

Call for Papers

*Constellation of truths: Towards a conceptualization of borders, (un)civil society, and  
contentious politics*

Borders are one site of today's epistemic struggles, as manifested by their omnipresence in electoral campaigns and the everyday dismissal of the voices of people on the move and their allies. This recognition invites us to acknowledge and engage with the different perspectives and experiences involved in the production of knowledge and truths alongside – in the contestation and/or under the influence of - borders. Understanding these processes implies being able to question borders in their materiality and ontology, reminding ourselves of Said's insight that a struggle over geography "*is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings*" (1994, p. 7).

Thus, we seek to move beyond the analysis of state-centric and hegemonic discourses related to borders, examining instead the often-ignored construction of social reality from below, in the borderlands or throughout the borderscapes. This implies refusing the hegemonic liberal understanding of borders, which obscures the colonial and racial logics that sustain their development and their role in (re)producing racial, gender and class struggles (Isakjee et al. 2020; Lindberg 2024; Cappiali and Pacciardi 2024).

We propose an approach that offers a view into the plurality of truths and narratives involved in the epistemic struggles of the borderland – truths and narratives that play a crucial part in the (re)production and contestation of borders, bordered subjects, and border identities. To this end, we offer a conceptualization of a 'constellation of truths.' This framework authorizes itself to think about truth-making as a political struggle and the experiences, conflicts, and competition as many attempts to construct alternative practices and political imaginaries. We argue that as (un)civil society actors in the borderlands are invested in intervening, attempting to construct alternative political imaginaries or producing knowledge in the borderlands, their struggles are generative of a constellation of truths. Within this constellation, diverse voices, narratives, and truth claims all interact with differing degrees of power to construct and broaden the realm of political imaginaries.

We offer constellation of truths as an alternative to the concept of post-truth as a means of understanding our current political moment. This conceptualization requires a degree of agility and nuance. We are, on the one hand, accepting that we have entered an unprecedented political moment where contested truths have come to play a central role in shaping public opinion and political discourse. We also concede that it is certainly true that utter 'bullshit' (Ball, 2017; Freeman, 2018; Stewart, 2017) is now a mainstay in much mainstream political discourse. On the other hand, we are also arguing that hegemonic discourse (of which political discourse is central) has always been incomplete, contested, and problematic and that a multiplicity of narratives have always existed in spaces outside of hegemonic power, suggesting that the multiplicity of truths we are seeing today, is not in fact anything new.

Feminist scholars and post-colonial thinkers (Said, 1993; Spivak, 2003) have, for decades, drawn attention to the pervasive silencing of counter-hegemonic narratives (and knowledge)—what we could also call 'truths.' In drawing insights from this rich literature which highlights the ever-

present submerged, silenced, or unacknowledged counter-hegemonic narratives, the assertion that there is anything ‘post’ about our current era finds itself on shaky ground. For there to be an era of ‘post’, there needs to be a prior era; “a time when politics supposedly had little to do with emotions or personal opinions” (Hannon, 2023, p. 48), a time when truth was singular, objective, representative, when it elicited trust from ‘the people’. This, we contend, never existed. Instead, we argue that rather than a post-truth era, knowledge is produced within a constellation of truths formed in part by the multiplicity of voices within, and between, (un)civil society actors.

We are inspired by Said’s concept of contrapuntal reading therefore, as a means of tying our interest in drawing on multiple voices, narratives, and truth-claims towards a deeper understanding of the discursive construction of borderscapes from below, with our interest in hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discursive practices of (un)civil society actors. Our engagement with (un)civil society brings into focus actors from across the political and ideological spectrum. In doing so, we move towards a broader vision of who and where politics and political discourse takes place; towards a recognition of the multiplicity of truths/narratives and the everyday importance of power dynamics. We do this however, while remaining cognizant and not denying the nefarious manipulation of truth by some actors. This approach offers a way to view politics beyond hegemonic discourse, to draw into our frame the plurality of truths and narratives ‘from below’ which play an equally crucial part in the discursive shaping of political subjects. Doing so, we believe, will help us to paint a more holistic picture of the ways that truths are being produced contrapuntally, through the relations and contestations of (un)civil society.

In introducing this new concept, we are hosting a workshop at the University of Victoria from Monday, April 7<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025, bringing together academics, activists, civil society actors, students, and practitioners. We are interested in discussions that bridge the academic and civil society spheres, allowing for critical discussions in border and migration studies. We are looking to foster discussions of the bottom-up discursive construction of borders, the role of contentious and populist politics in constructing border ‘crises,’ and the work and experiences of (un)civil society actors in borderscapes.

We are particularly interested in paper submissions dealing with the following questions or topics:

- Producing research on the borderscape in times of political ‘crisis.’
- Research strategies and limits for visibilizing the borderscape.
- Populism, contentious politics, and borders.
- (Un)civil society and the discursive construction of borders from below.
- Everyday politics, contention, and borders.
- The everyday discursive shaping of identity in border regions from an intersectional perspective.
- Contestations of settlers’ borders in Indigenous internationalisms.