Bordering

Creating, contesting and resisting practice

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Abstract

Materially and symbolically manifest, borders are shaped by history, politics and power. This first 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 and 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 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 first issue of a two-part series on *Bordering: creating, contesting and resisting practice*, the articles cover a range of these issues. Michele Lobo and Kaya Barry show how technologies can be used creatively to defy, refuse and unsettle borders. They reveal how borders and bordering are frequently contested and negotiated, often through creativity and ingenuity. Visual techniques are used to resist standard 'borders' of representation and the metaphoric borders of public debates on immigration and asylum seeking in order to challenge racialised representations of migration and mobility. Rachel Sharples also examines the use of digital technologies and transnational networking media to transcend and resist borders but this time by human rights activists at the Thai-Burma border. She argues that activists defy state sovereignties through their irregular movement across borders, and through connecting to other national territories.

In their article, Lisa Palmer and Balthasar Kehi illustrate how honeybees ceaselessly move back and forth across human devised borders of Timor. They show how the free movement of the honeybee is essential to the material and spiritual lives of people along the border. The ancestral and spiritual connections embodied by the honeybees are regularly enacted in people's ritual practice and speech, transcending cross-island political divides.

The making and maintenance of borders are also examined in Leicha Stewart's article. She analyses discussion in the lead up to the 2013 Australia election where the Australian border was constructed through notions of 'border security' and presented as being constantly at risk by the threat of asylum seekers. She reveals how visual imagery of military technologies used for monitoring the border featured repeatedly in television coverage prior to the election. This, she argues, operated as a device to recruit TV audiences into the government's racialised project of securing the border. This discursive technique, among many others, also functioned to legitimise the Government's punitive immigration policies. Maria Giannacopoulos' article shows how practices of bordering within legal frameworks render invisible the effects of colonial law: the legitimisation for the harms experienced by racialised populations so that colonial rule can be sustained. In doing so, she focuses on First Nation people's deaths in custody in Australia where she develops the idea of the 'debtscape' through which she shows how violence is legitimated

and colonial law endures. Mark Rainey examines the weaponisation of time as a bordering practice whereby the state uses time and waiting in destitution to marginalise, destabilise and exert control over asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers. Through in-depth ethnographic work in the UK, he demonstrates how asylum seekers are forced into becoming increasingly dependent on charitable support and live under the constant threat of arrest, detention and deportation. In so doing, Mark Rainey suggests that time should be considered as a technology of state power alongside dispersal, detention, destitution and deportation.

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