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## NATIONAL BORDER RELATIONS

Are the processes commonly described as globalization presenting us with a borderless future? Are borders, the limits of state authority, traditionally the instrument by which states and nations define themselves, changing beyond recognition at the threshold of the twenty-first century? Are borders, in the classical sense of the age of the nationstate, being abolished, as part of the erosion of the nation-state itself? Are they withering, or are they undergoing functional change? Are there regional differences between the developments in Europe (EU), America (NAFTA), Asia, and Africa?

A full answer to such very practical questions would perhaps benefit from a grounding in a “general theory of boundaries” conceived as an integral part of the “general theory of systems” (Strassoldo 1976–77, 1979, 1982). States and nations are just a genus of social (societal) systems, and it can be argued that social systems are just a specific kind of (general) systems. For instance, the study of boundary (or interface, as they are sometimes also called) processes, osmotic processes taking place through cell membranes, is one of the frontiers of biological research. In fact, the boundary became a basic concept in system theories in the 1960s and 1970s (Miller 1977). The boundary has an important place in several other disciplines, beginning perhaps with Gestalt psychology (boundary as the line that activates *Gestalten*) and philosophical anthropology, according to which

the drawing of neat boundary lines—around concepts, in the definition of categories, in the classification of phenomena, in staking out domains and setting rules—is one of the hallmarks of formal, rational discourse (Bateson 1972). That most elusive concept, form, can best be defined as a “marked space” (Brown 1969). We can only conceive objects, that is, chunks of reality that have a form, a line around them: “Epistemology is about where you draw the line” (Wilden 1972).

Restricting our view to sociological system theories, we find the concept of boundary (“boundary maintenance,” “boundary articulation,” etc.) recurring throughout Parsons’s voluminous works. He seems to have borrowed the idea from earlier anthropologists; and it was another anthropologist, Barth, who has given it renewed popularity in more recent times (Barth 1969).

The logical and ontological primacy of boundaries over any other system element has been emphasized by Luhmann, arguably the sociologists who has most systematically grappled with this problem. For him, any system first emerges as a difference—that is, a boundary—between the inside and the outside, the system and the environment. Later, a difference between a center and a periphery emerges within the system (Luhmann 1982).

It must be admitted, however, that run-of-the-mill sociology has not paid much attention to the concept and problem of boundaries, although

every time one meets such dichotomies and expressions as “in-out,” “internal-external,” “backstage-frontstage,” “cross-cutting,” “center and periphery,” “marginality,” “stranger,” “distinction,” “identity,” “closure,” and so on, a boundary is implied. Several hypotheses have been suggested for this widespread blindness of sociologists to such a pervasive reality. One is the necessity, typical of all sciences, to isolate phenomena in order to make them manageable for study; this leads researchers to focus on the “core” of social objects, dismissing their margins as though they just “die out” in a surrounding vacuum. Alternatively, it may well be that it is just the inevitable interconnectedness of social phenomena, the generally overlapping, uncertain, and fuzzy character of empirical social boundaries that has kept sociologists clear of them.

On the other hand, it is always possible to find forerunners and prophets for every sociological concept and theory. So one can be referred to Simmel’s fascinating musings on the “criss-crossing of social circles,” on the “door,” the “bridge,” and the “handle” as different means of overcoming the boundary-line between different domains. In fact, his whole “formal” approach to sociology is built on the notion that social life is a system of “frames”—that is, boundaries—that are an essential part of its dynamics. This notion, of course, has fed many other, later theorists, from Schutz to Goffman. In the case of territorial borders, one can refer to what Sorokin (1928) called the “geographic school” of nineteenth-century sociology (Le Play, Des Moulins) and to Durkheim’s claim that “frontiers” are a central feature of “social morphology.” The fullest early sociological treatise on borders is by a follower of Durkheim, the Belgian sociologist and social reformer De Greef, who developed a complex and suggestive theory of an evolutionary interaction between national, political, and territorial (“horizontal”) borders on one side, and social (“vertical”) boundaries (between groups, classes, organisations etc.) on the other (De Greef, 1908).

Borders—or frontiers, or boundaries—can be studied in a variety of ways: as limits of state sovereignty or as limits of administrative units within states, but also as cultural markers—markers of ethnicity, group or individual identity, and as form. Here, we are predominantly interested in the political borders between nations and states

rather than substate boundaries or cultural and anthropological concepts of boundaries (Cohen 1986). Borders, thus, are products of human attempts at organizing territories. They may change location as well as function. “Frontiers are inseparable from the entities which they enclose” (M. Anderson 1996, p. 178); they are “a geographical instrument . . . for the organization of space” (Guichonnet and Raffestin 1974, p. 9). Political borders are human constructs, not natural givens. “Frontiers between states are institutions and processes.” (M. Anderson 1996, p. 1).

Borders are institutionalized in legal texts and international agreements, and as such are the expression of political will and social organization. They mark the limits of political decision making, the limits of a legal space, the limits within which state identities and rights and duties of citizenship operate. Looking at borders as processes, Malcolm Anderson defines four dimensions (M. Anderson 1996, p. 2): (1) They are instruments of state policy, protecting and promoting interests; (2) the de facto control states exercise over their borders is indicative of the nature of the state; (3) frontiers are markers of identities of “imagined communities” (B. Anderson 1983); and (4) the “frontier” is a term of discourse, affecting “not only the physical flow of goods and persons, which can be measured; much more important, they affect the culture and consciousness of people, which is much more difficult to assess” (Strassoldo 1998, p. 87).

Historically, the development of the idea of the border has been closely linked to the idea of the development of the state (Breuille 1993). As the idea of the state changed, so did the functions of borders. Ancient empires, like the Greek or the Roman, had clearly defined boundaries within them—to define citizenship rights and duties—but the outer limits were ‘fuzzy’. The claim was that the limits of the empire were the limits of the (civilized) world; the empire could not be bounded. In practice, the Romans developed the idea of the *limes*, a frontier line well within the boundaries within which Roman authority ruled, with a zone of influence beyond, which would act as a buffer against the “barbarians.” Even in the Middle Ages, empires preferred to be separated by spaces—“marches” (lat. *margo*)—rather than by fixed lines. In premodern times, feudal, vertical bonds of fealty were of greater importance than territorial

frontiers, and local borders—city limits, customs and toll collection points—exceeded state borders in their practical impact on everyday life. Only the decline of the feudal and the rise of the absolutist order, and then of the nation-state, necessitated greater reliance on clearly defined and defensible boundaries.

Borders became the defining feature of the emerging territorial states, as fixed in the Westphalian system (1648), following the Thirty-Years' War, with its "permanent and unalterable" international frontiers. They were neither permanent nor unalterable. The next attempt to achieve and fix a balanced international state system was undertaken in the Treaty of Utrecht (1713); and then again at the Congress of Vienna (1815) after the Napoleonic Wars.

Social contract theories highlighted the right to exit a territory (if an individual or a group found that the territorial government had broken the contract)—a stipulation closely linked with the discovery of "uninhabited" lands, particularly in the New World. Right of entry, on the other hand, rested solely with the sovereign (with the emerging exception of diplomatic immunity).

Of particular importance was the concept of borders for the emerging European nation-states in the wake of the French Revolution: Homogenization within (i.e., erosion of cultural and linguistic boundaries) and "rational" or "natural" external frontiers exactly delineated frontiers to mark the limits of exclusive authority and sovereignty, guaranteeing and safeguarding the modern state's claim to be the "sole, exclusive fount of all powers and prerogatives of rule" (Poggi 1978, p. 92).

Nation-states established the "classical" functions of frontiers—limits of state jurisdiction, fiscal limits, lines of military protection and defense, customs borders, and sociocultural boundaries. Borders serve to safeguard stability within and protect against external threats. All these functions aim at differentiating between inside and outside, between "us" and "them"; they are means of inclusion and exclusion. In this sense, they are, first and foremost, barriers, enclosing a "security community" (Deutsch et al. 1957). Wilson and Donnan define borders as "political membranes through which people, goods, wealth and information must pass in order to be deemed acceptable by the state. Thus," they argue, "borders are agents

of a state's security and sovereignty, and a physical record of a state's past and present relations with its neighbours." In their view, borders consist of three elements: (1) "the legal borderline which simultaneously separates and joins states;" (2) "the physical structures of the state which exist to demarcate and protect the borderline, composed of people and institutions which often penetrate deeply into the territory of the state;" and (3) "territorial zones of varying width which stretch across and away from borders, within which people negotiate a variety of behaviours and meanings associated with their membership in nations and states." (Wilson and Donnan 1998, p. 9).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, concepts of the border assumed, under the auspices of "geopolitics," a Darwinian—biological or organic—interpretation. Friedrich Ratzel (1897) argued that states were living organisms, with frontiers as their skins. And as the organism grew (or shrunk), the skin would adapt, or have to be adapted. States, in his view, were striving to secure the necessary "living space" (*Lebensraum*) for their people and the most effective borders to safeguard them. While Lucien Febvre (1922) rejected such ideas of a "natural" border, seeing it closely linked to the militarization of the modern state, Ratzel's disciple Karl Haushofer paved the way for the Nazi interpretation of the state ruthlessly pursuing the frontiers deemed necessary for expansionist policies based on racial superiority (Haushofer 1986; Murphy 1997).

In the United States, Frederick Jackson Turner, from the perspective of the settlement of the North American continent, saw the "frontier" as a moving section where wilderness and civilization meet, having profound implications for an American "frontier mentality" (Turner 1894). This dynamic concept of frontier as a moving space led to purchase of territory (Louisiana, 1803, from France; Florida, 1819, from Spain) and territorial conquest through war (New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, California, part of Colorado, 1848, from Mexico), creating the Rio Grande border. The northwestern frontier with Canada was settled, after decades of controversy with Britain, in 1846, following the 49th parallel.

Frontiers in South America have been products of European colonialism. Yet, in contrast to

Africa, they developed over a longer period of time. South American independence, on the other hand, preceded African decolonization by about 150 years. According to the principle of *uti possidetis*, the administrative boundaries of the Spanish colonial government were generally accepted, but disputes about the exact location of frontiers have led to military conflicts up to the present day (Peru and Ecuador signed a peace treaty in 1998).

African boundaries were mostly drawn by the colonizing European powers in the late nineteenth century (Berlin Conference 1884–1885) in the “scramble for Africa,” largely ignoring ethnic, tribal, and linguistic structures on the continent (Asiwaju 1985). These artificial boundaries, sometimes modified in the implementation process *in loco*, were accepted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) at their first postcolonial conference in Cairo, in 1964, in order to guarantee stability. Recent events, such as those in Rwanda and Somalia, have given rise to fundamental questioning of these colonial frontiers and the state system exported from Europe along with them.

The literature relating to frontiers and boundaries in recent times is extensive (M. Anderson 1983; Anzaldúa 1987; Barth 1969; Brownlie 1979; Day 1987; Foucher 1988; Herzog 1990; Heyman 1991; Koptyoff 1987; Kratochwil 1986; Lamb 1968; Luard 1970; Martínez 1994a; Prescott 1987; Sahlin 1989; Strassoldo 1973; Strassoldo and Delli Zotti 1982; Tägil 1977). Particularly since the fall of the Berlin Wall, frontiers have increasingly returned to the political and academic discourse in Europe (M. Anderson 1996; M. Anderson and Bort, eds. 1998; Blake 1994; Brunn and Schmitt-Egner 1998; Donnan and Wilson 1994; Eger and Langer 1996; Eskelinen et al. 1998; Foucher 1990; Ganster et al. 1997; Kramer 1997; Martínez 1994b; Murray and Holmes 1998; Neuss et al. 1998; O’Dowd and Wilson 1996; Raich 1995; Rupich 1994; Wilson and Donnan 1994–1998a).

New international frontiers have been created (e.g., the Baltic states, the former Yugoslavia, the Czecho-Slovakian “velvet divorce,” Moldova); other boundaries have changed their function fundamentally, particularly in the case of the former Iron Curtain. Resurgent nationalisms in the former Soviet Union and in the Balkans, emulating the classic European claim to independent

nationstates in multinational contexts, have highlighted the inherent contradiction between the international community’s accepted principles of “sanctity of borders” and the “right to national self-determination (Hayden 1992; Sluga 1998).

At the same time, the rhetoric about a borderless Europe (i.e. the retreat of the classic nation state within the European Union) has been, at least partially, translated into reality. Free movement of goods and people was already envisaged in the Treaty of Rome (1957), the founding document of the European (Economic) Community. With the introduction of the Single Market in 1993, based on the 1986 Single European Act, the economic functions (customs, tariffs, etc) of borders inside the EU have been eroded. Since 1995, the 1985 Schengen Agreement and the 1990 Schengen Convention have been progressively implemented, in the process blurring the distinction between international and substate boundaries within the EU (den Boer 1998).

Political frontiers as limits of sovereign states were a European invention and were subsequently exported through colonialism and imperialism. Europe is now facing the biggest challenges to the traditional role of borders. The Schengen Convention, as of 1999 signed by all but two EU member states (the United Kingdom and Ireland) and implemented in ten member states, abolished border controls (passport controls, border police checkpoints) at the internal frontiers and transferred those border controls, standardized and supervised by the Schengen Control Committee, to the external frontiers of “Schengenland.” “The general purpose of frontiers in the sovereign state was to establish absolute physical control over a finite area and to exercise exclusive legal, administrative and social controls over its inhabitants. But the traditional attributes of ‘sovereignty’ are clearly being eroded in Europe and frontiers are losing their hard-edged clarity” (M. Anderson 1996, p. 89). Pooling of sovereignty, the legal prerogative of EU law over national law, and economic and monetary union (with the introduction of the euro in 1999) are often cited as indicators of the demise of the nation-state. This may be exaggerated. Milward (1992) has argued that the EU actually came to the rescue of the nation-state by providing the material benefits that secure its legitimacy. Yet

Milward did not take into account the developments in the 1990s, as expressed in the 1992 Maastricht and 1997 Amsterdam Treaties on European Union, the latter incorporating, for example, the Schengen *acquis* into the institutional framework of the EU.

Will the processes that can be observed in Europe have repercussions elsewhere? Commentators from areas where the European border experience was exported have taken a keen interest (Asiwaju 1996). If borders lose their symbolic and real functions in security and control, will other functions—such as markers of identity and culture—become more salient? Fernand Braudel (1985) observed how the Roman “frontier between the Rhine and the Danube was . . . a cultural frontier *par excellence*,” exercising tangible influence long after its historical demise (p. 66).

The Schengen Convention already entails a transformation of the border-line into a spatial concept of borders, which, in the light of advancing surveillance technology and the need to combat cross-border crime at the locus of its origin (or destination), rather than at the border has been seen as a return of the marches, or *limes* (Foucher 1998).

In addition, and orchestrating this process of erosion, institutionalized cross-border cooperation has become a common feature at nearly all European frontiers, having started along the German–Dutch and German–French frontiers and subsequently expanded with every phase of EU enlargement.

This, against the backdrop of the demise of the Iron Curtain, has also helped to focus attention on the fact that although borders may be barriers, they can also be (or become) points of contact, channels of communication and interaction. Martinez (1994b) describes four types of interaction at borders, arranged on a continuum from closed to open:

1. “Alienated borderlands,” characterized by political and military tensions that allow for very little, if any, exchange across the border. The border is closed; borderlanders on each side perceive of each other as aliens.

2. “Coexistent borderlands,” where contacts are possible and limited exchange takes place but long-term cooperation seems undesirable for political or military reasons.
3. “Interdependent borderlands,” where contacts are frequent, mutual trade and exchange across the frontier has assumed complementary character, and a common borderland mentality is being developed both sides of the border. The border, however, is still closely monitored and only open in so far as the states’ interests are not damaged.
4. “Integrated borderlands,” where all barriers and obstacles to cross-border communication, exchange, and movement of people, goods, services, and capital have been removed and a common cultural cross-border identity is developing.

Although these are “ideal-typical” definitions, it is not difficult to find practical examples to these four stages, which can, as envisaged by Martinez, be seen as stages in an evolution. Number 1 would be the historical example of the bipolar Cold War frontier, the Iron Curtain, as symbolized by the Berlin Wall, or, perhaps, by the “Green Line” separating Turkish and Greek Cypriots. Number 2 could be the borders between former Soviet republics, such as Belarus and Poland. Number 3 is clearly Martinez’s model for the U.S.–Mexican border, where, under the umbrella of NAFTA, goods and capital may flow relatively unhindered across the internal border of the free-trade area, but movement of people is restricted and border control is a high priority. Number 4 would be the internal frontiers of the post-Schengen European Union, classically expressed in the close cross-border relations along the German–Dutch (Euregio) or German–French borders, including the German provision of transferring sovereignty rights to institutions straddling the frontier (Beyerlin 1998).

Yet opening frontiers is not seen solely as a positive process. What is apparent is that people in Europe and the United States seem to harbor an unfocused, general anxiety about frontiers no longer providing the protection they once did. Organized cross-border crime, trafficking of drugs and other smuggled goods, and organized human trafficking seem to indicate that frontier controls are

no longer as effective as they once were. This may be changing as populations become more accustomed to the absence of frontier controls at the internal frontiers. This absence is widely welcomed in frontier regions. In general, the French—normally very sensitive to these matters—seem to have adopted a reasonably relaxed attitude about open frontiers, and those living in the frontier regions seem very pleased with the new situation. Law enforcement agencies seem to have adapted to the new situation without undue difficulty. The nature of frontiers is perceived as changing. New information technology for surveillance and identity control is widely seen as a key factor in securing efficient frontier controls.

The dangers of cross-border crime—drug trafficking, illegal weapons trade, car and cigarette smuggling, money laundering, fraud and corruption, human smuggling, and so on—must not be underestimated. At “their most extreme, substantial rises in the proportion of illegality in international economic activity can destabilize national economies” (Holmes 1999). The rise in internal and cross-border crime in Eastern Europe, particularly in the countries of the former Soviet Union, can be attributed to the difficult transitional situation in these countries: post-communist states attempting, in Claus Offe’s (1996) term, a “triple transition”: the rapid and simultaneous transformation of their political systems, their economic systems, and their boundaries and identities.

The discourse of migration control has become intricately linked with the discourses on crime and security in a process of “securization” (Bigo 1999; Huysmans 1995). Security has become a much broader concept, compared with the focus on military concerns that dominated the discourse until the changes of 1989–1990, encompassing new risks and threats to society, the economy, and the polity itself (Zielonka 1991). This constitution of a security continuum, including the control of frontiers and immigration among police activities in the fight against crime, is, Bigo argues, “not a natural response to the changes in criminality,” but rather a proactive mixing of crime and immigration issues (Bigo 1999, p. 67–68). Buzan has coined the term “societal security” to describe the shift of security concerns from protection of the state to protection against threats, or perceived

threats, against society and identity or against the identity and security of groups within a society (Buzan 1991).

The southern and eastern frontiers of the European Union, as well as the U.S.–Mexican border, demonstrate that the “promotion of borderless economies based on free market principles in many ways contradicts and undermines . . . efforts to keep borders closed to the clandestine movements of drugs and migrant labor.” (Andreas 1996, p. 51). Yet despite these efforts at tightening border controls, even erecting what has euphemistically been dubbed the “tortilla curtain”—a metal wall along the border south of San Diego—and combining military and law enforcement agencies, “many clandestine border crossers are adapting rather than being deterred.” (Andreas 1996, p. 64). Economic factors, “underlying push-pull factors” (Andreas 1996, p. 68), have frustrated repeated attempts at closing the U.S.–Mexican border to illegal migrants. Operation “Wetback” (under Richard Nixon) and, more recently, operation “Gatekeeper,” caused “immediate economic damage, tensions between social groups and [had] almost zero effect on illegal immigration.” (Bigo 1998, p. 159).

Clearly, these functional changes of states will be reflected in the functional changes of their borders, and vice versa. Borders, Foucher (1998) reminds us, “are time inscribed into space or, more appropriately, time written in territories” (p. 249). Thus, “different conceptions of the frontier as an institution existed before the modern sovereign state and other kinds will emerge after its demise” (M. Anderson 1996, p. 5). If we are not witnessing the demise of the nation-state, under the dual pressures of globalization and regional responses, the least we can state is that it is “diversifying, developing,” if “not dying” (Mann 1996).

Or will the new security architecture being created in Europe establish or cement dividing lines that will echo the maintenance of global inequalities? Is the hardening of the external frontier of—perhaps an enlarged—EU part of the Huntingtonian scenario of a “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996)? In view of the complexities within what Huntington loosely defines as “civilizations” as well as between them, this is unlikely (Holmes 1998), but frontiers will remain

instruments of politics and instruments for the protection of interests.

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