Guest Editorial

Southern Perspectives on Border Criminology: Introduction to the Special Issue

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Much of border criminology scholarship has documented and theorised on the border control apparatus and practices of Western European and North American countries and Australia. Such work interrogated the boundaries of punishment and policing by conceptually and empirically examining its new configurations in an age of migration control (Aas and Bosworth 2013; Aliverti 2021; Barker 2018; Eagly 2010; Fabini 2017; Weber 2013). In doing so, it has also illuminated our understanding of the geopolitical dynamics and politics of national criminal and migration systems and the global and social inequalities that such practices foreground and contribute to enhancing (Bosworth 2017; Franko 2019; Parmar 2019; Stambøl 2021). By charting the colonial legacies of contemporary practices of control, border criminologists have unsettled the national frame of much criminological scholarship and placed race at the centre in the study and conceptualisation of these practices (Chacón and Coutin 2018; Bosworth, Parmar and Vázquez 2018; Parmar 2018).

Less attention has been devoted to understanding the effects of Northern migration and border control policies and practices on people, societies and states at the receiving end of them, although important research has been conducted on life after deportation (Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Schuster and Majidi 2013) and on border externalisation (Oette and Babiker 2017; El Qadim 2014; Zaiotti 2016). Still, despite growing attention to questions of decolonisation within the discipline (Aliverti et al. 2021; Carrington, Hogg and Sozzo 2016; Cunneen 2011), much theorisation and empirical research is Northern.[1] That is, not only has this research been located in Global North jurisdictions, but it has also been conducted within a Northern conceptual framework, which naturalises the nation-state (Mehta 2018) and ascribes specific qualities to it: rationality, completeness and coherence (Heyman and Campbell 2007). In doing so, this work reproduces two problems. First, it assumes the universalism of border control practices, rather than conceiving of them as specific aspects of the distinctive configurations of neo-colonial (Northern) states (Chakrabarty 2000; Connell 2007). Second, the study of Northern bureaucracies in border criminology is constrained by normative ideas, epistemological frameworks and ideological structures that prevent the exploration and questioning of border controls and statecraft through novel lenses (Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Reeves 2014), including through Indigenous knowledge and understandings of bordering.

Therefore, in this special issue, we explore the limits of existing theories for understanding migration governance from a Southern perspective and what the potential for rethinking border controls and their study, such as alternative epistemological and methodological approaches, might engender. We invited contributions to imagine what a 'Southern perspective' on the

field of border criminologies would look like. In other words, what does it entail to study and theorise border control from the South? We organised a panel at the European Society of Criminology in September 2021 and then invited further authors. We sought to engage multiple disciplinary traditions and diverse case studies that speak to the various disciplinary perspectives and geopolitical dimensions of bordering. Many of the authors in this special issue are early career researchers who, through engaging with postcolonial theory and decolonial approaches, are fostering novel perspectives within border criminologies. Collectively, the articles bring together the different geopolitical, sociocultural and economic ways in which borders in the Global South are imagined, constructed, negotiated and reconstructed. The articles offer a wide range of epistemological and methodological insights for border criminologies to engage with, shifting our understanding from Northern perspectives. In building this project, we have been privileged to have the editorial support of Belinda Rawson, who has been an invaluable member of the editorial team. We are indebted for her work, as well as the encouragement and assistance of Tracy Creagh and the editorial board of the *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*. We are also grateful to the peer reviewers for their engagement with each contribution and for providing critical feedback.

Building on her ethnographic work with Bangladeshi women imprisoned in prisons in West Bengal, India, and on child marriages across the India–Bangladesh border, **Rimple Mehta** invites us to consider the potential of a Southern feminist approach to the criminology of mobility. This involves first acknowledging and countering epistemological bordering—that is, the processes of bordering and othering in academic knowledge production. She argues that 'if the criminology of mobility is committed to questioning borders and systems which govern mobilities, it must loosen the epistemic fixities'(2023; 3) Second, it involves attending to the multifaceted working of bordering in producing difference and othering and the importance of transversal and situated intersectional feminist politics to undo them. Third, she discusses critical tools in the Southern feminist's kit: maintaining reflexivity and accountability, embracing vagueness and fuzziness, paying attention to matters of space and time, the embodiment of theorising borders, and attending to forms of everyday resistance.

From a different standpoint, **Samuel Singler** charts novel border control technologies in the Global South as part of global circuits of mobility control. Considering the International Organization for Migration's Migration Information and Data Analysis System in Nigeria as a case study, the article seeks to expand debates about the Southernisation of border criminology to include an ontological dimension, which explores how objects and tools can exert political effects independently of their human designers and operators. Such insight destabilises traditional Northern forms of knowledge production about borders and migration. The resultant framework unsettles state-centric and Northern-centric perspectives on crimmigration control by foregrounding Southern agency and challenging technicist framings of border control technologies that represent these tools as neutral technical components within a broader global system of state-based 'migration management'.

Continuing the work of interrogating Northern knowledge and epistemologies, **Ana Aliverti** explores the place of storytelling and magic in immigration policing in the United Kingdom. 'Immigration stories' are important for grasping the role of the narratives in migration policing. While aimed at rendering a complex social world legible, this form of knowledge reveals its limitations. Rather than producing a cognitive template to make sense of a boundless world, immigration enforcement practices show illegibility as a hallmark of the state. The work of immigration officers is dominated by hazardous and arbitrary practices and rules (what she calls 'immigration magic'), which often leave them devoid of power and control. As an exercise in Southernising border criminology, she interrogates the received division of labour in theorising the state in the South and North, on the one hand, and state and society on the other. In doing so, she lays this Northern policing bureaucracy open to underexplored dimensions and angles, as frontline staff are tasked with re-spatialising state power.

Further, two articles in this special issue cast a critical eye on processes of bordering in the Southern context, reflecting on the importance of this exercise for denaturalising social and territorial borders. **Marya Al-Hindi** examines Israel's nation-state formation as a settler colonial domain, tracing continuities in the exclusion of racialised others in its constitution and contemporary reproduction. Defining Israel in contrast to the Arab 'terrorists', waiting to attack, necessitates a grand, looming settler colonial border and the sequestration of an entire population behind a man-made prison. The justification for this form of border 'control' is made possible by the historic truths established by the West in the colonial era through the characterisation of Arabs as a 'bestial', 'bellicose' group that thrives in conflict situations. The consequence of this characterisation is the global, all-encompassing understanding of the Arab threat. The Israeli 'defence' of its borders is re-imagined from a Southern perspective as an oppressive system of segregation justified by the ways in which Arabs have historically been constructed.

In turn, **Amalia Campos-Delgado** and **Guillermo Yrizar Barbosa** discuss the racialisation of Mexican citizens as foreigners by the Mexican state. Such 'misidentifications', they argue, reveal important insights into the implications of informal practices of internal bordering. Although perpetually denied through '*mestizaje*' ideology, racial knowledge remains crucial in everyday policing and a prominent tool in the exercise of border controls. Police intuition is shaped by images of Mexicanness, resulting in agents requiring Mexican citizens to prove their citizenship because they consider that they 'do not look Mexican'. By

drawing on statistical and archival material as well as semi-structured interviews, their analysis conceptualises migration control in Mexico as both a product of co-bordering agreements shaped by the asymmetrical power relationship between Mexico and the United States, and longstanding social control practices of marginalised communities—particularly Indigenous populations. They conclude that border practices in Mexico reproduce otherness, marginality and exclusion, which is experienced by non-citizens but also by citizens who are outside the identitarian imaginary of the nation.

In considering the politics of migration control in Argentina, **Federico Luis Abiuso** examines how neoliberal political forces have retooled and adapted discourses and policies linking migration to crime current in the North to do 'border populism' in contemporary Argentina. By analysing political discourse from media outlets, the article presents different core categories: (1) 'we need to know who is who'; (2) distinguishing the types of immigrants that arrive in Argentina; (3) tightening the conditions for entering the country; and (4) crime and migration. In broader terms, and as the argumentative plotline, each of these core categories relates to the *Cambiemos* initiatives to manage ethnic and cultural diversity: identify, select, control and criminalise. In conceptualising the discourse and policies as 'migration implants', Abiuso insists on the importance of attending to the social and political embeddedness of migratory control regimes and the forms of knowledge on which they are based.

Finally, **Erika Herrera Rosales** turns our attention to the religious and philanthropic foundations of 'migration care', which is under contemporary conditions provided through non-government organisations (NGO), many of them funded through international development funds. Drawing on extensive fieldwork in Mexico, she explores the ambivalence of goals served by humanitarian organisations that work with migrants from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. She suggests that these organisations engage in practices of policing of migrants that do not align with their professed intention to safeguard them. NGOs facilitate instances of paternalism to control migrants in their shelters and further subordinate them. The article addresses how local organisations and shelters have resolved the duality of care and control by punishing migrants. It concludes that NGOs are drawn to reinforcing the power structures that govern global migration. As a result, NGOs replicate entrenched racialising discourse, power inequalities and control over mobile subjects.

Conclusion

In this special issue, we put forward distinct understandings of 'Southern' as an epistemological move to enrich and democratise the study of bordering and criminalisation. In doing so, we navigate our own positionalities as researchers often doing research in universities in the Global North. Each of the articles open a space for a discussion that needs to be further developed. It is the responsibility of both scholars in the North and the South to hold this space for exploring alternative frameworks to re-imagine the idea of the state premised on the formation and maintenance of borders. The articles show that this exercise needs meaningful engagement and dialogue at ontological, epistemological and methodological levels to understand and disrupt the hegemonic understandings of sovereignty and the 'state', which are premised on the creation of the 'other'. This other is not always a 'foreigner' or an 'illegal migrant'; it may also be those citizens who are ethnically, culturally or linguistically different from the majority population. The image of the other keeps shifting, and in accordance with that, the internal and external bordering processes are justified by the state. This may be done, for instance, by posing the image of the conforming refugee against the image of the aggressive 'boat people', thereby justifying offering protection to refugees and keeping the state safe from the aggressive 'boat people', the intruders. Protectionism and patronisation serve as justifications for states, whether in the North or South, to control certain populations by keeping some of them dependent on welfare and warding off those who do not fit in the state's definition of security at a given point in time.

As the articles in this special issue show, the idea of the 'state'—with its concomitant internal and external bordering processes—is dynamic, and its endeavours are often supported by national media or internationally funded NGOs, who maintain the power inequities by representing or controlling mobile subjects through racialising discourse. Therefore, identifying the bordering processes and those responsible becomes a challenge. This is particularly complex when it becomes intertwined with the use of technology and externalisation or outsourcing of bordering processes, where the control centre becomes indiscernible and dispersed.

The articles in this special edition emphasise the importance of engaging with critical historical perspectives as well as contemporary neoliberal discourse to re-imagine the ways we understand and theorise in border criminologies. It presents the diverse ways in which the South continues to toggle with the idea of the state, as it has historically done in the context of colonisation. Most importantly, the articles showcase the ways in which mobile subjects experience, navigate and resist border practices, thereby setting up the premise for the re-imagination of border criminologies.

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[1] However, see Ghosh 2019; Mehta 2018; Reeves 2014; Sanchez and Zhang 2018; Super and Ballesteros-Pena 2022; Sur 2021; Vigneswaran 2013; Waseem 2022.

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