

Gender, Sexuality, and Activism in Detention

Gabriella ALBERTI (2010). "Across the Borders of Lesbos: The gendering of migrants' detention in the Aegean." *Feminist Review* 94: 138 - 147.

Alberti details her experiences participating in a No Borders camp constructed to protest the Pagani "reception centre" in Mytilene, Lesbos, an island in the Aegean Sea between Greece and Turkey. She narrates the march to Pagani and the shock when the women detainees refused an eventual offer by the Greek government to relocate them and their children to a presumably better detention centre; the reason they cited was that they did not want to be separated from their partners and fathers. The detainees' collective act of refusing "gentler detention" (141) brings to the fore a number of insights into the positions of the No Borders movement, NGO actors, European states, migrants, and, indeed, academics trying to understand the dynamics of (irregular) migration. Most notably, Alberti draws attention to the facts that sexuality and gender play integral roles in producing the conditions of illegality; that NGOs tend to depict migrants as "stuck" in detention centres whereas the reality is closer to one of "patterns of circularity, periods of mobility and immobility, spaces of negotiations and escape" (142); that in portraying women detainees as victims with greater vulnerability than the men, the Greek government was attempting to dispossess the women of their political agency and to undermine the political nature of their demand for release and liberty; and that activists need to recognize their social positions and be mindful of a tendency to romanticize the detainee as a heroic or revolutionary figure because of a presumption of what a political act entails.

Further reading:

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- Bhabha, J. (2002). "Internationalist Gatekeepers?: The Tension Between Asylum Advocacy and Human Rights." *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 15: 155 - 182.
- Burman, J. (2006). "Absence, "Removal," and Everyday Life in the Diasporic City: Antidetention/Antideportation Activism in Montréal." *Space and Culture* 9(3): 279 - 293.
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- Fialho, C. M. (2013). "A model immigration detention facility for LGBTI?" *Forced Migration Review* 42.
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- Millner, N. (2011). "From 'refugee' to 'migrant' in Calais solidarity activism: Re-staging undocumented migration for a future politics of asylum." Political Geography **30**(6): 320 - 328.
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- Rygiel, K. (2011). "Bordering solidarities: migrant activism and the politics of movement and camps at Calais." Citizenship Studies **15**(1): 1 - 19.
- Thompson, S. G. (2008). "Latinas and Their Families in Detention: The Growing Intersection of Immigration Law and Criminal Law." William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law **14**(2): 225 - 244.