

"SHE SHOULDN'T BE ON THE FIELD ANYWAY"

RACIAL BORDERS AND POLICING OF IDENTITIES IN EVERYDAY SPACES

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Knowing borders as 'racial' refers to the manner in which language of difference, conceived in the creation of the ideology of race, is now applied through the tightening and restricting of migrants and migration across national boundaries. This piece will explore how everyday bordering (Yuval-Davis et al., 2018) works to disrupt the making of 'home' for migrants, not only at border crossings but in spaces such as employment, leisure, and sport, and can even work to disrupt the ability to feel at *home* in one's body. By applying an intersectional lens to the displacement of home caused by racial, everyday borders, it will be argued that processes of othering in society are fundamentally linked to the logic of racial hierarchies embedded in everyday bordering. First, this will be examined by tracing how the policing of borders weaponises concepts originating out of white supremacy. This will then be used to explain how borders today continue to differentiate treatment on the basis of a racial hierarchy. A case study will then be introduced, looking at the undertones of whiteness in UK-based discourses on award of the BBC Women's Footballer of the Year 2024 to Zambian footballer Barbra Banda. This will demonstrate the intersections between racial governmentality of migrants and racial constructions in hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity. This will contextualise the vitality of using an intersectional analysis to deconstruct racial borders, through an examination of how racial bordering works in everyday spaces of community.

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The History of 'Race' and Borders

Understanding history through the lens of European colonialism makes evident how migration and borders have been, and continue to be, a central tool in creating unequal and racial colonial orders. Mass migration from colonial metropolises to the peripheries was an exercise of free movement, which allowed the creation of settler colonies (Gutierrez Rodriguez, 2018). After the creation of settler colonies such as Australia, conditionality on movement was imposed to restrict the movement of racialised peoples, showing that borders function along and replicate racial lines. This process of border flexing was instigated alongside the development and creation of the modern liberal and sovereign western nation state, and the conditionality of borders stems from the necessity of selective movement which built the modern nation states (Johnston & Lawson, 2005). This demonstrates that the policing and presence of borders is malleable — able to be flexed and changed in order to actualise the existence of a superior race, and to manifest racial and racist hierarchies (Achieme, 2022, p. 454). Mezzadra and Neilson (2012) term this as differential inclusion, showing that a person's status as a migrant is subject to fluctuating legal definitions as well as cultural and economic demands placed on legal and illegalised migrants. By centralising the critical race theory understanding that 'race' has been shown to be an unstable category (Balibar, 2011, p. 27), we can understand that, similarly, the fleeting and trivial markers that fluctuate to make a person's immigration status are unstable and subject to frequent change. Achieme's definition of borders as racial explicitly traces the impact of this history to now, showing that national borders still have disparate impacts along the lines of 'race'. One way this is actualised is through visa schemes imposed by the UK which systematically deny applications from countries where the majority of people are non-white, such as the African continent, much more frequently than applications from North America, a white majority country (ibid., p. 471). Because UK border institutions are able to obscure their racist intentions by splitting guidance and visa requirements by countries rather by race, the effects of their bordering can appear non-racially explicit— not targeted at black and other racialised people, but at 'Africans' (white and non-white alike). However, the real embodied outcomes of this

racial functioning of borders, instituted at territorial sites of historical coloniality, uphold white supremacy and mark non-white bodies as less free.

Looking at the patterns that result from the practical application of border restrictions is central to understanding borders as racial. However, more important for the ontological investigation of the racial functioning of borders is examining the way in which the space of borders work as sites that permit strict yet conflicting definitions of citizenship. This works to segment and stratify types of non-citizen in a deliberately hierarchical order (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2012). While seemingly not based on racial identities, the application of different definitions of a citizen borrows from, and replicates, the social construction of race in subjecting people to differential inclusion. This moulds non-citizens' identities at the borders into those that are superior, and therefore freer and more unrestricted, and the antithesis of freedom for those marked as inferior. These categories of identity can be based on a complex calculation which takes into account country of origin, changing labour demands and method of entry (Shachar, 2009).

Intersectionality is a lens which focuses on the need to consider that the lives of black women exist at the intersection of overlapping and complex forms of control (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality can highlight how different socially constructed identities intersect with socially constructed ideals of migration to govern differential inclusion (Lafleur & Romero, 2018). For example, hegemonic masculinity and femininity contribute to the notion of citizenship as applied differently; the frequent demonisation of black and brown migrant men as sexually violent shapes the extent to which borders restrict and frame their lives, with female migrants portrayed as contingent passive victims of distant conflict (Kroon & van der Meer, 2021). This therefore translates to different impacts in the freedom with which refugee men can successfully resettle (Griffiths, 2015), and the ability of female refugees to break the bounds of this portrayals without backlash – or indeed have a reunited family (Threadgold, 2006). The creation of different narratives about identities present within migration can then also be extended to other

groups of migrants in times of ‘crisis’ or heightened media attention, seen in the European ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015 which centred on Middle Eastern migrants (Bonjour & Bracke, 2020). Similarly, Eastern European migrants are shown to be able to ‘pass as white’ only when they are deemed sufficiently middle class – a further example of the complex social processes of belonging and othering (Blachnicka-Ciacek & Budginaite-Mackine, 2022) showing the importance of examining intersections of marginality in migration journeys to expose the workings of the systems of power at play. Racial borders are spaces in which superiority and inferiority is stratified by changing, moving and unstable categories that blend ideas about labour, cultural identity, deservingness and race, and are ultimately naturalised through the allegedly non-racial labels of citizen/non-citizen. The examination of splintering of identities within the immigration system and citizenship is another example of the power which comes from the creation and monitoring of micro-identities, governed by social forces.



Everyday Bordering: Disruption of Home

The analysis of everyday bordering identifies the workings of racial borders in spaces far and beyond physical border crossing points and employees of the UK home office border force, complimentary to the intersectional analysis of the splintering of identities. Mezzadra & Neilson (2012) identify that all political processes are intensified at a border (p. 60) and Balibar (2004) identifies that border control has moved to the “middle of political space” (p. 109), due to the role that everyday institutions play in enforcing immigration policy. Consequently, we can understand how intensely the identities of citizen and non-citizen are played out in spaces of community such as employment, healthcare, education, neighbourhoods, and cities. The evolution of language weaponised in the creation of racial difference,

can be seen clearly to now be deployed in the sphere of migration to reproduce and create hierarchies that results in some migrants being racialised as inferior (Pereira Trindade & Yilmaz, 2025). These understandings provide and set vital context for Yuval-Davis’s (2018) discussion of everyday bordering in the UK. The movement of borders into the everyday transforms not only employers, and similarly teachers, doctors, and housing staff, into proxy extensions of home office enforcers, but indeed transforms those racialised and stratified people too into policers of their own precarious status (Yuval-Davis, et al., 2018, p. 233). It quickly becomes evident how if a person is constructed as a non-citizen at the border, because racial borders are not spatially fixed and permeate the everyday, that a person’s non-citizen status can follow them around, preventing the putting down of roots and the establishment of home or belonging in a community (Webber, 2021). What the understanding of borders as ‘racial’ can do in combination with an intersectional feminist view of migration, is illuminate how systems of binary oppressions interact to create an embedded and pervasively hostile environment for migrants (Yuval-Davis, 2008). Hegemonic identities work to create binary categories, such as those of ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘black’, ‘white’ (Schippes, 2007). An intersectional view understands that binary identities are socially constructed, and that when complex and socially constructed identities outside of the cultural norm interact with systems which derive their power from hierarchical positioning of identity, the fundamental contradictions within them are exposed (Crenshaw, 1989).

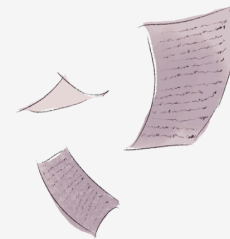
Boundaries in Women's Sport

The realm of sport is a particularly ripe area in which to look at the intersection of the policing of bodies by the above outlined implicitly racial borders, and hegemonic and dominant ideas of masculinity and femininity, because of the central role the body plays in cultural understandings of sport (Wilks, 2020). Barbra Banda is a women’s footballer who currently plays for Orlando Pride, a team in the top division of the National Women’s Soccer League in the USA (BBC, 2024). She has also represented Zambia, her national team, at major tournaments – though in 2022 Banda was prevented

from playing for Zambia in the Women's Africa Cup of Nations (Karoney, 2022). According to the Football Association of Zambia, this was because of her failing a "gender verification test" due to abnormal testosterone levels, although the Confederation of African Football (who are responsible for gender verification testing) dispute this, saying she was withdrawn by her national association and no tests were undertaken or failed (Knight & Worden, 2022). Despite overcoming these hardships in even being able to play, at only 25 years of age, Barbra Banda is considered one of the best women's footballers in the world —scoring 57 goals in 63 matches for Zambia, breaking countless scoring records domestic leagues and international football, and being renowned for her goalscoring, confidence and technical skill. Because of this in 2024, Banda won (via public vote) the BBC Women's Footballer of the Year award (BBC, 2024). This victory for Banda sparked significant backlash within the UK print media and on social media, with comments immediately jumping to question Banda's sex and gender identity, accusing her of being a man and inferring she should not be eligible to compete in the game (Wrack, 2025). Despite being assigned female at birth and living as a cisgender woman, Banda was subject to an outpouring of racist and transphobic abuse for existing outside the norm of a white female body (Grover, 2020). The spillover of this discourse was not limited to the online sphere, as since the high-profile conversation around Banda's sex, she was subject to abuse from the crowd at multiple football matches (PA Media, 2025). At the time of writing, almost exactly a year on from that initial racist transphobia directed towards Banda, she has again been the target of media attacks in response to being named in the FIFPRO World Best XI (Vertelney, 2025). The questioning of Banda's gender exposes the commonalities between misogynoir and transphobia— both originate as retaliations against divergent forms of gender expression that threaten the norm of the gender binary (Snorton, 2017).

Understood through an intersectional lens, the vitriol and abuse directed at Banda exposes the ongoing conflation of hegemonic femininity with whiteness. The outrage stems not from concerns about hormonal advantages in women's sports, but from ideas about how the female body should look, which are fundamentally embedded in

a westernised, white-centred world view (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014). In a space where white womanhood and white female bodily features are the norm, the black female athletic body is constantly treated with suspicion and accusations on non-belongings. The racism that is enacted towards Banda, can therefore be understood as a consequence of her invading a historically white, masculine space— which arose to be so out of colonial and exclusionary histories (Puwar, 2004). By comparison, cisgender men who have hormonal advantages in men's sports, such as swimmer Michael Phelps, are celebrated as phenomenal athletes— their biology is not used to question their gender identity (Fischer & McClearn, 2020). Across women's sports instead of this same celebration, black female superiority is routinely questioned on the basis that it diverts from

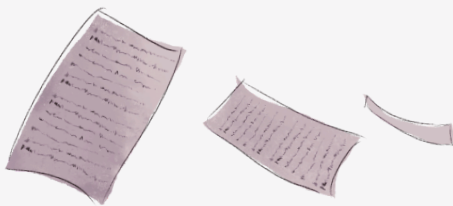


the white norm, seen in athletics with Caster Semenya, boxing with Imane Khelif, and tennis with Serena Williams (Engh, 2025). The way in which arguments about sex difference centre on non-white (yet cisgender) women exposes how women's sports spaces are caught up in, and further perpetuate, the same foundations of white supremacy which positions whiteness as the assumed, natural and objective norm (Fischer, 2023). The case of Banda, in combination with a wider understanding of the historical construction of the black female body as unfeminine, demonstrates how the actualisation of hegemonic identities can work to police the bodies, expression of identity and behaviour of black women. These forms of control over gender and racial identities can in turn be applied to any group which threatens the racial hierarchy of power in some way. Therefore, this intersectional exploration of Banda's experiences allows for an understanding of how the perpetual negation of black womanhood prevents black female athletes, such as Banda, to feel comfortable and at home in her own body without being constructed as

an invader, a predator in women's sports, and tying back into enforcing that divergent forms of femininity do not belong in sports, and consequently, wider society.

Borders in Sports and Beyond

But how does this relate to everyday racial borders? Barbra Banda is an immigrant and visa holder in the US, awarded this status based on her exceptional sporting ability. Borders are institutions which, as has been shown above, are not static and immutable, but active in creating and mediating identities. This is also achieved by selective intervention in global flows of people and labour (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2012). The productive institutions of borders not only affect migrants, but the underlying racial logic too creates the ideas of citizens who do not belong (Castles & Davison, 2000). Everyday borders can be understood then, to govern the lives of anyone perceived as non-belonging— particularly people of colour. The othering of non-white looking individuals links to the othering of migrants and they both draw from the same constructions of white supremacy in order to justify the existence of border regimes and exclusion of black women from western societies (Nunnally, 2010).



Therefore, the understandings of power and the way identities are splintered in order to uphold white supremacy can be drawn from both the concept of stratified racial borders which permeate the everyday, and the case study of Barbra Banda and the controversy of her mere existence in women's football in America. It can be seen that hegemonic white femininity draws the borders around what physique, attributes, bodily ideals and behaviours are acceptable, and conformity with these ideals is encouraged and rewarded (Upadhyay, 2021). These borders are actualised and brought into the everyday by instances such as the publicly visible abuse directed towards Banda and other female athletes, which teaches women of colour throughout society that their expression of femininity is not acceptable and contributes to the regimentation the lives of black, brown and non-white women in the Global North (Wilks, 2020).

The intersectional lens exposes the interplays in oppressive structures which govern the experience of women and racialised bodies, and importantly, how these structures of power enter everyday spaces. Similarly, the stratification of identity at borders works to uphold white hegemonic identities as privileged and powerful, and works within these same power structures to extend racial borders to the everyday.

Additionally, we return to the life of Banda to draw another intersectional example of the impact of racial border. In 2025, Banda and several of her Zambian teammates were unable to play for Zambia in games due to concerns that upon their return to the US, they would not be permitted entry and have their visas revoked (Guardian Sport, 2025). Here, the interplay of misogynoir (which refers to the intersection between racism and sexism that can be uniquely targeted at black women) and borders can be seen to, again, control the movement and freedom of racialised individuals who are caught at this intersection of multiple structures of oppression— that are amplified at the border (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012, p. 60). In times of salient political discourse and policy concerning migrants, those affected are those who experience the intersections of multiple power systems— in this case, a black, African woman from the Global South. This prevented Banda and her teammates from not only representing her home nation, but travelling and visiting her home country. Caught in limbo, unable to be at home in her body, in her profession, or in her country of birth, the everyday implications of racial hierarchies at the border and in gender identities are visible to see. In many ways, both the backlash against Banda and her inability to travel outside the US typify the actual functioning of racial borders and how they are able to permeate beyond the physical border into representing control over the lives of people who transcend borders into countries where they are othered and made an outlier and minority. This reinforces the racial hierarchies created at borders that place white bodies as more free from criticism and scrutiny, and more free to move through the world. Compoundingly, the Senegalese women's basketball team have been named as the first victims of the recent United States travel ban, which targets in the majority African nations and imposes a blanket ban on visas

granted to those nationalities to enter the US (Ewing, 2025). This again shows that the disempowering nature of the social categories of race and gender disadvantage female athletes in prominent and unique ways, and that these processes are mediated by, and begin at, borders.

To summarise, racial borders emerged from a colonial and Euro-Centric construction of history and weaponise the politics of difference in order to disrupt the process of homemaking for immigrants. This piece intends to add to the literature on the hostile environment to elaborate on some of the day-to-day forces that govern the life of migrants, and how these forces draw on long created concepts of racial hierarchy. This was shown to be actualised through the infiltrating of borders into everyday spaces of community far beyond physical border crossings, and the impacts this has on different migrant identities. Hegemonic ideas of masculinity and femininity born from a white, western world further extend and shape the embodiment of racial borders for black female athletes such as Barbra Banda. Intersectionality is therefore a critical lens with which to look at the everyday impacts of borders, and how they are embodied by intersecting and overlapping structural inequalities of power. This has significant implications for the way we understand the relationship between everyday spaces of work and leisure, and the centrality of migratory discourses to those spaces and the way both citizens and non-citizens navigate them.

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