded by the Joint Committee for Nordic Research Councils, 2016 – 2017.