Visceralities of the Border: Contemporary Border Regimes in a Globalised World

On the 9th November 1989 the Berlin Wall collapsed, triggering a chain of events that was said to have ushered in a new globalised era. Under no illusions as to whose ideology had prevailed, thinkers such as Francis Fukuyama pronounced an End of History (1992), with ideological debate now a matter of which *laissez faire* economist had been proven most correct. History had been won, and central to this new era of globalised trade was the notion of a borderless existence. When the Berlin Wall came down the number of border walls stood globally at 15 (Donnan and Wilson, 1999). The only question remaining was how long it would take for the others to fall. Almost three decades on and the realities could not be starker. The current number of border walls stands at 72 (Donnan and Wilson, 1999), with the spectre of further border development at the forefront of state policy throughout the Global North. In response to the claim that this process of bordering represents an aberration from an otherwise open and borderless capitalist landscape, this essay intends to invert such premises, arguing that the border is built into the very structures of global capitalism. Indeed, the border is *constitutive* of capitalism itself. Thus, building on from this premise, the article will situate the border at the heart of social life, asking in what ways a more sociological IR theory can make sense of our globalised world today.

The concept of the border has its modern origins in the 1648 Peace of Westphalia. Recognising the sovereignty of the nation state, the border represented the territorially defined space in which this sovereignty was secured. As such, the history of the border has been dominated by Realist conceptualisations in International Relations, and the current escalation in border building has led to a rebirth in so-called Neo-Realist theory (Teschke, 2009). From this perspective, the international landscape resembles a kind of Hobbesian sphere, in which individual (and heavily masculinised) nation states compete with one another for limited resources. Working within such a framework, the nation state itself becomes the main actor whose interests must be secured. In the terminology of Securitisation Theory, the nation state becomes the *referent object*, and the border serves a core component in determining what it means to exist securely. Such theories, however, serve only to reinforce the meta-narratives that Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) cautions against, and are often conceived from a purely macro-theoretical perspective. Questions of who is truly secured under such conceptualisations are readily omitted. For example, are all those represented within a state secured to the same degree? Indeed, does the securitising of the nation state actually lead to the insecurity of its citizens? It is in locating the border at the level of the macro that this essay intends to challenge, while never losing sight of the structural conditions in which the border is always already situated within. By doing so the article will locate the border at the level of the everyday, building on the growing field of Border Studies, and particularly Critical Border Studies in emphasising a more micro-political rendering of global border regimes.

In noting the way in which the Realist conceptions of border and state have come to dominate academic debate, political geographer John Agnew has warned of a 'territorial trap' (1994). According to Agnew, by conceiving borders as static and territorially defined 'lines in the sand' we fail to recognise the ways in which borders permeate our social life, becoming internalised and interiorised in myriad ways. Citing the relationship between knowledge production and the territorialist assumptions of Realism, IR scholars Noel Parker and Nick Vaughan-Williams (2013) have called for a new 'border epistemology': one which situates the border firmly in the everyday. Responding to this call for a more critical approach to border studies, philosopher Etienne Balibar has noted how the border no longer exists solely as a physical zone at the peripheries of a territory. Instead, Balibar argues, 'the border is everywhere' (2011, Vol.117: 1).

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From this perspective, the border becomes 'polysemic', differing in meaning depending on one's relation to it. Borders thus become vacillating entities, simultaneously 'multiplied and reduced, thinned out and doubled' (Ibid.). As such, the border resides less as an objective and territorially defined site and more as an embodied relation between people, or between subject and state. By introducing the notion of a polysemic border, Balibar resists the charge set forth by Mark Salter that the border is not everywhere; or more correctly, the border is not everywhere for everyone (2011, Vol.30: 2). For Salter, describing the ways in which the border pervades the minutia of everyday life neglects the realisation that for some, the border is a mere abstraction, transcended on a daily basis and never felt viscerally, while for others it is a violent and oppressively present fact of life. It is this *viscerality of the border* that the essay will turn to in making sense of social life in a globalised world.

Recognising the multivalent nature of the border and the relationship it has to experiences of subjectivity in contemporary society, Parker and Vaughan-Williams have rejected the idea of the border as fixed and unvarying. Instead, the authors propose we speak not of borders but of *border practices* (2013). What this does is emphasise the ways in which borders are (re)produced on a daily level. By situating the border at this level, it is possible to note how the border is, in Judith Butler's terms, performed. For Butler (2006), performativity is not to be understood as a performance in the Goffmanian sense. Instead the concept derives from linguistics, invoking forms of speech, or speech acts, which, by their very utterances, bring into being those things to which they refer. Performativity works because it is 'citational', always reiterating past practices and existing norms. For example, as of April 2017, under new Anti-Terror legislation, the National Health Service is legally obliged to check for passport identification before administering medical aid (*The Guardian,* 2017). Likewise, schools and universities are expected to check both student and parent identification before registering each pupil, sharing any immigration data with the Home Office (*The Telegraph,* 2013). Thus, the border is permanently reinscribed via the citational acts of passport checks, calling into being the border at any moment. No longer limited to peripheries either, such citational spaces have been interiorised into the very centre of social life. Thus, we see how this 'everyday bordering', as sociologist Nira Yuval-Davies (2018) describes it, intersects with the larger structures of society to actively *produce* borders.

While this everyday bordering is crucial to an understanding of social life in a globalised world, it is important to return to Mark Salter's caution that the border is not everywhere for everyone. What this draws us to is the need to situate the border, and its everyday manifestations, within a larger, structural framework. The work of Marxist theorist Louis Althusser (2014) has been central to this process. Althusser offered a critique of classical Marxist analysis that rejected its heavy emphasis on the forces of production – or economic base – for constituting political subjectivity and the larger superstructure of society. Drawing on the earlier work of Antonio Gramsci, Althusser argued for the relative independence of base and superstructure, reformulating Marxist analysis in the process and offering a more 'structural' reading of capitalist development (2014: 190-192). Fundamental to this process was the concept of interpellation (Ibid: 94). While much more common in it's French than its English usage, to interpolate means 'to call out to', or to hail. It is a process which constitutes the individual as an ideological subject. Althusser envisages the scenario of the man, who, while walking down the street, is hailed by a police officer. In recognising himself as the subject to which to police officer directs his call, the man is formed as an ideological being – as an individual subject addressed under the rule of law. For Althusser, it is in the figure of the policeman that the *ideological* and *repressive* apparatuses of the state coalesce (Ibid: 94). However, under the increasingly bordered conditions of our everyday existence, the figure *sine qua non* of the capitalist state surely becomes the border guard. While the sight of the gun, the baton, even the badge of the officer reminds the subject that the ideological is always already interwoven with the repressive, the border guard today represents a more innocuous figure. Nebulous and amorphous, simultaneously all too real and all too abstract, the power of the state takes on a reconstituted form, detectable at the school gates as much as the airport terminal. No longer a disciplinary society alone, but a society of control (Deleuze, 1992) – endlessly tracking, tracing, piecing together. Movement becomes everything, mobility and immobility the sides of a Möbius strip. If the subject is interpellated anywhere today, it is at the border of the everyday – hailed by a nurse's clipboard as much as a policeman's call.

While the essay has gone some way in establishing the degree to which the border is at the heart of our globalised world, the border serves another function in contemporary social life, to which the rest of the essay will be reserved. In his 1967 book *Of Grammatology*, French philosopher Jacques Derrida argued that the entire Western philosophical tradition is built on binary oppositions, in which one binary presides over another (1967: 30-44). Central

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to this process is the notion of the border. Simply put, to deem something inside is to simultaneously push, and thus border, something outside. In this sense, we define ourselves not by what we are, but by what we are *not*. This is what Derrida refers to as the 'constitutive outside' (ibid) and it is this relationship between Self and Other that the remainder of the essay will explore. Returning to the work of Althusser, it is clear – once the border is located at the centre as the state, as opposed to the periphery – that not all individuals are constituted as subjects to the same degree. In fact, some are denied formal subjectivity all together. They are, rather, interpellated as non-citizens, rendered 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998). Likewise, the citational practices of the border are not performed equally by all citizens at all times. Border performativity renders some subjects secure while actively denying security to others. Indeed, the security of one often implies the insecurity of an(other). As Butler (2010) herself notes, it is via the border that some lives are designated 'grievable', while others are denied greivability altogether. This Self/Other binary, and the process of 'othering' that this entails, remains a central, even constitutive, component of our global world, and offers a novel theoretical resource for making sense of contemporary social life.

It is in this relation between the Self and Other, situated within the context of a globalised capitalist system, that sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2003) has so forcefully conceptualised a politics of disposability. For Bauman, drawing insight from Marx, capitalism always produces a surplus. However, while Marx focused on surplus labour and surplus value specifically, Bauman notes how capitalism produces surplus populations as such. During the industrial revolution, this surplus population – made up, for example, of criminals, vagabonds, racialised outsiders, or anyone otherwise deemed 'undesirable' – was transported to other areas of the globe. Thus, in Bauman's terms, *global* solutions were sought for *locally* produced problems. In the era of global capitalism however, and in response to the production of surplus populations on a planetary scale, *local* solutions are sought for *globally* produced problems (Ibid.). Thus, while movement between borders was once crucial for the functioning of capitalism at a local level, the global capitalist system now relies on the denial of movement, particularly from the Global South to the Global North. As such, border walls proliferate, rendering entire populations 'waste.' For Bauman, the entire Global South comes to look, and act, like a 'human waste disposal industry' (Ibid: 94).

In developing this idea, theorists such as Henk van Houtum (2010) have argued that we are witnessing nothing less than a form of global apartheid. Thus, embodying a right to move that has been all but renounced, a condition of what we might call *fugitivity* reigns over these disposable people. Even if such populations escape a Global South that renders them waste, once these 'strangers' arrive at our door there is an implicit – if not increasingly explicit – understanding that they will be returned. Indeed, to be born in the Global North is no longer binding: to merely look disposable is enough to be authorised waste. Again and again, the UK Conservative government continues to deport UK nationals. From the Windrush scandal (*The Independent,* 2018) to the illicit charter flights that send UK citizens 'home', (*The Independent,* 2019) legal recourse is no longer enough. In the words of Giorgio Agamben (1998), such lives are rendered bare and deemed outside the law. Not just outside of this or that law of this or that country, but, as Michel Agier (2010) asserts, outside *law as such.* For these people, a Derridean spectre looms over them; identity ever *differing*, citizenship indefinitely *deferred*. Lost in a Kafkaesque limbo, permanently waiting for a judgement that does not come. Thus, a state of in-between-ness is produced, a 'zone of indistinction' in which the edict of the border has not yet been enforced. A kind of *liminality* takes hold: neither here nor there. Not so much in a state of becoming, but of unbecoming – stripped endlessly of all identity. Such is the status of the global 'Other' today.

What Bauman so powerfully articulates then isn't just the separation of the global North and South via the institution of the border, but the supplementary disgust and Othering with which this entails. It is here that the essay wishes to return to the notion of a *viscerality of the border,* drawing attention to the affective economies with which every border practice is imbued: to ask, as Noel Parker and Nick Vaughan-Williams have, what it is to exist *as* a border (2013: 5). Thus, the power of the border lies not only in the process of separation itself – for 'all boundaries beget ambivalence', as Bauman identifies (2003: 13). For the Self/Other to function, and for those citational acts of border performance to continue uncontested, a form of stigma, or 'abjection', is required. In her book *Revolting Subjects,* sociologist Imogen Tyler (2013) puts forward a notion of 'social abjection', both building on from and critiquing the earlier work of psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva. For Kristeva, the abject takes on a pre-symbolic form, understood as 'that which we discard from ourselves', and act of 'casting out' (1982: 10). Recognising the way in which this casting out takes on a social composition, Tyler attempts to rescue the theory from its purely psychoanalytical character, offering instead a constructed and deeply historical account of abjection. For Tyler, not

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only does this process of abjection function symbolically, across the body politic at large, but it is distributed unevenly across the social landscape. There are, Tyler argues, particular spaces in which abjection is felt most forcefully (2013: 24-28). Situating the border at the centre of this process then, we see how practices of bordering and affectivity forcefully intersect, giving the border a particularly visceral dimension. Indeed, it is the contention of this essay that the site *par excellence* of social abjection today is the border.

In our contemporary landscape today, replete with calls to 'build a wall' and 'take back the border', the brick and mortal realities of our bordered existence are all too apparent. While capital transcends the border at every moment, the free movement of people exists as both a fiction and a fact. For every Schengen Agreement there is a Mediterranean graveyard. Each implies the other. Highlighting the way in which politics of disgust operates via the institution of the border, this essay has gone some way in situating both the border and the process of othering within the context of a global capitalist system, offering a number of theoretical resources for making sense of contemporary social life. As Imogen Tyler reminds us, to be 'abjectified' as revolting is to simultaneously open up a space for change, for *revolt* (Ibid.). In the epoch of the capitalocene, of climate breakdown and endless risk, this space is required more than ever. To revolt, if it is to mean anything today, it to invite all life into the realm of the grievable (Butler, 2010), to deem every life lost the greivability it deserves: as one life too many.

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