

INTRODUCTION

Bordering, exclusions and necropolitics

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Abstract

Purpose – Contemporary governmentality combines biopolitical and necropolitical logics to establish social, political and physical borders that classify and stratify populations using symbolic and material marks as, for example, nationality, gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, social class and/or disability. The social sciences have been prolific in the analysis of alterities and, in turn, implicated in the epistemologies and knowledge practices that underpin and sustain the multiplication of frontiers that define essential differences between populations. The purpose of this paper is to develop a strategy that analyze and subvert the logic of bordering inherent in the bio/necropolitical gaze. In different ways, this paper examines operations of delimitation and differentiation that contribute to monolithic definitions of subject and subjectivity.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors question border construction processes in terms of their static, homogenizing and exclusionary effects.

Findings – Instead of hierarchical stratification of populations, the papers in this special issue explore the possibilities of relationship and the conditions of such relationships. Who do we relate to? On which terms and conditions? With what purpose? In which ethical and political manner?

Originality/value – A critical understanding of the asymmetry in research practices makes visible how the researcher is legitimized to produce a representation of those researched, an interpretation of their words and actions without feedback or contribution to the specific context where the research has been carried out. Deconstructive and relational perspectives are put forward as critical strands that can set the basis of different approaches to research and social practice.

Keywords Methodology, Governmentality, Necropolitics, Hierarchies

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Introduction

Sovereign forms of power, based on the right to take life or let live, have been “replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (Foucault, 1990, p. 138). This is a power that governs society by producing normalization (Foucault, 1990, p. 144) and by security mechanisms that yearn “to optimize a state of life” (Foucault, 2003, p. 246). This is a perspective that seems at odds with current migration processes. According to the Missing Migrants Project, 5,098 migrants died in the Mediterranean and 1,279 in North Africa in 2016 (IOM, 2017). Classic governmentality theory centered on the notion of biopolitics (Foucault, 1977/1995, 2003) fails to fully explain such deaths and the production of expendability. If power is concerned with the regulation of life, how can biopolitics account for death on such a scale? It could be argued that the concepts of “discipline” and “biopolitics” are unable to fully grasp the transformation of “life as surplus” (Cooper, 2008) and the complex imbrications of neoliberal capitalism “informed by the norms of corporate rationality and deployed in managing violence, social conflicts, fear and the Multitude” (Gržinić and Tatlić, 2014, p. 24). This constitutes a new geopolitical ordering that decenters life (Mbembe, 2003). In this frame, life, the living, and vitality cannot be fully wrestled from the multiple biopolitical articulations of death (Shields *et al.*, 2014). The notion of



“necropolitics” balances the centering on the production and transformation of life, and complexifies the topology of power relations within modern states (Mbembe, 2003). In this perspective, the security of life for certain populations cannot be fully accounted for without considering its interrelation with the different forms of suffering of other social groups. The following excerpt illustrates how necropolitical practices operate: there is an Other that threatens life and legitimizes practices of exclusion and ejection:

The perception of the existence of the Other as an attempt on my life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security – this, I suggest, is one of the many imaginaries of sovereignty characteristic of both early and late modernity itself (Mbembe, 2003, p. 17).

Necropolitical logics enact a politics of death in the name of vitality that defines which lives are worth protecting and which are deemed disposable (Lamble, 2013; Shields *et al.*, 2014). Contemporary governmentality combines biopolitical and necropolitical logics to establish social, political and physical borders that classify and stratify populations using symbolic and material marks as, for example, nationality, gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, social class and/or disability. The safeguarding of worthy populations is enacted and justified by pointing to potentially threatening events and declaring “state of exception” (Benjamin and Demetz, 1921; Agamben, 1998). Citizenship rights are weakened, suspended or removed, as citizens become “homo sacer” and life turns into “bare life.” The concentration camps in Nazi Germany, the detention centers in Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo, or the refugee camps in Europe constitute examples of physical areas where people are dispossessed of human rights and belong to no land:

So we have to think about these two different tactics, and how they work together: restricting a population to a land of which they have been dispossessed and refusing the entry into the European metropole of those who are presumed to belong to another land. One can see how these two modalities of colonial power work together to produce the situation in which the targeted population belongs, finally, to no land, a situation that embodies one clear impasse of dispossession (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, p. 24).

When referring to her experience representing migrants and asylum seekers in the UK, Frances Webber (2012) states that “the hallmarks of a free society (universal rights not to be detained arbitrarily; access to justice; to fair trial; freedom from double punishment; freedom of movement) and those of a humane one (access to subsistence, shelter and healthcare) have all been called into question” (p. 40). Something as banal as being born on the other side of the border produces a different physical and subjective constitution: a body that cannot circulate through certain territories with a particular self-understanding. How can something so banal lead to such a degree of physical and subjective suffering? Borders are central in the dynamics of differentiation and asymmetry involved in the construction of the Other.

The social sciences have been prolific in the analysis of alterities and, in turn, implicated in the epistemologies and knowledge practices that underpin and sustain the multiplication of frontiers that define essential differences between populations. Research practices and interventions are involved in the production of inequalities, population-mapping dispositifs, regulation practices, contingent problematizations, and complex ethical and political reconfigurations of regimes of governmentality (Rose, 1996). Biopower dynamics to “make live” are intertwined with those “reject-for-death” and “let die” which surface as practical consequences of policies, programs and differentiation effects of relevant policies and measurements (Fassin, 2009). These bio/necropolitical scenarios demand that the research community seriously addresses the processes of differentiation, asymmetry and border construction involved in academic and intervention practice, raising important questions regarding conceptual, epistemological, methodological and political matters such as: the collaboration between academic knowledge production and biopolitical and necropolitical

governmental logics; the ethical implications of particular research programs and their bearing on differential regimes of living and dying; the pervasive logics of risk and security; contemporary subjective constitutions based on the exclusion of others; and finally, questions about which tools should be developed to challenge the classificatory and hierarchical effects of specific research methodologies and methods. Academic discourse territorializes subjectivities, defines those that need to be intervened upon, and frames those who need to become objects of discourses and social interventions that provide vitality or cause demise; protection or abandonment, the two sides of the coin.

The contributions in this special issue implement diverse research strategies that uncover biopolitical and necropolitical social practices, and/or question and transform those same practices in our research methods. They develop theoretical and methodological articulations questioning the hegemonic representations that classify, rank and use groups of people to produce subaltern or object positions. Each article develops and combines a number of different strategies in the analysis of biopolitical and necropolitical practices, as if they were pieces of glass, producing unique multiple refractions of the topic being researched. In different ways, the papers address three central practices in bio/necropolitics: the delimitation of physical and/or subjective territories; the valued stratification of such territories; and the development of a political economy of life and associated epistemologies where one's survival depends on the Other's death.

Bordering, hierarchies and analytics

A set of borders were defined in the secret agreement between Great Britain and France in 1916, with Russia's approval, in what has been known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement or the Asia Minor Agreement. The agreement assigned bodies to territories and established the grounds for their selective circulation; it also solidified the continuation of the imperial order that "led to the continued instability of the Iraq-Syria-Israel-Palestinian region" (Cade, 2017). This metaphor illustrates that the definition of borders and territories is not innocent. First, it is a localized practice with invested interests. Moreover, it has the significant effect of flagging some differences as transcendental. Finally, the map does not show the position from which the map is drawn, and this is a power effect of paramount importance as it constitutes a localized practice that hides its localization. These processes of differentiation determine essential alterities. Practices and discourses of bordering constitute essential Others that define contexts of vulnerability or bare life. This is a process that is subjectively interiorized and fantasmatically understood as one's identity. Borders and territories, as axes of differentiation, constitute the basic foundation for biopolitical and necropolitical practices. Differences become essential. Biopolitics open certain bodies for circulation and transform them in objects/subjects of power by processes of subjectivation. Necropolitics immobilize bodies; subjectivise them and transform them into bare life: to be rich, somebody has to be poor; to be healthy, somebody has to be sick. In order to live, others have to die. Borders, in turn, constitute an analytic tool for understanding the socio-political space: "it seems that borders and the institutional practices corresponding to them have been transported into the middle of political space" (Balibar, 2004, p. 109).

Mapping nature and society is at the core of the modernist scientific project; a mapping that hides the position of the one who draws the map in the name of objectivity. A neutral, ahistorical and acultural map of knowledge that defines subjects and subjectivities, normal territories and territories that need to be intervened upon and transformed. The social sciences have been prolific in the definition of alterities, in the multiplication of frontiers that define essential differences between populations; differences that need to be adequately addressed. The analysis of scientific localization in research processes points to the position of the scientific gaze. Science, as a human activity, is socially and historically localized within institutional practices, a practice with ontological, epistemological, methodological, ethical and political implications.

Feminist epistemologies have stressed the importance of considering the position from which borders are defined and sustained. There is a gaze coded in a map, a gaze that has the power to define the borders of the map. Our current categories of knowledge and being are undergirded by power practices that define our trajectories across the social space. Similarly, research practices draw maps that define territories and subjectivities, and the gaze from which this map is drawn is of paramount importance. Feminist theory has shown how the scientific androcentric gaze has territorialized our understandings (Harding, 1986) and excluded certain voices from the production of legitimate knowledge. Strong objectivity (Haraway, 1988) assumes the situated character of knowledge, far from the gaze from nowhere and everywhere characteristic of realist positions. The “god trick of seeing everything from nowhere” (Haraway, 1988, p. 581) underpins research practices of disembodiment and de-responsibilization that precede the implantation of the biopolitical and/or necropolitical gaze. In contrast, situatedness, and situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988) are not exhausted in the description of the demographic traits of the researcher or the researcher’s assumptions toward the research topic. More fundamentally, they refer to the forms of inhabiting the domain of research and action; to the methodological decisions to engage with the research process and the relational transformations of situatedness produced. Situated knowledges therefore also reconfigure agency as distributed across subjects and entities, a process that entails “staying with the trouble,” “to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present” (Haraway, 2016, p. 1). This sense of entangled and entwined existence is elided in the knowledge practices that claim objective detachment of an omniscient observer, but has to be recovered if one is to attend to the situated material-semiotics of existence in complex and shifting life-and-death formations.

The papers in this special issue develop different strategies that analyze and subvert the logic of bordering inherent in the bio/necro political gaze. In “Borders and margins: debates on intersectionality and critical methodological standpoints,” Ilana Mountian explores the regimes of differentiation that define certain subjects as “the Other.” These are governmental practices that produce subjective and geographical positions; these positions are considered ontologically distinct and ethically/morally valued. The reification of subject positions defines dichotomies such as center/periphery, inside/outside, included/excluded, Us/Other. This territorialization concerns subjective and physical borders. Mountian draws on feminist and postcolonial scholarship to discuss the role of the researcher, as the research process discursively constitutes an “Other position.” From this critical strand, the authors assert that in research – as well as in popular imaginary – the categories constituted as the Other are often criminalized, romanticized or exoticized. In order to tackle the political and ethical consequences of reification of the “other” in research practice, Mountian highlights the importance of looking at the social context where research is deployed. More specifically, Mountian considers how social categories in intersection – such as gender, sexuality, race, class and any other category of difference – contribute to the definition of borders. Mountian argues that, in order to avoid epistemic and disciplinarian violence, this analytical lens needs to put forward methodological frameworks able to critically question the taken-for-granted binary constructions “Other-Us.” Mountian puts forward methodologies, like discourse analysis, that can account for and deconstruct the power relations constituting borders. A deconstruction of both the “Other” and “Us” may enhance the possibilities of encountering the Other, the possibilities of the Other to be seen as a subject. Hence, taking into account the impact of social context, and the power relations in academia as well as in public policies, are fundamental tasks in the development of a critical perspective.

Mountian shows how the Other is constructed in terms of asymmetric relationships, and it is necessarily to develop methodologies that deconstruct the hierarchy between research

and researched, between Us and the Other, in order to build a critical science. The reification of the “Other” as a homogeneous and stable category produces a valuative stratification of categories, characteristic of bio/necro political practices. Against this methodological procedure, Mountian explores two strategies for deconstructing the power relations involved in bordering and the production of the fetishized Other: first, deconstructing borders, and second, creating ethical encounters with the Other. Mountian argues that Critical Discourse Analysis could be useful in this twofold strategy where power relations based on regimes of difference are uncovered and transformed.

Social welfare is the area of inquiry in Rachel Dobson’s paper “Theory, Method and Practice for Social Welfare ‘Dirty Work’ Research: toward institutional and practice ontologies.” The paper explores how welfare practice is characterized by dichotomous hierarchies like theory/practice, “ivory tower/real-world.” The focus is on social work professionals, on how this position is built and the effects of such construction. Social work practice is considered as “dirty work” because of its association with governmental regulations; a position that subjectively produces embodied feelings of guilt and shame. The paper offers a perspective that stands out in the field of social work – a field that mainly focuses on “vulnerable” “at risk” populations and those who are defined as in need of “intervention” and that therefore rarely redirect the gaze back toward social work practitioners. The authors reflect from an “insider researcher” position by taking her own experiences in the field of statutory homelessness practice in England as raw material for her analysis. The paper develops a critical approach toward the construction of welfare workers in reference to the notions of expertise and correctness in practice, which implicitly and explicitly position them as blame and shame-worthy professionals. Through binary imaginings and naturalization processes, subjects are subsumed under singular identifications (the organization/professional identity), always-already knowable to others. The paper questions the use of binaries – such as structure/agency; top-down/bottom-up; inside/outside – for understanding social phenomena. Instead, Dobson proposes a complex, relational, performative and affective understanding of agency and subjectivity, in order to foreground an ontologically driven account of social reality and human experience. The paper looks at the constituted positions in the territories of “professionals” and “those vulnerable and in risk that could/should be intervened.” The approach questions methodological oppositions and reterritorializations in terms of structure/agency or top-down or bottom-up approach in professional practice. Instead, it suggests the co-constitution of institutions and subjectivities of what could resonate with structuration theory (Giddens, 1986).

In “Life, death, ethnography: epistemologies and methods of the quasi-event,” Posocco suggests the importance of a semiotic-material perspective in the analysis of the constitution of borders. Although the materiality of borders is apparent when we think about physical borders, a material-semiotic understanding of borders and territorializations suggests that social meanings are intimately related with the signifiers and material operations that constitute spaces, objects and procedures governing life. In the development of the notion of necropolitics, Mbembe analyses the articulation of discourse, spaces, bodies, identities, land, people, nations and frontiers. The mechanisms to govern death constitute complex governmental trusses and topographies of cruelty. Posocco’s paper draws on anthropological fieldwork in front of the National Palace in Guatemala and interconnects different elements that configure a social space: humans, the house of government, banners, and drones. This ordering transforms social space into a policed carceral space through the articulation of semiotic-material agents in a capillary surveillance where drones play a relevant role. The drone constitutes a situated object of anticipatory surveillance that gains its force from the relationship with all the other elements in a network where power relations are strategically distributed and where vulnerability and exposure accrue in socially stratified ways. Despite its apparently innocuous and concealed activity, the

drone participates in the processes of immunization of the political order. In this view, the articulation of individual and collective identities depends upon violent dynamics of inclusion, exclusion and difference, that are connected to knowledge formations, methods and infrastructures by which populations are demarcated: fostered for life, or destined for death or “overkill.” Posocco discusses the importance of thinking through sites, objects and frames simultaneously in order to understand the ways in which lines of difference and bordering configure life-and-death formations. By ethnographically exploring the mechanisms that constitute forms of inclusion and exclusion, the paper highlights the importance of drones, that is: objects that watch over people, monitor quasi-events and trace the contours of territories, to consider their roles in defining borders, situating routinized forms of violence and managing life. The drone is part of an epistemological and material infrastructure that produces a camp open to necropolitical practices. It is a technology of surveillance and control that connects population, political surveillance, potential prison and death. It regulates and shapes sociality within the camp. Despite the apparently innocuous and concealed activity, the drone participates in the processes of immunization of the political order. The importance of thinking through sites, objects and frames simultaneously are highlighted to understand the ways in which lines of difference and bordering configure life-and-death formations. The paper stresses the importance of infrastructures in the production of biopolitical, subjectivities and necropolitical camps under regimes of governmentality and new technologies of surveillance, detention and death. Furthermore, it shows that in order to methodologically explore these practices of stratification, it is important to focus on mediating artefacts that produce vulnerable bodies and zones of abandonment. Finally, the paper explores the assemblages that enact forms of differentiation and produce violent processes of inclusion, exclusion, exception and immunity in the structuring of the body politic. Under the regime of risk, technologies of surveillance, detention and death organize social, subjective and physical inner and outer space.

In “Gather in my Name, my Skin, my everything [...]” Gabi Hesk subjectively and intersectionality explores processes of bordering. The paper reflects on a performance, “Gather in my name” that she performed with her mother at the international conference Femigra held in Barcelona on 2012. The play performs an interchangeable “in between space,” from where attributions in terms of skin color, gender, the conjugal situation, are identified and that reflect on the mechanisms of creation and reproduction of “borders” in different spaces. Racial and family categorizations are corporeally exposed, foregrounding personal affect and embodiment. By performatively displacing constitutive subjective oppositions, the performance suggests a methodological procedure that defines these categories under erasure. The affective force of such performance is explicitly stated in terms of “being unable to breathe the words of one’s experience,” “feeling of being squashed,” “unable to be heard.” Therefore, the paper performs a double process of category deconstruction: on one hand, it questions the territorializations in terms of “object” and “subject” of research. Second, the performance explores, interconnects and transforms different axes of oppression. This also offers an exploration of shifts in subject positions and subjective elaborations from social assignation to multiple intersecting categories. The relationship of mother and daughter serves as a space for personal inquiry that names experiences of subjective signaling, social exclusion and intra-categorical suspicion. This subjective dialogue among intersecting categories constitutes a powerful methodological tool that moves from the conflicting particular experience to a critical self-analysis of the concurrent systems of oppression.

The performance, by relationally and experientially question bordering and hierarchisation, builds a position of commonality that transgresses subjective territorializations and allows the dialogue between the incommensurable racial territories.

The theoretical reflection on the performance exemplifies the construction of an “interchangeable in-between space” from where to relationally identify and question the relationship between signifiers (skin color, gender, family positions, etc.) and signified (the physical and subjective territorializations constituted by these signifiers). The process of diffraction accomplished by the performance constitutes hybrid spaces redrawing territorial borders that preclude the economization of identities. The process of embodied and subjective localization questions the reality of our identity formations and shows the multiple axes of differentiation traversing our lives. The other is recognized because the other is part of ourselves. The pungent question, “Can a white woman experience elements of Black racism which are linked to her connection with her Black children?”, strongly exemplifies Surya Nayak’s aphorism: racism has nothing to do with the color of the skin and has all to do with the color of the skin.

Gabi Hesk’s performance theoretical and methodologically defies subjective hierarchies and materializes and exemplifies methodological “hybrid” approaches. Their borderland positions locate them in conflict with the hegemonic norms ruling their social context, norms about gender, race and filiation that are intersectionally experienced. This dialogue results in the production of knowledge, in a methodology that is able to move from the particular experience to the critical analysis of the ways in which different systems of oppression work simultaneously. Performance as a form of “diffusion” of knowledge also disrupts normative principles, contributing to a “place of relationship” that is physically shared with the audience who is invited to gather. Gabi Hesk, in her self-exploration, reverts and displaces the multiple asymmetries that construct constitutive identities. By locating herself in the map of categories that construct subjectivities, Hesk destabilizes the racial positions built within family positions. The intersectional reading of positions displaces common dichotomies and deconstructs racial and familial hierarchies. The methodology questions another hierarchy: that of researcher and researched, theory and practice, or agent and subject of intervention. The performance opens a space that mingles research positions and transits in-between academic and everyday social practices. The performance constitutes a form of knowledge dissemination that transforms normative principles of academic practices constituting a “place of relationship” physically shared with the audience in “the gathering.”

Surya Nayak’s paper “Location as methodology,” dialogues with black feminists using the metaphor of location. Borders and territories locate bodies in certain positions, and the question about the distribution of bodies uncovers the hidden processes of territorialization. Attention to localization processes also help to identify those bodies that constitute “boundary events,” bodies whose existence questions defined territories. Nayak’s approach challenges the separation between content and method to resist the paranoid-schizoid splitting between theory and activism. Instead, it uses the metaphor of location provided by black feminist theory to resist the racist tactics of historical amnesia and question the logic of boundaries and reclaiming spaces in-between. The paper suggests a methodological approach that occupies the tensions and contradictions emerging from the processes of identification and displacement. It focuses on how subjects are produced by the locations they inhabit. In turn, positioning is a form of content/method that transforms our locations and, therefore, our production as subjects. Because the invitation to participate in a research is a form of positioning, the research has to address the conditions that make the invitation to the research process possible. The processes of differentiation build a distribution of institutionalized “homes” and a hierarchization between hosts and guests. They define who gets an invite. Guest and host constitute two positions in a hierarchy that delimit privileges and vulnerabilities, a form of relationship that transverses our everyday practices. By asking for the conditions of hospitality, the conditions of such relationship, the paper disrupts and destabilizes – but does not negate – the hierarchical oppositions inherent in the processes of hospitality (host/guest), research (researched/researcher) or knowledge (academy/activism).

The attentive surveillance of localization practices would allow the tactic positioning in disruptive borderlands, the reconstitution and redefinition of our constitutive theoretical and methodological hierarchies.

In the paper “Dis-locations, dis-posessions and the ‘dark side’ of diaspora,” Carole Boyce Davies explores the conditions of human trajectories of migration and displacements and their implications. The paper makes a timely contribution to the fields of migration and diaspora studies by theorizing the connections between concepts of migration, exile, diaspora, return, deterritorialization and statelessness. Movements, for Boyce Davis, constitute “the dark side” of globalization. Migration and diaspora are terms that connect to vibrant domains of contemporary theorizing, as well as to manifold situated social formations, conditions and plights. Boyce Davies notes that migration redraws the geopolitical world map that unevenly distributes welfare among populations, produces dispossession and dislocations. Boyce Davies locates these issues in the domain of theory as well as specific sites, making sites appear metaphorically, geographically and geopolitically. An example of this is the discussion of seascapes and their relations to histories of transoceanic journeying and “death leaps.” In this view, the sea entails both an epistemology of slavery’s Middle Passage, and a method that seeks to trace the “physics of blackness” that endure at the elemental level as well as in memories of violent uprooting and dislocation. This is powerful reconfiguration resonates with contemporary “analytics of the wake” (Sharpe, 2016) that seek to frame migrations and displacements in the present specifically as significant expression and experience of the aftermath of slavery. While borders and territorializations situate bodies in specific locations and regulate their movements and circulation, life exceeds containments. There are numerous desired and undesired border-crossings. Trajectories of movement and displacement produce new relations and open up new forms of articulation. Diasporas build new territories from divergent trajectories and create numerous “homes.” At the same time, diasporic trajectories construct new paths, new identities and new forms of subjectivation alongside forms of life inscribed by deprivation, loss of citizenship and human rights. The paper questions the effects of bordering and stratification by rewriting a new politics of location under a new praxis of internationalism. The valorization of border positions and of those positions that do not belong to definite territories is another form of resisting the economization of life. The paper approaches the (dis)connections of diaspora as material and symbolic (de)territorializations that dislocate oppositions such as home/outside, citizen/immigrant and local/stranger. By building multiple “homes,” the paper takes into consideration the singularities of minority groups in the USA that are dismissed from territorial whiteness, what could be considered as a “symbolic diaspora.” The forced migration to “no-lands” is a legacy of trans-Atlantic diaspora and the current Mediterranean diaspora. The violence of the forced movement of people is central to economic postcolonial-administrative policies of social dispossession and unbridled circulation of capital that produce physical deterritorialization and symbolic statelessness. A similar strategy is used in Suryia Nayak’s paper. By grappling with the conditions of absolute hospitality the paper blurs the borders between “guest” and “host” and points to an impossible position located in both and neither territories. Instead of resolving the tension between the host and the guest, between researcher and the researched, the paper invites us to inhabit a borderland position; to occupy and uncover the tension. While advocating for the dissolution of the tension between researcher and researched would presume the occlusion of the institutional framework that defines the opposition, Nayak explores the research tension in such a way that recognizes possibilities and frictions and, in such a way, transforms localizations. The impossibility of hospitality opens up forms of relationship that subverts and opens the research to alternative ethically framed methodological encounters. Researcher and research inhabit institutionally defined locations that need to be transformed by the institutional transformation of such positions.

In different ways, this paper examines operations of delimitation and differentiation that contribute to monolithic definitions of subject and subjectivity. The authors question border construction processes in terms of their static, homogenizing and exclusionary effects. Deconstructive and relational perspectives are put forward as critical strands that can set the basis of different approaches to research and social practice. Present biopolitical and necropolitical practices stratify populations and assign a certain value to each level, locating bodies in physical and symbolic zones. The hierarchization of life occurs at all levels and scales: from the segregation of refugees in camps (Davies *et al.*, 2017) to the value given to “white sex cells” and certain genetic traits (Schurr, 2017). These procedures are legitimized by economic discourses that locate value or danger in certain bodies and affect their possible living trajectories when variously defined as worthy, dangerous, or useless. The colonial metaphor of the frontier visualizes the segmentation of populations and the possible trajectories that borders define for those allowed to cross them. The axes of differentiation are the ground for deploying forms of oppression like patriarchy or xenophobia. These are differentiations that develop from contingent but systematic processes: the systematic contingency of differentiation categories that tend to be understood as “natural” (Brah, 1996).

Instead of hierarchical stratification of populations, the papers in this special issue explore the possibilities of relationship and the conditions of such relationships. Who do we relate to? On which terms and conditions? With what purpose? In which ethical and political manner? A critical understanding of the asymmetry in research practices makes visible how the researcher is legitimized to produce a representation of those researched, an interpretation of their words and actions without feedback or contribution to the specific context where the research has been carried out. Extractive and seemingly disembodied forms of research may even contribute to the stigmatization of the subjects and populations being researched. There are perspectives that have addressed these questions critically. Participatory Action-Research, for instance, argues that the community produces legitimate knowledge and consequently, that knowledge ought to be the result of horizontal dialogical processes. In different way, this paper examines the operations of delimitation and differentiation that contribute to monolithic definitions of the subject and subjectivity. The authors question border construction processes in terms of their static, homogenizing and exclusionary effects. Deconstructive and relational perspectives are put forward as critical strands that can set the basis of different approaches to research and social practice.

From “economies of life” to “hybrid living locations”

We are facing the proliferation and consolidation of physical and symbolic forms of “death worlds” or “camps” where populations are subdued into forms of degraded social existence. Soft control and invisible forms of prevention are employed for those “inside” the biopolitical enclave (Rose, 2000) while those “outside” suffer different forms of hard control based on exclusion from vital resources and the abandonment in symbolic, metaphoric and/or material “topographies of death” (Mbembe, 2003). The stratification and de/valuation of populations open the door for strategic use of life and death. In Mbembe’s reading of Foucault, “in the economy of biopower, the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the murderous functions of the state” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 17). The institutional defection from nourishment and care in specific territories or for particular populations can be actively enacted, as the anti-black state violence in the EEUU and Brazil (Smith, 2016), or passively implemented, as the EU inaction in the refugee’s crisis (Davies *et al.*, 2017). These practices intensify social vulnerability during “late liberalism” where powerless life becomes socially excluded and physically abandoned. The real or perceived threat deprives certain groups of basic social rights and transforms them into some form of symbolic and/or material “living dead.” Simultaneously, the fear of falling on the inauspicious side of the social or physical divide functions as an affective ordering facilitating the social acceptance of

exclusionary policies that transform “rights” into “privileges.” In summary, we face a complex regulation of bodies in terms of: capillary segregation of bodies in territories of biopower where conditions for the production of life are nurtured; zones of abandonment for those excluded from society (Povinelli, 2011); and areas of “bare life,” where death is actively promoted under an “unconditional threat of death” (Sylvester, 2006). The economic and egotistical approach to human life allows the indifference and exclusion of people in physical and symbolic zones of abandonment. Against this necropolitical logic, our research strategies and methods need to: value the singularity of different forms of vitality; be sensitive to the hierophanies of our everyday performances and rituals; and politically and ethically articulate with multiple distinct positions. The papers in this special issue develop different strategies that transgress the economization of life in terms of logics of value and disposability.

The processes of biopolitics and necropolitics are not teleological. They are the consequence of certain historical assemblages, and are transformed by these same assemblages. If the practices of bordering are central in our current governmental processes, these same practices will be historically transformed. Biopolitical and, particularly, necropolitical practices produce new forms of subjectivation. The suicide bomber could be understood as one form of such subjectivations, and Mbembe reflects on the logic of such acts in terms of sacrifice:

There is no doubt that in the case of the suicide bomber the sacrifice consists of the spectacular putting to death of the self, of becoming his or her own victim (self-sacrifice). The self-sacrificed proceeds to take power over his or her death and to approach it head-on. This power may be derived from the belief that the destruction of one’s own body does not affect the continuity of the being. The idea is that the being exists outside us. The self-sacrifice consists, here, in the removal of a twofold prohibition: that of self-immolation (suicide) and that of murder. Unlike primitive sacrifices, however, there is no animal to serve as a substitute victim. Death here achieves the character of a transgression (Mbembe, 2003, p. 38).

Mbembe (2003) ends the essay suggesting that “under conditions of necropower, the lines between resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom are blurred” (p. 40). Under these conditions it may be worth asking what other forms of agency can be built that transform our present forms of necropolitics based on articulatory political lines. The proliferation of necropolitical practices in terms of the constitution of death zones and the emergence of the *homo sacer* makes the development of a research political responsibility and ethics an urgent priority.

It is pressing to build conceptual tools that account for the complexity of necropolitical logics. There is evidence that the old categories in terms of poverty, participation or, even, inclusion, are no longer useful in the present context; methodological articulations that can challenge hegemonic representations that reproduce the discourses of differentiation and constitution of subaltern and abject positions. At the same time, it is important to establish respectful approximations with the people we work with and initiatives of articulation of differences that may sustain the construction of habitable worlds.

To overcome the pitfalls of physical and subjective territorialization, our methods and perspectives should avoid and overcome the practices of bordering. Tactical borderland positioning constitutes a transverse strategy common to the different papers gathered in this special issue. Borderlands constitute the non-places of high biopolitical and necropolitical intensities. These are locations codifying what can circulate and what must remain still. Borderlands can be defined materially or symbolically; can refer to an inner or an outer subjective space. Considering borders as a “process” and not as a fixed and immutable line in an “already made world” (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013), the spaces between borders gives us clues about the systematic practices that allow their proliferation and maintenance; what type of materialities and discourses allow their reiterations and what other expressions might emerge. Methodologically, “being in the frontier”

(Anzaldúa, 1987) transforms the research position. The exploration of “mestizos” places, what can be seen from this positions, embodiment and hybrid methodologies, transgress the dominant logics of knowledge production and can generate important political articulations.

The underlying logic of biopolitical and necropolitical practices not only permeate our everyday life but constitute a method for approaching social reality and academic production. It is crucial to reflexively scrutinize the effects of methodological procedures that contribute to the exclusion and marginalization of populations. Critical perspectives challenge domineering forms of knowledge and develop theories and methodologies that promote social change (Montero, 2004; Montenegro *et al.*, 2015; Parker, 2015; Sloan, 2000). Postcolonial perspectives have indicated the influence of epistemic, racial and gender hierarchies in knowledge production and the discriminatory effects of academic discourses (i.e. Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007). Moreover, feminist epistemologists have signaled how dominant power relations affect scientific discourses and establish conceptual and methodological procedures that reproduce patriarchal oppressive relations (Haraway, 1988, 1997; Harding, 1986; Mohanty, 2003). This colonial and patriarchal heritage has become intrinsically part of our methodological procedures that distance, segment, classify and hierarchically organize populations. These methodological practices include, among others: the delimitation, differentiation and decontextualization of analytic zones; the classification and ordering of research agents; the (un)intentional inclusion, exclusion and exhibition of subjectivities; and the definition and enforcement of procedures that sustain bordering. These procedures transmute populations into distinct units that are managed following economic criteria in terms of costs and benefits. The inhuman consequences of such approach drive social sciences to the political challenge of developing research methods that connect, intersect, blur and recognize the hierophany (as opposite to hierarchy) of populations. The emphasis on connection relocates affect and responsibility at the heart of research endeavors. Intersectional perspectives contemplate blending and hybridization instead of the purified categories of modernist narratives. The acts of blurring and intersecting expose the complexities and imbrications of academic territorialization, focusing on those in-between positions that inhabit social and physical frontiers. Uncovering the “hierophanies” of everyday performances and rituals values the singularity and uniqueness of each form of life. This special issue seeks to discuss and exemplify forms of research that expose and subvert current forms of bordering by using alternative metaphors and hybrid methodological procedures. It invites to see the different contributions as tools and provocations for dialogue, questioning and articulation.

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