

Clandestinity, Abortion, and Women as “Bare Life”

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In this project, I explore a diverse set of body politics in Argentina in order to investigate how zones of clandestinity work to enclose and construct women’s bodies in ways that are vital to the sovereign state, in moments of dictatorship as well as democracy. Drawing on three different research projects to juxtapose seemingly unconnected situations of detention and disappearance, forced abortions, and criminalized abortions, I use the work of Giorgio Agamben and Penelope Deutscher to explore ways in which women are constructed as “bare life” through the institutionalization of clandestine abortions. The zone of clandestinity that state sovereignty creates through the criminalization of abortion (or increasing restrictions, depending on the context) raises the following questions: What does the figure of clandestinity—and clandestine abortion in particular—tell us about how sovereignty is upheld in modern democracies? How is state violence implicated in producing hidden (female) bodies exposed to danger and which may be “killed” with impunity? Is the violent control of these invisible/excluded bodies a requirement to keep the illusion of the unified state sovereign body intact? Paying attention to zones of clandestinity that persist in democratic states can help to shed light not only on the precarious forms of citizenship afforded to marginalized members of the body politic, but also the violent but hidden interventions by which the state sovereign maintains its (gendered) power.