Birth Registration as Bordering Practice:
Theorizing States' Production of Statelessness among Migrants' Descendants

Allison J. Petrozziello, PhD
Toronto Metropolitan University, Dept. of Politics and Public Administration
apetrozziello@torontomu.ca

Abstract

Around the world migrants' descendants face a heightened risk of statelessness—and not only in contexts of forced migration. As states securitize both identity and migration management systems, how might the introduction of 'bordering practices' prevent racialized people on the move from proving their identity and claiming citizenship—in any country—for their progeny? This paper advances an intersectional feminist and multiscalar border theory of how states produce statelessness among migrants' descendants by restricting access to birth certificates and proof of citizenship. It engages in mid-range theory building based on content analysis of the author's global inventory of UN treaty body recommendations on birth registration issued to 58 countries across the five major world regions. The evidence demonstrates that far from being upheld as a fundamental human right, birth registration can function as a bordering practice for children born to those whom a given state is unwilling to recognize. A typology of bordering practices is proposed, comprised of corporeal, social, spatial, and temporal types. This enables researchers to analytically distinguish the types of practices which produce intergenerational statelessness in diverse contexts of human mobility. The framework makes a novel and interdisciplinary contribution to international studies of migration, human rights, citizenship, statelessness, and gender.

Keywords: bordering practice, birth registration, child statelessness, intersectionality, border theory

Introduction

Around the world migrants' descendants face a heightened risk of statelessness—and not only in contexts of forced migration. Globally, 850 million people lack identity documents (ID) (World Bank 2022), such as birth certificates and passports, the majority comprising rural poor, ethnic minorities, and racialized peoples. While being undocumented is not the same as being stateless, it does increase the risk that they or their descendants will join the estimated fifteen million stateless persons, who have yet to be recognized as citizens by any country (Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI) 2020). Most stateless people belong to ethnic minority groups, many of whom are migrant descended. Yet relatively little is known about how statelessness is

produced through the birth registration process itself and/or reproduced intergenerationally when migration status and multiple forms of discrimination converge.

How does the parents'—and especially the birth mothers'—precarious legal status, among other intersecting identity factors, affect a child's access to birth registration and proof of citizenship? What happens when the unregistered cross international borders, and have children of their own? Or when borders are brought to the unregistered, who are then issued temporary documents identifying them as not-belonging? As states securitize both identity and migration management systems, how might the introduction of 'bordering practices' (Parker and Adler-Nissen 2012) prevent racialized people on the move from proving their identity and claiming citizenship—in any country—for their progeny?

Despite growing numbers of people on the move, there is a limited number of refugee and migration studies on birth registration. This study is the first to take up statelessness scholar Laura van Waas' (2007) call for a global inventory of the exclusion of irregular migrants' children from birth registration and corresponding risk of child statelessness. But the analysis is not limited to this group alone. The study adopts a transnational perspective to bring into view the experiences of diverse groups of people engaged in cross-border mobility (or who are immobilized by bordering practices) as they navigate state systems. The study contributes to a small but growing body of gender and migration scholarship on the experiences of migrant women giving birth while living and working abroad, and the risk of statelessness facing their children (Fernandez et al. 2023; A. J. Petrozziello 2019b; Constable 2014; Allerton 2018; Ball, Butt, and Beazley 2014).

This paper advances an intersectional feminist and multiscalar border theory of how states produce statelessness among migrants' descendants by restricting access to birth certificates and proof of citizenship. It engages in middle-range theory building based on content analysis of the author's global inventory of UN treaty body recommendations on birth registration issued to 58 countries across the five major world regions. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, I bring together intersectional feminist theory with critical migration scholarship on bordering to propose a conceptualization of birth registration as bordering practice. This framework helps to understand birth registration as an exercise of power which, when wielded to exclude, can produce intergenerational statelessness for descendants of people involved in various forms of human mobility. A typology of bordering practices is proposed, comprised of corporeal, social, spatial, and temporal types. This enables researchers to analytically distinguish the types of state and non-state practices which produce intergenerational statelessness in diverse contexts of human mobility. The framework makes a novel and interdisciplinary contribution to international studies of migration, human rights, citizenship, statelessness, and gender.

Non-Registration of Birth and Child Statelessness within Migration Scholarship

The academic study of human mobility has long depended on the availability of data derived from birth registration, among other sources (Siddle 2000; McCaw-Binns and Mullings 2014). Nevertheless, only a handful of studies examine migrants' experiences accessing birth certificates and proof of citizenship for baby (Lee 2005; A. J. Petrozziello 2019b; 2019a; Fernandez et al. 2023). This paper contributes to an emergent body of scholarship on the phenomenon of child statelessness in contexts of 'irregularized' migration.

The issue of non-registration and the corresponding risk of child statelessness for children of irregular migrants was first raised in the early 2000s. Statelessness expert Laura van Waas (2007) raised the spectre of a stateless generation being born to irregular migrants across the globe, due to the legal, logistical, and attitudinal obstacles to their birth registration. Taking a rights-based approach, van Waas contrasted the clarity of the international human rights framework regarding the right to birth registration for all children irrespective of the parents' status,[1] with the reality that children born to irregular migrants were not being registered. Citing examples from Ecuador, the Netherlands, and Thailand, van Waas wrote:

> Birth registration is by definition an act of a government authority…At the same time, one of the other tasks of the government authority is to monitor and enforce immigration laws. Are these two jobs compatible? Will the birth registration process necessarily uncover the parents' immigration status and lead to their arrest and deportation? This is certainly the fear that prevents many irregular migrants from approaching the authorities to register the birth of their child (2007: 452-3).

Noting the lack of attention to the issue, van Waas called for "a comprehensive analysis of these issues by way of an inventory and comparative study of how birth registration of children born to irregular migrants is organised across the globe" (2007:458). While a handful of country case studies have since been carried out (Allerton 2014; Ball, Butt, and Beazley 2017; 2014; Butt, Ball, and Beazley 2016; Petrozziello 2019b; 2019a), this study is the first to take up van Waas' call by offering a full-length Global Inventory of the exclusion of irregular migrants' children from birth registration and corresponding risk of child statelessness.

While there is a relatively robust gender and migration literature on transnational families and social reproduction, the issue of birth registration for migrant women's children remains conspicuously absent. Nevertheless, some feminist ethnographies on migrant mothers pay attention to their experiences navigating bureaucratic systems, including the implications of pregnancy among migrant women without status in a range of contexts, such as Israel (Willen 2005), Ireland (Luibhéid 2013), and Hong Kong (Constable 2014). Nicole Constable's book *Born*

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[1] According to General Comment No. 6 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Birth registration should be "available to all children – including asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children –irrespective of their nationality, *immigration status* or statelessness" (CRC 2005: para. 12).

Out of Place: Migrant Mothers and the Politics of International Labor (2014) examines the experiences of women migrant workers from the Philippines and Indonesia whose stay in Hong Kong is meant to be productive, but not reproductive. Because pregnancy or childbirth could be cause for dismissal and repatriation, some mothers choose to hide the child's existence and not register the birth. Indonesians working in the Middle East face similar challenges registering their children, and sometimes bring their babies back home to the village to be raised by relatives who do not necessarily pursue registration either, until such time as the next generation wishes to migrate for work (Butt, Ball, and Beazley 2016). In *Crossing the Gulf: Love and Family in Migrant Lives,* Pardis Mahdavi tells the stories of migrant women in the Gulf cities of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Kuwait City, who are profoundly underserved by policies that lead to irregularization and statelessness for their children who are considered "native-born foreigners" (2016:79, 85). In Lebanon, children born to Bangladeshi, Ethiopian, Nepali and Filipina migrant domestic workers under the kafala system face similar difficulties (Fernandez et al. 2023). Building on Constable (2014), Mahdavi (2016), and (Petrozziello 2019b; 2019a), Bina Fernandez and colleagues argue that the risk of statelessness for these children is "enmeshed in a complex gendered and racialized conjunction of controls exercised over these women's reproductive capacity, mobility, migration status, and right to pass on their nationality to their children" (Fernandez et al. 2023: 3-4).

Building on extant knowledge of these cases, this paper advances an intersectional and multiscalar border theory of how states produce statelessness among migrants' descendants by restricting access to birth certificates and proof of citizenship.

Research Design

The paper engages in mid-range theory building based on content analysis of the author's Global Inventory of Exclusionary Birth Registration Practices (hereafter, 'Global Inventory' or 'Inventory') based on United Nations (UN) treaty body recommendations issued to 58 countries across the five major world regions. The Inventory identifies national and subnational policy changes and practices where birth registration is entangled in migration enforcement and/or producing a risk of statelessness for racialized people or ethnic minorities, as well as diversely categorized persons involved in human mobility. It includes only those practices which have been reported or legally challenged by affected persons, accompanying civil society organizations and rights defenders, and occasionally by service providers such as midwives, and made visible through UN human rights mechanisms. The research strategy was to work backwards from the concluding observations of each treaty body, by examining secondary sources available on the relevant treaty body website, including state party reports and replies to the lists of issues, committee documents (e.g. report of the working group, concluding observations, requests for information), alternative reports and stakeholder submissions by NGOs, academics, and other UN entities.

The main dataset used to construct the Global Inventory was the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion's Database on Statelessness and Human Rights (ISI 2020). The database includes recommendations issued to States within the UN human rights system that are related to stateless persons, nationality, children, discrimination, and implementing measures. At the time the queries for this project were performed (June 2022), the database contained recommendations from all the available sessions of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW), as well as recommendations issued since 2010 by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD); the Committee Against Torture (CAT); and the Human Rights Committee, which monitors implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by its State parties (ICCPR). The results were filtered by region and theme, yielding a total of 756 recommendations issued to a total of 143 UN member states on discriminatory birth registration practices. Since this study is concerned particularly with practices which are generating statelessness, the sample was narrowed further to the 230 issued to a total of 143 UN member states which mention birth registration in relation to the prevention or reduction of statelessness. Among these, 58 countries were prioritized for qualitative analysis in the Global Inventory because they mention migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers and/or they received more than one recommendation. Findings from the Global Inventory were coded according to the type of bordering they exemplify (as described below).

Conceptualization of Birth Registration as Bordering Practice

This section advances the theoretical proposition that a risk of statelessness is produced when birth registration is made a bordering practice. It draws on a framework which couples border theory with feminist theory on intersectionality, the body, and the global intimate. This feminist migration lens helps to understand birth registration as more than a technical-administrative system whose shortcomings can be overcome through supply and demand-side development solutions. I argue that the problem is not merely the non-registration of birth, but rather that birth + registration itself is the mechanism of inclusion/exclusion. Recording a birth is understood as an exercise of power by sovereign authorities who are recognizing (or erasing) legal persons and political subjects in a territory under their jurisdiction. Following Caplan and Torpey (2018), Breckenridge and Szreter (2012), I do not consider birth registration solely an exercise of government control or solely a means of liberation, but a process which holds the potential for both. It is an exercise of government power which, following eligibility criteria that are influenced by a given government's interests, can be exercised to include or exclude, uphold rights or violate them, bring into legal being or abandon. Bordering is a useful way of

conceptualizing this exercise of power which, when wielded to exclude, can produce intergenerational statelessness.

Border theory[2] reveals how multiple forms of bordering operate in *everyday life* beyond the physical border (Balibar 1998; Vaughan-Williams 2009). This move from a focus on borders to processes of bordering is part of a broader "practice turn" within social theory, following a linguistic or discursive turn of about 20 years (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, and Savigny 2001). Discourses are still recognized to carry social and political effects. Nevertheless, many critical border studies scholars consider *practice* a privileged entry point to study the dynamics shaping governance of borders and the people enacting, crossing, or entangled by them (Côté-Boucher, Infantino, and Salter 2014; Salter 2013).

My use of the concept *bordering practices* follows Noel Parker and Rebecca Adler-Nissen's theory of changing state bordering practices, which they define as:

> the *activities which have the effect* of … 'constituting, sustaining or modifying borders'. 'Practices' necessarily include a range from the most explicit and active to subtler and/or passive activities so as 'to constitute . . .', etc. Thus, 'bordering practices' cover not only actions plainly *intended* to 'border' (e.g., incorporating Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Israel) but also less prominent activities whose side effects include constituting and/or reconstituting, etc., borders (2012: 776).

Such practices can be intentional or unintentional, carried out by state actors or non-state actors, and may be "successful" or not depending on the perspective of the analysis (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012). Importantly, a focus on the practice of bordering brings us to the level of everyday lived experience and the "processes through which controls over mobility are attempted and enacted – and the effects of those controls in people's lives and in social relations more widely (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012:729). The concept has been enriched by insights from critical international relations theory, critical border and security studies, as well as feminist political geography (J. M. Williams 2016).[3] It shows how contemporary security practices and logics permeate spaces of everyday life, enabling many modes of separation, classification, and social sorting in the digital age. A recent special issue of *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* emphasizes not only the violence produced through bordering practices, but also the temporality (Ilcan 2022; McNevin 2022) and the agency of those navigating their way through (Ilcan, Squire, and Stierl 2022). The concept of bordering practices

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[2] For a review of border studies, including the various meanings applied to the notion of 'border', see Kolossov (2005) and also Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy (2019).

[3] This underscores the value of taking an interdisciplinary approach to the study of bordering processes. Bordering studies originated in geography (e.g., Newman 2006) and cultural studies (Anzaldúa 1987), and now benefits from contributions from a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives (Paasi 2012). To understand global governance, we need to analyze bordering processes and practices used in different multiscalar locations. This cannot be done within the confines of traditional subdisciplines.

is central to my analysis of the ways birth registration is blocked or differentially deployed for children born to migrant parents.

Of course, everyday bordering is not just a "local phenomenon" but must be understood from a *multiscalar* perspective. Local bordering can be an expression of national-level discourse, just as it is also part of a global process of political and social ordering of population and territory. As a technology of control by governments seeking to reassert sovereignty, everyday bordering is both a top-down political project and a bottom-up everyday sorting of us and them (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019). Taking a multiscalar approach is valuable not only to detect the power relations which operate at different scales, but also to analyze both structures and individual experiences. Benedict Anderson refers to this perspective as an "inverted telescope" (1998), whereby the everyday micro experiences enable one to see the macro. In this instance, a focus on everyday bordering helps to conceptualize how bordering operates at a broader level. The challenge then is not only to situate everyday encounters within the wider scalar, spatial, and temporal contexts within which they occur, but to analyze what those encounters reveal about the functioning of borders writ large.

The conceptual perspective on bordering as a process, never quite complete, can be used to bring diverse types of borders within a single but broad frame of analysis. This study engages in *middle-range theory building*, which is a process that involves using empirical research to create theories that explain social phenomena. To understand the patterns and mechanisms of exclusion from birth registration, I brought feminist and border theory to bear on my analysis of the Global Inventory empirical results in order to develop a conceptualization of *birth registration as bordering practice*. To be considered a case of birth registration as bordering practice, the following criteria had to be met:

1. There <u>always</u> had to be a human rights violation of a child's right to an identity and nationality.
   This violation was often co-present with other rights violations, such as the mother's right to reproductive healthcare, mother's equal right to confer nationality on her child, parent(s)' right to seek asylum, or parent(s)' right to identity and a nationality.

2. And there had to be evidence of <u>at least one</u> of the following:
   - *Corporeal bordering*: Borders attached to racialized migrant women's bodies which block access to reproductive healthcare; Hospital practices of document (non)issuance; DNA testing; Registration practices for babies born via surrogacy

   - *Social bordering*: Presence of one or more intersecting forms of discrimination affecting parent's and/or child's access to birth registration

   - *Territorial bordering*: Extension of state territorial presence in border areas through birth registration drives; Politicized birth registration practices as part of conflict / contests over territory

- *Mobile bordering*: Entanglement of birth registration with migrant or refugee identity management schemes or migration enforcement; Constraints on access to birth registration due to spatial containment of migrants; Legal and administrative obstacles to birth registration for foreigners/people on the move

- *Temporal bordering*: Intergenerational dynamics of non-birth registration/statelessness; Indefinite deferral of decision on parents' or children's applications; Temporary, ad hoc or time-bound documentation practices for parents and children; Legal interpretations and administrative practices for babies born in transit; Retroactive denationalization through birth registration

Concepts, according to Gary Goertz (2006:5), are "theories about ontology because they are about the 'fundamental constitutive elements of a phenomenon' which play a critical role in explanation." My claim that birth registration functions as a bordering practice can be understood as a constitutive one, as opposed to a causal claim. Birth registration does not always (and need not) operate as a bordering practice. However, there is ample evidence that birth registration policies and practices *constitute* national identities by prescribing and inscribing definitions of who belongs and who does not. There is evidence of exclusion by both omission and commission. The exclusionary exercise of sovereign power at the critical juncture of birth + registration is a phenomenon which helps to explain why so many millions face a risk of lifelong statelessness and rightlessness.

When defining a concept, it is useful to consider its opposite. One former civil registrar interviewed for the broader project once objected, "But birth registration is always a bordering practice!" It is true that a civil registrar's daily determinations of who does and does not meet eligibility criteria for inscription can be theorized as the enactment of borders which filter entry. But those borders do not materialize for people whose identity, marriage, residence, and citizenship are documented and secure. Birth registration is *not* experienced as a bordering practice for those whose presence or identity pose no threat to state understandings of who belongs in a given territory/nation. Birth registration is not a site of bordering when it is inclusive, rights-based, free, straightforward, non-discriminatory, transparent, consistent in its operating procedures and as a result, accessible to all.

The non-cases are instructive as to what does not constitute birth registration as bordering practice. The initial search yielded UN recommendations on birth registration which were issued to 143 UN member states, among which 58 were included in the Global Inventory sample based on the aforementioned criteria. The non-cases refer to the 85 countries where birth registration may be deficient but is not necessarily deployed as a bordering practice. The non-cases are still relevant to scholarship and programmatic interventions on birth registration and prevention of child statelessness as matters of human rights. However, the obstacles to birth registration in the non-case countries are largely known—distance, cost, institutional weaknesses—and being addressed through efforts to "go the last mile" and "close coverage gaps," in development parlance. The excluded may be rural people living in poverty, but they are not necessarily subjected to bordering practices.

A Typology of Birth Registration Bordering Practices

This section offers a typology of bordering practices that are enacted in the birth registration process. This enables researchers to analytically distinguish the types of practices which produce intergenerational statelessness in diverse contexts of human mobility. It highlights who is excluded, the types of bordering, and the legal and administrative practices which can drive a wedge between the new humans and the critical piece of paper proving their legal personhood. For analytical clarity, the typology clusters the practices around the types of bordering described above: corporeal, social, spatial (territorial and mobile), and temporal. Patterns and mechanisms of exclusion from birth registration are identified and described under each, noting where a particular risk of statelessness is produced.

Corporeal Bordering

Corporeal bordering refers to the ways borders can be inscribed on the body itself. Sociologist Georg Simmel once wrote that "people are boundaries" (1997), suggesting that as relational beings we serve as boundaries to others, and boundaries in space and time. In recent decades, border scholars have continued to note how people become borders (Balibar 1998) and how human bodies serve as border sites in our biometrically managed world (Amoore 2006). Corporeal bordering is closely related to the other types of bordering identified here— e.g., corporeal bordering can be an expression of social bordering. What distinguishes it is not just the discussion or social interpretation of a body, but the attachment of the border to the body itself. This is why more and more would-be migrants, instead of being border crossers, become an embodiment of the border (Doná 2015). And so, the border is wherever these people are, as they become stuck in limbo in their everyday lives, immobilized socially and geographically.

Though biometric technologies allow for the inscription of borders on all bodies, the bodies that are ensnared by bordering practices are those that are marked as not belonging to hegemonic understandings of national identity. This marking is done by states as they produce identities and inscribe them onto the body through various identification and documentation practices (Mountz and Hyndman 2006). Critical scholarship on migration and borders has drawn extensively on Foucault's concepts of biopolitics and governmentality to understand the moves being made (e.g., Walters and Haahr 2004; Larner and Walters 2004). However, most migration scholarship building upon Foucault's work does not specify why racialized female bodies and their reproductive capacity in particular are being targeted as a site of migration control and citizenship restriction.

Feminist migration scholars have begun addressing this lacuna by theorizing the control of the species body and its reproduction as a key site where biopower is exercised (Inda 2002). Feminist scholarship also draws on queer theory to show how nation-states select and govern migrants through sexual regimes, which affects who can acquire legal status (Luibhéid 2013; 2014). Eithne Luibhéid argues that sexual logics can channel migrants and their children into

non-status, as seen in Ireland, the Dominican Republic, and New Zealand, where governments amended birthright citizenship eligibility to require that at least one parent be a citizen or permanent resident (Luibhéid 2014:141). Such efforts are underway in the US as well, and have been challenged in the Supreme Court.

In this study, I use the concept of corporeal bordering primarily to draw attention to the ways in which borders inscribed on pregnant or birthing bodies affect their access to reproductive healthcare and consequently, proof of birth for their newborn child. If the paper trail for newborns begins at hospital, corporeal bordering brings into view the maternal migrant body and her access to reproductive healthcare—or not. When borders attach to reproductive bodies, the effects of borderings are felt as those bodies seek a location to birth and continue to move (with or without their newborns) in space and time (Bagelman and Gitome 2020).

The concept of corporeal bordering helps to understand the ways borders can be inscribed on the (birthing) body itself. When women's reproduction is interpreted as marking the boundaries of the nation (Mayer 2004), then mothers whose maternity is protected and desired by the state will not necessarily face obstacles to the registration of their newborn—quite the contrary (Hill Collins 1999). But racialized migrant women's bodies, whose maternity has been discursively, socially and/or politically cast as a threat, may find that the corporeal border, which has been inscribed on their body, hinders access to a birth certificate for baby. This is why it is important to bring the birthing body (intertwined, relational mother-unborn child subject) into view, in relation to the spaces and institutions which would register the newborn child and recognize legal personhood upon birth—or not.

A feminist migration lens helps to see that the story of (non) birth registration starts earlier than the act of registration itself. From a feminist theoretical standpoint, it is useful to decouple *birth* and *registration*. This brings into view the reproductive bodies who are giving birth, and the ways in which they are variously protected or problematized and policed by those in positions of power. In order to understand whose births are being registered (or not), I argue that the story must start earlier than the act of registration. If we locate the pregnant woman's body in time and space as feminist scholars of reproduction have done (Bagelman and Gitome 2020; Ní Mhurchú 2016a), we can map out what is available to her and her newborn child in terms of reproductive healthcare services, identity documentation, consular protection, and migration status. At any of these points, there are obstacles, which are compounded in contexts where questions of belonging are unsettled or affected by structural forms of discrimination on the basis of gender, race and/or ethnicity.

This research uncovered at least seven examples of corporeal bordering practices which impact possibilities for registration, as can be seen in the following table.

Part 1 Typology of Birth Registration Bordering Practices: Corporeal Bordering

Corporeal	**Blocked access to reproductive healthcare**: Racialized migrant and minority women face obstacles to care, including mistreatment, intersecting forms of discrimination, fear of deportation, militarized maternity wards, and lack of insurance.

• Relates to the physical and biological body	**State family planning policies:** Where the state limits the number of children a family may have, it may be administratively impossible to register unauthorized births.
	Hospital documentation practices: Some hospitals withhold the birth notification until uninsured migrant women can pay hospital fees. Or the hospital issues forms with missing or misspelled information, which is difficult to amend and limits the utility for purposes of birth certificate issuance. In extreme cases, a hospital may not allow the baby to leave the hospital with its undocumented mother, leading to family separation.
	Ad hoc documentation for children of non-resident mothers: Creation of a foreigner birth certificate (legal or de facto); hand-written hospital birth notifications without the father's name in lieu of a birth certificate for children of migrants.
	Gender-based violence: GBV and harmful practices, such as forced or child marriage, decrease the chances that children resulting from this violence receive birth certificates. Conversely, unregistered/stateless girls and women may be more vulnerable to trafficking, forced marriage, etc.
	Registration practices for babies born via surrogacy: State policies can strip the gestational mother of any parental rights, and the child from knowledge of its biological origins, by not listing her on the birth certificate, sometimes without her consent. Instead, the commissioning parents are listed directly on the baby's birth certificate establishing their legal parenthood.
	Mandatory DNA testing for multiply marginalized groups: Administrative requirement of DNA testing to establish identity/nationality, required only for certain groups experiences multiple forms of discrimination.

The concept of corporeal bordering helps to understand how intersecting and multiscalar power relations affect access to birth registration for people on the move. More than a mere administrative act, birth registration can be understood as the site of baby's first bio/geopolitical encounter with institutions, and their 'petty sovereigns' (Butler 2006), who are exercising biopower in their (un)willingness to document the existence of this new life or the differential inclusion through issuance of ad hoc or dead-end documents.

Corporeal bordering is an expression of power brought to bear on the birthing body in mobility. Conceptualizing birth + registration is a matter of the global intimate (Mountz and Hyndman 2006; Pratt and Rosner 2012). The body is a location from which to understand the bordering practices which are at once bio- and geopolitical. Corporeal bordering underscores the geopolitical nature of the intimate experience of birth (McKinnon 2016), revealing how seemingly personal struggles over access to birth registration and citizenship reflect broader geopolitical power relations. If birth registration is a geopolitical act that happens after birth, then who gives birth to the child, where, their social and geographic location all have a bearing on whether and how the child is registered, and what that registration affords them in terms of citizenship and rights.

Feminist attention to the scale of the body and the global intimate provides crucial insights into the operation of sovereign power in relations between states and migrant populations. Zooming in on the visceral embodied experiences of women and children offers a critical vantage point from which to observe shifting enactments of sovereignty, state strategies

of containment, and the differential (im)mobilities they produce for racialized migrant women and their children. Pregnancy can serve as a prism for viewing some of the less visible ways that states are attempting to manage migration within their borders by delinking territorial presence from proof of birth and citizenship. In contrast to the spectacular performance of migration control through so-called 'search and rescue' in the Mediterranean (K. Williams 2018) or the Caribbean (Loyd and Mountz 2018), governmental practices that administratively separate babies from the identity documents proving their status and associated rights are decidedly less visible. Yet, the effects are similarly heinous.

Babies born to mothers whose bodies are bordered can be displaced at birth by way of biopolitical bifurcation. An administrative wedge is lodged between the newborn and its vital link to the body politic—a birth certificate. When borders attach to reproductive bodies, the effects of borderings are felt as those bodies seek a location to birth and continue to move (with or without their newborns) in space and time. When we map the effects of corporeal bordering out across space-time, we can begin to see how it blocks access to an identity and a nationality for the newest humans upon arrival on this planet. We see racialized others being geopolitically and legally manoeuvred out of existence, proof of birth denied. A border on a pregnant body renders precarious the legal existence of the next generation.

Social Bordering

Social bordering refers to the ways in which boundaries are enacted between different groups of people, demarcating self from other/us from them, and authorizing or precluding particular forms of mobility (social and geographic). The term social bordering is used to identify bureaucratic practices where one or more forms of discrimination affect a parent's ability to obtain birth certificate and citizenship for their child. The presence of discrimination becomes the indicator of where a social border has been imposed.

It is useful to understand the relationship between boundaries and borders. Boundaries can be found everywhere in social life. For Simmel, "the boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially" (1997:142). The term boundaries can be used to refer to various entities besides state-imposed borders: social boundaries, personal boundaries, etc. Accordingly, social boundaries are enacted and upheld by people exercising power in everyday life, not just state actors. Exclusion has been a dominant factor in the creation of social and spatial boundaries (Sibley 2002). Borders are a more formalized and territorialized type of boundary, enacted with the backing of coercive and administrative state power (Nevins 2002). Simply put, "all borders are boundaries, but not all boundaries are borders" (Parker and Adler-Nissen 2012:775). To make a social boundary into a border, it must be made more explicit, evident, and formal, as happens through state bureaucratic practice. *Social bordering* more adequately captures the ways in which social boundaries become borders when state bureaucracies rely on social markers to sort the newborn baby humans before them.

Yet, social boundaries are fluid and spill over the (state) borders meant to contain them. My thinking about the relationship between bordering practices and social boundary making is informed by Nira Yuval-Davis et al (2019), who theorize bordering as both sociocultural and political, occurring at the intersection of governance and belonging. Citing Marit Aure (2011), who analyzes everyday bordering and social ordering on the Russian-Norwegian borderlands/contact zone, they write:

> Bordering practices and social divisions affect each other, are constantly changing, and can both include and exclude certain collectivities. The 'border' and the divisions stemming from it are fluid, contextual, and spatially manifest in the community and its relations with the state (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019:20).

Social bordering practices can happen anywhere, but are especially apparent in the borderlands where territorial borders transect lives while people and families blur the social boundaries between us and them (Anzaldúa 1987).

Social bordering has important consequences in terms of social inequalities. The relationship is bidirectional: bordering plays a major role in controlling and widening social inequalities at multiple scales (Shachar 2021; 2020), and conversely, social inequalities (on multiple scales) can trigger bordering practices (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019). In this way, social bordering performs a filtering function as state entities filter out those not considered to belong socioculturally (on the basis of gender identity, ability, religion, etc.). When socially bordered, individuals have greater difficulty accessing their social and economic rights (among other human rights). Those experiencing multiple forms of discrimination are more likely to be made stateless, their social existence placed outside the bounds of any state (Brennan, Murray, and Petrozziello 2021; Petrozziello 2019). Conversely discrimination and social inequality are lived consequences for stateless people (Kingston 2017).

Intersectional and postcolonial feminist perspectives are especially valuable for interpreting the enactment of social borders. Yuval-Davis' method of "situated intersectionality" (2013; 2015) views the…

> different social divisions as discourses and practices that are ontologically different and irreducible to one another but that, in any concrete situation, are mutually constituted and shaped. They form the particular, nuanced, and contested meanings of particular social locations in particular historical moments and within particular social, economic, and political contests, in which some social divisions have more salience and effect than others (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019:27).

In other words, the social identities and boundaries which become salient enough to be turned into borders are politically and historically contingent. The way that Yuval-Davis and other anticolonial feminists use intersectionality places contemporary inequalities in global context and within global history. Such an approach is useful to question what matters and to whom

(why might certain social borders be enacted through birth registration), and to call attention to how certain understandings or stereotypes have become normative or stable in a given location among a given set of actors (Yuval-Davis 2006).

In this study, social bordering is used to theorize birth registration as a site of enactment of the social boundaries of belonging. Government bureaucracies have long been a means of sorting and ordering the humans in a given jurisdiction (Breckenridge and Szreter 2012; Caplan and Torpey 2018). Exclusion is not necessarily new. What the Global Inventory reveals is that patterns of exclusion from birth registration map onto historic legacies of social exclusion (often stemming from colonialism and other forms of violence). There are also contemporary iterations of the same—new groups being excluded, using new technologies. An intersectional and anticolonial feminist lens (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019; Lugones 2016; Mendoza 2015; Hill Collins and Bilge 2016) shines light on the intersecting power relations which prevent people of certain social identities and locations from registering the birth of their children— regardless of whether the applicant is actually a foreigner.

The Global Inventory identified bureaucratic practices where one or more forms of discrimination (on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, migration status, ability, religion) affect a parent's ability to obtain birth certificate and citizenship for their child. In other words, the presence of discrimination was used as an indicator of where a social border was imposed. The research uncovered 13 examples of social bordering practices which impact possibilities for registration, as can be seen in the following table. These are organized around the kind of social boundary being enacted—gender and sexuality; race, ethnicity and religion; and intersections thereof.

Part 2 Typology of Birth Registration Bordering Practices: Social Bordering

Social	Gender and sexuality as social boundaries of belonging
• Laws, policies, administrative procedures, and practices which differentiate or mark boundaries between different social groups • Active process of social exchange and interaction ("encounters")	**Legal gender discrimination**: Gender discriminatory nationality laws (GDNL) disallow mothers from registering the birth or conferring nationality to her child when unmarried, married to a foreigner, or unable to prove the marriage. Specific practices include: non-issuance of birth certificates; requiring father's presence or permission; and registering the child as a foreigner with temporary residency. **Administrative procedures** for conferring citizenship on children born to citizen mothers and foreign fathers, which are different/more cumbersome than procedures for registering children born to citizen fathers. Administrative obstacles for registration and nationality recognition for children born to citizen mothers while abroad.
	Marital status discrimination: Legal or administrative requirement of presenting a marriage certificate to register the birth of a child; placing additional conditions for children born out of wedlock to acquire registration or nationality; refusal to register children born out of wedlock even where no legal restriction exists. State refusal to recognize and register interfaith marriages. **Administrative procedures for paternal recognition:** Administrative practices which fail to recognize paternity for children born to unmarried citizen fathers and foreign mothers; where the father is not recorded on the birth certificate, the child faces obstacles to establishing filiation and claiming citizenship through the paternal bloodline.
	Harmful social stigma through bureaucratic practice: Administrative recording of information on birth certificates of children born out of wedlock that expose the child to social stigma (e.g., recording father as "unknown," listing two surnames instead of the mother's family name, and other harmful naming practices); registration of rapist father or his religion on the birth certificate.
	Discrimination against LGBTQ+ parents: Where same-sex marriage has not been legalized, some registrars refuse to transcribe birth certificates and recognize the nationality of children born to same-sex parents abroad. Where marriage equality exists, administrative procedures are not necessarily in place to recognize the parental filiation of the non-biological or non-gestational parent, especially for children born abroad.
	Gender inequality in women's independent access to their own ID: Subjecting women to additional requirements (e.g., spousal authorization) to obtain their own identity documentation makes it harder for them to prove their identity and meet birth registration requirements for children. Adolescent mothers who have not reached the age of majority may not possess ID required for registering their child.
	Racial, ethnic, and religious boundaries of belonging
	Civil registrar discretion exercised when an individual is perceived to possess a 'foreign' name, accent, or appearance; refusal to issue documentation; arbitrary

	transliteration of foreign names introducing inconsistencies and errors which are difficult to correct.
	Administrative earmarking: Annotations on birth records separating out those deemed not to belong.
	Religious discrimination: discriminatory naming practices (leaving first name blank) for non-baptized children who are not Christian, exposing them to stigma and discrimination.
	Intersections of the social boundaries of belonging
	Administrative blockage for children of mixed status parents: Where systems for birth registration are bifurcated (one process for nationals, another for foreigners), access to birth registration/citizenship for children of "mixed couples" (mixed nationality or status primarily, but also mixed race, religion, etc.) is hindered by discretionary and discriminatory practices; mother's undocumented/non-status can become determinant, leading to children's non-registration or registration as a foreigner, even when the father is a card-carrying citizen.
	Gender + religious + ethnic discrimination: Administrative blockage of birth registration for children born to women from religious and ethnic minority groups; systematic denial of citizenship and disenfranchisement; religious or ethnic discrimination around naming practices.
	Sex + age discrimination: Requiring adolescent mothers to be accompanied by a legal representative to register the births of their children. Requiring that civil registry officers report cases of adolescent mothers to the prosecutor's office.
	Disability + ethnic discrimination in contexts of mobility: When a disability is detected at birth, this is sometimes marked on the birth certificate issued to a child, ostensibly to facilitate their access to support services. Where state services exist, this may create a disincentive for registering the births of children who are politically deemed not to belong so as to limit the state's liability for upholding their right to social protection.

Though all of the social bordering practices are intersectional in some way, the Global Inventory identified some particular intersections of the social boundaries of belonging which are worth highlighting here.[4] Children of "mixed couples"—whose parents are of different nationalities or status categories—may find their mother's non-status becomes determinant in decision-making over whether and how their birth can be recorded. Women belonging to religious or ethnic minority groups face similar administrative blockage. When adolescent mothers must be accompanied by a legal representative or present a national ID when they are not yet of age themselves, sex and age discrimination multiply and compound.

Spatial Bordering

Borders are enacted in the process of birth registration not only to govern social belonging, but also as an exercise of sovereign power over both territory and the humans residing or moving (through) it. Spatial bordering refers to the process of "fixing" geographic

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[4] For a more fulsome discussion of intersectionality and statelessness, see (Brennan, Murray, and Petrozziello 2021; Petrozziello 2025a; 2025b).

space into concrete and comprehensible social places (Kolossov and Scott 2013: 1). Within this category, I use the concepts of *territorial* and *mobile bordering* to understand how birth registration plays a role in these exercises of sovereign power. Whereas the social and corporeal forms of bordering refer more to the governance of social belonging, the spatial forms of bordering—whether territorial or mobile—refer to the governance of human mobility. The following sections discuss each spatial type of bordering in turn.

Territorial bordering

Territorial bordering involves the delimitation of physical borders marking the edges of a sovereign state's territory, and can also be used to understand the geopolitical contestation of borders by foreign state, non-state, or unrecognized state actors. Within mainstream international relations and international law, the world is understood to be compartmentalized into state territories which are (mostly) fixed and lack internal fluidity. Critical scholars have argued that this "territorial trap" (Agnew 1994) of naturalizing borders represents a "hegemonic imaginary" which covers over the complexity of social/economic/cultural realities and power relations operating at multiple scales (global, regional, national) (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019:19). Human geographers take an alternative view, and have made the evolving process of reconfiguring state borders in terms of territorial control, security, and sovereignty a major research theme (Paasi 2012; Van Houtum 2005; Hyndman 2012; Johnson et al. 2011).

The dynamic process of territorial bordering is especially apparent in postcolonial contexts and contested territories. The Global Inventory uncovered two examples of territorial bordering practices which impact whether and how births are registered, as shown in part 3 of the typology.

Part 3 Typology of Birth Registration Bordering Practices: Territorial Bordering

Spatial-territorial	Consolidation of postcolonial state control over territorial borders and borderlands through birth registration: Newly established institutional presence of civil registrars in the hinterland and border regions extends the reach of the state to its outer edges. Classification of the people living there as citizen/non-citizen through late birth registration campaigns constitutes both territory and subjects of sovereign power. IOs and NGOs often accompany birth registration campaigns, assisting in the sorting of people whose presence blurs territorial borders in the borderlands.
• Actions by state, non-state, and/or unrecognized state actors with the effect of enacting a political border and consolidating sovereign control over a territory	Politicized birth registration practices as part of conflict / contests over territory: Actors vying for control over a territory begin issuing their own birth certificates as a means of extending their sovereign authority and/or refusing to accept birth certificates or ID documents issued by the competing power. Systematic denial of birth certificates and other documentation for persons of certain ancestry, in order to make them subject to removal. Surveillance of parents by occupying power based on ID codes listed on birth certificate. Non-issuance of birth certificates in non-government controlled areas where the government has lost administrative control. (See also the Corporeal Bordering practice of GBV and the Social Bordering practice of "Harmful stigma through bureaucratic practice" for children born from rape during conflict).

Birth registration as territorial bordering practice can also be observed where births are registered by non-state actors (e.g., ISIL in Iraq and Syria) and in unrecognized or partially recognized states (e.g., Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Abkhazia, and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic). Here it is useful to contrast the masculinist idea of the world map as an archipelago "characterized by the interpenetration of controlled and 'uncontrolled' areas, legitimate and nonlegitimate political units" (Kolossov and Scott 2013:7) with the fluidity of identity and mobility among those bringing their babies into the world in such conditions. While armed men wield power to redraw the map, pregnant and postpartum women push powerfully across the archipelago for birth + registration. The Global Inventory offered glimpses of the geopolitics of birth + registration: ethnic Georgian women birthing children in Russian-occupied Abkhazia, and risking a border crossing to have them registered and recognized as Georgian; Palestinian women in occupied East Jerusalem who cross security checkpoints to give birth in order to secure birth registration (Hammoudeh, Hamayel, and Giacaman 2017). In Syria, some women make dangerous journeys with babies in tow to cross over to government-controlled areas to register births (Clutterbuck 2021); but many prefer that their children remain under the radar and unregistered, for the time being. Mothers living in or near buffer zones make difficult choices about where to give birth, how to document it, and how best to navigate the borders which have crossed their family's lives. They make their reproductive choices well aware of how their birthing bodies are defining (and defined by) the boundaries of nation/state. They seek safety to bring new humans into the world. As intertwined bodies bifurcate into two, mothers search for the hands which can be trusted to record the facts of birth.

Mobile Bordering

Mobile bordering refers to the dispersion of bordering processes in locations beyond the territorial border as a means of "managing migration"—or disciplining "messy" human mobility to mould it into an object of state management (Triandafyllidou 2022). The concept prompts a shift in analytical perspective, away from (only) studying the movement of people across territorial borders toward critically interrogating the "movement of borders to regulate the mobility of people" (Shachar 2020:7). I borrow Ayelet Shachar's concept of shifting borders to analyze how mobile borders show up for migrants and refugees wherever they encounter bureaucracies for registering birth. While social bordering can also operate to distinguish who belongs, I use mobile bordering to understand how birth registration becomes imbricated with state efforts to manage migration. Shachar's proposition of the shifting border as a framework for analysis builds upon a large body of work in critical border studies (Balibar 1998; Coleman 2007; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019), which also informs my interpretation of the bordering practices affecting children of people in mobility.

Ayelet Shachar's (2020) paradigm of shifting borders helps to visualize a legal cartography in which people in mobility "show up" in the eyes of governing authorities and are bordered. This is more than a matter of an individual state's exercise of sovereign power over entry and permanence in a territory. Far-away states (and the international organizations doing their bidding) are deploying new technologies to arrest and contain the mobility of would-be migrants and asylum-seekers, sometimes before they even make a move. The concept of mobile borders helps to capture the ways in which this happens at the critical juncture of birth + registration, as states bring the border to baby through legal and administrative practices which make the issuance of a birth certificate contingent on the parent(s)' status. The Global Inventory uncovered ten examples of mobile bordering practices which hinder access to birth certificates, as shown in part 4 of the typology. Five relate more closely to migration governance, and five to the governance of civil registration. All ten reveal how migration governance is imbricated with birth registration.

Part 4 Typology of Birth Registration Bordering Practices: Mobile Bordering

Spatial-mobile	Migration governance
• Related to the regulation of human mobility. • Practices wherein birth registration becomes imbricated with state efforts to manage migration.	**Spatial containment and constraints on mobility**: Militarized checkpoints at border crossings, buffer zones, and in the interior constrain access to civil registrar offices for those lacking travel or ID documents. Refugee parents who are prohibited from leaving camps, and migrant parents who are detained, cannot physically reach civil registrar offices and may be fearful of presenting themselves to government authorities.
	Migration enforcement within birth registration process: Public officials in healthcare and civil registrar offices are sometimes required by law to report undocumented migrants who seek their services to immigration authorities, potentially triggering their deportation. Even when not legally obligated, they may cooperate in migration enforcement via information sharing with authorities. Migration enforcement at points of access to healthcare, including reproductive services. Other state practices that attempt to regulate or control migration through birth registration include: requiring in law or practice that parents produce documents providing their migration status (e.g., passport with valid visa, residence permit) in order to obtain a birth certificate; non-acceptance of other proof of identity (e.g. national ID card from country of origin); denial of official birth certificates for foreigners to prevent parents from claiming the right to stay; forcing migrant parents to sign 'voluntary' return declarations in order to obtain official birth certificates.
	Migrant identity management: Creation of foreigner birth certificates, or other bifurcated birth registration procedures for nationals and foreigners, which in practice do not necessarily lead to confirmation of a foreign nationality. Sometimes governments reserve newly adopted electronic birth registration systems for babies born to nationals while continuing to issue paper-based certificates for those born to foreigners. If lost or damaged, there is little recourse to replace the paper certificates which lack backing in a centralized system.
	Refugee identity management: Many asylum-seeking and refugee parents are undocumented/lack civil registration, and unable to rely on consular services from their country of origin. Deficient RSD and ID issuance in host countries. National birth registration campaigns designed only to document citizens, excluding refugees. Intermittent refugee registration campaigns and issuance of ad hoc identity documents, such as refugee or refugee claimant cards, which may be of limited duration and not necessarily valid for purposes of birth registration. Birth registration services are unavailable in many camp settings, and leaving the camp to seek registration is either disallowed or not feasible. "Special solutions," such as separate registers and databases, for registering children born to refugees/migrants.
	Gender discriminatory migration governance: Where women's access to migration permits is conditional on spousal sponsorship or permission, their status is highly precarious and could be revoked even in situations of gender-based violence. Since birth registration for children born to mixed status couples often depends on the mother's migration status, if the mother falls out of status her child may not be registered. Where pregnancy/family life is disallowed, migrant workers may choose non-registration of children over loss of employment and deportation.

	Civil registration governance
	Legal and administrative obstacles for foreign parents with precarious status: In some places, foreigners are not legally entitled to receive a birth certificate for their child. More often, a convergence of laws and regulations (civil status, migration, etc.) block access to birth registration to parents without status. Discretionary and inconsistent administrative interpretation of the rules often leads to delays or non-issuance of birth certificates for migrant/refugee parents, who are unable to prove their identity, marital, and/or legal status in country. Arbitrary and inconsistent administrative interpretation of what constitutes "residence" (de facto presence or legal status) can block issuance of birth certificates or proof of citizenship for those considered non-resident.
	Digital interoperability of government systems can prevent non-citizens from obtaining birth certificates for their children. Where civil registration is integrated with other systems (e.g. population register, tax registry), administrative requirements can make it virtually impossible for non-citizens without a valid passport or residence permit to be issued a birth certificate.
	Linkage of birth registration to social protection: Hailed as a good practice to incentivize parent demand, linking birth registration to social welfare benefits may backfire for migrants and refugees with precarious status, for whom the host state may be reluctant to extend social protection. The same is true for linkage of birth registration to maternal healthcare service delivery, where access for migrants is not guaranteed (see Corporeal Bordering).
	Deficient consular civil registration services: Many countries of origin do not have a consular presence in the countries where their nationals are transiting or residing; and if they do, may not offer robust civil registration services (birth registration for children born abroad, marriage or death certificate issuance). Even if services are available, asylum seekers and refugees may be unable to approach the consulate for fear of repression/jeopardizing their asylum claim. Migrants may lack a birth notification for children born at home, or other evidentiary requirements. Many consulates do not engage in outreach for their nationals in an irregular situation.
	Return & reintegration: Upon return from abroad, those lacking birth certificates face additional obstacles to obtain them from their country of origin. Without a birth certificate, they are unable to prove their nationality and may be rendered ineligible for reintegration supports.

Controls on mobility which are enacted beyond the territorial border—known as internalizing and externalizing border control (Menjívar 2014)—make it harder for migrant and refugee parents to physically reach a registrar's office. Spatial constraints were apparent for ethnic Georgians in Russian-occupied areas, and for refugees who were prohibited from leaving the Osire camp in Namibia. In the Dominican Republic-Haiti border region, civil registrars routinely refer people with precarious status to the central office in the capital to pursue their claims. Not only is this costly for people living in poverty (and ineffectual); it involves crossing multiple military checkpoints. Stateless persons of Haitian ancestry who are undocumented, or whose foreigner ID cards have expired while awaiting the naturalization that never came, face a similar fate as Haitian migrants with expired regularization cards: a risk of detention and

deportation, despite calls by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to halt all deportations to a country in deep humanitarian crisis (OHCHR 2022). Internal spatial bordering practices, such as ID and status checks at military checkpoints and multiple institutions, fracture the space through which pregnant migrant women and migrant parents feel they can safely move. The mobile border bears a close relation to corporeal bordering, discussed above. It could be said that corporeal bordering is a technique of the mobile border, as it is "multiplying and fracturing into an operational individual-control system, where each person 'carries' the border with her as she moves across space and place" (Shachar 2020:37).

One of the clearest ways in which mobile borders are enacted in the birth registration process is when public officials interpret their duty as migration enforcement rather than rights protection. Sometimes functionaries in healthcare and civil registrar offices are required by law to report undocumented migrants who seek their services (e.g., Belgium, UK, Germany, Bulgaria, North Macedonia). In resistance, a migrant rights organization in Germany began picking up birth certificates on behalf of migrant parents to shield them from possible arrest and deportation. When borders are made mobile, migration enforcement happens even in the everyday spaces where life begins. Dominican authorities' militarized deportation raids on maternity hospitals strategically targeted pregnant and postpartum Haitian migrant women seeking reproductive healthcare services as a way to prevent them from obtaining hospital birth notifications for their newborns. Dominican civil society organizations documented and denounced the abuses (MOSCTHA 2021; OBMICA 2021), together with feminist allies (Medrano Mercedes 2021; Suero 2021), the UN country office (Naciones Unidas-RD 2021), and the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (CIDH 2021).

Less spectacular but no less impactful are the myriad documentation requirements which also turn civil registrars into migration enforcers. In Cyprus, Latvia, North Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia, and Ukraine, a child can only be registered and receive a birth certificate if the parents (particularly the mother) are able to submit certain ID documents. In South Africa, migrants from Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Mozambique, Malawi, and children born to asylum seekers from Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, DRC, Rwanda, who are unable to prove any connection to their own country upon arrival in South Africa, face great difficulties obtaining birth certificates. Lebanon requires a residence permit to issue a birth certificate, and Israel denies official birth certificates for foreigners and even forces African migrant and asylum-seeking parents to sign 'voluntary' return declarations in order to obtain official birth certificates. The problem is not simply that migrant parents cannot meet the evidentiary requirements to obtain a birth certificate, but that the requirements are designed to detect irregular status and trigger removal to prevent migrant parents of children born on the territory from claiming the right to stay.

Where states are unwilling to register the babies born to migrants or refugees, international organizations (e.g., World Bank, UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM) have stepped up to provide "special solutions" or "stopgap measures." Whether the creation of separate registers, procedures, and databases are a stopgap measure facilitating access to protection, or a form of

dead-end documentation that place those registered in this way in a prolonged state of structural ambiguity, is subject to debate.

Just as issuing temporary permits can lead to permanent precarity (Bailey et al. 2002), so too can special birth registration practices. In Germany, the UNHCR praised the practice of issuing children of asylum seekers an extract from the birth register instead of a birth certificate, which contains notes, such as 'identity not established' and 'name not established.' Never mind that parents cannot use an extract to get a birth certificate/proof of nationality from their home country. In the DR, the UNHCR praised the country's creation of a separate procedure for foreigner birth registration as a safeguard against statelessness. Never mind that the Foreigner's Book, according to human rights lawyers in country, functions as a purgatory which many enter and from which few ultimately emerge. One need look no further than the hands of Rohingya refugee mothers carrying plastic bags full of the ad hoc IDs they were issued over the years (Brinham 2019), or Kenyans of Somali descent who hand over expired refugee cards and alien IDs, but are still unable to register their babies born in country (Praxides 2021). In practice, many of the so-called safeguards are administrative practices which create non-solutions or dead ends. Dead-end documentation cements statelessness rather than prevents it.

Structural gender discrimination within migration governance also makes it difficult for migrant mothers to register their children. Children born to mixed status parents in Cyprus (non-EU migrant mothers and fathers who are Cypriot or EU citizens), for example, may not be registered because the mother's precarious status depends on her spouse's willingness to sponsor her. If the relationship ends, the link to status is severed and so too is the child's paternal link to recognition and citizenship rights. In such situations, actual access to birth registration is conditional on the documentation and residence status of the parents, especially the mother. Prohibitions on pregnancy and family life for women migrant workers, as seen in Middle Eastern countries with the kafala system, lead women to hide or even abandon children sooner than risk discovery for having violated the terms of their contract and repatriated. These findings resonate with Constable's (2014) ethnographic account of the babies 'born out of place' to Filipina and Indonesian migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong, wherein migrant women are welcomed as workers, but not as people or citizens. Their bodies are considered an instrument of production, not reproduction; reproduction is seen as the exclusive right and privilege of the citizens for whom they are employed to provide care. Temporary migration schemes attempt to mould people into workers alone, whose presence is meant to place no burdens on the host state. Nationality policies work in tandem to discourage them from overstaying by denying citizenship (in Hong Kong, right of abode) to their children. While Constable's work shows that such policies, which are designed to keep people from staying on permanently, often have the opposite effect, leading them to overstay and work without authorization, my study emphasizes that the production of statelessness through birth registration bordering practice is what arrests the family's mobility.

The other five mobile bordering practices are grouped because they exemplify how the governance of civil registration itself places birth registration out of reach for non-citizens. Very

few places have laws which explicitly prohibit the issuance of birth certificates for foreigners (without status). Rather, as Van Waas (2007) mentions in relation to birth registration for irregular(ized) migrants in Thailand, barriers to birth registration most commonly arise from a convergence of different laws rather than specific legal prohibitions. The legal cartography of exclusion from birth registration is comprised of both l egal and administrative obstacles for parents with irregular status. In Greece, for example, asylum seekers and refugees have been turned away from some civil registrar offices if they do not speak Greek and arrive without an interpreter (ENS 2020:9). In Mexico, the law prohibits denial of birth certificates regardless of the parents' status; nevertheless, many Central American and extracontinental migrants transiting through the country remain unregistered due to inconsistent implementation and lack of documentation. Arbitrary interpretation of what constitutes residence (legal status or de facto presence?), as seen in Morocco and Egypt (Manby 2019), also produces inconsistent outcomes in terms of access to a birth certificate for parents with precarious status.

As governments work to strengthen their civil registration systems and coverage, some "good practices" can exclude migrants by default. Digital interoperability of databases may be an efficient social governance strategy insofar as it enables a given state to filter out those it considers ineligible for social protection. In countries with advanced and automated CRVS systems (e.g., Norway), which are integrated with other systems (population register, tax registry), administrative requirements can make it virtually impossible for non-citizens without a valid passport or residence permit to be issued a birth certificate. In countries which are building civil registration systems, linking birth registration to registration for social welfare benefits has been hailed as a good practice for incentivizing parents to complete the process.[5] But this may have the opposite effect for parents with precarious status, as sites of access to social protection become fraught with nationalist and anti-immigrant politics.

The final two mobile bordering practices have to do with migrants' access to civil registration services from their home country, both while abroad and upon their return. In a vicious cycle, host governments often rely on consulates from migrants' countries of origin to issue birth certificates and proof of citizenship. Yet, deficient or non-existent consular civil registration services make this impossible. Manby's (2019) work on consular birth registration in Morocco and Egypt provides an important study on the topic. Some efforts to improve these services are worth mentioning here. Lesotho has committed to strengthening consular birth registration for children born to Basotho migrant workers in South Africa. Mexico now allows its undocumented nationals, many of whom are Indigenous migrant workers, to obtain late birth declaration at its consulates in the US. In the best-case scenario, consular birth registration can interrupt cycles of intergenerational statelessness. In the worst-case scenario, not only do migrants and their children born abroad remain undocumented—they are still unable to do so upon return to their country of origin. As home countries (often with US/EU funding and IOM assistance) roll out return and reintegration programs for their returning

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[5] See, for example, the Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems' compendium of good practices linking civil registration with social protection systems: https://crvssystems.ca/SocialProtection

nationals, access to such supports often depends on their ability to prove their identity and nationality. 'Doubly undocumented' Roma in the former Yugoslavia (e.g., Montenegro, Bosnia, North Macedonia) were rendered ineligible for reintegration supports (e.g., housing, tax exemptions, health card) for that reason. US citizen children of Mexican migrants who were deported to Mexico (or returned voluntarily with family) have difficulties enrolling in school due to administrative difficulties obtaining a Mexican birth certificate (IMUMI 2016).

The spatial maneuvers outlined here have major implications for the scope of rights and protections that people on the move can enjoy—including children's human rights to identity and a nationality. Spatial bordering works in conjunction with temporal bordering to make the next generation fall out of space and time.

Temporal

Temporal borders are borders on the axis of time (Border Poetics/Border Culture Research Group, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, n.d.). Temporal border*ing* refers to "the establishment of deadlines and time limits which impact on migrants' lives and geographies" (Tazzioli 2018:14). Institutional deadlines can limit the time within which border-crossers can lodge a claim for asylum, legally stay in country, become eligible for residency or naturalization, renew permits, regularize status, or register the birth of a child in a timely fashion.[6] A temporal perspective on human mobility pays attention to the imposition of bureaucratic time as a technology for managing migration, noting the contrast between state-managed time and biological time over the life course (Anderson 2020).

Temporal bordering works in conjunction with spatial bordering. The analytical challenge is to understand the articulations and disjunctures of the temporal and spatial expressions of bordering. This study uses the category of temporal bordering to highlight the intergenerational dynamics of (non)registration of birth and the production of statelessness for children born to parents with precarious status. This includes babies born to parents who are "in transit," hold temporary permits, have fallen out of status, or who are stateless themselves. The category is also used to track the effects of temporally limited migration management on the ability of parents to register children. Part 5 of the typology offers a summary of ten examples of temporal bordering practices, which impact whether, when, and how births are registered.

Part 5 Typology of Birth Registration Bordering Practices: Temporal Bordering

Temporal	Intergenerational statelessness among the migrant-descended /
	minority groups: Stateless parents, who have been denied and deprived
• Related to time, and how it is interpreted,	documents proving their identity and/or nationality, are unable to meet the evidentiary requirements for obtaining a birth certificate for their children, reproducing statelessness intergenerationally. This often happens along the matrilineal line, since women are even less likely to have independent access to

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[6] What is considered timely birth registration vs. late birth registration varies widely across jurisdictions. The shortest time frame I have encountered in this research is three days, beyond which parents must justify the delay and sometimes pay a fee or provide additional documentation. More commonly the time period is one month, three months, six months, or one year. Some places do not impose time limits or fees.

manipulated or deployed as a governance tool • Long-term, protracted and intergenerational effects of non-registration • Short-term and time-bound measures for registration	identity documents and legal migration channels. Adults without birth certificates are unable to obtain proof of citizenship/national ID, perpetuating the intergenerational cycle.
	Discretionary registration practices in absence of statelessness determination procedures (SDP): Leaving the nationality field on birth certificates blank; recording the child as having 'unknown' nationality; assuming without verification that the child will acquire the parent's (usually the mother's) nationality and recording the mother's nationality on the birth certificate.
	Babies born to nations without states: Babies who are born to peoples engaged in protracted political struggles for statehood are not exempt from these struggles; they are born into them. Living in exile or without political recognition of their homeland generations later, these children risk falling out of both space and time.
	Registering minorities and stateless persons as foreigners: Some states use a separate administrative procedure meant for foreigners to obtain a foreign nationality to register children born to minority groups who are descended from migrants but unable to prove their identity and/or stateless persons.
	Retroactive denationalization enabled by electronic birth registers: Attempting to register a baby in today's electronic systems can surface legacy issues of irregular or fraudulent identification from generations before. Instead of interpreting the rules in the best interest of the child, some registrars retroactively cancel the records of all prior generations rendering the child ineligible for citizenship and producing a risk of statelessness.
	Indefinite deferral of decision: Temporal bordering happens when applications (for naturalization, document renewal, etc.) are left pending indefinitely. This can either be a passive act wherein bureaucrats fail to act due to unclear political/legal/administrative guidance, or a deliberate strategy of administrative obstructionism.
	Temporary identity, migration management, and statelessness solutions: Regularization drives with rigid eligibility criteria, short registration periods, and cumbersome renewal processes make it difficult for migrant parents to regularize or maintain status. Parents who are issued temporary refugee, claimant, humanitarian, or work permits may face difficulties maintaining status and using those temporary ID documents to register the birth of children. Proposed solutions for statelessness are often time-bound and complex, making it difficult for people to qualify even as foreigners.
	Late birth registration: If migrant parents are unable to meet documentation requirements by the bureaucratic deadline for timely birth registration (which varies by country, from three days to one year), they will have to pursue a more onerous process for late birth registration. The process can be complex and costly, and often requires additional court or administrative procedures as well as additional documents that parents may be unable to produce. Access to late birth registration is often conditional on the documentation or residence status of the parents.
	Exceptional time-bound birth registration drives: Some governments apply temporary, time-bound and geographically limited measures to allow for the registration of children born during a specific period, despite the ongoing and protracted nature of the displacement.
	Born in transit: Babies born while migrants are en route to their destination often face similar legal and administrative obstacles to registration as described

	under Spatial-mobile bordering above. The obstacles become a form of temporal bordering when families arrive in destination countries which have no provisions in place for those arriving without a birth certificate to acquire one.
	Expansive legal and administrative interpretation of "in transit" exceptions for all children born to foreigners without status: Constitutional exceptions from jus soli nationality meant for children born to people in transit (e.g., crew members, diplomats) have been applied to children of all migrants who lack an officially recognized migration status, by recording their birth as having occurred to a person in transit.

Temporary solutions for managing migrants' identity and status may produce permanent temporariness for parents, as is well established in the critical migration literature (Bailey et al. 2002; Hennebry 2012; Tize 2021; Al-Dabbagh 2022; McLaughlin and Hennebry 2015). What has not been studied is how such practices produce a risk of statelessness for generations to come. The Global Inventory yielded many examples of how regularization drives with rigid eligibility criteria, short registration periods, and cumbersome renewal processes make it difficult for migrant parents to regularize or maintain status (DR, Egypt, Morocco, Trinidad & Tobago), which is often required to obtain birth registration (as discussed in the Mobile bordering practices section). The temporary permits issued to Haitians and Venezuelans in Trinidad & Tobago, Colombia, and Peru have not necessarily facilitated access to birth certificates and proof of citizenship for their children—even on the continent of *jus soli* birthright citizenship. Temporary forms of identification (refugee cards) issued to Somali, Sudanese and Congolese refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya decades ago, have been called "alien markers" because they block, not facilitate, access to citizenship for subsequent generations.

Temporary policy measures have also been popular among states seeking to address statelessness. Where proposed solutions for statelessness are time-bound and complex, it is difficult for applicants to qualify even as foreigners. In *Offshore Citizens*, Lori calls the establishment of such interim measures "the papers of waiting for papers" (in relation to the UNHCR and UNDP's solutions for the UAE to manage Ugandan refugees' identity) (2019:180). My shorthand for this practice is "dead-end documentation." While the creation of a special register is sometimes seen as a good practice or a step toward resolving the documentation situation of prolonged or complex cases, over time the pathway rarely leads to the promised condition of permanence. The creation of separate registers runs the risk of leaving people in limbo, or worse, engaging in administrative apartheid. Such a measure enables the future cancellation or suspension of status for those whose existence is recorded in this way. Rather than regularizing their status and providing a pathway to citizenship, the system keeps them de facto stateless and reproduces this condition for their children.

My analysis of birth + registration calls for contending with competing notions of time. Bridget Anderson's (2020) typology of time considers natural/biological time vs. industrial/bureaucratic time. Acknowledging the potential trouble with classifying things as natural, she defines *natural/biological time* as "temporal passing that proceeds irrespective of interference by humans," such as the life course (Anderson 2020:56). *Industrial* or clock time is

"required and facilitated by technologies and bureaucracies" and *bureaucratic time* is defined as "the synchronous time that is imposed by states and that is necessary for states to function" (Anderson 2020, citing Gross 1985). What differentiates industrial from bureaucratic time is that it is the state-standardized time of both the clock and the date. Linear time- and date-stamped bureaucratic time regulates the birth registration process, for it is fundamental for institutions or authorized individuals to record time and date of birth, in addition to place and parentage.

Yet, the vital event being recorded occurs on a different plane of time altogether: *maternal time* or the cyclical and eternal time of reproduction of the human species (Ní Mhurchú 2016, citing Kristeva 1981). Focusing on the migrant mother-child (born and unborn) subject, Aoileann Ní Mhurchú argues that *thinking with reproduction* is a theoretically rich approach as it "introduces a different spatio-temporal understanding of what identity and belonging, and thus politics, can be" (Ní Mhurchú 2016: 32). I understand (and have lived) pregnancy as a time-bound transitive state in which the gestational mother carries the possibility of bringing forth a new human. Birth happens on biological and maternal time, whereas registration happens (or not) on the bureaucratic clock. Interpreting how temporal bordering operates intergenerationally requires attention not only to temporal disjunctures but to these competing notions of time itself. Time and temporality are manipulated not only to control human mobility, but also to control the reproduction of the body politic by way of birth registration as bordering practice.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that birth registration can function as a bordering practice for children born to those whom a given state is unwilling to recognize, producing a risk of statelessness among descendants of migrants with precarious status. Borders and processes of bordering play a constitutive role in world order, yet are often taken as given within mainstream international relations and international law (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019). If the enactment of borders or bordering is an ongoing process central to global governance, then understanding how the birth certificate functions as a similar technology of governance is key to understanding how the world is governed.

The empirical analysis and mid-range theory building demonstrates how borders are enacted in the process of birth registration, the types of bordering practices, and their heinous effects in terms of human rights. The feminist migration lens enabled me to conceptualize birth + registration as analytically separate yet linked. An analytical focus on *birth* brings women's birthing bodies into view, showing how the corporeal bordering they experience directly affects their ability to register their baby. The analytical focus on *registration* in contexts of human mobility sheds light not only on how migrants experience civil registration, but also how states manufacture as migrants the people they consider do not belong. In this way, intersecting power relations on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, migration status, and religion

give shape not only to social boundaries but to the official demographic composition of countries whose governments select whom they wish to recognize as legal persons. If feminist inquiry is about revealing unquestioned differences and inequalities that conceal the exercise of power (Ackerly, Stern, and True 2006: 30), then this project has sought to reveal that such "gaps in coverage" are a politically produced condition. I contend that the problem is not merely the non-registration of birth, but rather that birth registration itself *is* the mechanism of inclusion/exclusion.

What does a feminist conceptualization of birth registration as bordering practice reveal about the global and national governance of human mobility and citizenship? If citizenship has been theorized as a site of inclusion/exclusion, which plays a fundamental role in the sovereign control of mobility (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013), so too can birth registration be understood to function in this way. For states desperate to gain control over human mobility, birth registration—a bureaucratic process which should lead to confirmation of citizenship somewhere—is a strategic location for wielding sovereign power to include and exclude. For the excluded, there are no guarantees that they will in fact be able to obtain a birth certificate and confirmation of citizenship elsewhere. State bureaucracies constitute citizens and non-citizens from the very moment of birth. They also manufacture as foreign those for whom a given state lacks the political will to recognize and protect. And international organizations (IOs) operate in a parastatal fashion, lending legitimacy to the technical non-solutions that are rolled out as interim or stopgap measures.

Borders are being enacted in the bureaucratic process of birth registration, blocking access to citizenship for migrants' children—even in the Americas, the continent of *jus soli* birthright citizenship. This research demonstrates that when migration enforcement is imbricated in processes of civil registration and nationality acquisition, birth registration becomes a critical juncture in the production of liminal legal status and statelessness. Whether by omission or commission, exclusion from birth registration remains a violation of fundamental human rights. This is clearly of concern to the regional and international human rights systems, as it is to the affected persons, rights defenders and civil society organizations who are making strategic use of these to hold States accountable.

The birth certificate is such an important document NOT because it fully establishes legal identity, but because it serves as a record of time and place of birth and lineage, which are the two existing means of establishing a claim to nationality and preventing statelessness. Bordering as a process and technology of governance operates similarly, with temporal, spatial, and social dimensions. With many bodies passing through, some are ensnared and some waved onward. Which women's bodies have brought forth the new humans matters greatly to those seeking to govern population. This is why both birth registration and bordering function as filters, a technology of governance over identity and mobility.

When borders are made mobile in service of a broader migration governance agenda driven by prosperous countries of the Global North, a macro picture of global dividing lines begins to emerge. In *The Birthright Lottery: Citizenship and Global Inequality,* Ayelet Shachar (2021)

argued that there is a "persisting fault line" between those privileged and disadvantaged by the shifting border. That framework allows us to see the "evolving legal cartography and geography of power and (im)mobility" (Shachar 2020:61) in a grounded way. Grounded examination of border struggles (wherever these manifest in the lives of people in mobility) can help to jump scales, in order to visualize what Nicholas de Genova calls the "ongoing reconfigurations of an effectively planetary regime dedicated to the neoliberal and postcolonial government of human mobility" (De Genova 2017a: 24). In this planetary regime, disorderly human mobility is arrested in "buffer zones" which affluent democracies (e.g., EU, US) pay less affluent countries (e.g., Morocco, Turkey, Mexico, Dominican Republic) to create through development cooperation, in order to keep unwanted migrants from reaching their physical border. Bilateral and multilateral agreements are complemented by new technologies for "border management" and "identity management." Today, electronic borders enacted through e-Gates and algorithms—coupled with emerging forms of digital ID—serve as building blocks of what Ronen Shamir theorized as a global immobility regime (2005). Making migration orderly, for many destination countries, involves immobilizing those seeking to escape the poverty, climate crisis, and civil strife that a wealthy "us" associates with a faceless "them."

Drawing on Shachar's notion of the shifting border, I have argued that birth registration is a key site where determinations of inclusion/exclusion happen, as it (like so many other state laws and institutions) has become imbricated with migration control. In particular, the concept of "legal spatiality" – *where* a person is barred from onward mobility and by *whom* (Shachar 2020:8) – is useful to trace how parents' experiences of being irregularized and (im)mobilized preclude the spatial possibility of legality for their newborns. Shifting borders to manage migration where migrant parents show up to register a birth reconfigures the geography of power. This is not only a matter of national sovereignty where governments determine who enters, stays, or belongs in a territory, but a multiscalar exercise of power by multiple actors connected through transnational policy agendas seeking to securitize migration—and identity too. It goes well beyond the internalization/externalization of migration enforcement, illustrating the quantum, ubiquitous nature of bordering which new technologies enable. When borders are enacted within birth registration, children born to irregular migrants are made stateless and the next generation falls out of both space and time.

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