

Gender, Narratives and Perspectives: Notes toward an Anthropological Understanding of Government on the Border between Brazil, Peru and Colombia

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Abstract

Based on ethnographic research developed in the city of Tabatinga, on the tri-border between Brazil, Peru and Colombia, this article seeks to set forth the theoretical and methodological elements for an anthropological understanding of government on the border, which takes into consideration gender relationships and regulations. Understanding that relationships between gender and the border/frontier cannot be seen in a static, causal way, or only through macro analyses, we argue that frontier and borderland production processes are chiefly defined by normative gender regimes, which effectively actualise certain gender logics on border territories. At the same time, these intersect with logics of ethnic, national, regional background and socioeconomic position. This article is the result of over five years of ethnographic, educational and anthropological research, and of participation in the public and political arena of gender and sexualities in the city and the borderland region.

Introduction

Based on ethnographic research developed in the city of Tabatinga, which is located on the tri-border between Brazil, Peru and Colombia, this article seeks to set forth some theoretical and methodological elements of an anthropological understanding of government on the border, taking into consideration gender relationships and normativities. Understanding that the relationships between gender and the border/frontier cannot be seen in a static, causal way, or through macro analyses only, we argue that frontier and borderland production processes are chiefly defined by normative gender regimes, where the effect is to simultaneously actualise certain gender logics intersecting with those of ethnic, national, regional background and socioeconomic position. In this sense, one of the fundamental aspects of our proposal is to devise theoretical and methodological approaches, which take into consideration the construction of narratives in and about the frontier (the border as narrative), affections, the ordinary and the materiality of performative gender and power relations.¹

Therefore, the relational and processual focus of the present proposal implies an attentive exercise in the empirical approach to spaces, people, and relationships on the border. Beyond the

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¹ For gender we are following the proposals of Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004); *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

theorisations about borders and the persistence of distanced analyses,² our proposal is based on multi-positioned ethnographic field experience. Between 2011 and 2015, we lived, taught and researched in the transborder region paying attention to several spaces, to different intrigues and relationships, and focused on gender relationships. We analysed the academic field, the sex markets, Peruvian migration, everyday transborder relationships, inter-ethnic relationships, and public policies associated with gender, sexuality, engendering, public security, and the border itself. As a result of this experience, we have been able to attest to recent changes in both policies and social life, as well as the effect of these policies on transborder life. But most importantly, we have witnessed and participated in the different ways in which the state and the border are embodied, and become entangled and appropriated by local networks of friendship, economy, sex, and family. In the present article, we seek to represent and analyse this knowledge about the border, focusing particularly on the relationships between state and gender.

We begin with a narrative of the territory of Tabatinga, focusing on the Amazonian region's colonial history and the period before 1980, using the idea of borderland as a concept-myth³ as reference, as well as Brown's and Das' ideas of the state as a masculine agency.⁴ This narrative—under the socio-historical genre of description—operates as a contrasting image for further historical transformations and to signal those displacements in points of view and narrative focus where gender and women begin to change political and analytical places. In this sense, we approach borderland and governmentality transformations since 1980 in terms of gender. Specifically, we pay attention to women's participation in this process and to the social life of public policies, which mobilise women as a political category.

However, beneath the mythical grand narratives of colonisation and oppression, beyond the vertical narrative of oppositional positions between local-indigenous-women versus the state-white-men and beyond the entire historical construction of frontier/border, where are the specific and embodied women? Where is gender as a carnality of ordinary relations, as a set of performative acts? Trying to approach these perspectives, we twist the narrative point of view. To provide an example of what we are doing,⁵ we present a fragment of everyday intimate relationships where gender, borders and state are mutually intensified in an intersecting and embodied way. This twist highlights a micro-social and micro-political dimension of the border, and demands ways of writing and reading which favour an understanding of the characters, the relationships, and the affections at stake. Such a narrative implies a different approach to the articulations of gender and borderlands, where gender

² Kathleen Staudt, *Border Politics in a Global Era: Comparative Perspectives* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

³ Mito-concepto, in Spanish, from Margarita Serje, *El revés de la nación: territorios salvajes, fronteras y tierras de nadie* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2005).

⁴ Wendy Brown, "Finding the Men in the State," in *The Anthropology of the State – A Reader*, eds. Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 187–210; Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

⁵ Flavia is writing her PhD dissertation in social anthropology about gender, Brazilian public policies and the borderland, and José Miguel is writing his book about transborder sex markets in this border region. Both authors have been conducting research and teaching at local universities in this region since 2011.

not only informs us about the effects of public policy on women, but about systems of relationships and normative regimes actualised in a performative way. Where borderland/frontiers not only informs about organised projects of masculine expansion and the expression of sovereignty, but about relational fields of differentiation and conjunction.

Borderland Government in Tabatinga: Nuances and Transformations

The city of Tabatinga is situated west of the state of Amazonas (Brazil), on the left bank of the Amazon River. It has an estimated population of 61,028 inhabitants.⁶ It originated from a settlement formed on the outskirts of the military fort of São Francisco Xavier de Tabatinga, a fortress erected in the second half of the 18th century as a military outpost to demarcate the boundary between the territories of Portugal and Spain, and settle territorial disputes between those two nations (see Rezende,⁷ Zárate,⁸ and Sampaio⁹). Between the end of the 19th century and the 1940s, transnational exploitation of rubber caused waves of rubber soldiers (mainly men) to settle in the region, coming from several Brazilian regions (predominantly the Northeast), Peru and Colombia. That economy, as Pineda explains,¹⁰ changed the Amazonian landscape and social life in the Amazonian region forever, signalling these countries' internal and external bordering processes. The city and the region thus have a long history of conquest and colonisation, with military and religious institutions playing a prominent role in controlling, converting, and decimating native indigenous populations (see Taussig,¹¹ Rezende,¹² Zárate,¹³ Sampaio¹⁴ and Pineda¹⁵). Additionally, the region's history is dictated by the economies of extraction of its natural resources, by informal river trade, and the logic of debt, which have left their mark to this very day.

Despite demographic growth and the emergence of several settlements, communities and cities, the 18th military garrison turned military village (*vila militar*)¹⁶ retained its largely defensive

⁶ *Estimativas da população residente no Brasil e Unidades da Federação com data de referência em 1º de Julho de 2015* (IBGE – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2015). Accessed January 3, 2018: ftp://ftp.ibge.gov.br/Estimativas_de_Populacao/Estimativas_2015/estimativa_dou_2015_20150915.pdf

⁷ Tadeu Valdir F. de Rezende, *A conquista e a ocupação da Amazônia brasileira no período colonial: a definição das fronteiras* (PhD Dissertation, São Paulo: University of São Paulo, 2006).

⁸ Carlos Botía Zárate, *Silvícolas, sirringueros y agentes estatales: el surgimiento de una sociedad transfronteriza en la amazonia de Brasil, Perú y Colombia – 1880–1932* (Leticia: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2008).

⁹ Patrícia Melo Sampaio, “Amazônia: fronteiras, identidades e história,” *Ciência e Cultura* 61:3 (2009): 26–29.

¹⁰ Roberto Pineda, “El río de la mar dulce. Imaginarios sobre la amazonia: los dilemas entre un paraíso y un infierno verde,” in *Amazonia colombiana: Imaginarios y realidades – gobernanza y sociedad* ed. J. Echeverri (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2011), 77–91.

¹¹ Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

¹² Rezende, *A conquista e a ocupação da Amazônia brasileira no período colonial*.

¹³ Zárate, *Silvícolas, sirringueros y agentes estatales*.

¹⁴ Sampaio, *Amazônia: fronteiras, identidades e história*, 26–29.

¹⁵ Pineda, “El río de la mar dulce,” 77–91.

¹⁶ Many Brazilian garrisons stationed soldiers, officers and some of their relatives at a residential facility and military installation called a military village (*vila militar*).

border duties until the mid-twentieth century. In 1968, during the Brazilian military dictatorship, which lasted until 1986, the territory of border towns and settlements were classified as “areas of interest for National Security.”¹⁷ This effectively suspended individual rights within them, and demanded a greater presence of national defence institutions. With this concern in mind, and under the Amazonian Constitutional Amendment (*Emenda Constitucional do Amazonas*, n. 12/1981), the military village was made an autonomous municipality in January 1983.

In the 1960s, the *vila militar* at Tabatinga was still considered a Special Border Platoon, and like many other border outposts set up in the Amazonian region, it was made up almost exclusively of young single men sent from other Brazilian regions as a result of military drafts. Back then, the Brazilian armed forces fostered, encouraged, and rewarded recruits to move to the Amazonian borders by offering economic incentives. On top of this, military-service time spent on the border was equivalent to twice as much time spent on duty elsewhere in the country, effectively reducing a soldiers’ service time.

Analysing the settlement process at Tabatinga through the family chronicles of contemporary local inhabitants, we noted how kinship and alliance relationships configured an important state strategy for settlement. As a local woman noted: “Everyone here is the son of the military.” At the generation of grandfathers/mothers, families in the region are very often made up of the union of a man from Northeast Brazil (either members of the military or workers in the rubber industry), and indigenous women from different ethnic groups. These martial bonds contributed to the hundreds of riverside family communities that exist to this day. Marques¹⁸ has proven how the military settlement and defence strategy for the Amazonian borderlands was associated with ideas of fixation and miscegenation as well as with sexual reproduction practices institutionally fostered by the Armed Forces for the construction of the *patria* (nation).¹⁹ This description easily becomes widespread in the narratives of former inhabitants of Tabatinga, and in those of the retired soldiers who served at the border.

These accounts outline the constituent forms of government in the city’s recent history, and allow us to see how the crossing of certain arbitrary imaginations of gender, race, Amazonian territory, and border are articulated to construct not just state action, but also settlements, cities, economic fluxes and the principles of social relationships. The pioneering of the border as masculine agency is the result of a gendered imperial imagination about the body, about work, and about the territory itself.²⁰ These relationships, logic and imagination are reinforced by military and religious narratives, and are based in the economics of extraction (rubber, timber, exotic animals and their skins, and the production and trafficking of cocaine). Therefore, Amazonian bordering quests not

¹⁷ The Federal Decree n. 314 of 13/03/1968 instituted the National Security Law, and the Federal Law n. 5.449 of 04/05/1968 mapped the territories affected by the decree’s prescriptions.

¹⁸ Adriana Aparecida Marques, *Amazônia: pensamento e presença militar* (PhD Dissertation, São Paulo: University of São Paulo, 2007).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁰ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather, Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995).

only defended a territory, but also produced and populated it with specific gender organisation. This was reinforced with the intersection of forces, agencies, knowledge, and possibilities.

The pre-1980s image of the city is the contrasting image to this analysis. An image constructed through Brazilian narratives about Amazonian frontiers and international borderlands (see Faulhaber²¹ and Becker, Miranda and Machado²²), and is confronted by such gender analyses' (see Wendy Brown's²³ and Veena Das'²⁴ work on the masculinisation of the state).²⁵ As proposed by Colombian anthropologist Margarita Serje,²⁶ it is the actualisation of the concept-myth of frontier as a space that is both empty and rich, liminal, borderline, fantastic and wanting. It is a product of the systematic policies of aestheticising and eroticising others.

In the midst of a proliferation of analyses of the recurrent polysemy of ideas about the border²⁷ and about the multiplicity of approaches (see the works of Alvarez,²⁸ Hannerz,²⁹ Donnan and Willson,³⁰ Faulhaber,³¹ Garcia,³² Albuquerque,³³ Iossifova,³⁴ Cardin and Colognese,³⁵ Albuquerque

²¹ Priscila Faulhaber, "A fronteira na antropologia social: as diferentes faces de um problema," *BIB* 51 (2001): 105–125.

²² Bertha K. Becker, Mariana Miranda and Lia Osório Machado, *Fronteira amazônica: questões sobre a gestão do território*. (Brasília: National University of Brasília – UNB, 1990).

²³ Wendy Brown, "Finding the Men in the State."

²⁴ Veena Das, *Life and Words*.

²⁵ Through two different pathways, either along the lines of political science, or an anthropology of everyday life and subjectivity, both authors emphasise a reading of the state as a fundamentally masculine agency that has violent effects over women's lives. For our own case, Das' (*Life and Words*) analysis provides particular inspiration, as it is based on an ethnography of the effects of partition between India and Pakistan on the production of female subjectivity and conjugal relationships (and about the ways in which women re-elaborate those effects through the work of time).

²⁶ Serje, *El revés de la nación*.

²⁷ The word frontier has been used throughout this text to refer to conceptual realities, as opposed to border and borderland, which have been used to highlight empirical ones. The authors originally emphasised this difference by using italics to refer to the conceptual aspect of the general Portuguese term *fronteira*.

²⁸ Robert Alvarez, "The Mexican-US Border: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 447–470.

²⁹ Ulf Hannerz, "Fluxos, fronteiras, híbridos: palavras-chave da antropologia transnacional," *Revista Mana* 3:1 (Rio de Janeiro, 1997).

³⁰ Hastings Donnan and Thomas Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (Berg 3PL: Oxford, 1999).

³¹ Faulhaber, "A fronteira na antropologia social," 105–125.

³² Clara Inés Garcia, ed., *Fronteras: territorias y metáforas* (Medellín: Hombre Nuevo Editores, 2003), 15–34.

³³ J. Lindomar Albuquerque, *A dinâmica das fronteiras: os brasiguaios na fronteira entre o Brasil e o Paraguai* (São Paulo: Annablume, 2010); J. Lindomar Albuquerque, "Limites e paradoxos da cidadania no território fronteiriço," *Geopolítica(s): revista de estudos sobre espacio y poder* 3 (2012): 185–205.

³⁴ Deljana Iossifova, "Editorial. Searching for Common Ground: Urban Borderlands in a World of Borders and Boundaries," *Cities* 34 (2013): 1–5.

³⁵ Eric Cardin and Silvio Colognese, orgs. *As Ciências Sociais nas fronteiras. Teorias e metodologias de pesquisa* (Cascavel: JB, 2014).

and Olivar³⁶), Serje attempts a different path through an understanding of frontier as concept-myth.³⁷ In her book *El revés de la nación (The nation's reverse)*, the author focuses on the multidimensional and conceptual historical process of constructing wild territories on the border and periphery of the Colombian nation-state. This process brings her to an understanding of the powerful, self-reinforcing, and mystifying dimension of the concept of frontier, intimately linked to the idea of empty territories and wild populations, and to images of borderland heroes. Along the lines of Michael Taussig,³⁸ the author shows how this system of images about the frontier, disguised as a set of scientific truths, is presently actualised in terms of public policies, media narratives, humanitarian actions, and social research. It attempts to produce information about the fringes of humanity or about frontier resistances. “The concept of the frontier has a reiterative effect. Its rhetoric is particularly efficient at naturalising the assumptions that underpin it.”³⁹ It is anchored to a certain myth, in a reflexive and spectacular way, of the national project, “the Nation.”⁴⁰

Although the *frontera* that Serje prioritises for her conceptualisation is an internal frontier, her analyses can be extended for a mythical-conceptual understanding of international borders, mainly in South America. Such an extension makes sense when we think about the Amazonian region, where different concepts, ideas, and realities have been superimposed since European discovery, conquest, and colonisation on borderlands and frontiers, agriculture and economy, colonial and conservation, ethnic and national. Their mythical construction remains relevant and determinant to this day despite political changes. This logic is conceptualised through Marshall Sahlins’ analysis about the “conjuncture actualisation of mythical structures,” and the recent political transformations of nation-states to incorporate, modify, and reinforce the conceptual-mythical logic.⁴¹ The concept-myth of the frontier is, after all, a structuring of national, political imagination.⁴² Below, we show how that structure in conjuncture is actualised through national and border political changes since the 1980s, bringing about a reorganisation of gender relationships.

³⁶ J. Lindomar Albuquerque and José Miguel Olivar, “Apresentação. Dossiê Fronteiras: territórios, políticas, diferenças e desigualdades,” *Revista Ambivalências* 3:5 (2015): 3–27.

³⁷ Serje, *El revés de la nación*.

³⁸ Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*.

³⁹ Serje, *El revés de la nación*, 35.

⁴⁰ See Serje, *El revés de la nación*, 120–138. This accords with the Brazilian literature on frontier expansion (*frontes de expansão*) such as, for example, José de Souza Martins, *Fronteira: a degradação do Outro nos confins do humano* (São Paulo: Hucitec, 1997); Priscila Faulhaber, “A fronteira na antropologia social,” *BIB* 51(São Paulo, 2001): 105–125; Lylia Galetti, *Sertão, fronteira, Brasil: imagens de Mato Grosso no mapa da civilização* (Cuiabá: Entrelinhas/EdUFMT, 2012). On Brazil’s concern with its international borders and the Amazonian region as a great internal and international border, and the reappearance of such concern over the last 8 to 10 years, see Daniel Hirata, “Segurança pública e fronteiras: apontamentos a partir do Arco Norte,” *Cienc. Cult* 67:2 (São Paulo, 2015) and José Miguel Olivar, “O dia que o tráfico chegou na fronteira. Relatório de Tabatinga,” *Transit, Crime and Borders: Gender, Human Trafficking and Sex Markets in Brazil* (Campinas: Center for Gender Studies /PAGU, Unicamp & CNPq). Serje’s analyses is particularly applicable to the Brazilian case.

⁴¹ Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

⁴² Serje, *El revés de la nación*; Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

From the 1980s, with Brazil's transition to democracy, and the new constitutions in Colombia (1991), Brazil (1988) and Peru (1992), along with the expansion of neoliberal policies, the growth of cocaine trafficking in the region, and of Tabatinga's and other adjacent cities' recent acquisition of municipal status, the tri-border saw an intensive series of territorial, political, and economic transformations. During this time, Tabatinga was built as an urban unit,⁴³ using the Armed Forces' human and material resources. This brought about the unification of several Brazilian territories: the Tabatinga *vila militar*; the *ticuna* indigenous community of Umariáçu,⁴⁴ and small settler communities—including communities inhabited by Peruvians—organised on the river banks or stretching along the international border with Colombia.

The Brazilian geopolitical notions of Borderland Strip, Northern Arc, and the Amazonian mesoregion of the Upper Solimões River are central to an understanding of Tabatinga. The legal definition of a borderland strip was established in 1979⁴⁵ and incorporated into the territorial classification of the Northern Arc of the Program for Promoting Development of the Borderland (PDFF, acronym in Portuguese).⁴⁶ The Northern Arc would possess—among other traits that actualise conceptual-mythical narratives about the Amazonian region—peculiar ethnic and administrative characteristics, constituting an indigenous arc from both a territorial point of view (natural reserve areas, indigenous territories), and territorial identity (ethnic and cultural importance). At the same time, the program was integrated into the National Regional Development Policy (PNDR, acronym in Portuguese),⁴⁷ which incorporated the Tabatinga municipality into the mesoregion of the Upper Solimões River.⁴⁸ This classification results from a mix of regional development theories and unequal

⁴³Jorge Aponte-Mota, *Leticia y Tabatinga: transformación de un espacio urbano en la Amazonia. Tesis de Maestría en Estudios Amazónicos* (Leticia: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2011).

⁴⁴ The *ticuna* indigenous communities Umariáçu I and Umariáçu II are located in the Tukuna Umariáçu Indigenous Territory, demarcated in 1998, and within the Tabatinga municipality. The *Terra Indígena* stretches along 4,854 hectares and has an estimated population of 7,219 inhabitants (National Foundation of Indian-FUNAI, 2011).

⁴⁵ “Brazil's borderland strip with neighbouring countries has been established at 150 km (Law n. 6,634, of 2/05/1979), parallel to the dividing line on the land of the national territory.” Machado et al., “O desenvolvimento da faixa de fronteira: uma proposta conceitual-metodológica,” in *Território sem limites: Estudos sobre fronteiras*, org. Tito Carlos Machado de Oliveira (Campo Grande: UFMS, 2005), 52.

⁴⁶ Fostered by the former Ministry of National Integration, the PDFF established the entire territory of the “borderland strip” of the states of Amapá, Pará, Roraima, Amazonas, and Acre as belonging to the “North Arch.” See *Programa de Promoção do Desenvolvimento da Faixa de Fronteira – PDFF* (Brasília, Ministério da Integração Nacional, 2009), 34. Accessed July 21, 2016: http://www.mi.gov.br/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=e5ba704f-5000-43df-bc8e-01df0055e632&groupId=10157

⁴⁷ *Política Nacional de Desenvolvimento Regional*. Decreto Nº 6.047, de 22 de fevereiro de 2007. (Brasília, Ministério da Integração Nacional, 2007). Accessed July 31, 2016: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2007-2010/2007/decreto/D6047.htm

⁴⁸ According to the Decree 6, 047/2007, which instituted the National Regional Development Policy PNDR, a mesoregion is a “continuous subnational space (...), with a common identity, which comprises areas from one or more States of the Federation, defined for the purpose of identifying potentialities and vulnerabilities, to guide the formulation of socioeconomic, cultural, political and institutional or environmental objectives.” The mesoregion of the Upper-Solimões is located in the far South-East of the State of Amazonas (Brazil) and

regional development,⁴⁹ implying a series of indicators of social vulnerability linked to Brazilian hegemonic geopolitical thought.⁵⁰

In 2008, another state program, Territories of Citizenship⁵¹ (*Territórios da Cidadania*) was added. This is a federal strategy to universalise action to enfranchise regions seen as most vulnerable across the country. This program proposed articulating a series of public policies in territories such as the Upper Solimões River mesoregion and the Northern Arc borderland strip, which, in the case of Tabatinga, are superimposed. Inspired by the idea of vulnerability,⁵² these policies and programs—and the ensuing territorialisation—did not diverge from the system based on extractive exploitation and colonisation, and overtly guided public policy development in the region over the last decade.

Including these Brazilian policies, Tabatinga grew organically with Colombia and Peru. The growth of the city of Leticia in Colombia; the consolidation of Tabatinga as the capital of the Amazonas state; its development as a tourist attraction and a free-trade area; the growth and fragmentation of drug trafficking; and the circulation of people and goods from Peru have all contributed to Tabatinga's transformation over the past few years. Alongside Leticia and the island of Santa Rosa in Peru, the city is part of a transborder urban complex.⁵³

In a thirty-year period, the population of Tabatinga doubled from 27,923⁵⁴ to 52,272.⁵⁵ These are the official population numbers, and do not include possible under-recording or the populations of Leticia and Santa Rosa, or the floating population between the cities. As part of that transborder urban complex, Tabatinga gradually took on the central role in the mesoregion, with access to public services, state infrastructure, and trade.

comprises nine municipalities along the banks of the Solimões River: Amaturá, Atalaia do Norte, Benjamin Constant, Santo Antonio do Iça, São Paulo de Olivença, Tabatinga, Tonantins and Fonte boa e Jutaiá.

⁴⁹ David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2006).

⁵⁰ Márcia Anita Sprandel, "Breve genealogia sobre os estudos de fronteiras & limites no Brasil" in *Nacionalidade e etnicidade em fronteiras*, orgs. Roberto Cardoso De Oliveira and Stephen Baines (Brasília: UnB, 2005).

⁵¹ The Program for Territories of Citizenship was set up in regions with the "lowest Human Development Index – HDI; the greatest concentration of indigenous and *quilombola* communities (*quilombolas* are the descendants of runaway and maroon communities [*quilombos*] dating back to Brazil's colonial period and the practice of slavery). The greatest number of beneficiaries are in the Family Allowance Program; the greatest number of municipalities with low economic dynamism; with greater social organisation and at least one territory per state of the Federation." See: *Programa Territórios da Cidadania* (Brasília, Presidência da República, 2008). Accessed July 31, 2016: <http://www.mda.gov.br/sitemda/sites/sitemda/files/ceazinepdf/3638408.pdf>

⁵² *Programa Territórios da Cidadania*, 2.

⁵³ José Miguel Olivar, "Gender in Borderlands and Transborder Territories in the Brazilian Amazon," Center for Gender Studies, PAGU; Sao Paulo Research Foundation 2013/26826-2 (Campinas: State University of Campinas, 2016).

⁵⁴ *Censo Demográfico Número 4: Amazonas*. (IBGE – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 1991), 35. Accessed January 3, 2018: https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/periodicos/82/cd_1991_n4_caracteristicas_populacao_domicilios_am.pdf

⁵⁵ *Censo Demográfico Número 4: Amazonas*. (IBGE – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2010). Accessed January 3, 2018: <http://cod.ibge.gov.br/2vzs7>

The initial and almost solitary primacy of the military, religious and customs institutions, along with the economic exploration of natural resources, has given way to representatives from all the institutions of the federal, state, and municipal governments in the region. There is also the important presence of civil and religious society (NGOs, religious missions, social movements). From a fundamentally masculine and colonising federal action, we witness a turn towards the diversification and fragmentation of positions of power where local and feminine agents are gaining prominence.

Such policies, programs, and projects were neither developed at the same time nor as a consequence of one another. The confluence of several plans, program, and policies on the part of the Brazilian federal government constitutes a decade-old strategy of public management, materialised into projects of income redistribution, and the creation of ministries for the promotion of the human rights of women, blacks, and the LGBT population. The way in which these have developed reveals an incorporation of discourses about regional development, the protection of human rights, and social and productive social inclusion. But, beyond the rhetoric about Amazonian regional and social development, the public agendas on the tri-border suggest a process of reestablishing the Amazonian region on the periphery and the concept-myth of the frontier.

With respect to gender, this process of state expansion and territorial transformation would suggest important changes in the role played by men and women, and imaginations about gender relationships. First, it becomes evident that over the past 30 or 40 years, there have been significant transformations in the political and economic participation of women in the bordering process. Their role used to be chiefly defined by locally-born, mostly indigenous women participating in reproduction, conjugality, and home care. Women who were seen as newcomers to the region, were married to members of the military, and participated in the education of the local children. Today, women participate much more in the state and the exclusivity of the military and masculine side has waned.

Many women, both newcomers and locals, occupy executive and other positions of power within the state. They also work in areas imagined as feminine and secondary to defence and security policies—positions in social assistance, human rights, health and education, protection of women and children, and communication.⁵⁶ Several public border-related policies are geared towards women and towards guaranteeing their rights, sometimes even towards transforming economic and power relationships. Such is the case in the implementation and strengthening of the public health system on the border,⁵⁷ which supports maternal and child health, the Family Allowance program (*Bolsa*

⁵⁶ Although it is not within the scope of this research to quantify women's presence in the state, their levels of participation are particularly high in the management of municipal centres in social assistance, where they act as social assistants, psychologists, administrative agents and in general services. They also work in public health fields, as nursing technicians and nurses, and in primary and higher education, as teachers of Humanities and teacher training.

⁵⁷ In this respect it is interesting to see Ligia Giovanella et al., "Saúde nas fronteiras: acesso e demandas de estrangeiros e brasileiros não residentes ao SUS nas cidades de fronteira com países do MERCOSUL na perspectiva dos secretários municipais de saúde," *Cad. Saúde Pública* 23:2 (Rio de Janeiro, 2007): S251–S266.

Familia),⁵⁸ and the policies implemented to decrease violence against women, including human trafficking.⁵⁹ All of these policies connect the border with women as a political category.

Within this framework, the emphasis on violence against women and vulnerability are key concepts related to governance and take centre-stage in understanding the new relationships between the border/frontier, the state, and gender. Annual reports produced by the Presidency of the Republic's Special Secretariat of Policies for Women indicated that in most Brazilian municipalities, the policies' resources were used to confront domestic and family violence. In border regions such as Tabatinga, there is a special emphasis on combatting women trafficking, which mobilised very specific discourses about gender, sexuality, mobility and territory. Once again, human rights and social protection policies ended up drifting towards ideas of public security and national defence.

As analysed by Olivar,⁶⁰ since 2013 the emergence of a discourse on human trafficking in Tabatinga has led to the government denouncing those engaged in the trafficking of individuals for sexual exploitation and domestic servitude. The main focus is on immigrants and gender (feminine, indigenous, inter-generational, inter-ethnic). As a result, policies used to confront human trafficking occupied a major role in articulating gender and borders by stimulating actions to control both internal (public security) and external order (national defence).⁶¹ Within this logic, the Amazonian Frontier, as well as the Amazon as an immense border(land), has been narratively produced as a place of particular vulnerability for young and adult women, their sexuality (and those of the men in relationships with them) becoming subtle threats to a national morality which enshrines progress, development, and civilisation.

Still, ethnographic knowledge of the capillary workings of that policy allowed us to ascertain the leading role of women, both local and newcomers, indigenous, non-indigenous, and white. It was mainly a local feminine articulation that used the powerful rhetoric of violence and human trafficking, to demand a greater presence and action from the (masculine) military and police forces, to survey the sexuality and movement of young women.⁶²

⁵⁸ The program *Bolsa Família* (Family Allowance) is a conditional income transfer aimed at families in poverty, similar to other programs developed in most Latin American and Caribbean countries (Silva). These programs are developed as a strategy of empowerment for women, with the direct beneficiary being women who are the head of household. It was implemented in Brazil thirteen years ago and, until 2015, it provided for some 13.8 million Brazilian families, according to official data from the Ministries of Social Development. In the case of Tabatinga, as well as other cities from the Upper Solimões mesoregion, this policy shaped new circuits of monetary circulation, consumer relations and urban dynamics.

⁵⁹ The policies to confront violence against women were linked to the Secretariat of Policies for Women of the Presidency of the Republic of Brazil (SPM/PR). However, since the end of 2015, Brazilian federal management has undergone several transformations and the Secretariat of Policies for Women (SPM) has been fused with the former Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality and the Secretary for Human Rights, and been placed under the Ministry of Justice and Citizenship.

⁶⁰ Olivar, "Gender in Borderlands and Transborder Territories in the Brazilian Amazon."

⁶¹ About this, see Adriana Piscitelli, "Revisiting Notions of Sex Trafficking and Victims," *Vibrant* 9:1 (2012): 275–310.

⁶² Olivar, "Gender in Borderlands and Transborder Territories in the Brazilian Amazon."

In addition to focusing on human trafficking, new policies about women, leading to political discourses and displacements regarding gender, have actualised the border and rendered it more complex. This is seen in the critical social event (not the individual case) of the murder of Lana Micol. In May of 2013, radio presenter Lana Micol, who was the director of the National Radio of the Upper Solimões River (part of the Brazilian Communication Corporation), was shot dead on the street by a stranger. Her death, which her ex-husband is accused of having ordered, had repercussions in the mass media and provoked the dismay of local citizens.

The murder of Micol brought to the public arena divergences and disputes about the border, as well as the emergence of a locally based women's rights and feminist movement—connected to regional, national and transborder networks of gender. The judicial answer to Lana's death was less related to policies to confront violence against women than to the fact that a federal civil servant had been shot dead in a borderland region where gun related deaths are rife. On the other hand, feminist leaders, the Brazilian Communication Corporation, the Federal Secretariat of Policies for Women, and the Federal University of the Amazonas state organised demonstrations, developed public policy projects, promoted preemptive action at schools, and demanded due response to cases of femicide.⁶³ The murder of Micol resulted in the formulation of a project to create the House of the Brazilian Woman in Tabatinga,⁶⁴ paving the way to a new affirmation of national-local distinctions. Micol's murder, along with public mobilisation on discourses about human trafficking and sexual exploitation, effectively mobilised local feminine and feminist movements favouring a greater and more coercive (masculine) police and military presence.⁶⁵

This analytical review of the policies against human trafficking and confronting violence against women on the borderland, and, finally, the case of Lana Micol, shows the transformation in gender relations in this border region. We also ascertained how the constitutive force of rhetoric about violence and security, the need for greater presence of the state and greater mechanisms of governmentality are actualised and modified based on the new concern with gender, which insists on turning local women into either victims or participants in criminal activities, or as the agents of social change.

⁶³ Femicide, the murder of women motivated by gender, was added to the Brazilian Penal Code by the Federal Law n. 13104 on March 9, 2015.

⁶⁴ The project of a federal centre to help women subjected to violence on the border was the team effort of several institutions, including the Observatory on Gender Violence in the Amazon. Unfortunately, the centre was never implemented, despite the signing of an agreement between the Tabatinga municipality, the State Government of the Amazon and the (now suppressed) Secretariat of Policies for Women of the Federal Government.

⁶⁵ About the logic of feminisms of incarceration and their encounters with humanitarian policies around international human trafficking, see Elizabeth Bernstein, "Militarized Humanitarianism Meets Carceral Feminism: The Politics of Sex, Rights, and Freedom in Contemporary Antitrafficking Campaigns," *Signs Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 36:1 (2010): 45–72.

Women, Gender, Everyday Lives

So far, we have reconfigured the narrative about Tabatinga as a colonial-legacy frontier, and as a violent space connected to multiple forms of trafficking. As such, it represents or produces conditions of special vulnerability for women, although women have come to occupy positions of greater power and to act upon these, by demanding greater security and sovereignty. Within this narrative system, a multiplicity of reasons causes gender to become transformed into a normative principle, which produces a number of relationships.

Within this, a great number of different aspects are still unclear. These include, to use Povinelli's terms,⁶⁶ the entire carnal dimension of relations of love, power, and desire, and the everyday and ordinary experiences setting the more concrete reality of the border.⁶⁷ The very ways by which this is configured, the points of view it assumes and reinforces, continue to create a great distance in the narrative matrix of these descriptions, as Staudt has recently pointed out about the broader field of Borderland Studies.⁶⁸ But, as we shall see, such a distance is not just an epistemic flaw or a problem of methodology, but a condition of possibility of the concept-myth. That is, being on the border does not necessarily eliminate the distance (to the extent that it is point of view), but brings distance into the game of what Marshall Sahlins calls the risk implied by the very practice of ethnography.⁶⁹

The way in which we will bring this article to an end will thus be to bring forth what we might call an alternative, fragmented and partial narrative about this border, both in terms of gender and of the ways in which ethnic-racial relations, state relations and relations of national tension (sovereignty) are performatively constructed by specific bodies. If we were to put it in such terms, our narrative would be just an example of possible approaches, or a certain perspective that highlights the multiplicity of possible lives and arrangements making up the material, everyday and affective existence on the border.⁷⁰

In Paul Ricoeur's terms,⁷¹ this narrative is the configuration of data collected (prefigured) not just in a number of interviews, but in the ethnographic living together with these people in the course of a few years. As in any narrative, the process of configuration and reconfiguration is in itself one of analysis. An analysis that does not come in the shape of the objectifying relationship of scientificism, but of many other narratives. In this sense, as Ricoeur suggests,⁷² the process of re-configuration is continued in the exercise of reading.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy and Carnality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁶⁷ Das, *Life and Words*.

⁶⁸ Staudt, *Border Politics in a Global Era*.

⁶⁹ Sahlins, *Islands of History*.

⁷⁰ This short narrative is based on the authors' doctoral and post-doctoral research, and is part of a larger set of work (including research reports and a doctoral thesis), constructed according to the rules and technical and ethical parameters of financing agencies and the Brazilian Association of Anthropology.

⁷¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Tempo e narrativa* (Campinas: Papirus, 1994).

⁷² Ibid.

Thus, before putting forth our narrative, it might be useful to present some theoretical elements sustaining our ethnographic and narrative (re)configuration work, that is, a number of concepts and analytical procedures that inform our reconfiguration.

A recent Brazilian work on transborder territories and relationships is particularly relevant to our interest in reconfiguring the frontier as a problem and as an object of study for an anthropology of gender. The work of José Lindomar Albuquerque stands out as an important reference where the border between Brazil and Paraguay—as a quite peculiar relationship—is materialised in the bodies of “Braziguayan” subjects.⁷³ In this work, the border is presented as a social space being constructed through the diverse agencies of multiple actors, who Lindomar Albuquerque follows up in documentary, biographical and ethnographic ways. Also paying attention to transborder spaces and subjects, Claudia Lopez⁷⁴ analyses Ticuna indigenous peoples’ appropriations and re-elaborations of international borders in the social production of a territory with multiple (ethnic, national, agricultural) borders.⁷⁵ This is a composition of several territories and borders, cutting across fronts of economic expansion, territories of inter-ethnic contact and conflict, international borders and transnational mobility. It gains ethnographic and analytical force in the work of José de Souza Martins,⁷⁶ Galetti⁷⁷ and Nóbrega,⁷⁸ and opens up very different analytical pathways. On the other hand, the studies of Paula Togni⁷⁹ and Gustavo Dias⁸⁰ make the uncommon effort of conceptualising the frontier analytically in the framework of works about transnational mobility between Brazil and Europe. In their studies, the border is more than just a geopolitical line, which is crossed, and we witness how the line of the international limit expands between national territories to specific technologies of control, neighbourhood configurations, and people’s bodies. This research, produced

⁷³ Albuquerque, *A dinâmica das fronteiras*; J. Lindomar Albuquerque, “Procesos de fronterización y sentidos de pertenencia entre Brasil y Paraguay,” in *Líneas, límites y colindancias. Mirada a las fronteras desde América Latina*, coord. Alberto Hernández and Amália Campos-Delgado (Tijuana/Ciudad del México: Colegio de la Frontera Norte/CIESAS, 2015).

⁷⁴ Claudia Lopez, *Ticunas brasileiros, colombianos y peruanos: etnicidad y nacionalidad en la región de fronteras del alto Amazonas/Solimões* (PhD Dissertation, Brasília: University of Brasília, 2000).

⁷⁵ In this vein, Lynn Stephen, *Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in México, California and Oregon* (Duke University Press: Durham, 2007) on indigenous transborder social life between Mexico and the United States is a reference, and, especially in our case, is the historical work by Carlos Zárate, *Silvícolas, siringueros y agentes estatales*, about the confrontation over the Amazonian border between Colombia, Peru and Brazil, as well as Jorge Aponte’s research, *Leticia y Tabatinga* on the relationships between the cities of Leticia (Colombia) and Tabatinga (Brazil) through urban day-to-day relationships and spatialities—both these latter authors are part of the Group of Transborder Studies of the National University of Colombia.

⁷⁶ José de Souza Martins, *Fronteira: a degradação do Outro nos confins do humano* (São Paulo: Hucitec, 1997).

⁷⁷ Lylia Guedes Galetti, *Sertão, fronteira, Brasil: imagens de Mato Grosso no mapa da civilização* (Cuiabá, MT: Entrelinhas/EdUFMT 2012).

⁷⁸ Renata Nóbrega, *“Entra na Roda”: história, cotidiano e mobilidades em Rondônia* (PhD Dissertation, Campinas: State University of Campinas, 2016).

⁷⁹ Paula Togni, *A Europa é o CACÉM. Mobilidades, gênero e sexualidade nos deslocamentos de jovens brasileiros para Portugal* (PhD Dissertation, Lisboa: ICS, ISCTE, 2014).

⁸⁰ Gustavo Dias, “Tactics of Border Crossing Movement: Exploring the Mobility of Brazilians through the Schengen and UK Airspace,” *Revista Ambivalências* 3:5 (2015): 216–247.

through travel and long-term ethnographies, highlights the importance given to social agents in their practices and skills to produce, penetrate, regulate, decompose, and reinstate multiple borders (social, economic, international). Finally, we consider it important to highlight how in the works of Togni⁸¹ and Nóbrega,⁸² there is an explicit and rare concern to understand these borders (relationships, territories and displacements) in terms of gender, affection, sexuality, the production of family and economic circulation.

On the other hand, in their foreword to the Special Issue *Gendered Borderlands*, Segura and Zavella suggest that “a feminist project of borders interrogates the multiple meanings of both limits and borders,” and, in that exercise, they propose four analytical dimensions: structural, discursive, interactional and agentic.⁸³ These authors follow the *Chicano*/U.S. tradition of border theory, very much inspired by Glória Anzaldúa’s analyses,⁸⁴ which break away from more geopolitical and sociological visions and are constituted in terms of culture (something which is neither economic nor political, nor social), identity, resistance and hybridisation, “transgressive” sexualities and semiotics, with strong disciplinary links with Cultural Studies and Literary Critique.

Analytical approaches connecting gender and borderland territories in Brazil are scarce and focus mainly on the experiences of women (whether migrant or in binational relationships), leaving aside less rigid and more relational conceptualisations of gender and the frontier/border. Some of them, particularly concerning the Amazonian borderland, are characterised by interpretive matrixes of oppression and violence (capitalist, colonial, hetero-patriarchal, sexual, ethnic), which translate into terms of sexual and gender violence against native women and girls associated with internal bordering processes,⁸⁵ or with characteristics explicitly or implicitly taken as a cultural or historical part of the Amazonian region.⁸⁶ Within that mythical system, frontiers become the appropriate locus to project and recreate national and regional fantasies and terrors of sex and gender.⁸⁷

This construction’s reverse is found in another positive, and, once again mythological dehumanisation of Amazonian women. Represented as the victims of sexualisation on the part of “demonic males”, from “conquering troops”, they are discursively re-elaborated as essential strong strugglers and heroines (the Amazonas warriors). The problem is that, as Serje indicates⁸⁸ (and Kempadoo for the Caribbean case⁸⁹), these readings do not deactivate conceptual-mythical mechanisms and academically reinforce imaginary principles about these territories and their

⁸¹ Togni, *A Europa é o CACÉM*.

⁸² Nóbrega, “Entra na Roda.”

⁸³ Denise Segura and Patricia Zavella, “Introduction: Gendered Borderlands,” *Gender & Society* 22:5. (2008), 537–544.

⁸⁴ Glória Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, [1987] 2012).

⁸⁵ Martins, *Fronteira*.

⁸⁶ Iraídes Torres and Márcia Oliveira, *Tráfico de mulheres na Amazônia* (Florianópolis: Editora Mulheres, 2012).

⁸⁷ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.

⁸⁸ Serje, *El revés de la nación*.

⁸⁹ Kamala Kempadoo, “The War on Human Trafficking in the Caribbean,” *Race and Class* 49: 2 (2007): 79–84.

inhabitants. An entire universe of other principles and gender relationships, which are pervaded by Amazonian history and social organisation and is neither informative about women nor sufficiently explained through domination/violence, is left aside. Many day-to-day social practices and dynamics, and widespread agencies, ambiguous and marked by gender and far-reaching regional logic of sociability (such as mobility, the social construction of generations, relationships with sexuality, economic exchange relations) have similar aims.

Our own proposal shares the spirit of feminist critique, but follows different theoretical and methodological pathways from those put forth by Segura and Zavella⁹⁰ and the Brazilian author above. In anthropological and gender terms, the approach we intend to construct is strongly influenced by what is commonly known as the anthropological epistemic turn of the 1980s and 1990s, mobilised by women and feminist theoretical critics (see Strathern,⁹¹ Butler,⁹² Haraway,⁹³ and Ortner⁹⁴), as well as by other contributions about the entanglements of anthropology, history, gender, and narrative (see Sahlins,⁹⁵ Taussig,⁹⁶ McClintock,⁹⁷ Das⁹⁸), and the Actor-Network Theory.⁹⁹ This repertoire enables an approach which is more attentive to the social fabrication of the world, its differentiation, and its distinctions.¹⁰⁰ It shows multiple materialities and partially connected imaginations rather than a logic of meaning or domination, not distinguishing between the symbolic and the material, the structural and the discursive, literal and metaphoric.¹⁰¹

This approach also informs our empirical and analytical relationship with the nation-state, a central category in analyses of borders. Apart from conceiving the nation-state as a given entity that operates on the border, we choose to follow the path of an anthropology concerned with ethnographic reflection about governmentality and about the state as a porous administrative system, which is highly contingent and polymorphic¹⁰² and intelligible from its margins.¹⁰³ We pay special attention to

⁹⁰ Segura and Zavella, "Introduction: Gendered Borderlands."

⁹¹ Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

⁹² Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

⁹³ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

⁹⁴ Sherry Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal," *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power and Acting Subject* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 42–62.

⁹⁵ Sahlins, *Islands of History*.

⁹⁶ Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*.

⁹⁷ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.

⁹⁸ Das, *Life and Words*.

⁹⁹ Bruno Latour, *Reensamblando lo social: una introducción a la teoría del actor-red* (Buenos Aires: Manantial, 2008).

¹⁰⁰ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Avtar Brah, "Diferença, diversidade, diferenciação," *Cadernos Pagu* 26 (2006): 329–376; Adriana Piscitelli, "Interseccionalidades, categorias de articulação e experiências de migrantes brasileiras," *Sociedade e Cultura* 11:2 (2008): 263–274.

¹⁰¹ Latour, *Reensamblando lo social*.

¹⁰² Brown, *Finding the Men in the State*; Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima, "Sobre gestar e gerir a desigualdade: pontos de investigação e diálogo," in *Gestar e gerir: estudos para uma antropologia da administração pública no Brasil*, org. A.C. de Souza Lima (Rio de Janeiro: Relume-Dumará, 2002), 11–21; Aradhana Sharma and Akhil

the state's productive and spectacular dimension in its relationship with gender and terror/violence,¹⁰⁴ discourses of human rights and humanitarianism,¹⁰⁵ and the regulation of gender, sexuality and sex markets.¹⁰⁶ The idea of capillarity is central to this framing of theoretical resources, and it is understood as the very operational and creative nature of the state, following Foucault's reflections about governmentalities and of power as exercise,¹⁰⁷ as well as Judith Butler's¹⁰⁸ idea of performative acts.¹⁰⁹

It is this perspective of the frontier, the state, gender and relationships that informs the narrative below. As we have mentioned, our perspective does not stem from interviews or surveys, and neither is it representative in the sense of qualitative or quantitative sampling. Such a narrative, of which we present only a fragment, is the result of ethnographic experience with these people for over twelve non-continuous months, and in permanent connection with other people and networks (as is typical in this type of ethnography). It is a narrative of affections, an open process of performative acts, which instead of being analysed discursively or formally, translate an ethnographic experience and the analytical exercise that is to remain latent within it. Such a narrative constitutes a concurring element within the contested narratives, descriptions and truths about these frontiers, which renders its narrative, non-analytic form of significant value. Insofar as other methods and theoretical references are used, a different relationship is established with the people inhabiting these borderlands, and other forms constitute the basis of data configuration, revealing the different nature of the border. Thus, what emerges is the frontier in its multiplicity, and in this sense, the text we produce, the forms, languages, images and contents of this final narrative fragment, translate this very difference and multiplicity (they appear to belong to another text and do not seem to fit in).

Gupta, "Introduction: Rethinking Theories of the State in an Age of Globalization," in *The Anthropology of the State – A Reader*, 1–43.

¹⁰³ Veena Das and Deborah Poole, eds., *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* (Santa Fe, NM: SAR Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁴ Das, *Life and Words*; Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*.

¹⁰⁵ Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁶ Butler, "Gender Regulations," in *Undoing Gender*; Adriana Piscitelli, "Shifting Boundaries: Sex and Money in the North-East of Brazil," *Sexualities* 10 (2007): 489; Adriana Vianna, "Atos, sujeitos e enunciados dissonantes: algumas notas sobre a construção dos direitos sexuais," in *Discursos fora da Ordem: sexualidades, saberes e direitos*, org. Richard Miskolci and Larissa Pelucio (São Paulo: FAPESP/Anablume, 2012).

¹⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008); Thomas Lemke, "Foucault, Governmentality and Critique," Paper for the Rethinking Marxism Conference (University of Amherst (MA), 2000), 21–24.

¹⁰⁸ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, eds. Sue-Ellen Case (New York: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 270–282; Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁹ In her recent *Notes towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Judith Butler displaces the classic concept of performative acts away from the field of gender towards her more recent studies about precariousness, state, and collective action.

In August 2015, when in tears, Socorro told her friend Cauã that the landlord of the restaurant had asked her to leave in two weeks' time. Cauã furiously offered to talk to the landlord, a big local tradesman, because "he owes us a few favours." It wasn't the first time one of Socorro's "babies" had offered to help her, and yet this time, she, understanding the scale of the favours and debts, and the nature of the business, preferred to turn down the offer. She decided to accept what, in her logic was the will of God, and prepared herself to dismantle the project she had been building for ten years in two weeks. We met Socorro in 2011, at the beginning of our fieldwork in Tabatinga, and over the next two months we developed quite a close friendship. From the start, Socorro was aware of and following up the developments of our research processes, and it was through her that we approached Cauã. In 2015, our friendship already being quite solid, we were able to experience and participate on a daily basis in the entire process of the closure of Socorro's life in Tabatinga and her return to the land where she was born.

From 2013, Socorro looked after Cauã in Tabatinga like a son, the axis of their relationship being her restaurant, and therefore, food. Over all those years, Socorro had an employee with whom she built a tense and hierarchic relationship of affection, care, near maternity and work called Flor. Flor worked at the restaurant as a waitress, cook, and, for some time, as a manager. She was young and greatly desired by the regulars at the restaurant. Flor went out with Cauã, and it was in that context that Cauã and Socorro became friendlier.

Socorro is Peruvian, from the sierra region, very far from the border; an independent single non-indigenous woman of about 45 years of age. She arrived in Tabatinga on her own, as a runaway from her own local family and romantic context, and following an unsuccessful attempt to set up business in Manaus (the capital city of the Brazilian State of Amazonas). On her boat trip back from Manaus to Iquitos (Peru) she decided to stay in Tabatinga. She refused to go back to her land just like that, so quickly defeated and with nothing to fall back on. Tabatinga was a strategic place, since it was easy to settle there and make a business, due to the city's intense relationships with Peru. To many in neighbouring Peru and Colombia, Brazil and the border are major references of better or easier access to money, health assistance, sexual freedom (as we were informed several times by Peruvian "*chivas*"—gay men), land, and seemingly better systems of rights protection. By acquiring municipal status and through its urbanising process over the past 30 years, Tabatinga has become a case in point, materialising the possibilities of a Brazil-on-the-border, open to foreigners, which to many Brazilians is unequally and excessively open.

Like many Peruvian men and women in Tabatinga, Socorro went into the food business and after some years managed to set up a very successful restaurant for the small and very delimited local middle class, mainly men and consisting of whites both Brazilian and Colombian, health professionals and university professors, members of the military, federal police officers, and some Colombian and Brazilian traders. Her talent for public relations, and her insistent desire to differentiate herself from the regional Peruvians allowed Socorro to build friendships with many of them, hence, Cauã.

A man in his mid-twenties, white, muscular, from one of the richest states in Brazil, and from an upper middle-class family, Cauã is intense, sincere, violent and sexist—*machista* in the

words of Socorro herself, who also highlighted his intelligence, sagacity, and the fierce character of his prejudices. Cauã worked as a federal agent of public security in Tabatinga. His stay in Tabatinga, part of the Brazilian strategy for military/police control of borders, migrations and illicit transborder markets (particularly drug trafficking), lasted three years. This was a compulsory service in his career, and brought him an additional compensation on top of his salary, which raised his wages to about 10,000 Brazilian Reais (about US\$3,500) a month.¹¹⁰ These federal agents, like the young officers in the armed forces, constitute a sort of foreign elite during the time they spend in Tabatinga. Even from the point of view of their bodily styles, because of the positions they occupy and their salaries, they somehow stand at the peak of the sexual and conjugal desires of local women (and some transgender men). In turn, Cauã, like many of his army colleagues, sexually consumed the border quite intensely, through the relationship between the place, the myth-concept, and the bodies of local women. Still, as is more quietly stated within his institution, many male federal agents are encouraged to have sexual experiences with native women and are constantly reminded to beware of being captured by them into any conjugal or reproductive relationships through spells or trickery.

These relationships with, among others, high-ranking officers facilitated the process of legalisation of Socorro's presence in Brazil (i.e., in Tabatinga) before the commencement of the Mercosul agreement.¹¹¹ They also enabled some friends of hers (a Peruvian couple) to register their child in Brazil. After all, gender, class, a position of newcomers into a "barbaric" region, detachment from original kinship, all revolved around care and food to constitute certain images and relationships: they all trusted her, considered her a good Peruvian, unlike the rest. They were prepared to protect her, confide in her both personally and professionally, listen to her good advice, and be her friends. For her, these relationships meant the safest protection possible (she would say, only after God's), acquaintances she could introduce in her context of origin, guaranteed income and a distinguished clientele. In the case of Cauã, such fine networks granted him first access to his particular border/frontier, Flor.

Flor is young, good fun, poor, and very attractive; she is a Loretana, from the Peruvian jungle region of Loreto, indigenous, from a riverside community, wild and "without any aspirations in life" (in Socorro's own terms). Hyper-seductive, she dismissed all the men who approached her, and turned down various marriage proposals—all of them financially profitable—from white men, both Brazilian and Colombian. Several men from the Brazilian defence and security forces have tried to go out with her, marry her, and take her away with them. Her constant refusal was seen as an affront by her oldest sister, the lover of another Federal public servant. She thinks Flor was wasting precious opportunities to prosper in her life. Another one of her sisters was going out with a Federal police officer, who later took her away to live in his hometown in another Brazilian state. Over the years, the only man Flor had a strong and more long-lasting relationship with was Cauã, who, as she

¹¹⁰ Cauã's salary is about ten times the amount Flor could earn in a month and over twice as much as Socorro's monthly income.

¹¹¹ The Mercosul migration agreement (Ordinance nº 6.975, from October 7, 2009) was created to facilitate migration between the Mercosul countries: Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. In 2009 Peru, Colombia and Bolivia entered this agreement.

used to say, offered her the least material things. According to Socorro, the relationship had a strong and erotically violent element of combat and mutual domestication.

To Cauã, she represented much of everything he despised about that “arse-end of the world” and of everything he would have liked to possess. Flor, the tri-border, Tabatinga, all made up the frontier he penetrated and could not civilise; the border that both he and Socorro had sought for, fantasised about, and hated.

Socorro initially favoured the relationship, as, in her opinion, Cauã represented the possibility that Flor might stop being so indigenous and “wild,” and that she might start a better life. She facilitated encounters, mediated arguments, and advised Flor to polish her manners. But the relationship changed, and Socorro began to look after Cauã more. She even protected him from Flor’s rowing, “savagery” and “witchcraft.” As her friendship and trust in Cauã grew, her relationship with Flor became more distant and their trust diminished. In the past few years of Socorro’s life in Tabatinga, she suspected that Flor and her mother (in a distant indigenous community) were putting some sort of spell or craft on her. Trust was lost between the women. Within this relational network, so strong and intensely affective, sexual and economic, the frontier is produced as a peculiar borderland and a set or system of borders, fragmented and tangled up in the actions of the different agents.

Final Considerations

In this article, we have presented an exercise of opening up a methodological and analytical route into understanding the border and its forms of government from a gender perspective influenced by anthropological theory, gender and feminist studies, and border studies. The exercise is the result of the authors’ involvement in the project “Gender in borderlands and transborder territories in the Brazilian Amazon,” and reflects part of a research and teaching experience of over five years in the Amazonian transborder urban complex consisting of Leticia (Colombia), Tabatinga (Brazil) and Santa Rosa (Peru). The purpose of this exercise has been manifold: (a) to move forth in producing specific knowledge about that border and its forms of government; (b) to argue in favour of approaches from the borderlands; (c) to bring to the discussion the mutually structuring relationship between gender and bordering processes; and (d) to present a specific way of understanding the social, affective and bodily existence of the state on the border.

In the first part of the article, we presented what can be seen as the point of view of the state in narrating the border. A fundamentally detached and wide-range perspective which pays attention to macroscopic phenomena and to vectors of social production based on national centres of power, masculine forces of exploration, and major economic cycles. The narrative of the first part also focuses on a historical perspective that allows us to construct a concept-myth image of the border following Serje’s concept,¹¹² to which we oppose both historical transformations and changes or twists in perspective. That first image is the result of a political and national imagination of gender

¹¹² Serje, *El revés de la nación*.

and no-man's lands which, as can be seen in the works of Martins¹¹³ and Nóbrega,¹¹⁴ charged popular, rural, or black men only (in some cases along with their wives) with the task of spearheading agricultural expansion and national defence. This is the most primal form of the prerogative dimension of the state (and the border, and gender) as masculine agency.¹¹⁵

The historical transformations we have witnessed in Tabatinga since the 1980s are connected to the expansion of the state's liberal dimension, a financial expansion of capital, and a new version of civilising processes and the expansion of the internal border: humanitarianism, social assistance, human rights, liberal commerce, and non-governmental organisations. From the original military garrison and its relationships of colonial domination and national defence, also through the populating and the biological and cultural production of non-indigenous people (miscegenation), we have gone, over the past few years, to an intense and complex city. This shows the need for a diachronic and processual perspective that pays attention to multiplicity and transformation in understanding a border like Tabatinga, its forms of government and the ways in which it comes about.

In this scenario, gender relationships are produced in other terms, and women gain spaces of power and leading roles in several realms of governmentality and commerce. However, this does not necessarily imply either a change in the political perspective on frontiers and borderlands, or a change in analytical perspective. In this logic, woman as the subject of action or discursive crystallisation gains a central place in the mythical tension between civilisation and barbarism. In this narrative, women appear increasingly in charge of the humanitarian dimension of government (care, structurally linked to the rule of law), as active agents demanding more masculine protection and defence (when it comes to confronting gender violence), and, discursively, when young and indigenous, as vulnerable victims requiring greater tutelage and more empowerment. Within this configuration, the national liberal and developmentalist need for integration overlaps with the need for defence from foreign threats to protect women's bodies.

In the second part of this text, we presented a different narrative for a different borderland. Not in terms of resistances or even as a narrative that can substitute the previous ones, but as a different level in the connections of agents, actors, discourses and the pieces involved. Alerted by gender/feminist anthropological literature, we have taken a critical stance towards (hegemonic) conceptual-mythical narratives about gender and borders. In a way, the critique consists of suspending that detached and wide-range viewpoint found in a state perspective, and ethnographically exploring what happens in the intimate, private and everyday life on the border, for from the economy, relational universes, and architectures of power and government. It is from that level of connection that we access and narratively reconfigure relationships such as those where Socorro, Cauã, and Flor elaborate social positions and positions of power (where gender, national and regional, ethnic-racial and other elements intersect) with the effect of producing and embodying the border and frontier. That is, the frontier at Tabatinga acquires in this narrative an important social, empirical and agentic density, which is connected in a diachronic gaze with the images and narratives

¹¹³ Martins, *Fronteira*.

¹¹⁴ Nóbrega, "Entra na Roda."

¹¹⁵ Brown, "Finding the Men in the State."

presented above. That connection is not necessarily a causal one in either sense of the word¹¹⁶ but mutually productive, absolutely complementary, and critical, in the unfinished task of setting up, explaining and understanding that place, those relationships and frontiers.

It could be said that this last narrative exercise is just a fragment of work that has been carried out in the framework of the aforementioned project. While some of our work develops our proposal by focusing on specific aspects of transborder life (see, for example, Olivar,¹¹⁷ and Olivar, Melo da Cunha and Rosa¹¹⁸), in this paper we have focused on exposing a theoretical contrast and, thus, a contrast between different border approaches.

Our work has allowed us to prove how a change in perspective can be potentially favoured by a change in the text's form. We can see a narrative that focuses on details about the intimate lives of agents, small differences and distinctions, to the work of time¹¹⁹ and to the linguistic forms obtained in the course of fieldwork. That attention has meant adopting a writing style that could be described as more literary, not in the sense of poetic forms, but of narrative attention. Therefore, as Ricoeur reminds us,¹²⁰ it requires a certain type of complicity on the part of readers to complete the process of reconfiguration of memory, narratives, and relationships.

Gender, in an intersectional reading focusing on relational and affective agencies¹²¹—sexual, familiar, economic—opens up an entirely new dimension of the social and political life of/on the borders. This becomes clear when we look at the ways in which transborder women (such as Socorro and Flor) deal with and appropriate the public state bordering policies of the best-positioned country. In this search for quality of life or social mobility, which can neither be called hybridity nor resistance,¹²² the state is transformed into consumable bodies, potential alliances, personal and moral networks of protection, affective threats, cash-flows to be accessed through an economy of services and care, through sexual or reproductive involvements among others. In this sense, the border, its policies and forms of government, acquires the materiality of bodies and adopts the shapes and limits of personal relationships where nationality becomes just one of the intersecting axes, and where laws or public policies are just one out of many conditions of possibility.

Finally, this border and its historical regimes of configuration and power, acquires the shape of centrality. Absorbing and re-elaborating notions of limits or margin, this border can now be seen as

¹¹⁶ Latour, *Reensamblando lo social*.

¹¹⁷ José Miguel Olívar, "O dia que o tráfico chegou na fronteira. Relatório de Tabatinga," in *Final Research Report: Transit, Crime and Borders: Gender, Human Trafficking and Sex Markets in Brazil*, ed. Adriana Piscitelli (Campinas: Center for Gender Studies /PAGU, Unicamp & CNP, 2015); Olívar, "Gender in Borderlands and Transborder Territories in the Brazilian Amazon," José Miguel Olívar, Forthcoming. "Exploring Traffic and Exploitation on the Brazilian International Border in the Amazon," *Social and Economic Studies*.

¹¹⁸ José Miguel Olivar, Flávia Melo Cunha and Patrícia Carvalho Rosa, "Presenças e mobilidades transfronteiriças entre Brasil, Peru e Colômbia: o caso da 'migração' peruana na Amazônia brasileira," *Revista Tomo 26* (2015).

¹¹⁹ Das, *Life and Words*.

¹²⁰ Ricoeur, *Tempo e narrativa*.

¹²¹ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Brah, "Diferença, diversidade, diferenciação" and Piscitelli, "Interseccionalidades, categorias de articulação e experiências de migrantes brasileiras."

¹²² Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal."

a centre, an intense and multiplied lived space. The idea of the transborder thus acquires a new form. Through relationships, such as those seen between Flor, Socorro and Cauã, the transborder condition multiplies and loses the univocality of the migratory experience and the restrictions of mobility. Being in and inhabiting that frontier means multiplying it, and the transborder condition becomes the everyday, performative, active and unequal composition of territory through one's own body and through economic, affective and sexual circulation.