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INTRODUCTION

**Border Politics**

**Anne Begg & Vijay Devadas**

University of Otago & Auckland University of Technology

Borders are everywhere. They are constitutive of political life: we heard much about borders during Donald Trump's campaign and subsequent election; we see this manifest consistently in discussions about asylum seekers in Australia and refugees seeking to come into Europe; and we witness this in debates about the need to militarise borders in India and Pakistan, for example. Borders work to demarcate and distinguish between inside and outside, between those who belong and those who do not, it demarcates between what can be included and what should be excluded: between what Giorgio Agamben calls *zoe* and *bios* (2000, pp. 33-34). There are many ways in which borders are erected: these can be through ethnic, religious, national, class, regional and intergenerational lines. Borders thus function to split the social field, to break sociality into a form of multiplicity that can be easily governed. Conceived in this way, borders become central to thinking through the biopolitical, that is to say, borders facilitate a biopolitical caesura.

Contributions to this issue of *borderlands* focus on strategies of border control, both symbolic and actual. In an age of globalisation, transnational corporate hegemony and impending environmental collapse, borders increasingly work to divide first world from third world, rich from poor and white from brown. These strategies are not recent innovations. Rather, they continue a Western program of what Mark Kelly calls 'biopolitical imperialism' (2015). Kelly draws on the work of Michel Foucault (and most particularly his seminal work *Society Must Be Defended*) to claim that 'racism is the generic ideology of imperialism, that you can't have one without the other' (Kelly 2017). As Foucault notes, 'racism justifies the death-function in the economy of biopower by appealing to the principle that the death of others makes one biologically stronger' (1997, p. 258). In a world where the division of world politics are structurally such that it compels us to take shelter behind borders, racism and borders are critical concepts. For Kelly, the territorial border has become a biopolitical border. Biopolitics can be defined as the technology of power which constitutes a population

through the state caring for and managing the well-being of that population, to the exclusion of others. As Kelly (2017) explains, 'If you're going to have this distinction between the valuable life inside your nation versus the life outside it which you don't care about, racism is the way to do that'. Furthermore, according to Kelly (2017), this effect is being exacerbated because the first world is moving toward a form of political unity, to a situation in which first world countries don't fight each other but, instead, wage war against poor and mostly brown people.

Indeed, what we are witnessing today, as Kelly articulates and which the contributors to this issue demonstrate, is not new: in fact, the strategic mechanisms of contemporary border politics have a much longer history, etched in a major transformation that occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Foucault notes this as follows:

I think that one of the greatest transformations political right underwent in the nineteenth century was precisely that, I wouldn't say exactly sovereignty's old right—to take life or let live—was replaced, but it came to be complemented by a new right which does not erase the old right but which does penetrate it, permeate it. This is the right, or rather precisely the opposite right. It is the power to 'make' live and 'let' die. The right of sovereignty was the right to take life or let live. And then this new right is established: the right to make live and to let die. (1997, p. 241)

The establishment of this new right depended, to a large extent, on the construction of borders (real and imagined) that focused on life, regulating who can and cannot live, who must die, who must be quarantined, and kept away from the general populace. No longer is the focus on the individual in and of itself: rather the focus is on the population, or more precisely, the life of the population. Again, as Foucault notes, this is

a technology [of power] which brings together the mass effects characteristic of a population, which tries to control the series of random events that occur in a living mass ... This is a technology which aims to establish a sort of homeostasis, not by training individuals, but by achieving an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole from internal dangers. (1997, p. 249)

This technology of power which Foucault names biopower 'takes control of both the body and life or that has ... taken control of life in general—with the body as one pole and the population as the other' (1997, p. 253). Biopower thus marks a modality of government that is concerned with the population, or more precisely, with the strategic management of population. It also marks a rethinking of the way in which the power of sovereignty is constituted: sovereignty now, because it is dealing with populations, cannot survive simply by disciplining (to take life and let live); rather it is underpinned by the 'power of regularization ... [of] making live and letting die' (1997, p. 253). And this is done by 'using overall mechanisms and acting in such a way as to achieve overall states of equilibration or regularity; it is, in

a word, a matter of taking control of life and the biological processes of man-as-species and of ensuring that they are not disciplined, but regularized' (1997, pp. 246-247). Sovereign power is now invested in deploying various regularising technologies of power to organise the population so as to maximise its value as resource. This new mode of organising the multiplicity of individuals that is the population is what Foucault calls biopower. Biopower seeks to bring 'life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations' (1997, p. 143); calculations that seek to quantify, measure, objectify, and classify the forces of life in ways or relations that 'maximize and extract forces' (1997, p. 246) most productively.

To that end, as the articles which constitute this issue show, a strategic way of enacting biopower is to establish borders, both material and symbolic which function to regulate the conditions of life: who can live within the borders, who cannot; who is part of the population within the border; who can be included and who can be excluded; who is a citizen and who is not and, by extension, who has rights and who does not. From these contributors, we learn that borders, articulated variously, are central to the reproduction of power and inequalities.

Anelynda Mielke's article titled 'Objectifying the Border: symbolism and subaltern experience of borders in Palestine and Canada' focuses on the centrality of symbolic objects to border struggles and to contemporary expressions of State power and control. Mielke grounds her discussion, first, in the subaltern scholarship of Jacques Rancière and Ranajit Guha, and second, in Bruno Latour's concept Dingopolitik, thereby linking politics with the marginalised and political struggle with contestation over objects and symbolic representation. She claims that 'symbols and symbolic objects are markers at the gate that subdivides a ruling class from a subaltern class, and that challenging such markers is absolutely necessary in any struggle to disrupt the existence or placement of such a gate' (Mielke, this issue). Furthermore, invoking Latour, Mielke points out that the political realm is focused on objects, that borderlands are defined by objects bearing symbolic meaning and that, 'in the absence of such objects human interaction with borders could not take place' (this issue). In short, Mielke's article focuses on the politicisation of inanimate objects in border struggles. It interrogates the strategic placement of the Israeli Wall, both physically and symbolically, before comparing this massive State intervention to the symbolic tactics deployed in one resistive response to Canadian border practices and policies.

By situating the Wall as always already a legitimate object, and its mode of construction as the key legal issue, Israeli law effectively depoliticises its symbolic and physical presence and works, instead, to validate and shore up State aggression. As Mielke explains, 'the Wall takes precedence, and reference to technical problems and concerns effectively obliterates underlying concerns over the Wall's existence or villagers' rights to access their land' (this issue). However, although the Wall's builders might expect that it establishes Israel's land

appropriation as an irrefutable reality, increasing media coverage of anti-Wall protests can also (re)situate the Palestinian cause as well-warranted political activism.

In Canada, Abdelkader Belaoui's case attracted support from 250 community organisations and several Members of Parliament (MPs) before it was decided he could remain in Canada. The Canadian state set out to claim an objective position, establishing Belaoui's outsider status as an apolitical fact, beyond the realm of debate or questioning. The case played out round two key objects or symbols. The first was that of St Gabriel's Church in which Belaoui sought sanctuary for nearly four years. The second was an art installation set up outside the Passport Office by activist supporters using Popsicle sticks as symbolic objects, to count out and physically display the days of his incarceration in the Church. The Popsicle sticks installation came to participate unwittingly in a struggle over the symbolic meaning of church-as-object, 'over its enrolment by different actors, alternatively and simultaneously casting it church-as-sanctuary, church-as-accomplice, and/or church-as-prison' (this issue).

Although these border struggles are vastly different, they are similar in that a literal barrier prevents contact between a stronger state's authorities and a person or population understood as subaltern. They are also similar insofar as symbolic objects play central roles in the struggles, utilised by the State to render restrictive practices apolitical and uncontested and by activists to expose such practices as always political and as crucial targets for contestation and resistance.

Leila Whitley's article 'The disappearance of race: a critique of the use of Agamben in border and migration scholarship' examines border and migration scholarship most particularly through the lens of Critical Border Studies. Whitley claims that the prolific and enthusiastic uptake of Giorgio Agamben's work offers no critique of Agamben's failure to include issues of race/racism in his study of the overlapping concepts, 'homo sacer', 'bare life' and 'the camp'. As Whitley sees it, the emphasis on legal studies, which follows from Agamben's theory, means that other dynamics of difference remain peripheral at best and are sometimes 'explicitly denied' (this issue).

Whitley explains how critical border scholars, following Agamben's theory of the homo sacer, focus on the exclusion of the migrant from the legal protections afforded by citizenship and the resultant exposure to violence that follows from this exclusion. John Darling's work, for example, considers the rejection of permission to continue living in the United Kingdom and the 'attendant withdrawal of permissions and support, that positions the refused asylum seeker as bare life' (Whitley, this issue). In other examples, Charles Lee (2010) and Nicholas de Genova (2010) indicate ways in which legalisation for specific tasks manifest as 'mechanisms of sorting migrants, and creating distributions of legality on the basis of state-centric and capitalist rubrics of desirability' (this issue). Whitley's key point is that 'while these accounts

provide evocative descriptions of the violence to which illegalized migrants are exposed ... it is striking that they do not describe the ways that particular groups of people are disproportionately illegalized or made vulnerable to illegalization' (this issue, emphasis added). For Whitley, the racialised and gendered dimensions of violence and power are lost when structures of violence are reduced to state-enacted processes of illegalisation and nobody asks why or how a certain person, or group of persons, are illegalised.

The same exclusions apply in those scholarly studies of migration detention centres that invoke Agamben's concept 'camp'. While analysis does explain how legal structures enable the suspension of legal protections for some, it does not answer the question of who is detained in the camps, and why. Whitley argues that even if 'racism is understood as the 'obvious' foundation of these practices and, therefore, not in need of theorization' the effect is that the complexity of racism is degraded and delimited (this issue). In contrast, the legal system of European and European-derived states is given elevated status in the structuring and functioning of nation-state bordering and detainment practices. Whitley makes a special study of Nick Vaughan-Williams' prize-winning book, *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power* in which he examines the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes in London in 2005. Vaughan-Williams 'reinterprets Agamben's theory to point toward its generalized deployment—a biopolitical border enacted not in a limited space of the camp, but in a generalized space of the camp, operating or potentially operating, throughout daily life' (Whitley, this issue). In other words, a generalised border situates us all as potentially subject to the violence visited on Charles de Menezes. Again, what's missing in this discussion is why certain people, and certain bodies, are more vulnerable to state and police violence than others.

After examining in some detail Agamben's theory that the potential to be fixed as bare life is the basis of the modern political order, Whitley critiques and challenges the notion that 'all citizens are thus vulnerable to the machinations of power within the nation-state' (this issue). She cites critiques from other scholars, including Judith Butler, Achille Mbembe and Alexander Weheliye who highlight the ways biopolitical theories elide differential relations of power and obscure the longer traditions of work interrogating colonial imperialism, racism and sexism. While Michel Foucault (1997) situates racism and fragmentation of the population as the State's basic mechanism of control, Whitley stresses that this should not justify reading constructions of racism back into a theoretical concept such as bare life. Rather, Whitley calls for border and migration scholarship that points away from Agamben's work and towards more nuanced approaches that place 'scholarship on racism, gender and embodiment, genocide and coloniality at the theoretical centre' (this issue).

David Eades' article 'Boats, Bodies and Borders: the geospatial significance of a fence-line' deals less with theory and more with the

practice of everyday life on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, where asylum seekers are being held in an Australian detention centre. This article focuses on a specific incident that occurred in early 2014 when Papua New Guinea (PNG) nationals clashed with a group of asylum seekers who were taking collective action against their placement on the island and the Australian government's increasing hostility towards asylum seekers. As Eades explains, 'Australia's effort to deter unauthorized boat arrivals has shaped its policy of processing their asylum claims offshore' and 'has secured a bi-lateral agreement with PNG to host asylum seekers while they are being processed' (this issue).

Asylum seekers are often viewed with suspicion and hostility, as 'others' different from 'us', as a salient foreign out-group, and when perceptions mark the out-groups as an inferior class of humanity, a form of dehumanisation or out-group derogation can result. This leads to flashpoints of social unrest and, as Eades explains, this is what occurred at the processing centre on Manus Island between 16-18 February 2013. Various in-groups and out-groups added to the complexity of the incident which involved not only transferees or asylum seekers but also PNG and Australian employees who worked on Manus Island, the PNG police and some PNG residents (Eades, this issue). Eades uses local media coverage and the findings of the Cornall Report (2014), an independent report commissioned by the Australian government, to inform his discussion.

The Cornall Report states that problems occurred when transferees adopted a racist attitude towards PNG nationals employed at the Centre. This attitude reflected frustration with Australian policy that would settle them in PNG, not Australia, if they were granted refugee status. The fence-line separating transferees from local residents also fueled this response, the fence becoming 'a border of jurisdiction between threat of an out-group (the transferees or asylum seekers) and safety within an in-group (the PNG community)' (Eades, this issue). The fluidity of alliances between in-groups and out-groups proved just how problematic such categories can be and made it much more difficult for both PNG and Australian media to construct a suitable frame or narrative.

PNG local coverage describes 'conflicting accounts' but justifies PNG police and locals crossing the fence-line on the basis that there was a lack of adequate response from the service-provider and order needed to be restored. Australian media framed it very differently, claiming the service-provider and Australian government actions were appropriate and it was the transferees' actions that were the source of the problem. A key point here is that there is no mention of why people are arriving and seeking asylum but, rather, the implication that 'illegal arrivals' are hindering Australia's efforts to protect lives. As Eades points out, 'Australia is intentionally distancing itself geospatially from clashes and conflicts for which it is primarily and ultimately responsible' (this issue).

The Cornall Report recommended that 'it would be in the best interests of the future safety of transferees and the orderly management of the centre if there was a comprehensive community liaison program to address any resentment or negative attitudes' (2014, p. 99) (Eades this issue). In the last section of his article, Eades discusses the concept of hospitality and the need for a thoughtful, ethical response to asylum seekers. While establishing greater levels of interaction among the various factions involved may help reduce threats to identity and curb levels of hostility, there will always be in-group and out-group tensions while Manus Island remains the scapegoat for Australia's immigration policy.

The contribution from Mahdis Azarmandi and Roberto Hernandez draws attention to the (re)emergence of unresolved tensions when contemporary narratives attempt to address continuities of racial/colonial injustice when re-naming city places and spaces. As Azarmandi and Hernandez explain, 'erasure of colonial violence through memorialization is made visible by acknowledging the necessity for renaming' (this issue). However, they also argue that 'a second type of erasure occurs in the process of re-naming, where resistance by communities of colour is equally neglected' (this issue). They use various examples to demonstrate how contestations over the collective history and memory of colonialism, as well as ongoing racism and the often-contradictory responses to it, are filtered through prevailing discourses of multiculturalism, diversity, tolerance and inclusion. In this article, they focus on Barcelona and, especially, on continuing debates over the removal of a statue of Antonio Lopez y Lopez, a renowned slave trader, and on the renaming of Antonio Lopez Plaza.

Azarmandi and Hernandez challenge emerging dominant narratives concerning colonial monuments and problematise some of the responses from both local political initiatives and anti-racist groups. They point out, for example, how suggested replacement names such as Nelson Mandela or Rana Plaza (and other names linked to Spanish Republican and Anarchist resistance movements) while seemingly benign, work to construct racism and colonial violence as detached from the Spanish and Catalan present. Azarmandi and Hernandez argue that in this process the white liberal left, as well as white anti-racist groups, are 'dislocating the conversation about racism to places like South Africa, or approaching resistance to racism as a question of abstract human rights and diversity' (this issue). As they claim, 'if the debate over re-naming said monuments is being done in the name of inclusion, tolerance and diversity, then we must further interrogate the contours of that debate to highlight who is being newly remembered and/or silenced in the current process' (this issue).

The erasure or silencing entailed in colonial commemoration reiterates embedded racial hierarchies and those targeted, whether as citizens or undocumented migrants, are of African descent, Muslims, Latin Americans, Asians and Gitanos and are deemed to be intrusive

'others'. The authors discuss the case of Alfonso Arcelin, whose challenge against the controversial 1992 exhibit *'El negro de bayoles'* demonstrated how one can recognise and resist institutionalised racism without abstracting the issue to another place and time.

Although the option of Nelson Mandela as a suitable replacement for Antonio Lopez y Lopez is losing favour in public debate, the use of his persona in the European context serves to illustrate State responses to contemporary discussions of racism. As Azarmandi and Hernandez argue, by looking at motivations for commemorating Mandela it becomes apparent that he is made a symbol for diversity, human rights and, above all, reconciliation thereby effectively disavowing and displacing ongoing struggles against racism. This article echoes the work of Leila Whitley (see above) when it claims that the commemoration of opposition to racism cannot be reduced to abstract human rights that are presumably exercised and at risk everywhere equally, 'when the history of colonialism has had very specific racial and gendered contours' (this issue). Like Whitley, Azarmandi and Hernandez highlight the risk of reproducing colonial-master narratives in the name of an anti-racism shaped by Europe. They call, instead, for commemoration that allows 'for the flourishing of voices of those that continue to be marginalized amongst the pernicious existences of white supremacist social structures and privilege' (this issue).

Brett Nicholls' account of the work of Adam Curtis, the BAFTA award-winning documentary filmmaker, provides a fine overview of the political background to forms of border politics and social control discussed by the other contributors to this issue. Nicholls sees 'a characteristic suspicion of political elites and the ideas that underpin their plans for society' as a central, defining feature of Curtis's work. However, rather than situate Curtis's work within a political framework, Nicholls sets out to explore the essential logic of this suspicion and to consider Curtis's stories as 'both a powerful articulation of the post-political present and a compelling form of social theory' (this issue).

Curtis, as a filmmaker and journalist, grapples with the post-political condition of contemporary power. He excavates ideas from history to characterize the ambition of political elites as an intention to build a better, more stable, freer society. However, his work then attempts to demonstrate that 'this modern aim invariably produces its opposite: a society in crisis preoccupied with control' (Nicholls, this issue).

It is in his most recent film *Hypernormalisation* (2016), that Curtis's work provides an overview of the issues of migration and border control dealt with in other contributions to this issue. As Nicholls explains, Curtis 'presents a bleak account of increasing global instability and the powerlessness of politicians to do anything to keep this in check' (this issue). Curtis's style of documentary filmmaking is not easy to categorise in conventional terms. However, his 'realist journalistic narrative voice' is best considered in terms of the conventions of journalism, the aim of which, if we follow Curtis at his word, is to tell the

public what is happening in the world' (Nicholls, this issue). Key here, as Nicholls states, is that this is at a time when journalistic explanations seem to be in short supply.

Curtis sees the political present in the West as hypernormal. Nicholls explains: 'This is to say that not only do we think that politics today is normal, we also think it is normal that there are no alternatives. He argues, we live in a carefully constructed make believe world that has long since abandoned a commitment to political ideas, and robust political debate and action' (this issue). For Nicholls, Curtis's logic engages with political complexity and utilises complex fragments from the past to draw together multiple social situations and strands of thought.

*Hypernormalisation* is, for Nicholls, Curtis's most pessimistic film. As Nicholls sees it, Curtis's thinking bears a 'striking resemblance' to Baudrillard's later work and focuses on new forms of cynicism and disdain emerging within politics. In Nicholls' words: 'Power now disappears behind a public relations veil, if it exists in any conventional sense to persuade, seduce, threaten, and so on, and is replaced by a confusing simulation of power. As such, power paradoxically becomes more destructive' (this issue). Nicholls then makes the point that 'in this confusing and unchecked form an authoritarian and extreme nationalism has begun to take hold' (this issue). It is this point that the article makes a direct link with the theme of this issue and serves to situate border and immigration controls as crucial sites for political interrogation and critical analysis. As Nicholls concludes, 'the task is to find a way to politically engage with complexity, to sort through the real and the fake, and to overturn the iron cage of rationality' (this issue).

While the contributors to this issue engage with power, or more precisely criticise power for its exclusions, they also collectively speak of the urgency of dismantling the configurations of power that produce racialised inequalities. Such a position, of thinking through strategies to challenge power is urgent. The ascendancy of Donald Trump is an unfortunate reminder that border politics remains foundational to sovereign power and our task is one that should be committed to dismantling borders and imagining a world that is without borders: to reprise Agamben, we need to advance a community of singularities, fragments, 'mediated not by any condition of belonging ... nor by the simple absence of conditions ... but by belonging itself' (1993, p. 85).

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