

Book Announcement: Undesirable

Discussion published by Jennifer Boittin on Sunday, February 5, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

I am delighted to (somewhat belatedly) announce the publication of [*Undesirable: Passionate Mobility and Women's Defiance of French Colonial Policing, 1919-1952*](#), by Chicago University Press (Nov. 15, 2022). Below, I've placed the editor's description of my book.

With my best,

Jennifer.

Archival research into policing and surveillance of migrant women illuminates pressing contemporary issues.

Examining little-known policing archives in France, Senegal, and Cambodia, Jennifer Anne Boittin unearths the stories of hundreds of women labeled “undesirable” by the French colonial police and society in the early twentieth century. These “undesirables” were often women traveling alone, women who were poor or ill, women of color, or women whose intimate lives were deemed unruly. To refute the label and be able to move freely, they spoke out or wrote impassioned letters: some emphasized their “undesirable” qualities to suggest that they needed the care and protection of the state to support their movements, while others used the empire’s own laws around Frenchness and mobility to challenge state or societal interference. Tacking between advocacy and supplication, these women summoned intimate details to move beyond, contest, or confound surveillance efforts, bringing to life a practice that Boittin terms “passionate mobility.” In considering how ordinary women pursued autonomy, security, companionship, or simply a better existence in the face of surveillance and control, *Undesirable* illuminates pressing contemporary issues of migration and violence.