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Governing Permeable Borders. Country Europa – A Project by Marcelo Expósito and Verónica Iglesia

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The hegemonic logic of security needs the delimitation of a terrain, because without a threat to protect against, it loses its legitimation. The terrain comprises a space, being in which is never permitted to everyone in the same way, and with this a community that defines itself through belonging. This collective that is never homogeneous is constituted through inequalities: among those who belong, as well as in relation to those who come into it – often only temporarily. Inequalities emerge through the distribution of labor as well as through the heterogeneity of rights. One of the central regimes resulting in hierarchizations and categorizations into multiple relations of gradations is the border.[1] Borders are always

permeable and porous – the borders of Europe as well as those of a prison or a gated community. Among other things, because the border is always characterized by the impossibility of closing it, there is no complete security. Through the regulation and control of the permeable border, permanent insecurity is produced for the security of the community to be protected: precarization becomes an instrument of governing, with which populations are regulated in different ways.[2]

The impossibility of security and the permeability of borders have grown in western capitalist modernity out of the controllability of the circulation of people and commodities that is never complete. The political focus is therefore on the regulation and control of border-crossing to legitimate security mechanisms with respect to those circulating persons constructed as dangerously different. Instead of strictly guarding against those who are dangerous, however, this regulative manner of governing focuses on preventive strategies: the anticipation of flexible, contingent tactics of crossing borders. The flexibility and contingency of the control of the border is, among other things, a violent reaction to the flexibility of migration, which can intertwine with the practices of traveling.[3]

This thematic complex is developed and actualized in the project *Country Europa* by Marcelo Expósito and Verónica Iglesia.[4] And even more: the two knowledge producers inscribe their artistic project constitutively into the crisis and transformation processes of current capitalist relations, security and precarization logics, and provide in their critical art practice a line of flight, in which the combined and produced border-knowledge presented in it is compared with art institutions' current strategies of dissolving borders.

In November 2009 Iglesia and Expósito were invited to the European biennial of contemporary art Manifesta 8, which took place a year later in Murcia (Spain). A proposal was suggested to them that they could develop a small artistic intervention in cooperation with the inmates of the penitentiary in Murcia. The artists' response – as they write in their publication *Country Europa* – was to substantially expand their project and not limit themselves to the penitentiary as a classically segregated and secured space. At the same time, they rejected the exploitation logic that art institutions like to practice in cooperation with non-artists: the "result" of the collaborative photo workshop with prison inmates was not to be simply prepared as a photographic project in an exhibition to be consumed, objectified and thus exposed to the gaze of the viewers. In addition, the inmates were to be paid for the workshop, because at the moment they were working for the art business. This demand not only puts the dynamics of precarization on the agenda in the projects in which art institutions are to be opened into social space, but also thematizes the precarious artistic projects themselves and thus the general reformation of labor in postfordist relations of production.

The project resulted in a book, which is accessible as both a visual and text-based tool set under http://countryeuropa.net. It is an assemblage of various contemporary security logics and border regimes and the precarization of labor and life arising from them. Iglesia and Expósito write their own experiences of crossing borders into this assemblage, so that a complex structural (in-)security ensemble becomes evident, which perpetually refigures itself through movements, movements of people, in which the ensemble manifests itself in a subjectifying manner and is challenged at the same time.

This assemblage of artistic knowledge makes it clear that there is no untouched position outside the current interweaving of security and precarization, no position with which a distanced observer perspective could be assumed in a research project or an exhibition. The first drive to the penitentiary in Murcia approaches a border regime in a segregated high security location that does not reveal the surveillance cameras at that moment, but already conveys to the visitors an impression of being panoptically seen. Documents are to be submitted ahead of time, the equipment for the photo workshop is meticulously examined, several controls take place before it is possible to drive on and then walk on. In fact, a penitentiary, one could say. Nothing out of the ordinary in this place. Before they were even able to enter into this high security area at all, however, first it was necessary to enter Spain. To re-enter Spain, because due to their different citizenships, Expósito and Iglesia's collaboration already implies travel movements between Europe and Latin America, between Spain and Argentina, movements that also probe the possibilities of migration and are subject to a postcolonial logic for those with no European passport.

The globally operating art field is based on the potential unboundedness of creativity, knowledge and individuals as well. However, the limitations and controls, to which primarily all the artists who do not come from the "global north" are exposed with their bodies as subjects, are rarely brought up in international art discourses and are hardly reflected in artistic works themselves. The existential precarization, the fear and the experience of violence that the Spanish border regime evokes, in this specific case, are generally part of transnational migration movements, precarious residences and working conditions.

Even after repeated private and work-related stays, the artist entering the country with an Argentinian passport still needs

written permission from the Spanish police, for which the following documents, among other things, had to be presented[5]: excerpt from the census record of her city of origin; a notarized copy of a valid passport; a written statement indicating where and with whom the person plans to stay in Spain; a declaration of obligation from the host assuming responsibility for the appropriate behavior of the person entering the country; a statement of agreement not to take or seek employment; an obligation to cause no harm to the destination country; personal photos reliably documenting that the relationship between the visitor and the host has existed for a longer period of time, etc.

Even if the Latin American citizen manages to collect all the papers and documents in time and submits an application for entry into the European Union – a process that means more than a month of paperwork as well as costs amounting to about 200 Euros – there is no guarantee at all that she will actually be permitted to enter European territory. Ultimately, the Spanish police decide at the moment of crossing the border whether entry will be permitted or not. The controls are contingent and are carried out flexibly.

Contingency decreed that the artist with the Argentinian passport at the Spanish destination airport was waved out of the waiting line for non-EU citizens and subjected to a special control and disciplining. Already assigned to the crowd of those counted in the negation of EU citizenship and thus categorized and classified as a potentially dangerous other, an additional questioning took place in the contingent extra control of a few by several police officers about the reason for the stay and the letter of invitation from the host. These few were not permitted to pick up luggage from the conveyor belt nor to make a phone call to at least get a message to those waiting at the exit of the border area and thus at the entrance to the “host country”. For over two hours it remained

unclear whether entry would be granted. During this time, a self-control took place among those entering the country, so that in the unforeseeable moment of the decision about their potential dangerousness, they would contribute nothing to being judged a danger after all and deported.

It is not only in the moment of crossing the border from Latin America to Spain that a postcolonial logic is inherent to this violence of police selection. The movement of traveling overlaps with the regulation of migration and thus the experience of the contingency of being exposed to this kind of legal and mental precarization. However, this border regime is not repressive by itself, the contingent power of decision of the police not described with sovereignty alone. Indeed, the repressive control is part of a flexible border regime that uses sovereignty-logical tactics, among others, to regulate the circulation on the porous borders that in the form of migration is necessary to the survival of the political community to be secured.

The European border regime is never about complete isolation against migration, but rather a process of step-by-step incorporation, which generally demands the subordination of the needed non-European labor force. The regulation of the permeable border produces hierarchicized inclusion processes, which mean, not least of all, an accordant differentiation of the legal status of the immigrants.[6]

From a demographic perspective, or rather a biopolitical perspective, the permeability of the border becomes at once a question of "survival". Rather than securing an existing collective, the border contributes to the production of a heterogeneous population.[7] The European population is shrinking dramatically, which is why it seems less and less reasonable to protect and secure

purportedly autochthon populations against dangerous others. For economic and socio-political reasons, the individual European nation-states, as well as the EU as a whole, increasingly see themselves as no longer capable of maintaining achieved prosperity at all "on their own". This Europe existentially needs immigration. [8] This was formulated unmistakably in Autumn 2007 by the EU Commission for Justice, Freedom and Security: with a consistently falling birth rate, the EU needs 20 million migrants in the next twenty years.[9]

When this news was announced to the highest level European security officials, Spain had a biopolitical reproduction rate of 1.37 "births per woman of child-bearing age" – by no means a reassuring average, even though the reproduction capacity of the Spanish population is already based on the permeable border: a fifth of the child-bearing women counted were not Spanish, since all the births were counted from women who have been residing "legally" in Spain for at least two years. To further increase this biopolitical rate, in Autumn 2007 the government headed by Zapatero introduced a so-called baby check of 2,500 Euro for every legal birth or adoption in Spanish territory. This bonus could be claimed until the end of 2010, then the baby check was withdrawn again by the same government in the course of a comprehensive austerity package to eliminate state debt.

However, this baby bonus was still in effect when Verónica Iglesia entered Spain for the *Country Europa* project in the penitentiary of Murcia. She was pregnant with a patrilinear potential Spanish citizen. Upon entry, she was categorized as a possibly threatening Other, who is exposed to the contingent police estimation of the degree of her dangerousness. In the logic of the Spanish border and migration regime, as a pregnant woman she became a *pharmakon* for the precarious national bio-security.[10] Her body became a

pharmakological dose to be assessed by the police, one that can either be classified as toxic and dangerous for the national community and deported, or one that is assessed as potentially healing and medicinal, which is taken in (and over) to secure Spanish and ultimately also European survival. This biopolitically immunizing border dynamic is variable and depends on the dose of the domesticable other as well as on the respectively necessary mixed dose of the endangerment and security of a population, in order to keep each individual governable and ultimately to prevent revolt.



One of the central photos of *Country Europa* shows Iglesia's pregnant belly, on which "peligro", "danger", can be read in black letters.[11] A few weeks after the photo was put on the Internet, photographic adaptations of it started showing up in late 2010 – in both a Spanish and an Argentinian journal to illustrate articles

relating to the end of the Spanish baby bonus. On one extremely pregnant belly that these adaptations show, handwritten black letters can be seen announcing: “Goal: give birth before 31 D(ecember)”[12]. Does this have to do with the mediatized ambivalence of the biopolitical *pharmakon*? Or with stealing ideas and plagiarism? The adaptations can be understood in any case as an example of ideas that circulate around the world and can be (re-)appropriated, in contrast to the limited freedom of movement of individuals classified as dangerous; they can be read as an example of the ambivalence between freely circulating creativity and the restrictively regulated circulation of persons.

Cultural racisms are inscribed in the governing of the permeable borders of Europe, which manifest themselves within the territory of communities as a lasting, latent criminalization and as an obvious subordination of migrants. In the EU, these patterns of order increasingly correspond to neoliberal governing through social inequality and an insecurity becoming normalized. It appears that an above-average number of people appearing in court are primarily those who find themselves increasingly in extremely precarious living and working conditions, and who evince non-conformist counter-reactions to the current economic order of obedience and segregation in different ways.[13] The rising number of criminal offenses and court sentences, not only in the USA, but also in some places in Europe, can be read as symptoms of the preventive police battle against revolt to establish “internal security”, which also needs politically induced precarity for its own legitimization.

In their assemblage of *Country Europa*, Iglesia and Expósito form a visual concatenation of outside views of the penitentiary building in Murcia with pictures of Argentinian gated communities, popularly known as “countries”. These kinds of high security residential areas

symbolize, not only in neoliberal Argentina of the 1990s, a further component of the increasingly global security logic that permeates the social, a logic based on the segregation of space and the hierarchization of circulating persons and, at the same time, on far-reaching precarization. In these often highly indebted arrangements of private property and the privileged lifestyles of the middle and upper class, the borders must remain permeable to establish security and guarantee reproduction. In a pharmakological biopolitical logic, the residents seek specifically to protect themselves potentially from the very people they hire as security personnel, who take care of their households, look after their children, and pass the borders and cross through the terrain for other services. The privileged are potentially afraid of the subordinated, often precarious laborers who first keep the private neighborhood running at all.[14]

Within the framework of this assemblage of security dynamics and precarious working and living conditions, conducting a collaborative photo workshop with inmates in the penitentiary of Murcia only under the condition that the participants — not by chance, mostly migrants of Latinamerican and Eastern European origin — should be paid for their work was a provocative intervention in several respects. Not only because no monetary transactions are permitted in prison. The fee had to be transferred to a kind of "account" for each of the participating inmates. The fee also covered the – contractually regulated – use of image rights, an agreement that is by no means conventional in these kinds of collaborative art projects. Of course the small three-digit sum remained symbolic, especially since the fees had to be paid from the limited budget for *Country Europa*, which also covered the artists' fees.

Country Europa contextualizes and problematizes current practices in the biennialization of the global art system and thus also the opening of art institutions into the social field. Here the permeability of the borders also serves the dosed incorporation of excitingly dangerous and "authentic" social protagonists remote from the field of art to increase economic and symbolic capital. In this incorporation specific to the art field, the social field is the *pharmakon*, a revitalizing medicine within the (in-)security logics of biopolitical immunization going far beyond the art field.

[1] Cf. Sabine Hess/Bernd Kasparek (Ed.): *Grenzregime. Diskurse, Praxen, Institutionen in Europa*, Berlin/Hamburg 2010.

[2] Cf. Isabell Lorey: "Gouvernementale Prekarisierung", in: Isabell Lorey/Roberto Nigro/Gerald Raunig (Ed.): *Inventionen I: Gemeinsam. Prekär. Potentia. Kon-/Disjunktion. Ereignis. Transversalität. Queere Assemblagen*, Zürich 2011, p. 72-86, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0811/lorey/en.

[3] Cf. Sabine Hess/Vassilis Tsianos: "Ethnographische Grenzregimeanalysen. Eine Methodologie der Autonomie der Migration", in: *Grenzregime*, op.cit., p. 243-264.

[4] http://countryeuropa.net/ *Country Europa* is part of the project *creating worlds* and was developed in a collaborative practice which – according to the artists' project-website - involved the Chamber of Public Secrets (CPS), the group of inmates-participants, the non-governmental organization Paréntesis, Manifesta 8 team, and the designer Sergio Braguinsky. *Country Europa* will have an update in the framework of the exhitibion *Second World*, curated

by What, How, and for Whom (WHW) in Graz, Steyrischer Herbst 2011.

[5] Marcelo Expósito/Verónica Iglesia (Ed.): *Country Europa*, 2010, http://marceloexposito.net/pdf/countryeuropa1_introduccion.pdf, p. 11.

[6] Cf. Paolo Cuttitta: "Das europäische Grenzregime: Dynamiken und Wechselwirkungen", in: Sabine Hess/Bernd Kasparek (Ed.): *Grenzregime. Diskurse, Praxen, Institutionen in Europa*, Berlin/Hamburg 2010, p. 23-42, here p. 28-30.

[7] Cf. also William Walters: "Mapping Schengenland: Denaturalizing the Border ",in: *Society and Space*, No. 5 (2002), p. 561-580.

[8] Nevertheless, illegalization and the associated lack of rights are increasingly regarded in the European migration regime as an inevitable stage along the long way to a possible legalization and "integration" (cf. Cuttitta, "Das europäische Grenzregime", in: *Grenzregime*, p. 29).

[9] Cf. Commission of the European Communities: *Towards a Common Integration Policy*. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM (2007) 780 final, from 5.12.2007, Brussels, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0780:FIN:EN:PDF (accessed: 17.5.2011)

[10] The *pharmakon* stands for *biopolitical immunization*, which is constituted through the segregation of the dangerous Other into an integrable and a non-integrable part and is based on the permeability of a border regime. On the development of this

immunization dynamic securing domination, see Isabell Lorey: *Figuren des Immunen. Elemente einer politischen Theorie*, Zürich 2011, p. 260-281.

[11] http://brianholmes.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/exposito2.png and Expósito/Iglesia: *Country Europa*, http://marceloexposito.net/pdf/countryeuropa1_introduccion.pdf, p. 16/17.

[12] "Objetivo: parir antes del 31-D", see the Spanish journal El Mundo http://www.elmundo.es/elmundosalud/2010/12/29/mujer/1293616040.html?a=5029e8a0339b5ccc3fb00e3db135cd21&t=1293620957&numero= and the Argentinian journal Clarín http://www.clarin.com/mundo/Carrera-Espana-dar-luz-termine_0_399560096.html

[13] For the USA see Loïc Wacquant: *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity,* Chesham 2009, for Paris in a differentiated analysis, Judith Revel: "Vom Leben in prekären Milieus (oder: Wie mit dem nackten Leben abschließen?)", German translation by Birgit Mennel, in: *Grundrisse. Zeitschrift für linke Theorie und Debatte*, No. 32 (2009), p. 36-45.

[14] Cf. Expósito/Iglesia: *Country Europa*, http://marceloexposito.net/pdf/countryeuropa3_countries.pdf, p. 32-39.