

## On Border-Making and Politics of Borders

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opening (Mezzadra and Nielsen 2013) continuously occur. An important task of border research is to analyse the way in which borders simultaneously perform several functions of demarcation and territorialization (Balibar 2002), and how they do this.

Following these premises, this chapter adds to the existing border research agenda by focusing, from the perspective of critical geography, on borders as the result of specific relations between power and space. It proposes an understanding of borders as technologies for the articulation of various controls and managements of flows which are always in a tension between inclusion and exclusion. Attention is also paid to borders as sites of struggle in different localities and involving various actors. Moreover, the article focuses on the increasing embodiment of borders as devices of control by those who cross or attempt to cross them, considering the body as 'the most elementary space' (Balibar and De Genova 2018: 752) where border technology applies.

Overall, I will present a critical overview of how politics articulates at and connects with borders, and of the actors involved in processes occurring along the different power relations taking shape at and around them. Within this framework it proposes a border studies agenda that is oriented towards the understanding of borders as technologies for the reproduction of inequality.

The article opens with a critical review of the literature on border politics, highlighting the existence of a substantial body of theoretical reasoning on the topic that is not always balanced by empirical work and research. Keeping in mind that 'it is the management of the border regime which is of greater importance today' (Newman 2003: 18), it continues with an examination of bordering processes and their meaning in relation to territorial power configurations, especially with regards to asymmetries shaping different and uneven accesses to mobility. It then focuses on present borders and bordering processes as the result of specific relations between power and space, pointing to their role and functions. The chapter thus proposes an intersectional approach to border research to understand borders as technologies for the reproduction of inequalities and as sites of struggle. Throughout the discussion, and following these premises, it presents possible empirical research directions and suggestions for developing interdisciplinary border studies.

## The state of the art in the literature on border politics

Border studies literature increasingly emphasizes an understanding of borders as processes rather than static and fixed lines dividing territories. Since John Agnew's critique's seminal 'territorial trap' contribution concerning the geopolitical imaginary (Agnew 2003), borders' definition as lines defining the sovereign power of territorial nation states and the concept of the territorial state itself have come under scrutiny.

An avoidance of taking the shape and spatial configuration of the state and borders for granted is not to deny their importance for understanding the contemporary world. Nor is it to underestimate processes of re-territorialization. Whatever the nature of the relationship, 'the marriage between territories and borders is impregnated with societal power, so that it continues to be crucial to reflect on how these elements come together in the practice of territoriality' (Paasi 2009: 216). Instead of being considered a feature of the modern world's political and territorial configuration, the state and its borders need to be understood as the result of specific historical contingencies (ibid.). This change in the approach to borders affords an opportunity to examine them not merely as objects of study but as sites of investigation (Parker et al. 2009), and to recognize their fluid and changing nature, increasing sophistication and the complexity of bordering processes (Amilhat Szary and Giraut 2015; Casaglia and Laine 2017), which cause them to operate what has been defined as differential inclusion (De Genova 2002; Andrijasevic 2009; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013).

This line of inquiry has afforded the scope for an interdisciplinary endeavour in border studies to grasp the level of people's everyday experience: the way in which the border is recognized as everywhere (Balibar 2002), affecting and conditioning people's lives in sites and situations that may be far removed from the boundary dividing two nation states. This implies an overcoming of the idea of the border as a 'line in the sand' (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012) and, instead, an examination of the ways in which the 'borderwork' (Mumford 2012) operates in people's daily experience. The border is better described as a discursive landscape composed by a normative dimension and everyday experience.

In his theoretical framing of borders and power, published in 2003, David Newman points to the fact that a research agenda for border studies needs to introduce 'the basic question of "borders for whom?". Who benefits and who loses from enclosing, or being enclosed by, others. This, in turn, raises questions of power relations' (Newman 2003: 22). Over the years the literature has increasingly focused on questions of power in relation to borders and bordering

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processes, and several books focusing specifically on border politics have been published (Vaughan-Williams 2009; Amilhat Szary and Giraut 2015; Squire 2015; Staudt 2018; Longo 2018). The scope and aims of this theoretical and analytical endeavour are diverse and heterogeneous, but it is interesting to note the general effort to understand and give sense to the growing importance of bordering processes in contemporary societies and to the intrinsically political nature of border management policies, regulations, measures and regimes. More generally, the main questions motivating the prolific theoretical production on border politics concern ‘how borders work and for whom’: how do they function, how do they affect people’s lives, what do they enable and who benefits from them?

The work of Vaughan-Williams, in particular, lays the foundations of an understanding of the role borders play in political life (Vaughan-Williams 2009: 4). He specifically seeks to plug this gap in much of the literature on border studies, not only from the discipline of International Relations but also from those of anthropology, political geography and sociology. The invitation is to understand the current framing of the concept of the border of the state, and how this defines the interrelationship of violence, territory and power. To better understand where borders are and what they do in contemporary geopolitical imaginaries entails a highlighting of everyday aspects of bordering and their biopolitical character. In his final remarks Vaughan-Williams invites border scholars to pursue an ‘incessant identification and perpetual deconstruction of the multiple practices of inside/outside in order to interrogate what is enabled by, and who benefits from, diverse border politics’ (ibid., 170). With a different aim the ‘borderities’ neologism Amilhat Szary and Giraut (2015) propose applies the Foucauldian concept of governmentality to territorial limits. This proves useful when we seek to overcome the rigidity of the relationship of territory, state and borders, helping to reveal the power relations which originate at the border and that are articulated around it. Following this perspective, borders appear to be the result of specific relationships between power and space, and bordering becomes the process in which these relationships may be observed. Borderities are themselves technologies of power as *dispositifs* of control that can filter, in an increasingly sophisticated way, different kinds of goods and people.

Other contributions draw from case study research to inquire into the diversity and ambiguous positioning of various border-related actors and politics. Squire (2015) critically engages with humanitarianism, an increasingly important feature of border management, as a struggle over the human, by proposing a ‘more-than-human’ understanding of border dynamics, involving material and social forces. This allows her to underline how ‘bordering practices involve exclusiona-

ry processes of subject formation' (ibid., 22) and, referring to Fassin, to reason on border politics as 'politics of life'. Technology and the evolution of border security are another essential element of the politics of borders, and Longo's book gives a rich account of the transformation of borders, borderlands and related issues of sovereignty which becomes not only territorial but also spatial, because security practices are performed in different locations that are often beyond state territory. An examination of technologies of security and biometrics reveals that this understanding of border politics also points to the emergence of the 'pixelated subject' (ibid., 224), substituting the individual in the relationship with the state and questioning the meaning of citizenship.

The lesson of these recent contributions is that we need to address the transformations occurring at borders in a sophisticated way, not merely to revise the concept of state border but rather to understand and account for new bordering practices that, through the advancement of technology and the diffusion of control and security, affect people's everyday lives, the very meaning of 'human' and 'life', and the nexus between territory, violence and power. The following sections elaborate on these considerations and show the potential of an intersectional approach applied to border studies, while illustrating some of the possible, and urgent, research developments arising when borders are examined as sites of investigation for the understanding of global inequality and the struggle for rights and justice.

## **Bordering Processes and Configurations of Power**

If we understand borders as the result of a specific and inevitably evolving relationship between space and power, a border research agenda must apply a constant monitoring of the political meaning of border configuration and bordering processes.

Indeed, examining border politics also requires us to consider the actors involved in bordering processes, whether they are producers or subjects of control, allowed or forbidden to cross, or reaffirm or question the border. Any border management and border regime intended to regulate the flows of goods and people across borders implies the application of rules and regulations that affect people's lives, their mobility, their relationship with space and their acceptance of certain degrees of control over their data and bodies.

This understanding of borders as devices for control complicates and enriches their connection with issues of power related to space. Pointing to borders' filte-

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ring ability also leads us to their most interesting paradox: the generalized acceptance of the very different relationships people can have with them. The uneven effects of bordering practices on people are scarcely questioned and mostly taken for granted. However, there is nothing natural or given about the unequal opportunities of mobility related to the possession of a certain passport. If we agree on the imagined nature of the nation state, we must also reflect on the artificial validity of its managing institutions, such as the passport and visa systems. The mechanism of global mobility is unbalanced, unsustainable, classist and racist.

The differential inclusion and related exclusion which the different border regimes at work constitute creates a hierarchy of mobility patterns. This results in forms of inequality in terms of possibility of movement and access to space which directly connect with different and uneven positioning in terms of citizenship and human rights, freedom, dignity, health, access to resources and in many cases the basic protection of life itself. Borders' asymmetry reflects the economic inequalities of the global world, in which access to Western countries is controlled and filtered to secure privilege and maintain the asymmetry itself. These geographies of uneven development and power, which must be at the core of any geographical knowledge (Harvey 2001: 226), are not as clear and linear as they used to be. Instead, 'space and power are related today in asymmetric and rather unpredictable ways on all spatial scales' (Paasi 2009: 216). These global power relations have been defined as neo-colonial, because they reproduce the classic colonial conditions of oppression, albeit in a renewed configuration of sovereignty that does not imply traditional imperialistic features and sovereign territorial control. Nevertheless, the new colonial power is a direct consequence of former colonial relations, because it relies on the result of the land exploitation, political instability and economic dependence which characterize the former colonies of the European empires.

A new and important feature of such power relations concerns the control of people's mobility as a means of maintaining and reproducing inequality. Indeed, border studies scholarship in the last decade has dedicated much research to migration, a direct consequence of the importance this phenomenon has assumed all over the world and of the implication of changing border regimes. In such theorizations the violence of borders and the injustice of their management are core elements for reflection. The 'global migration crisis', on which the political and public opinion of Western countries has focused since 2013, has made the world acknowledge the 'hundreds dying in shipwrecks in the Mediterranean; thousands of refugees climbing over newly erected barbed-wired fences in Hungary; thou-

sands more living in camps in Calais, France ...; and ships full of Rohingya refugees being pushed back out to sea in Southeast Asia' (Jones 2016: 3).

Displacement – due to war, famine, poverty, the environmental consequences of global warming, discrimination, political persecution and other impulses – has been growing in various parts of the Global South and is creating a situation of crisis which northern and western countries are unable to face properly. The direct consequences thus far of the increasing number of people on the move searching for better lives have been the tightening of borders' surveillance and visa regimes – already in place as a reaction to the 9/11 terrorist attacks – the creation of camps or other forms of containment for migrants and refugees, the institution or revision of policies to deal with asylum seeking, and the increasing externalisation of border management and migration control to prevent people from leaving their countries of origin or transit.

The increasing sophistication of border regimes in practices, technologies and policies results in a level of personalization of filtering that implies the use of biometrics and other forms of control. In many cases this directly involves the bodies of people on the move. Several scholars have analysed how the increasing penetration of security policies and practices in everyday life has reached the level of the individual and allowed various forms of profiling (Longo 2018) and the embodiment of borders (Salter 2006; Amoore 2006). Technological advances in security make bodies not simply the direct target of control – for example, through biometric recognition systems – but also devices of control diffusion (Popescu 2015). These technological advances increasingly involve the control and disciplining of bodies by both collecting and storing biometric data and individualizing procedures related to the issuing of visas and allowing border crossings.

In this respect a second paradox related to border control concerns the amount of data people are willing to give in exchange for easier border crossings. The typical example concerns the frequent flyer or 'trusted traveller', whose biometrics and personal data are registered at airports and other ports of entry to make the crossing procedure quicker and smoother. The price to pay for efficiency is the transfer of personal information including fingerprints and bank account and credit card numbers in a society where personal data is increasingly commercially valuable. Besides, money is actually paid to join special programmes for expedited customs processing, which exposes the fact that the ability to afford certain travel standards in addition to a powerful passport buys an easy border crossing experience.

## **Borders as technologies for the production and reproduction of inequalities**

The same trusted traveller and easy inclusion reasoning can be projected onto exclusionary uses of control, especially in relation to visa regimes. In addition to the high costs of visa procedures, under the European Union's Visa Information System (VIS), for example, certain 'third country nationals' are subject to security practices which imply a selective sorting of people, depending on their nationality. The list of countries whose nationals require a visa reveals a bias against poor and politically and financially unstable countries, and war-torn areas, as Bigo and Guild (2005: 236) point out. VIS not only clearly discriminates against different nationalities, it also considers the potential 'risk' of individual applicants both in relation to their criminal records and their socio-economic situation. Applicants' economic situation – evidenced by bank statements, property certificates and employment status in accordance with the European Commission Handbook for processing Visa applications – is one of the elements considered in assessing the risk of irregular immigration they represent (Glouftsiou 2017: 193).

The combination of passport nationality and economic condition is the first and easiest hint we have of the way in which the border crossing experience depends strictly on both ascribed and acquired characteristics, and is ultimately an intrinsically subjective experience. At a formal level these two elements are of great importance, and this begins to reveal the intersectional character of the border experience.

However, the combination of these two characteristics is not linear, because their weight and balance vary in the extent to which they afford the possibility of moving easily. In most cases money is indeed a powerful element in determining a person's possibility of crossing borders regardless of nationality, and recent investigations into the selling of citizenship to foreign investors<sup>1</sup> prove how far this mechanism can extend. This means the mobility inequality and power relations borders reinforce are not strictly related to nationality but rather depend on a combination of privileges/disadvantages which varies for each individual. An intersectional approach thus proves useful in examining the global system of privilege and oppression in relation to border management, because it allows us to underline the interwoven nature of different oppressive categories rather than

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1 Among EU countries Malta and Cyprus (and on a smaller scale Greece, Portugal and Spain) have been reducing their budgetary deficit by 'selling' 'golden visas' to investors from outside the EU (source: [http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20190118\\_04112699](http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20190118_04112699), last accessed 6 March 2019).

merely summarizing their effects (Crenshaw, 1989) and to recognize the different weights they exercise in different situations, cases and moments.

The literature on migration and border management highlights how different bodies undergo different experiences with borders and their violence, often indicating how the border control and asylum systems reassert heteronormative power over women and LGBTQI+ people, affecting their freedom to move to or stay in their intended destination country and in what circumstances (Ferreira 2018). As Fassin (2001) has brilliantly conceptualized, in the 'biopolitics of otherness' migrants' bodies are the sites where the violence of border management is inscribed and, for the same reason, where resistance can express itself. Andrijasevic attempts to bridge feminist and queer studies with critical border theory by examining the geographies of exclusion which the regulation of sexualities produces in relation to the sex trafficking, asylum and economic migration (Andrijasevic 2009) which produce nuanced and very diverse experiences of mobility.

Stressing this issue of differentiation and variability of the migratory experience further, we can point to the fact that even the legal statuses of people on the move are not fixed, which 'suggests that immigration regulations do not operate as mechanisms of straightforward inclusion or exclusion, but rather produce differentiation and stratification of legal statuses and subjectivities' (ibid., 398). The transformation of borders and citizenship results in the overcoming of the simple dichotomy of inclusion/exclusion, which no longer accounts for the variety of different positioning with respect to individual characteristics and the possibility of the differential inclusion (De Genova 2002) which creates figures of subjugated 'illegal' migrants always susceptible to deportation (De Genova 2013). Drawing on the concept of differential inclusion, we can also reason in terms of differential mobility patterns on the basis of nationality, class, race, gender and sexuality to more accurately describe the current reality of unequal global mobility (Luibhéid 2002). These forms of inequality and oppression related to border management have a strong connection with issues of violence of and at the border, with processes of victimization – and subsequent abjection – of the figure of the migrant, and with the recognition of agency in relation to the representation of migrants, and more specifically of certain categories of migrant such as migrant women or LGBTQI+ people. As Butler (2004: 140) suggests, it is crucial to critically analyse representations as one of the main domains in which the practices of humanization and dehumanization are recurrently produced. Subjects deprived of the possibility of self-representation are more likely to be excluded from the privilege of humanization in representations made by others (ibid.).



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The intersectional approach in the analysis of borders and bordering processes can be powerful and effective, because '[intersectionality] offers an important potential tool for feminist geography to understand the intimate connections between the production of space and systematic productions of power' (Valentine 2007: 19). We can see a reciprocal positive influence between border studies and the intersectional approach, because this encounter generates awareness of the co-implication of space and identity, and the significance of space in processes of subject formation. It is important to develop geographical thinking about the relationship of multiple oppressive categories and underline the high contingency and situated accomplishment of identity construction.

### **The Actors: Agency, Conflict, Violence and Struggle**

The present configuration of border management the previous sections outline creates specific personal and political positioning with regard to people and their relationship with borders. Saskia Sassen suggests that the general opinion and policies concerning immigration 'place exclusive responsibility for the immigration process on the individual and hence make the individual the site for the exercise of the state authority' (Sassen 1999: 17). This approach focuses on individuals' responsibility instead of pointing to the structures of economic, geopolitical, and neo-colonial power relations as primary causes of people's mobility.

Similarly, the Western migration narrative operates a systematic reductionism by categorizing migrants as either victims or criminals, and therefore as people who must either be saved or rejected. This process reinforces the association between migrants and danger, and the idea that no matter the category to which they belong they are unable to care for themselves and either deserve our help or are subject to deportation. The problem of defining migrants by degrees of vulnerability and considering them as victims (of the conflicts they escape, trafficking and the violence they encounter on the journey) results in their representation as deprived of their agency, especially in relation to the choices they make in their migration project, during the journey and in all its negotiations.

Actors are political subjects who participate in the definition of the frontier and giving it meaning (Brambilla). The border is a space of conflict that entails both violence and creativity, and where different requirements, such as the need for mobility and the imperative of control, come into conflict.

The border's political essence and its nature as the result of power relations taking shape spatially make it a site of contestation. Strategies and tactics of resis-

tance and resilience can create the possibility of a re-politicization of borders and the recognition of migrant subjects as political subjectivities. As Brambilla (2017) observes, the concept of the biopolitics of otherness which Fassin develops also allows us to see forms of resistance and opposition to the violence of the border. Besides the violent aspects of border management, which must be underlined, 'borders are widely recognized in fact to be spaces of encounter, interaction and exchange, where despite official prohibitions, officious policing and sanctimonious exaltations of the state's sovereign prerogative to exclude everything is possible' (De Genova 2013: 1185).

Research should focus on the agency of people in the shaping of the border as a conflictual and highly political space by critically examining the tactics migrants adopt, humanitarian interventions as possibilities for the re-politicization of borders and the representation of migrants as subaltern subjects. The complexity of bordering processes implies that the term 'border' no longer refers simply to the physical boundary itself but increasingly also encompasses its various representations (Sidaway 2011; Brambilla 2015; Casaglia and Laine 2017) and the representations of actors involved in bordering processes and practices.

Concerning representation, attention also needs to be paid to mapping and the creative use of participative and critical counter-mapping. A re-discussion of the representation of world and contemporary border-related phenomena would be useful in affecting people's imaginaries connected with mobility, especially considering the representation of borders as 'lines in the sand' that are taken for granted. As several authors show (Mogel and Bhagat 2007; Bueno Lacy and van Houtum 2015; van Houtum and Bueno Lacy 2019), the cartographic representation of the border is a work of art that contributes to maintaining and reinforcing the nineteenth-century idea of the nation state and supports an idea of territory as a political technology (Elden 2010). Every map of the world shows a grid defining different sovereignty operating on territory, and such a visualization greatly influences our daily perception, imagination and representation of reality.

Accordingly, the cartographic representation of people's cross-border mobility is permeated with this static and traditional vision of territory as compartmentalized into nation states. Whether they show migration to Europe (as well as to the US or other Western countries) or other forms of mobility across borders, maps generally display unidirectional fluxes crossing a fixed line, whose established rules trespassing beyond implies an act of transgression. 'The use of static border-geometry in the case of mapping of migration is not an anomaly but rather the dominant way of representation in the media, education, politics and even the

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academy' (van Houtum 2012). The challenge here, and following Butler (1999), is to make knowledge more accessible without losing its complexity – without simplifying it by flattening its multi-layered richness into a two-dimensional representation. This effort should accompany both research and the dissemination of results, because it may be a powerful way to contrast the limiting categorization of forms of mobility and actors by demonstrating the phenomenon's complexity and richness.

Questioning the political and rhetorical use of the 'crisis' metaphor may help to detect the emergency and exceptionality which have become ways of hiding the routinized use of violence to reproduce and validate injustice and asymmetry.

### Conclusions

This contribution opened with the recognition that the importance for a border research concerned with its political aspects lies in questioning contemporary borders' function and meaning, given that they are and have always been the result of contingency. We underlined the importance of highlighting the power relations which constitute and are shaped by border and mobility management, and making sense of power configurations with regard to bordering processes to understand borders as markers and makers of global inequality.

A survey of the recent literature devoted to border politics revealed an increasing interest in migration processes, whether through an analysis of border technologies, governmentality, institutional and non-institutional actorness, interrelationships amidst violence, territory or power. We believe that this effort should further move in the direction of highlighting and understanding borders as technologies that filter and differentiate in a way which reproduces asymmetries at different levels.

With this main aim the chapter focused on the intersectional character of these asymmetries and on the diverse ways in which borders affect people's lives and bodies, while underlining their inherent violence. Moreover, pointing to the violence of borders also allowed a recognition of the forms of resistance or resilience by those challenging the control of mobility regime, non-institutional actors providing assistance to undocumented migrants and anyone attempting to produce and circulate the counter-narratives which operate on a daily basis. All such efforts seek to create new forms of life opposing the differential distribution of precarious conditions (Butler 2012) and processes of differential inclusion.

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