Bordering

Creating, contesting and resisting practice

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ELISE KLEIN

Australian National University

UMA KOTHARI

University of Manchester, UK

Editors

Abstract

Materially and symbolically manifest, borders are shaped by history, politics and power. This second special issue of a two-part series brings together an international collective of authors who presented their papers at a conference on Technologies of Bordering convened by the editors at the University of Melbourne, Australia in July 2019. We invited presentations that critically engage with multiple and varied forms of bordering as expressions of power and oppression, as well as those that considered the possibilities and aspirations for more hopeful and progressive futures. Articles explored a range of issues from borders within and beyond detention centres and carceral systems to colonial and postcolonial forms of bordering. Drawing on a variety of empirical research across different spaces and scales, a range of theoretical perspectives and a diversity of methodological approaches, the articles collectively address the material, digital, virtual and human technologies that divide, exclude, contain, control and govern humans and non-humans.

Keywords: asylum, nonhumans, materiality, borders, refugees

Introduction

Materially and symbolically manifest, borders are shaped by history, politics and power. They take various forms, have multiple functions and are ceaselessly changing, from the building of a new Mexico-US wall, the collection of bio-metric data in India to the creation of national parks that delimit human and non-human mobility. Through a wide array of material, digital and virtual technologies borders divide, exclude, contain, categorise, control, govern and protect people. For example, the presence or absence of documents such as passports, permits and identity cards control the movement of people across borders as do security and surveillance technologies like gamma ray scanners that can reveal undocumented bodies hiding in trucks that are attempting to cross borders. Such technologies are a material manifestation of bureaucratic systems that are mobilised to assign identities to people and ascertain their associated rights as citizens or non-citizens. Borders are also found between the human and non-human world, often at the level of ontology that separates and silences concerns and relationality.

Borders and bordering technologies are not always rendered visible either. Indeed, biometric identify cards, for example, create borders that are delocalised and dispersed, potentially everywhere. Furthermore, bordering technologies are exclusionary and affective mechanisms that are perceived and conceived by people in different ways for instance through the separation and othering of gendered, racialised, colonised and indigenous bodies. Thus, bordering processes and practices produce and maintain subjectivities but at the same time distinguish between those who belong and those excluded or considered strangers. Belcher, Martin and Tazzioli (2015, p. 4) refer to these

ongoing and often repetitive social practices of bordering as the 'exclusionary mechanisms of identity-production'.

In this respect, deterrence is increasingly a feature of national border making whereby admission routes are policed, people are detained in offshore and onshore centres and are subjected to long and often indefinite waiting, asylum seekers are criminalised and access to welfare is restricted or even withheld. This crafting of a 'hostile environment' is designed to deter refugees while enabling governments to fulfil their formal commitments to international refugee law (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Hathaway 2015, p. 7). Thus, while stigmatisation may be used to create borders, deterrence itself is constituted by the practice of bordering and the classification of people (Mills and Klein 2019) with racial, colonial, class, ablest and gendered implications (Fletcher and Wright 2017).

While some borders have become more permeable for finance, goods and information, and there is ongoing work on the possibilities and potential effects of a borderless world, the world is becoming increasingly bordered. For example, Australia's operation sovereign border regime, and associated forms of torture, surveillance and military intervention, reveal what it means to make and maintain the Australian border. The important work of Behrouz Boochani, translated and edited by Omid Tofighian (2018), is illuminating here. Drawing on feminist Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's etymology, their decolonial formulation of the Kyriarchal System, show how it is 'the perfect manifestation of a system that strips human beings of their personhood and autonomy' (Boochani 2018a, n.p). In such a system, freedom, health services are withheld in an insecure environment and 'over time the rules and regulations wear down the prisoners' mental health', reflecting a form of 'psychological torture' (Boochani 2018b, n.p). These multiple forms of violence 'subject imprisoned refugees to relentless and pervasive practices of micro-control and macro-control' (Boochani 2018c, p. 528) that permeate Australian society. The cruelty of bordering is also taking place in other parts of the world. In the US, for example, racialised walls are being erected along the US/Mexican border, along which children are being separated from their parents.

Yet, despite policing practices and divisions borders are frequently and actively being contested and negotiated. Indeed, bordering technologies have

promoted and prompted various strategies of evasion, resistance and solidarity, from the forging of documents to the transgression and rejection of borders. This has been an important practice by First Nations people from the Aboriginal Provisional Government in Australia, who have created passports to reinstate sovereignty and refuse settler occupation as they travel between Aboriginal Nations across the Australian continent, and internationally (Aboriginal Provincial Government 2019). Migrants breach national borders, as do plants and animals, and the movement and circulation of water and air render borders permeable. Inter-disciplinary endeavours equally reveal academic silos to be flexible, fluid, contested and ephemeral. Accordingly, thinking through, and displacing, borders can assist in challenging dualistic conceptions that divide humans from non-humans, land from sea and insiders from outsiders, amongst other socially constructed dualities.

This two-part special issue brings together an international collective of authors who presented their papers at a conference on Technologies of Bordering convened by the editors of this special issue at the University of Melbourne, Australia in July 2019. The conference provided a space for scholars and activists, often separated by disciplinary, political and geographical boundaries, to share their ideas, knowledge and experiences.

We invited presentations that critically engage with multiple and varied forms of bordering as expressions of power and oppression as well as those that considered the possibilities and aspirations for more hopeful and progressive futures. Papers explored a range of issues from borders within and beyond detention centres and carceral systems to colonial and postcolonial forms of bordering. Drawing on a variety of empirical research across different spaces and scales, a range of theoretical perspectives and a diversity of methodological approaches, the papers collectively address the material, digital, virtual and human technologies that divide, exclude, contain, control and govern humans and non-humans. This critical exploration of borders and bordering practices is timely and salient. As the papers reveal, borders continue to order, classify and categorise ideas, identities, people, places, things, landscapes and the non-human. Yet, at the same time, they are being defied, confounded and resisted.

In this second issue of the two-part series on *Borders: creating, contesting and resisting practice*, the papers cover a range of these issues. Behrouz Boochani and Omid Tofighian's piece draws from a conversation between them at the State Library of Queensland reflecting further on bordering practices in and around their Manus Prison Theory work. They cover a range of topics including how to write collaboratively across borders and the opportunities and constraints of using technologies such as whats app to transgress Australia's prison regime. They further reflect on how language itself borders people, places and ideas. In conversation, Boochani and Tofighian illuminate the varied and multiple attempts made to dehumanise refugees through geographies of bordering that occur in relation to the 'kyriarchal' system that permeates not only Manus Prison but is manifest across onshore institutions of settler colonial Australia.

Tanja Müller examines the legacies of colonial borders arguing that they create artificial communities envisaged by the coloniser and play a role in creating separate nations and distinct national identities. Through tracing Italian colonialisation in the Horn of Africa, and specifically the borders of Eritrea, Müller finds the border to be both exclusionary, as well as providing possibilities for those living along the border to overcome these exclusions. In a similar vein, the paper by Simon Batterbury, Matthias Kowasch and Séverine Bouard focuses on the settler colonial border making of New Caledonia. The analysis illuminates the various practices by settler colonial governments to minimise Kanak self-determination. The authors also show how these bordering practices have been contested by Kanak people where aspects of development have been used as a tool for independence.

The contribution by Louis Everuss challenges sovereignty as a form of border-making. He refers to the Westphalian notion of sovereignty as a 'zombie category'—a dead social institution kept alive in political and scholarly discourse. Everuss draws on First Nations and asylum seekers accounts of sovereignty which he argues offermore suitable and mobile forms of political authority. In her paper on 'Borderscaping Antarctica', Germana Nicklin responds to a need to (re)examine borders, bordering, and borderlands in an Antarctic context. Despite an apparent absence of overt border narratives and practices in Antarctica, she argues that there are extensive border systems at

work. In the paper Nicklin expands on these bordering perspectives and approaches suggesting that they create an Antarctic 'borderscape'.

Anne Brown's paper challenges Eurocentric understandings of the human in human rights discourses. Through a critical review of the literature on human rights, she highlights the need to go beyond exclusionary Western-centric ontologies that are unable to account for different ways of being human and thus essentialise the operation of rights. She concludes by arguing the importance of adopting a more relational view of rights open to different ways of being human, and that acknowledge and reflect indigenous ways of being. Finally, Uma Kothari's paper explores the various ways in which lighthouses represent and are understood as material and symbolic border. She links her discussion of lighthouses to foundational distinctions between land and water arguing for a move beyond more terracentric notions of borders that dominate the discourse. Drawing on the experiences of refugees journeying form Turkey to Greece, she reveals how the Korakas lighthouse on Lesvos, marking a border between the danger of the sea and the safety of land, become a site of welcome, refuge and solidarity.

ELISE KLEIN is a Senior Lecturer in Public Policy at the Crawford School, The Australian National University. Klein holds a DPhil in Development Studies from the University of Oxford and has published widely in international leading journals on issues of postdevelopment, social security and political economy including women's economic security, welfare conditionality, therapeutic cultures and settler colonialism in Australia.

UMA KOTHARI is Professor of Migration and Postcolonial Studies, The University of Manchester, UK and Professor of Human Geography, The University of Melbourne, Australia. Her research interests include colonialism and humanitarianism, mobilities and borders, and environmental change and island geographies. She is Vice President of the European Association of Development Institutes, on the advisory board of *In Place of War*, a Fellow of the UK Academy of Social Sciences and a recipient of the Royal Geographical Society's Busk Medal.

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