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Beyond exclusion: borders, migration, and injustice in a globalized world

Para além da exclusão: fronteiras, migração e injustiça em um mundo globalizado

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ABSTRACT: This text offers a critique of traditional conceptions of justice, which tend to frame the injustices experienced by migrants primarily in terms of their exclusion from the political communities they seek to enter. It challenges the foundational assumption underlying the discourse of exclusion, namely, that a clear and definitive distinction can be drawn between "insiders" and "outsiders." In contrast, the notion of *adverse incorporation* is defended as a more suitable analytical tool, revealing how migrants, rather than being simply excluded, are incorporated into transnational economic and political structures in subordinated, exploited, and precarious ways. The text proposes a reinterpretation of how political communities are delimited, encouraging a move away from the idea of borders as fixed lines at the edges of states and toward an understanding of borders as complex systems embedded throughout the social fabric, systems that are fundamental to the construction of our current global capitalist world. It is argued that achieving this conceptual shift requires incorporating multiple notions of space and time into our analyses of the territorial boundaries of political communities.

Keywords: borders, adverse incorporation, relational spatiality, relational justice.

RESUMO: Este texto oferece uma crítica às concepções tradicionais de justiça, que tendem a enquadrar as injustiças experimentadas pelos migrantes principalmente em termos de sua exclusão das comunidades políticas nas quais buscam ingressar. Ele desafia a suposição fundamental que sustenta o discurso da exclusão, a saber, a de que uma distinção clara e definitiva pode ser traçada entre "de dentro" (insiders) e "de fora" (outsiders). Em contraste, a noção de incorporação adversa é defendida como uma ferramenta analítica mais adequada, revelando como os migrantes, em vez de serem simplesmente excluídos, são incorporados em estruturas econômicas e políticas transnacionais de maneiras subordinadas, exploradas e precárias. O texto propõe uma reinterpretação de como as comunidades políticas são delimitadas, incentivando um afastamento da ideia de fronteiras como linhas fixas nas bordas dos Estados e avançando em direção a uma compreensão das fronteiras como sistemas complexos inseridos em todo o tecido social, sistemas que são fundamentais para a construção do nosso atual mundo capitalista global. Argumenta-se que alcançar essa mudança conceitual requer a incorporação de múltiplas noções de espaço e tempo em nossas análises dos limites territoriais das comunidades políticas.

Palavras-chaves: fronteiras, incorporação adversa, espacialidade relacional, justiça relacional.

1 Introduction

The injustices faced by migrants are often analysed as if they were fundamentally reducible to the issue of their exclusion from a legally defined political community. This exclusion is typically interpreted in terms of the obstacles migrants encounter either in crossing the territorial borders of states or in achieving full integration into the host society through the acquisition of citizenship after having crossed such borders (Carens, 2013; Higgins, 2008; Velasco, 2016). This paper will argue that this way of framing and analysing the injustices experienced by migrants is inadequate. This does not imply a denial of the serious injustices associated with how states manage their territorial borders or with the processes of acquiring citizenship. As we shall see, this perspective adopts an overly simplified view of the complex web of social relations that constitute political communities, particularly regarding the understanding of their boundaries and limits. These analytical shortcomings affect the critical capacity of the normative proposals based on such a perspective. The very notion of "exclusion" as the source of injustice must itself be called into question. (Blanco Brotons, 2021)

It has become something of a commonplace to point out that much of the twentieth-century liberal tradition following John Rawls has developed a theory of justice based on an idealized conception of societies as closed and self-sufficient. Beck has referred to this conception as the "container model" (2004, p. 140). Other authors have described this perspective as "methodological nationalism" (Sager, 2016). This view posits a relationship between the state and society in which the territorial boundaries of the state also delineate the set of citizens that constitute it. Moreover, it presupposes that all participants involved, and all resources used in social exchanges remain within that boundary. The state, within its territorial borders, is thus understood as the container that encompasses all relationships, basic institutions, and resources relevant to the life prospects of the society it regulates. This descriptive vision is accompanied by the normative idea that only members of the political community within such a container are subjects of justice in relation to their corresponding state and to their fellow citizens. Consequently, "outsiders" could not claim justice from "insiders" beyond abstract duties of humanity. Those on the outside are effectively excluded from the social relations that constitute the political community, and thus it would be out of place for them to demand justice from a state or a citizenry of which they are not a part. In response to such exclusion, one could only appeal to human rights, rights owed by every human being to any other, regardless of shared social institutions. However, according to the liberal tradition of "open borders," one could also assert the right to freely cross borders to live within the political community of one's choosing. In doing so, the migrant would cease to be an "outsider" and would become an "insider," thereby gaining access to all the benefits of membership in that community. In this way, the limitations that the "container model" imposed on the theory of justice appeared to be magically resolved.

Nevertheless, the analysis of the injustices suffered by migrants could not end there, for it is also an undeniable fact that not all migrants residing in a state are recognized as citizens or as full rights-bearing subjects (Benhabib, 2004, pp. 129-169; Carens, 2013, pp. 1-4; Velasco, 2016, pp. 147-153). This lack of recognition prevents them from being treated as full subjects of justice, often leaving them without political voice and rendering their claims insufficiently legitimate. Within this context, it is commonly assumed that the final state to which migrants must aspire if the resolution of the injustices they suffer, rooted as noted in their exclusion, is to be possible, is their full integration into the political community through the acquisition of nationality or citizenship. This reflects the conventional teleological framework that has generally characterized the analysis and interpretation of "immigrants," according to which "it is presumed that there could be no other possible end for them than to settle permanently." (De Genova, 1998, p. 89)

This helps explain the emphasis placed by authors such as Juan Carlos Velasco (2016, p. 56-236) and Joseph Carens (2013, pp. 19-169) on the issue of nationality and integration into the host political community. The other side of the coin, freedom of movement made possible by open borders, functions as the condition of possibility for migrants to live where they choose. Thus, the resolution of migrants' injustices would depend, on the one hand, on their ability to reside where they wish (overcoming the exclusion imposed by territorial borders), and on the other hand, on their recognition as full and equal rights-bearing subjects in the state in which they have chosen to settle (overcoming the exclusion enacted through nationality, that is, through their "citizenization").

This way of framing the issue presents at least two problems. On the one hand, by prioritizing the question of nationality and integration into the host state's political community, it adopts a limited perspective on migration that focuses solely on "permanent" migrants, those who are likely to establish a strong bond with the receiving society. It would seem, then, that the injustices experienced by migrants who do not seek to form deep or lasting ties with the host country, who clearly identify as nationals of another state, or who are subject in some way to a political community without residing within its borders, are either non-existent or irrelevant. Reinforcing the teleological orientation we have already discussed, when such "temporary" migrants do become the object of attention, the fundamental question remains the same: "when do workers admitted on a temporary basis acquire a moral right to remain permanently?" (Carens, 2013, p. 113)

The migration perspectives just outlined place excessive emphasis on the permanent/temporary dichotomy (Sager, 2016, p. 48), while also adopting the former as the normatively privileged reference point. What is needed is a more comprehensive approach to migration, one that does not assess the injustices of certain forms of mobility according to how closely they resemble a normatively favoured type. Since I have addressed a critique of this "citizenization" perspective elsewhere (Blanco Brotons, 2025), this issue will be set aside in the present article.

This article will focus on a second problem: the perspective on migrants' injustices outlined above remains fully within the liberal discourse discussed at the outset and does not challenge its central assumption, namely, that there is a clear distinction between "insiders" and "outsiders" as marked by territorial borders. It does not problematize the conception of political communities as entities clearly bounded by their territorial frontiers. Hence, the "borderological fetishism" that characterizes much of contemporary migration studies (De Genova, 2015, p. 3), which are obsessed with the borders that delimit states and with their "opening" as the most promising normative response that can be offered to migrants. From this framing, the multiple and complex mechanisms that shape the lived experiences of current or potential migrants through positions of vulnerability, exploitation, or subordination are obscured.

The idea that migrants are excluded from the political community they wish to enter is employed both by philosophers who argue in favour of their right to migrate freely (Carens, 2013; Velasco, 2016) and by those who reject such a right (Miller, 2005; Nagel, 2005). The former appeal to universalist principles, universal moral values, or human rights of supposed rational self-evidence. The latter question whether such rights cannot be overridden by more weighty ones and whether states have any obligations of justice toward individuals who do not belong to their political community. Both positions ultimately converge on a fundamental assumption: that a clear distinction can be drawn between "insiders," who are entitled to a dense set of state-based rights, and "outsiders," to whom only thin, weakly enforceable, and broadly interpretable human rights apply. In both cases, the reasoning remains bound by the dichotomies imposed by methodological nationalism (Sager, 2018, p. 3-29), which offers an overly simplified account of borders. (Clarke, 2022, p. 413)

This article argues against this binary conceptualization of the social world and seeks to offer an alternative way of thinking, with particular attention to the territorial delimitation of political communities. It will be argued that political communities are, in fact, far more fragmented and interdependent than this binary framework suggests. Far from the image of political communities as cooperative relationships regulated by a state and confined within fixed and clearly delimited territorial borders, where membership can be neatly determined, we are faced with a complex and unequal web of relations among various actors operating within expansive networks that go beyond formal political communities. Political communities whose boundaries, when viewed through these relations, become blurred. By developing this understanding of the boundaries of political communities, this article aims to outline a more comprehensive approach to addressing the injustices experienced by migrants, one that moves beyond the limitations of the inclusion/exclusion framework and the dichotomy between "outsiders" and "insiders."

To this end, this article is structured in three parts. The first section explores the relationship between territorial borders and the discourse of migrant exclusion. It will be argued that this discourse functions more as an ideological screen that conceals the adverse incorporation of agents within contemporary globalization. The second section, in order to better understand the multiplicity of borders involved in the production of adverse incorporation, examines different ways of conceiving space and, in connection with this, different conceptions of the territorial delimitation of communities, beyond the territorial borders of states. Finally, the third section offers an approach rooted in normative political philosophy to address this complex issue of borders.

2 Territorial Borders and the Discourse of Exclusion

In recent years, we have witnessed an intensification of nationalist policies that has fuelled growing anxiety over immigration control as a means of protecting the nation. In this context, "the revitalisation of nationalism has been mirrored in the increasing significance -both material and symbolic- of borders, exemplified in the enthusiasm of walls and fences" (Clarke, 2022, p. 413). How can we not interpret the imposing walls proliferating across various regions and the increasingly stringent border controls as the sublime materialization, the unequivocal sign, of the injustice faced by migrants? How can we fail to recognize, at the root of all these problems, the binary categorical logic of exclusion that heavily fortified borders so violently render visible by drawing an unquestionable line between the categories of "insiders" and "outsiders"? Through our increasingly walled borders, the supposedly true logic underlying the migration issue within the state system is made visible. Once this grammar is accepted, the "grand" solution to the migrant problem, the sweeping gesture that would allegedly resolve everything at once, seems to become the abstract demand for "open borders."

However, as Wendy Brown has emphasized, we must not lose sight of the fact that these imposing borders have a profoundly theatrical dimension. Their primary purpose is not to control migratory flows, but to stage the integrity, autonomy, and self-sufficiency of the nation (Brown, 2010, p. 104), the enduring illusion that there is a clear-cut division between "insiders" and "outsiders," and that the state and its justice concern only its citizens. According to the logic borders enact, anyone attempting to cross from the outside is cast as a foreign element, with whom no prior relation or obligation exists, a trespasser who, on their own initiative, seeks to establish an unauthorized relationship with agents who are under no obligation to accept it.

In this sense, discourses that focus on the exclusion of "outsiders" by "insiders" remain within, and ultimately serve to reinforce the idealized fictions of methodological nationalism. They help sustain the

fragile legitimizing image of liberal states as those that recognize and enable the freedom and equality of the members of their community, understood exclusively as "insiders." The imaginary of borders, along with the discourses that uncritically adopt their imposed logic, thus functions as a smokescreen that conceals the diffuse and entangled relations of interdependence that characterize any political community.

As Balibar argues,

> "the notions of interiority and exteriority, which form the basis of the representation of the border, are undergoing a veritable earthquake. The representation of the border, territory, and sovereignty, and the very possibility of representing the border and territory, have become the object of an irreversible historical 'forcing'." (2004, p. 5)

Instead of uncritically accepting the traditional binary demarcations of "insiders"/ "outsiders," "us"/ "them," imposed by the Westphalian system of states, "especially in the era of so-called globalization, there is a need to ask where society begins and ends." (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2011, p. 187)

Elsewhere, I have argued that, in contrast to such discourses, the concept of *adverse incorporation* offers a more critical perspective on the multiple mechanisms of domination, subordination, and exploitation set in motion by contemporary globalization (Blanco Brotons, 2021). Host countries actively structure migration flows; they require migrants for multiple reasons, establish various cooperation programs with sending countries, create access channels and legal categories to incorporate new individuals into their cooperative structures, and furthermore, maintain significant extraterritorial interests (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 131-166). Through all these mechanisms, states seek to incorporate migrants while simultaneously keeping them separate. In other words, migrants are not simply excluded or included, rather, they are subjected to *adverse incorporation*, a condition shaped by relationships imposed upon them for the benefit of others (Du Toit, 2004; Phillips, 2011). From the perspective of the "excluded," the discourse of exclusion "has little meaning: they are still very much included" (Bracking, 2003, p. 7). Irregular migrants, often taken as a paradigmatic example of exclusion, are fundamental to meeting the demand for flexible labour required by global capitalism. The legal production of illegality, commonly regarded as one of the most extreme forms of "exclusion", corresponds to an active process of inclusion aimed at subordinating their labour. (De Genova, 2015, p. 5)

Of course, this is not intended to deny that walled borders cause great suffering for those attempting to cross them. What is at stake here is to highlight and critically examine the underlying logics that lead us to conceive the territorial boundary of the political community and the question of who is entitled to justice. The dichotomy between "insiders" and "outsiders" is, in fact, often presented as the foundational logic of the state system and of the issue of nationals versus migrants. It has been argued here that this idea endures as a mere fetish -a remnant of Westphalian illusions. A fetish that is ideologically employed to the benefit of states by portraying them as clearly bounded, territorially contained entities, thereby obscuring the extensive mechanisms that define their transnational responsibilities.

3 On the territorial delimitation of political communities

In a globalized world, the primary function of the territorial borders of states is no longer, if it ever was, simply to "delimit the territorial scope of each of the political entities recognized by the international community" (Velasco, 2015, p. 51). Borders have become multiscalar phenomena that can no longer be understood solely within the international framework (Fraser, 2010, p. 43-44). They are essential components in the production of the "heterogeneity of the global," and, simultaneously, they themselves

have become pluralized (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. ix). Borders play a key role in the generation of the labour power, according to the peculiar (heterogeneous and flexible) characteristics demanded by the global economy (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 61-66). Political borders are not only devices for marking the exterior of states. They also spatially, normatively, and economically fragment the interior of the territory to create the diverse nodes and differentiated spaces necessary for the articulation of highly selective and specialized global networks (Ong, 2006, p. 75-79). Borders are essential for the constitution of identities and for collective self-representation (Brown, 2010, p. 40-42), yet these identities and collective representations are no longer coextensive with national identities framed by territorial borders.

It becomes necessary to return to the core of the issue and examine the notions of space and territory that underlie the concept of territorial borders. As we shall see, the territory of states can no longer be conceived solely from the absolute conception of space -rigid, fixed, and measurable- imposed by states' territorial borders (Harvey, 2009, p. 174). Other ways of constituting space and defining territories must be taken into account. Such notions can no longer monopolize the entire meaning of the borders of political communities. The position of social agents can no longer be determined simply by their location inside or outside the space delimited by these borders.

3.1 The multiple conceptions of space

Harvey follows Kant in granting the knowledge of geographic space a propaedeutic role (Harvey, 2009, p. 17-36). The assumptions we hold about this domain constitute some of the conditions of possibility for other forms of practical knowledge. If we wish to attain practical knowledge attuned to our world, we must first analyse the interpretations constructed around fundamental geographic concepts, such as space or territory, in order to assess their consistency, correctness, or limits. Kant, in the realm of anthropology, another discipline he recognized as propaedeutic, conceived of the human being as one who constitutes himself throughout history with the aim of realizing autonomy in the world. Similarly, it is necessary to approach space as something constructed over time by humans in connection with the construction of our desired destiny in the world. If what humans make of space, as with what they make of themselves, conditions the possibilities of their destiny, then "we need not only to examine what our geography and anthropology have been and are, but consider what they might become" (Harvey, 2009, p. 31). If we aspire to a just and genuinely cosmopolitan world, we need to reconstruct an appropriate geographical knowledge that can illuminate the path toward such a goal.

The conceptions of space and time we employ can introduce fictions into our theories that limit both their critical depth and their practical applicability. For example, the smooth and homogeneous Euclidean/Newtonian conception of space and time that dominated liberal theory (at least in the United Kingdom during the nineteenth century) and universal history led John Stuart Mill "to imagine the world as a connected and smooth surface, uniformly available to a fixed grid of knowledge", a representation of the world that fed into the European imperialist mindset (Mehta, 1999, p. 111). The unquestioned hegemony of this Euclidean/Newtonian understanding of space and time throughout modern history (Harvey, 2009, p. 167), especially with the rise of the modern state and its interest in measuring, controlling, organizing, and monopolizing (Bauman, 2005, p. 27-54), underlies the limited understanding many contemporary philosophical approaches exhibit with regard to the fundamental terms we use to characterize the world, such as territory, city, region, state, or community. These concepts, however, cannot be adequately understood without a prior and thorough consideration of the nature of space and its relationship to time. (Harvey, 2009, p. 133)

Harvey distinguishes three ways of understanding space (2009, p. 134-141). First, there is *absolute space,* which is fixed and immovable. It corresponds to Euclidean/Newtonian space, conceived as "a preexisting, immovable, continuous, and unchanging framework (most easily visualized as a grid) within which distinctive objects can be clearly identified, and events and processes accurately described" (Harvey, 2009, p. 134). This is the kind of space Bauman describes as being imposed through the state's drive to measure, standardize, and calculate. According to Harvey, it is a space of individuation, where people and objects can be clearly identified by reference to a unique location in space and time. It thus serves as a medium for the clear identification and naming of individuals and things, which cannot simultaneously occupy the same location in time. Socially, this kind of space is the space of bounded entities, such as private property and administrative units. Finally, absolute space is clearly distinguished from time, which is understood in absolute terms as a linear progression toward an infinite future.

Secondly, there is *relative space*, the space of processes and movement, associated with Einstein and non-Euclidean geometries. In this case, space cannot be understood independently of time, as both are shaped by the modes of circulation of goods and people. It is not a space of individuation, but of relative identity, in which various objects or persons may occupy the same position in relation to a given point or reference. Proximity in absolute space may translate into great distance in relative space, and conversely, spatial remoteness in the absolute sense may correspond to closeness in relative terms, depending on the forms of connection between locations. For example, wealthy suburbs connected to the city centre by rapid trains or highways may be "closer" in relative space than poorer intermediate neighbourhoods with inadequate roads or public transport. In this example, the poorer neighbourhoods are physically closer in absolute space, yet farther away in relative space. This relativity does not eliminate the possibility of individuation or control, but it does imply that different rules must be considered depending on the processes in question: "the spatial frame varies according to what is relativized and by whom (…) Each map projection tells its relative truth, even though it is mathematically correct and objective." (Harvey, 2009, p. 135-136)

Finally, we have *relational space*. In this case, "the idea that processes produce their own space and time is fundamental" (Harvey, 2009, p. 136). This is the conception proposed by Leibniz. Here, people, objects, and processes do not simply exist *in* space and time; rather, space and time are themselves produced by the relationships established among them: "the fundamental order of ideas is first a world of things in relation, then the space whose fundamental entities are defined by means of those relations and whose properties are deduced from the nature of these relations" (Whitehead, 1978, p. 718). Different relations produce different space-times. From this perspective, individuation becomes problematic. Relational space-time connects with dialectical modes of analysis, in which the various elements involved mutually affect one another through processes of co-evolution. These connections or influences may become temporally condensed to form places, regions, or events with relatively stable, though never fixed, features. Relational space-time is open, fluid, multiple, and indeterminate (Harvey, 2009, p. 137). An example of relational spatiality in the context at hand can be found in the *bordering scapes* analyzed by Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy (2019), spaces with their own dynamics that serve to create, control, and connect populations. Examples include airport checkpoints, the Calais Jungle, or the grey zones into which many asylum seekers fall. Another example, which will be discussed further below, is De Genova's (2015) notion of "Mexican Chicago."

How should one choose which conception of space is most appropriate for a particular case of analysis? According to Harvey, the type of space to be considered may be one of them, or all simultaneously, depending on the phenomena under investigation and the aims of the researcher. There is no predetermined answer to this question; rather, it depends on human practice, such that "the question 'what is space?'

is therefore replaced by the question 'how is it that different human practices create and make use of different conceptualizations of space?'" (Harvey, 2009, p. 140). Regarding the relationships between absolute, relative, and relational space, in earlier works, Harvey conceived them hierarchically: relational space would encompass relative and absolute space, while relative space would include only absolute space, and absolute space would not encompass either of the others. Now, however, he recommends approaching each of these conceptions independently, in dialectical tension with one another.

However, it may be more appropriate to understand absolute and relative spaces as different forms of institutionalization of a fundamentally relationally constituted space. Institutions are relatively stable social structures (Giddens, 1979, p. 65). They are also characterized by the diverse sets of resources they are able to mobilize, which form the basis of their relative stability (Giddens, 1979, p. 22-23). Absolute space, for example, can be understood as a type of social institution imposed as a fundamental tool for the purposes of control and measurement by the modern state and, like any other institution, it derives its reality from a combination of rules and resources (Giddens, 1979, p. 21, 68; Sewell, 1992, p. 10-13). The first category includes norms and bodies of knowledge generated in various fields such as topography or cartography, which aim to conceptualize this type of space. The second encompasses material resources such as the platinum-iridium standards deposited at the International Bureau of Weights and Measures, the texts of international agreements, measuring instruments, references to standards in legal texts, and material border infrastructures, among others. The materialization of particular conceptions of space through these resources tends to "naturalize social relations by transforming contingent forms into a permanent landscape" (Harvey, 2009, p. 158). Only by resituating absolute and relative spaces in this way, as different degrees of institutionalization of a space that is essentially relational, can we fully understand why Harvey later explains the basic concepts of place, region, and territory in exclusively relational terms (Harvey, 2009, p. 166-201). Only in this way does it become coherent for him to generalize to his entire spatial philosophy the dialectical mode of analysis that he initially associated with relative space. (Harvey, 2009, p. 250)

In any case, the analytical distinction between these three types of space constitutes a fundamental contribution. It allows us to understand that, in order to critically engage with the practical problems we face, we must consider the possibility that different kinds of space and time may come into play.

3.2 On territorial boundaries

From the ideas presented in the previous section, an alternative way of conceptualizing the territorial delimitation of political communities can be drawn, one that differs from the account discussed earlier. This alternative mode of thinking may help us move beyond the dichotomous logic of inside/outside, us/them, which underpins the discourse of migrant exclusion and obscures the responsibilities of political communities in a globalizing world.

As previously explained, in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of any entity, we must take into account the various conceptions of space at play. Since space and other fundamental geographic concepts are essentially relational, any entity is constituted by a more or less unstable, multiple, and dynamic "crystallization" of relationships between people and things. The question of territory can only be addressed by attending to the human practices and processes involved, as well as to the ways in which different conceptualizations of space are employed.

The term *territory* has a history that sheds light on the problems shared by other fundamental geographic terms such as *region* and *place* (Harvey, 2009, p. 171-175). The observation that territorial behaviour is common in the natural world conveniently served to naturalize the specific forms of

territorialization that emerged in Europe from the seventeenth century onward, namely, the modern state and the system of private property. The fundamental condition of these territorializing practices was

> "the construction of territorial forms that were unambiguous, fixed, and secure. This last required unique appeal to the absolute theory of space and time and the invention of practices of representation (mapping and cadastral survey) that confirmed the fixity and lack of ambiguity." (Harvey, 2009, p. 172)

This entailed the dominance of absolute space over relative and relational dimensions in European political thought, an understanding that was later exported to the rest of the world through colonization.

This form of territorialization, based on the dominance of absolute space through the strict demarcation of territorial borders between states, is not in any sense natural, but rather a social construction and a political achievement. Consequently, *territory* becomes an instrument for simplistically representing something else: social relations, the bounded domains of nations, and the scope of political responsibilities. To achieve this, territory had to be assumed as something simple and clear, upon which political communities came to be conceived as clearly delimited entities, possessing "some 'natural' and unambiguous being in absolute space and time" (Harvey, 2009, p. 173). Such entities were thus imagined as immune to the influence of the complex human relations that unfold in relational space-times.

Clearly, we are dealing with the mode of perceiving the world previously referred to as "methodological nationalism." The preceding analyses, however, show that in order to move beyond this perspective, we must reject the "borderological fetishism" of migration studies, as described by De Genova (2015, p. 3), that is, their reduction of the question of territory to the clearly demarcated territorial borders of states. Such a reduction reaffirms the hegemony of the absolute conception of space and time that underpins the development of the Westphalian system of states and methodological nationalism.

Undoubtedly, the relevance of political borders and the necessity of clear definitions within absolute space, as well as the relevance of the normative evaluation of such developments, are indisputable. However, the exclusive predominance of this conception of space must be rejected. The need for individuation and precise delimitation within absolute space

> "has to be put into perspective of the continuous processes of capitalist and other modes of production of relative space-time (through financial and commodity flows and migratory movements) and the pervasive relationalities of global political power and contested moral authority." (Harvey, 2009, p. 174)

If we aim to achieve a global order that transcends the harmful fictions of methodological nationalism, it is necessary to develop the concept of territory according to the interrelation of the absolute, relative, and relational conceptions of space.

De Genova's concept of the "Mexican Chicago" provides a compelling illustration of an analysis that seeks to address the complex interconnections between absolute and relational space. The outcome of this analysis allows us to challenge the presumed integrity and fixity of United States space. Its aim is to render comprehensible a Chicago

> "that could be said to meaningfully and substantively belong to Mexico, and thus, could be situated within Latin America – a Chicago that, even as it remained physically located within the territorial confines of the United States, had become elusive, even irretrievable to some extent, for the U.S. nation-state". (De Genova, 2015, p. 6)

The territory of Latin America, from this perspective, emerges relationally through the aggregation of social relations, rather than being defined by the borders of nation-states. The territory delineated by these borders implodes, and they can no longer be uncritically accepted as the sole criterion for defining the national territory. The relational perspective disrupts the stability and security of territory as a separate and discrete entity. In this sense, it emphasizes the continuous production of boundaries within the social fabric, that is, the ongoing processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization generated by social dynamics (Harvey, 2009, p. 173).

Within the disciplinary field of "border studies," it is similarly emphasized that theorizing borders "involves an attempt to understand the nature of the social" (Rumford, 2006, p. 155). Rather than fixed lines that territorially delimit states, borders are approached from a relational perspective that understands them instead as "processes, practices, discourses, symbols, institutions or networks through which power works" (Johnson et al., 2011, p. 62). The challenges posed by relational thinking lead us to reconsider the role of borders under current conditions that may be characterized as post-territoriality. Their function can no longer be understood simply as delimiting the territorial scope of political entities recognized by international organizations. Instead, we encounter policies of "everyday bordering." Rather than being located at the edge, "borders have now spread so as to be everywhere (…) Any place has become a borderland; and borderlands can no longer be determined exclusively in relation to specific territories and states" (Yuval-Davis *et al.*, 2019, p. 17).

The pluralization of borders is a fundamental development in the globalized world that cannot be overlooked. "Borders are no longer solely the preserve of the state, and societal actors can redefine borders or appropriate them for purposes other than those originally intended" (Rumford, 2006, p. 159). The challenge of understanding borders in all their social depth and variability entails the necessity of thinking about them "in ways which take us beyond the logic of open versus closed". (Rumford, 2006, p. 159).

4 On the Normative Analysis of Borders

All of the above seems sufficient to understand why we cannot, as proponents of "open borders" do, become obsessed with a single modality of border, space, and territory, while ignoring the complex system they form together with other modalities and functions. As with any system or network, the removal of one of its components or nodes does not eliminate the system but rather triggers a coevolution of the remaining components. If we seek to transform and eliminate the harmful effects of a system, we must attempt to address the complex interconnections among its multiple components without generalizing one of them, in this case, the territorial borders of states, as the fundamental problem imposed by the delimitation of political communities on migrants. The problem with "open borders" proposals, therefore, is that they adopt a perspective that does not go far enough. (Sager, 2018, p. 25)

We would do well to follow Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy when they assert that

> "We are not going to reduce our suggestions on the topic of bordering to simplistic, 'universal' solutions, nor are we going to treat bordering as one single issue. Different local, regional, global, and historical contexts might favour some political responses more than others, and the political priorities of some situated people and groups with whom we share transversal political alliances might differ." (Yuval-Davis *et al.*, 2019, p. 170)

As these authors point out, we have no reason to believe that a world without borders would necessarily be a more just one. Just as it is inappropriate to disconnect the right to free movement

from other civil, political, and social rights (Yuval-Davis *et al*., p. 171). Our priority must be to address the social structures that constitute the human world and the economic and social policies that perpetuate inequalities, "because such policies are often more important than migration policies in shaping migration" (Yuval-Davis *et al*., 172). Capitalism currently represents the dominant dynamic shaping the hegemonic conception of space and time (Harvey, 2009, p. 156). From its need to create a heterogeneous field of agents within the space and time of capital arises "the compulsion to distinguish" that characterizes our globalizing world (Beck, 2004, p. 147). Without a radical transformation of this capitalist background, the very real danger of "open borders" proposals is that capitalism's compulsion to distinguish will multiply and transfer to other domains, creating not a world without borders but thousands of small fortresses (Walzer, 1993, p. 39), exacerbating inequality, which, as we know, is the prevailing tendency of this dominant dynamic in today's world. (Chancel *et al*., 2022)

From a relational perspective on justice, that is, a justice that understands its scope to encompass the social structures established among any agents, it is necessary to attend to the concrete institutional apparatuses through which, in their mutually constituted relationship, the state shapes the migratory experience. We encounter complex border systems composed of various devices, mechanisms, policies, and practices involving a multitude of agents positioned in highly diverse ways. It should not be assumed that such border systems belong exclusively to the political system. They are also directly connected to the especially deep system of capitalism. The configuration of the border system largely depends on how capitalism employs borders to generate a heterogeneous labour force and the diverse temporalities it requires for its proper functioning (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 61-166). These systems are also related to complex policies of belonging that transcend the nation-state. (Yuval-Davis *et al*., 2019, p. 4-9)

The principle that "all those who are subject to a given governance structure have moral standing as subjects of justice in relation to it" (Fraser, 2010, p. 65) should also be applied to border systems and all agents subject to them. This must be done by analysing the various mechanisms through which states enact the "adverse incorporation" of persons within their political communities, and the ways in which they impose relations of domination, exploitation, or subordination on them. In the current phase of globalization, states develop instruments and capacities that become disconnected from their politically recognized territories and are rearticulated into highly specialized spatialities and partially global regimes. Despite their disconnection from the Westphalian conception of territory, these mechanisms can still be interpreted as forms of state authority (Sassen, 2008, p. 415-420). In analysing border systems, we must also not overlook other forms of authority, distinct from the state, which impose overlapping forms of reterritorialization. The contemporary world can be characterized by a proliferation of assemblages of territory, authority, and rights, inhabited by multiple subjects, which break with the systemic coherence previously ascribed to political communities.

Territorial border systems are embedded throughout the social fabric. It is necessary to shift the conception of borders "from seeing them as operating on the margins of the state and society to considering them major constitutive features of contemporary social, economic, and political dynamics" (Yuval-Davis *et al*., 2019, p. 161). At the same time, the statuses of individuals become more flexible and multiply. It is important to recognize that just as we must consider the complex systems that compose the borders of communities, we must also attend to the intricate processes, conditions, and relations that position individuals very differently within our social fabric. All of these are fundamental tools in the practice of adverse incorporation in our globalized world. If we aim to understand the ways in which our political communities are limited, we must not lose sight of the interrelation of these various devices nor their internal complexity, and by no means should we totalize any one of these mechanisms -no matter how significant- as the full content of borders or the essential problem of migrants.

5 Conclusion

Throughout this work, it has been argued that the analysis of injustices affecting migrants cannot be reduced to the binary normative framework that opposes "insiders" to "outsiders." This approach, widespread among nationalist perspectives, liberal philosophers seeking to limit the scope of global justice obligations, and even proponents of open borders, is insufficient to grasp the complexity of the mechanisms through which political communities delineate their boundaries and position those subject to their influence. Against the notion of exclusion, the concept of *adverse incorporation* has been proposed as an analytical tool capable of shedding light on the processes by which migrants are included in social, political, and economic systems that depend on them, while simultaneously subjecting them to vulnerability, subordination, domination, or exploitation.

We have contended that such incorporation operates through multiple border regimes that not only regulate territorial access but also fragment the social space, structuring inequalities through legal classifications, control mechanisms, differentiated labour regimes, and dynamics of (non)belonging. All of this takes place within a context of capitalist globalization in which the nation-state is no longer the sole relevant actor, and in which the logic of borders has become pluralized, decentralized, and increasingly complex, forming a network of practices and relationships that exceed traditional territorial boundaries.

In this scenario, conceptualizing borders from a relational perspective, one that integrates absolute, relative, and relational notions of space and time, is essential. Similarly, the normative evaluation of border systems must move beyond a focus on formal recognition, or the violence exercised at fortified borders, toward a structural critique of the material and symbolic conditions that enable the subordination of certain subjects. Relational justice, therefore, demands close attention to the concrete practices that shape migrants' lived experiences, beyond legal status or geographic position within or across fixed political boundaries.

Ultimately, rethinking the borders of political communities requires abandoning the normative illusions inherited from methodological nationalism and opening the analysis to a dynamic, plural, and contested understanding of territoriality and belonging. Only through such an approach can we build frameworks of justice that are more attuned to the migratory realities of the contemporary world and to the responsibilities of communities, states, and actors that, in a globalized context, transcend traditional Westphalian demarcations.

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