

## About This Book

I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing.

—bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

*Undoing Border Imperialism* merges different forms of theory that tend to be relegated to separate spheres: academic, movement, and experiential theories. While societal structures legitimize academic discourse as the most rigorous and objective type of theory, all three kinds of theory are invaluable. Together these forms help us to understand systemic injustice from different angles, and empower us to take action against authoritarian and oppressive systems. This book is primarily embedded in movement theory, which stems from the praxis of organizing, and experiential theory, which is based in lived realities and resistances.

The first chapter, “What Is Border Imperialism?” relies on academic theory. Drawing on critical race theory, feminist studies, Marxist analysis, and poststructuralism, this chapter theorizes and evaluates border imperialism from within intersectional pedagogy. I argue that the violence of border imperialism is a direct result of the violence of colonial displacements, capital circulations, labor stratifications in the global economy, and structural hierarchies of race, class, gender, ability, and citizenship status. Rather than victim blaming and racist stereotyping that punish

migrants for irregular forms of migration and render them “illegal,” this chapter rigorously challenges the inhumane ideology of border controls that denies migrants their freedom and self-determination.

The second chapter, “Cartography of NOII,” maps out NOII’s response—as an anticapitalist, anticolonial, and antiracist migrant justice movement—to border imperialism. This is not a comprehensive history or even a summary of all NOII campaigns; rather, the chapter offers my perspective on some of the strongest formulations of NOII’s movement-based analysis and practice over the past decade. I outline the analyses and practices of direct support work, regularization of legal status for all migrants, abolition of security certificates, Indigenous solidarity organizing, and collaboration within anticapitalist movements. The strategies described in this chapter are relevant to other social movements grappling with how to be accountable to communities that are impacted by the systems we are confronting, how to strengthen alliances, and how to expand movements to effect tangible as well as transformative change.

The third and fourth chapters rely on social movement theory. Describing social movement theorizing, radical queer activist Gary Kinsman notes, “Activists are thinking, talking about, researching and theorizing about what is going on, what they are going to do next and how to analyze the situations they face, whether in relation to attending a demonstration, a meeting, a confrontation with institutional forces or planning the next action or campaign.”<sup>20</sup> In these chapters, I share the knowledge generated

from these kinds of engagements within NOII. Rather than abstracting principles *onto* social movements, which can feel artificial and top down, these chapters generate principles *from* social movements, for a more grounded and pertinent discussion.

In the third chapter, “Overgrowing Hegemony: Grassroots Theory,” I address social movement strategies and tactics, antioppression practice, and group structure and leadership. Within these three areas, I explore current social movement debates, including building broad-based alliances while maintaining radical political principles, fostering antioppressive leadership while opposing hierarchies, and affecting tangible change while prefiguring transformation.

The fourth chapter, “Waves of Resistance Roundtable,” brings together fifteen grassroots NOII organizers to provide their own insights on some of these long-standing contentions. Their astute responses raise the level of consciousness on the nature of campaigning, organizational structure, alliances, and decolonization. Reflecting a diversity of (although not all) opinions within NOII groups, this roundtable disrupts conventional forms of writing that by privileging a single author, skew the collective and heterogeneous nature of movements. The roundtable holds the heart of this book.

The fifth and final chapter, “Journeys toward Decolonization,” discusses decolonization as a liberatory and prefigurative framework on which to base not only struggles against border imperialism but all social movements. Decolonization is rooted in dismantling

the structures of border imperialism, settler colonialism, empire, capitalism, and oppression, while also being a generative praxis that creates the condition to grow and recenter alternatives to our current socioeconomic system. Decolonization necessitates a reconceptualization of the discursive and embodied borders within and between us by grounding us in the fundamental principles of mutual aid, collective liberation, and humility—not in isolation, but instead within our real and informed and sustained relationships with, and commitments to, each other and the Earth.

This book also weaves together short narratives from thirteen powerful voices of color. For many racialized people, sharing our narratives means much more than having a personal outlet. Narratives and stories are foundational to keeping our cultural practices alive and to rekindling our imaginations. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, an Indigenous Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, describes storytelling as “a lens through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism, where we can create models and mirrors where none existed, and where we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice. Storytelling becomes a space where we can escape the gaze around the cage of the Empire, even if it is just for a few minutes.”<sup>21</sup> The stories throughout this book are not only challenges to the norms of border imperialism and settler colonialism; they are also glimpses into envisioning and actualizing egalitarian social relations.

The inclusion of these thirteen narratives, all authored by racialized and predominantly women activists and

writers, is a political act. In one of the most poignant affirmations of women of color solidarities ever depicted, poet Aurora Levins Morales writes, “This tribe called ‘Women of Color’ is not an ethnicity. It is one of the inventions of solidarity, an alliance, a political necessity that is not the given name of every female with dark skin and a colonized tongue, but rather a choice about how to resist and with whom.”<sup>22</sup> This describes more than a solidarity based on shared identity. Women of color solidarities are based on the recognition that since the subjectivities of women of color are the most impacted by systems of oppression and exploitation, we embody the pathways necessary to concurrently disrupt multiple layers of injustice.

The thirteen voices in this book refuse to be disappeared and defy surrender. These are the tongues that were never meant to survive, the stories that were meant to be stolen and silenced through centuries of annihilation and assimilation. The centrality of these voices to this book is an enactment of antioppressive leadership—a principle that this book calls on us to heed. Given that capitalist, white supremacist, and heteropatriarchal society has taught us to fear, judge, and compete with one another, facilitating space for other women of color warriors is an intentional political practice, an offering in the spirit of decolonization.

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