

Notice of Doctoral Dissertation Examination

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PhD in Global Governance

Navigating Risks across Borders: The Lived Experiences of Central American Women Migrants

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9AM**

Balsillie School of
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1-23

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The journey for 'unauthorized' migrant women from the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) through Mexico dangerous and violent. In hopes of achieving safe passage to the United States (U.S.), women migrants will have to navigate borders. In this dissertation, I use the concept of borders to reveal the gendered experiences of (im)mobility. I argue that navigating borders throughout the migratory journey is not simply about experiencing the risks and vulnerabilities associated with restrictive border enforcement policies and practices implemented by the nation-state. (Im)mobility for women migrants is equally about the boundaries and/or barriers that are created by oppressive systems of subordination, such as patriarchy. These borders determine their embodied experiences, which not only affect their journey through Mexico, but their access to migration as well as their migratory options and resources.

In Article #1, I begin by exploring how disembodied border policy affects people, specifically migrant women. I show how territorial nation-state borders are governed in Mexico and how this governance can be associated with the long history of immigration control in the U.S. The border governance implemented in Mexico categorizes migrants as 'unauthorized'. For women migrants, this subordinate category exists throughout their migration journey producing vulnerability and violence as soon as the Mexico-Guatemala boundary is crossed. This embodied illegality creates forced invisibility, further

marginalizing women with respect to finding work, experiences of sexual violence and abuses by migration actors.

In Article #2, I shift my focus and explore other types of borders and/or barriers. I argue that nation-state border policies and the categories associated with these policies, such as 'unauthorized', 'irregular', 'undocumented', are but only one type of oppression that migrant women face in their migration. I connect the violent effects of territorial border practices with other structures of oppression, such as gender discrimination, class, race, which constitute the woman migrant subject and affect women's embodied experiences. I frame my analysis using intersectionality and corporal feminism to examine how gender inequality is embedded in the context of migration; how it is a motivating factor, but can also impact migratory options and resources.

Lastly in Article #3, I explore how migrant women navigate these borders and attempt to survive in this migratory context. I examine how they act within limitations, constraints, exploitation and violence. Using the 'mobile commons' as an analytical concept, I employ a feminist analysis to examine how situated and relational knowledge affects the survival tactics and strategies applied by women migrants while on the journey to the U.S. I contribute to the scholarship on the mobile commons concept by showing how diverse experiences and vulnerabilities affect knowledge and, thus strategies, while on the run and how migration is not a gender-neutral experience.

Together, these three articles illustrate how gender is embedded in migration and borders and how women migrants in the NTCA and Mexico must confront these lived realities and navigate their journeys within these constraints and limitations.

Dissertation will be on deposit in the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and available for perusal.