

Interventions on rethinking ‘the border’ in border studies

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Abstract:

The expansive understanding of borders and boundaries in recent scholarship has enriched border studies, but it has also obscured what a border is. This set of interventions is motivated by a need for a more sophisticated conceptualization of borders in light of the recent trajectories of border scholarship. In contrast to the much-feted “borderless world” of the early 1990s, the trend during the past decade has been to consider the exercise of state sovereignty at great distances from the border line itself as “bordering”. Indeed, Balibar’s (1998) notion that “borders are everywhere”—that the sovereign state’s loci of bordering practices can no longer be isolated to the lines of a political map of states—has gained tremendous currency but it is also quite a departure from traditional border studies. Thus the broad question posed to our contributors was: Where is the border in border studies?

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Article:

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The first decade of the twenty-first century saw substantial growth and diffusion of scholarly work in border studies in geography and beyond. This can be seen as partly a reaction to naïve, post-Cold War “borderless” world discourses and partly a response to clarion calls of the late 1990s for more attention to borders as the sum of social, cultural, and political processes, rather than simply as fixed lines (for a recent review of this body of literature, see Parker et al., 2009). Some of the emergent work continued long-standing interest in the role of international political borders in the still-dominant territorial order of the sovereign state system (O’Dowd, 2010). This work drew inspiration from the disjunction between the notion of a borderless world through globalization and the reality of increased border securitization as part of the “war on terror”, economic protectionism, and anti-immigration sentiments. Along these lines, scholars have analyzed changes at political borders such as new border fences (Jones, 2009b), biometric passports (Amoore, 2006), increased violence at the border (van Houtum & Boedeltje, 2009), and expanded security practices at airports and border crossings (Salter, 2008 and Sparke, 2006).

Much of the bordering work that marks some bodies as legitimate and others as out of place happens far from the political border itself through document procurement, data monitoring (Amoore, 2007), immigration raids (Coleman, 2009), offshore detention facilities (Mountz, 2010a), and exclusionary narratives in media and popular culture (Spoonley & Butcher, 2009). Geographers have focused our attention on the technologization of borders and visualization practices (Amoore, 2009), on cognitive boundaries of categories (Jones, 2009a), and on the relationships between “traditional” borders and the so-called borderless world of networked, topological space (Paasi, 2009). External drivers of border studies have included strong institutional support of the topic of borders, especially by the European Union. Not surprisingly, then, the increasing permeability of internal borders of the EU but the simultaneous reterritorialization of state power has been an important aspect of recent scholarship, particularly around the topic of transboundary cooperation (Johnson, 2009, Kramsch and Hooper, 2004 and Popescu, 2008). The conflicting logics of “national” borders and “supranational” unity have often complicated attempts at cooperation at the border line (Sidaway, 2001). Border studies in the EU have also shown that “new” European borders, especially the external borders of the Union, are in some ways no less hard than their internal predecessors, and indeed have become fairly “sharp” markers of difference (Scott & van Houtum, 2009).

Geography by no means has monopolized border studies. Recent important contributions from IR and political sociology focus on the diffusion of border security discourses (Salter, 2010), “virtual biopolitics” (Vaughan-Williams, 2010), and the movement of borders into cyberspace (Deibert & Rohozinski, 2010). Questions about the appropriate spatial scales of border studies have also featured prominently in recent years: asking whether the evidence of the performance of the border is best found in cities (e.g. Jirón, 2010) or in the actions of non-state actors ranging

from vigilantes to entrepreneurs who do borderwork, such as petitioning for an exclusive regional labeling, to improve their business (Doty, 2007 and Rumford, 2006). Borders are also alive and well in cultural studies, such as in work on borders as sites of cultural encounter with the “other” (Rovisco, 2010), and in philosophy, particularly on the relationship between citizenship and borders in Europe (Balibar, 2009).

In light of the rich-but-diffuse recent history of border scholarship, the contributors to this set of interventions put forth possibilities for a more coherent, interdisciplinary agenda for border studies focusing on the interconnected themes of place, performance, and perspective.

Although the spatiality of borders has undergone shifts in recent decades, it is nevertheless still important to consider the place of borders in border studies, i.e. where do we look for evidence of bordering practices and what are the impacts on particular places? The places of bordering have expanded well away from the border line itself to non-descript office parks and cyberspace just as risk assessment at the border has become pre-emptive in what Louise Amoore describes as “spatial stretching” and “temporal orientation”. As Alison Mountz will show, political geographers must continue to interrogate the material manifestations of borders, particularly the relocation and reconstitution of unconventional border sites offshore and to sites internal to sovereign territory.

Borders are enacted, materialized, and performed in a variety of ways. Mark Salter suggests that the performativity of borders increasingly resembles Butler’s (1988) idea of “stylized repetition of acts”. Building on analyses of the narrative construction of statecraft, including borders, that has been at the center of critical geopolitics for two decades, recent work suggests how border studies can be enriched by focusing on the performative aspects of borders by state and non-state actors. Borders are, according to Paasi, enacted and performed not only as “discursive or emotional landscapes of social power” on the one hand, but also as “technical landscapes of control and surveillance” on the other.

Another concern for border scholars is how best to gain access to the border methodologically, or which perspectives provide the most fruitful openings to borders and borderwork. Just as the “where” question is complicated by unconventional border sites, the seemingly simple question of “who borders?” entails an increasingly complex answer since bordering practices are less and less the exclusive domain of the state and its agents. Indeed, as several contributors point out, a range of private actors including media, businesses, and citizens is involved in the daily work of

making borders. “The sovereign decisions of the border”, as Amoore describes, are as likely to be made by programmers and mathematicians who write computer code as they are by uniformed border agents. According to Mountz, gaining access to borders may therefore entail smarter use of geography’s sophisticated methodological tools such as GIS, cartography, ethnography, and Participatory Action Research. Conceptually, it may also be useful to move scholars away from “seeing like a state” (a constraining lens given the increasing heterotopia of contemporary borders) and toward “seeing like a border”, as Rumford proposes. Such a shift in emphasis would allow scholars to disaggregate the state and the border in order to conceptualize the multiple actors and sites of borderwork.

To this list of three ‘p’s’ could be added a fourth: political. The shifting nature of borders has made them neither less politicized, nor lessened the need for scholars to be mindful and critical of the complicated relationship between state power and space and the fact that this relationship is perhaps most apparent at borders, wherever they are found. Indeed, collectively these interventions put forth possibilities for an ever more robust agenda for scholarly inquiry into borders while highlighting the need for any border scholar to accompany the ongoing transformations of state power with critical and politically attuned eyes.

Borders, theory and the challenge of relational thinking

Anssi Paasi

Rather than neutral lines, borders are often pools of emotions, fears and memories that can be mobilized apace for both progressive and regressive purposes. This became evident once again after the collapse of the socialist block. Events of the early 1990s gave a strong boost to border studies. This renewed interest was related to the removal of old states and borders, the rise of new ones, the moving (and the “ethnicization”) of conflicts from state borders inside states, and the related refugee problems. The expansion of the EU led to an allocation of resources to border studies in EU programs, pegged to the normative goal of a peaceful shaping of the political and economic landscape in post-Cold War Europe.

A popular refrain since the late 1990s was that border studies are mushrooming, that new theoretical approaches and interdisciplinary views on borders are needed. Such claims resonated with the invention of new keywords in the social sciences, often related to globalization (space of flows, de/re-territorialization, mobility, hybridity, post-modernity, neo-liberalism), which seemed to challenge the apparent fixity that had characterized the world of border research during the Cold War period (Paasi, 1998). Rather than fixed lines, borders were now seen as

processes, practices, discourses, symbols, institutions or networks through which power works. The simultaneously mounting neo-liberal rhetoric on the “borderless world” was shaken by the 9/11 attack in the USA. This gave a new impetus to security studies and reminded again of the emotional roles of borders.

While border studies have become more diverse during the last ten years or so, there is still not a catchall theory. There is instead a vigorous search for new conceptualizations on borders, often echoing the early claims to study hegemonic/counter-hegemonic boundary producing/reproducing practices. Bordering reflects politics in many ways. It is not only the politics of delimitation/classification, but also the politics of representation and identity that come into play. Bordering separates and brings together. Borders allow certain expressions of identity and memory to exist while blocking others. Respectively borders are open to contestation at the level of state and in everyday life.

I will reflect here two issues facing border scholars today: (1) the question of theory and (2) relational thinking that challenges bounded spaces. I will argue that both issues have been under-scrutinized, which has led to neglect the role of context in border studies.

State borders are related in complex ways to local, regional, state-bound and supranational processes. A general border theory seems unattainable, and even undesirable, for two reasons. First, individual state borders are historically contingent and characterized by contextual features and power relations. There can hardly be one grand theory that would be valid for all borders. Such a theory is not problematic because the borders are unique but rather because of the complexity of borders and bordering. Borders manifest themselves in innumerable ways in daily lives and state-related practices and in institutions such as language, culture, myths, heritage, politics, legislation and economy. These practices condense in the contested idea of citizenship that brings together state, power, control, social responsibilities and possibilities. This implies that borders can be theorized reasonably only as part of wider production and reproduction of territoriality/territory, state power, and agency.

The strands of power that constitute (and are constitutive of) the borders make it increasingly difficult to think of certain borders as local and others as global. It is the increasing complexity of the contexts of borders that forces scholars to reflect borders in relation to such categories as space/territory/region, agency and power, to social practices such as politics, governance and economics, and to cultural processes such as ethnicity and spatial (national) socialization.

Contextual research gains added value in comparative perspective. An analysis of the geo-historical forms of spatial socialization and daily life experiences related to identity, citizenship, and politico-territorial loyalties can reveal the roles of borders in the making of the geographies of ideologies and hegemony in states.

On the second issue, current scholarship in relational thinking treats bounded spaces generally as politically regressive and suggests that territories should be seen as open networked or topological spaces of relations (Amin, 2004). Contrary to the ongoing vibrant research on the changing meanings and functions of borders, and how they could be conceptualized, relational thinking has been more academic and normative, in the sense that it is not related to any specific border. Relational thinkers have not studied concrete state borders but have rather reflected their general roles as products of modernity.

In political geography, “bounded spaces” have been understood in two ways. First, states have been recognized as the major territories and respectively their borders as key elements to exercise territoriality, sovereignty and control. This static view has been challenged by ideas such as the territorial trap (Agnew, 1994) or spatial socialization (Paasi, 1996) that aim to reveal how territoriality is practiced. Other examples of bounded spaces include supra- and sub-state regions/regionalisms. Relational perspectives seem to be more valid in the case of sub-state regions than states. Such regions differ from state territories in many ways: the former do not have sovereignty and the related means to hold coercive power. Normally, neither regional citizenship with rights and duties exists, nor is there strict control of movement. Yet such regions can be significant for political mobilization.

The relational critique implies that borders are lines that surround spatial entities, lines that are crossed by all kinds of connections in the “topological” world, with an emphasis on the economy. The limits of ontological-normative thinking are quite obviously related to the neglect of the contextuality and historical contingency of borders, and the related power relations. Simple linear thinking has to be challenged also in the case of such borders since bordering, symbolism and institutions emerge simultaneously in the complicated processes of territorial institutionalization. Borders are never to be found only in border areas but are also located in wider social practice/discourse all around societies, and increasingly in relation to global space.

The notion that borders are “everywhere” needs further reflection. There are two obvious modalities to this (Paasi, 2009). First, borders are rooted in historically contingent practices and

discourses that are related to national ideologies and identities. These can be labeled as discursive/emotional landscapes of social power that often draw on various forms of nationalism. The site of the border is therefore not only the borderland but also the complex nation-building process and nationalist practices that can have material manifestations. For example, emotional bordering is often loaded into national celebrations, flag or independence days, military parades and cemeteries, international sports events, nationalized and memorialized landscapes and other elements of national iconographies.

Second, technical landscapes of control and surveillance, monitored by increasingly technical devices and biometrics, have gained in importance in the post 9/11 world, as Louise Amoore shows. This may simultaneously strengthen bordering in a society, be constitutive of social, cultural and political distinctions between social groups but may also contribute to the consolidation of state space. New technologies associated with border control – to prevent terrorism or illegal immigration – are not located solely in border areas but may indeed exist “everywhere”.

These two overlapping landscapes link abstract ideas of border to society and show the site of borders in discourses/practices that are exploited to both mobilize and fix territoriality, security, identities, emotions, social memories, the past-present-future-axis, and national socialization. These landscapes ultimately operate in the same direction: to strengthen state space as a “bounded unit”, however porous it is, or whether it has sharp physical borders or fuzzy borders.

It is crucial to reflect the forms of borders and bordering practices in various contexts, but it is equally important to scrutinize how the state operates in this regard. Territorial control of all kinds of flows, (national) ideologies and socialization – the key mediators in how borders bring institutional practices and discourses into everyday lives and civil society – demand careful consideration of the historical and contemporary functions of states (O'Dowd, 2010). This does not mean that the state is some superior agent among the complicated forms, tactics and manifestations of territorial power. Power can be seen as an increasingly complex phenomenon that exists in networked, topological and territorial social relations (Allen, 2009). As political geographers our major challenge to theorize and study empirically these complexes. Such work can have major political relevance and contains a progressive element since understanding the relations between such complexities and bordering may help us to fight nationalism and xenophobia.

On the line: writing the geography of the virtual border

Louise Amoore

It is March 2010 and 250 newly appointed “match analysts” begin their work at the UK’s National Border Targeting Centre (NBTC). Attending to the screened data on border crossings in and out of the UK, they “judge the strength of computer generated alerts” and pass risk-flagged data on to border control, law enforcement or intelligence agencies. In a world in which the events of 9/11 have been rendered a problem of border security for which the solution is a “joining of the dots” of data, it is precisely such risk-based judgments that rewrite the geography of the border line. In the border writing for our times – is ever present but entering the visible register in programmes such as the UK’s NBTC and e-Borders projects and US Automated Targeting System (ATS) – what the border is, where the border begins and ends, what crossing a border means: these are old questions that confront us anew. To be clear, though these emergent border techniques appear to derive from the UK and USA contexts, they act within software systems that are global in scope. Thus, the geography of an apparently “virtual border” (Home Office, 2009) witnesses a spatial stretching in which the border is “exported” via “touchpoints” and “encounters” between mobile people, objects and data, in a system “designed to operate far beyond state boundaries” (Trusted Borders, 2010). Not only in space but also in time, the temporal orientation of emerging border geographies is pre-emptive, “assessing security risks against data”, “preventing potential threats prior to arrival”, demarcating lines long before a recognizable border is reached (see www.datawars.org for results from an ESRC-NWO funded project on this complex).

To speak of borders, space and time, of course, is to pose a particularly geographic problem in such a way as to bring the discipline of geography into conversation with work from across the humanities and social sciences (Nield, 2006 and Raley, 2008). Borders exhibit a unique set of resonances across the space-time of an apparently globalized world of mobile people and things and that of the sovereign practices of the state. Put simply, emergent forms of bordering seek to reconcile security with mobility and sovereignty with economy. The circulations of a global economy and the data traces left in their wake are rendered a resource to the state’s capacity to draw sovereign lines, as captured in the US Department of Homeland Security’s (2008) ambition for “secure borders, open doors”. No longer strictly a matter of disciplinary practices that stop, prohibit, enclose, delimit or proscribe, the work of the contemporary border is conducted in and through movement itself. This is evident in Foucault, Senellart, and Davidson (2007, pp. 44–45) depiction of a security apparatus, that it is oriented not to the disciplinary concern to “let nothing escape”, but rather to “open up and let things happen”. The “space of security”, for Foucault, poses a “different sort of problem”, one that must “allow circulations to take place, sifting the good and the bad, ensuring that things are always in movement” (p. 65). Disciplinary techniques position mobility and security in a fraught relation, where the prevention of infraction is

achieved precisely by stopping, halting, prohibiting at the border line at the edge of territory. By contrast, the contemporary border places mobility at the service of security thereby finitely grading and risk scoring forms of movement such that the body is divided even within itself (Deleuze, 1992).

The particular and specific emergent forms of border practice exceed an area of interest that one might term “border studies”, demanding instead that the spaces of bordering – the “material locations” to echo Anssi Paasi – be considered as elements of a somewhat novel modality of sovereign power. To clarify, that is not to say that the border no longer matters, quite the contrary. As a site of the exercise of sovereign power border practices locate new ways to instantiate the state’s decisions and judgments. New ways, as Sparke (2005, p. xiv) has suggested, of “graphing the geo” through novel spatial processes. The geo-graph itself, the very capacity to write the world and draw the lines of safe/dangerous, of risk/at risk, here/there, is located in an assemblage of state and commercial authorities, bodies, money, data and things who dwell together in the border landscape. To return to the example with which I began this intervention, my interviews with border security software designers suggest that “judgments” of the match analysts are made possible only by the algorithmic risk models already written by mathematicians, software designers and computer scientists. These practitioners “work out the best set of rules” governing the links between otherwise scattered items of data. The graphing of the geo thus incorporates sovereign decisions that exceed the state itself – spatial processes of searching and scanning, detention and deportation that are located far away from the visible policing of the border line. In effect, within these global and data-driven systems, border lines are drawn via the association rules between items of data. The associational logic that produces an alert on the screens of analysts and border guards may thus read:

“If past travel to Pakistan and flight paid by a third party, then risk score of ***; if paid ticket in cash and this meal choice on this flight route, then secondary checks against ***; if two tickets paid on one credit card and seated not together, then specify this risk level”. The association rules of algorithmic models are never quite rules but more akin to elements that will produce one risk effect on one day, at one particular time and in one set of circumstances, and quite another in other instances.

In this way, the lines drawn in commercial techniques such as credit rating or life insurance risk scoring are newly deployed in the writing of contemporary border security. Just as the collection of spatial data was intrinsic to the history of cartographic writings of the border line, so the data collected in the course of commercial transactions with airlines, travel agencies, banks and credit card companies are assembled to write a new cartography of the border line (Amoore & de

Goede, 2008). Precisely because such data form the traces and contours of global circulations, they become the means of mapping and securing a world in movement.

The border has historically figured not only as a site of security but also as a domain of dissent and a place of encounter where the visceral difficulties of political life are exposed and challenged. As the encounters of the border seep into the relations between plural subjects and objects – screen and eye, biometric card and credit card, algorithm and decision, border guard and travel agent, mobile phone and gate, visa application and bank – the question of critical intervention itself is posed anew. In many ways border studies have relied upon the exposure of the excesses and slippages of border practices as its critical resource. Yet, the contemporary border actively incorporates the excess of security into its capacity to govern the line. Thus, for instance, when people are wrongly targeted as high risk, detained on the basis of a score derived from data that is not their own but associated with them (an example would be “cultural” associations derived from the selection of Halal in-flight meals), mistakes that are made merely become new data with which to refine the rules and “write another line of code”. What, then, are the possibilities for intervention in the prejudicial judgements and mundane violences of an apparently virtual border? In the offshore immigration systems that moves the encounter with the other into an already decided software score, is it ever possible to trace an encoded border decision and to speak back to its injustice?

One critical response to such questions is to differentiate ever more clearly and with greater insistence between the life as object of border security, a definite life in Deleuze and Boyman’s (2001, p. 29) term, the life whose traces border security targets for attention, and a life as potentiality, as “everywhere, in all the moments that a given living subject goes through and that are measured by living objects”. Amid the life that is attached to given subjects and objects, there is already present a life in potentiality, a surprising and unanticipated life that has capacity to interrupt the border line (Amoore & Hall, 2010). In the face of all border security dreams of an automated gate, a digital decision and risk-based rules, there remain unanticipated worlds of encounter in which one must proceed without recourse to already decided protocols of action. Understood in this way, the writing of the border via data and risk scores does not aspire to a virtual border at all, but rather to the capacity to reduce the multiplicity and uncertainty of a life to an actionable and realizable security decision.

There are alternative readings of the small fragments of life that are drawn together into border risk programmes, other ways to visualize the relational and associational life of people and things on the move. There are other ways to understand, for example, why it is that this allegedly “high risk” financial transaction is made across this international border (e.g. a small charitable

agency seeks to send aid to Pakistan), or why this “suspicious” travel is one-way and paid in cash (e.g. a young student finally buys a hard earned ticket to open a more hopeful future). It is the lively, unexpected, unforeseeable everyday singularities of the border crossings of people and objects that must remain vivid and researchable geographic worlds. “Any political responsibility”, writes Keenan (1997, p. 12), “is itself nothing more than an experience of a certain encounter at the border, of a crossing and its irreducible difficulty”. To intervene in the writing of the contemporary border, then, is to speak back to the automated decision, the algorithmic rules and the risk-based judgment, to reinstate its irreducible difficulty, and to write the associations and relations of border lives differently.

Border politics: spatial provision and geographical precision

Alison Mountz

While often understood and policed as static, permanent lines, as in the case of the militarized built form separating Mexico and the United States (see Burridge, 2009 and Nevins, 2010), borders are increasingly characterized by movement rather than stasis. Borders are more diffuse and proliferating more rapidly than at any time, and they are reproduced as digital entities in cyberspace where authorities share data, and as legal and bureaucratic entities where migrants and advocates struggle over policy to negotiate entry and exclusion. Given recent changes to actual boundaries around nation-states, however, it is imperative that political geographers in particular not lose sight of the physical manifestations, material realities, and everyday productions of borders that function to include and exclude a range of people located somewhere along a spectrum between citizens and non-citizens.

This intervention explores how borders are moving and the potential of geographers to contribute to understandings of their new locations and politics. While building on the literature on movement of the provisional border, I suggest that there is work yet to be done to understand with precision where and how borders are moving, and how this movement can be conceived of as political. By political, I reference two ways in which political geographers have understood the term, speaking broadly. Shifts in formal governance structures signal spatial changes in the way borders are governed that also alter delimitations of sovereign territory. Border politics also reference those phenomena and movements that catalyze political involvement among citizens who are not necessarily engaged in formal structures of governance. Changes along borders discussed here involve politics in both senses.

Many scholars have been tracking the movement of borders in two directions simultaneously: offshore (e.g. Walters, 2004) and to sites inside sovereign territory (e.g. Bigo, 2000 and Coleman, 2007). While some borders appear fixed and even fortified with the building of walls and fences, still others are more provisional. An example of the latter would be the movement of border enforcement along with the mobility of enforcement officials. The risk of being caught corresponds directly with their bodily movements.

Borders are not only provisional, but also rather proliferating precisely through their contingent nature and the shift in resources and enforcement practices to offshore and interior locales. In the United States, as a result of a legal provision that declares any location within 100 miles of the border a port of entry, the border increasingly crops up in unlikely places – the laundromat, the grocery store, the bus station – places not traditionally conceived of as the border, but where US Border Patrol operates nonetheless. Additionally, border enforcement that was once the jurisdiction of federal agents is increasingly being taken up by local officials. In the United States, for example, 287(g) agreements have granted powers to local police officials to conduct immigration enforcement functions once the sole responsibility of federal officials (e.g. Kocher & Coleman, 2010).

Offshore, borders also proliferate in dispersed fashion. Walters (2008), for example, studied the return of stowaways on ships and argues that scholars take more seriously the banal sites where sea meets land and where technical modes of governance are carried out daily. Walters' work informs my own, where I seek to understand how ports of entry, like borders, are mobile entities, moving to reach out strategically to populations en route (Mountz, 2010b). In order to understand how ports are moving, I must examine not only the places where border enforcement operates, but also the discursive narratives about security and legal geographies that enable this movement. This migration of the border offshore raises questions about sovereignty, security, and geopolitics. Since 2001, to provide one example, Australia has detained asylum seekers trying to reach its shores by boat on foreign territory such as Nauru and Indonesia. In July 2010, new Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard proposed a new processing center in East Timor for all asylum seekers (Brown, 2010).

Because borders are always in a state of becoming, their conceptualization remains provisional in nature. And yet, borders have not simply been relocated everywhere. Rather, they have been reconstituted with enforcement methods in strategic locations, and it is the innovative study of these particular locations – such as interior checkpoints and offshore detention and processing – that constitutes some of the exciting contemporary scholarship on borders.

Given the intensely politicized nature of the border in contemporary public discourse, geographers need to offer creative ways of mapping borders. An array of methodological tools can cut through heavily politicized and imprecise language frequently used to depict borders, such as harmonization, militarization, and securitization. Geographers are using GIS, cartography, ethnography, and Participatory Action Research to study borders.

A number of scholars are implementing innovative research methods to study the border in the field, not only in new ways, but also in new places. Some, like Burridge (2009), do so by working with activists (No More Deaths, in his case) in Arizona to study their daily encounters with state authorities over everything from human smuggling to the enforcement of local environmental codes. Others, like Hiemstra (in press), step outside of US sovereign territory to examine detention and deportation histories among those returned home to Ecuador. Her maps show Ecuadorians' geographically bewildering detention and deportation stories as they move circuitously through the US system. Kocher and Coleman (2010) use quantitative mapping techniques to examine where local traffic stops occur in Durham, North Carolina, in relation to residential migrant locations. This method enables Kocher and Coleman to examine with statistical accuracy whether particular residential or work communities have been profiled through enforcement. In political science, Hassner and Wittenberg (2009), responded to repeated references to the wall under construction between Mexico and the United States, by asking whether this was an anomaly or a pattern. They discovered 28 fortified barriers constructed globally since the end of the Cold War. In each of these examples, research enabled empirical detailing of the sites and modes where the border proliferates, moves, and materializes.

I discuss these recent studies not only for their innovative methods, but also because they facilitate the illustration of new cartographies of border enforcement. These maps are drawn with the accountability of careful empirical research that offers new information and therefore new opportunities to inform public debate and public policy.

The movement of social scientists to track the movement of the border on the ground will inevitably lead to new discoveries. For me, a project to study offshore border enforcement led to the realization that this movement was only one piece of a larger picture wherein spaces of asylum were shrinking and uses of detention offshore by states expanding. This research also enhanced my understanding of sovereign power as a network that moves with and through the bodies of migrants and authorities, never stopping along the edges of sovereign territory, but moving well beyond into grey zones where international and domestic policy, law, and

jurisdiction are blurred. Tracking the border led me to new sites that emerged as significant, including island detentions, intimate daily spaces of enforcement such as the bus station, and the port of entry as a material expression of the mobile nation-state. My research on island detentions demands that I understand the correspondence between what Katz (2007) calls forms of “ontological insecurity”, racialized discourses that other asylum seekers detained offshore, and the strategic geographies of their detention on islands. In particular, the discourse of “the bogus refugee” appears frequently in regions where more exclusionary practices have been put in place to inhibit the arrival of asylum seekers on sovereign territory (Mountz, 2010a).

Whereas I began with the provisional, I end with the political. The hidden nature of borders signals political projects that are also hidden from view. Indeed, borders bring to the fore the relationships between power and space that political geographers study. Research on borders will always be politicized both in public discourse and on the ground in classed and racialized struggles over entry, exclusion, citizenship and belonging. The relationship between these two realms of politics requires examination of border enforcement as it is practiced on the ground and the racialized discourses mobilized to explain and narrate exclusion.

Traditionally, social scientists have followed particular populations as mobile migrants. It is equally important to follow the migration of discourses, policies, practices, ideas, authorities, and the people and institutions that enact borders in order to understand the uneven power relations among those engaged in this struggle. In the United States, Canada, the European Union, and Australia, spaces of asylum are shrinking and the use of detention and deportation has expanded significantly (e.g. Collyer, in press). In 2009, 440,000 people spent time in detention in the United States, and both detention and deportation rates from both Canada and the United States reached historic heights. The most casual glance at news from Arizona, the Mediterranean, or the Indian Ocean serves to remind us of the relevance of contemporary border struggles and their relation to broader political struggles.

Places everyone! Studying the performativity of the border

Mark Salter

The border is a primary institution of the contemporary state, the construction of a geopolitical world of multiple states, and the primary ethico-political division between the possibility of politics inside the state and the necessity of anarchy outside the state. As with all institutions, the inscription of the border and indeed the state requires constant deployment of resources: the writing of the border, the state, and the world again and again (Walker, 2010). In this sense,

governments, citizens, and other agents perform the border, by which I mean that they enact and resist the dominant geopolitical narratives of statecraft as they cross, or are prevented from crossing, borders.

There are three registers of border performativity that share the same assumptions about the need for the constant articulation and rearticulation of the central claim of the sovereign state: that there is an inside/outside division in global politics. First, formal performances of the border include the description and defense of particular territorial borders; second, practical performances of the border include the actual politics of enforcing the admission/expulsion and filtering process of the border; and third, popular performances of the border include the overtly public and political contestation over the meaning of the border. When a border is crossed, for example, it is possible to identify the actual, formal line crossed. We give the officials an always-incomplete story of our identity and our passage; and we are either frightened of or delight in lying to the guard, about the amount of duty-free liquor or cigarette we bring, or our intention to travel or work in that country. This image of safe-citizen is thus performed based on expectations of the border guard's expectations. The practical performance of that identity is often evident, but is acute at the border because it represents an existential moment of crisis: the border is where identity claims are adjudicated, where performance is reviewed. Because that border was efficient and correct in admitting or forbidding persons, it is represented publicly as "smart". In this intervention I hope to illuminate novel areas of contemporary research that consider the ways that formal, practical, and popular performances of sovereignty can be found, and resisted, at the dispersed and heterogeneous sites at which the border function of exclusion from the political community takes place.

Sovereignty is the lodestone of political science and international relations, understood as that unique power to both exert exclusive force and law within a particular territory and over a particular population and that recognition from other international actors. The theory of sovereignty, as Walker, 1993 and Walker, 2010 points out, neatly divides the world into two: inside the state political theory and the "good life" is possible; outside the state there is only the international order, anarchical and dangerous. With the manifold and multiplicitous empirical changes wrought by globalization, this oversimplified straw man could not be upheld as the core concept of any kind of critical thinking (see also Agnew, 1994). Rather than take sovereignty and its territorial inscription to be givens, scholars have oriented their study toward the formal, practical and popular geopolitics through which sovereignty is performed (Hughes, 2007 and Ó Tuathail, 2005). Borders, thus, become a crucial site in all three registers: formal, practical and popular.

The meaning of performativity most often invoked by critical border scholars comes equally from the sociological work of Goffman and the philosophical work of Butler (Parker et al., 2009 and Salter, 2008). Goffman (1959, p. 241) argues that “power of any kind must be clothed in effective means of displaying it, and will have different effects depending on how it is dramatized”. He points us to the dramaturgical analysis of particular social situations: roles, acts, audience, frontstage and backstage areas, etc. Butler, from a Foucauldian position, argues that “gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (1988, p. 519). Sovereignty, like gender, has no essence, and must continually be articulated and rearticulated in terms of “stylized repetition of acts” of sovereignty. The state, through its policies, actions, and customs, thus performs itself as sovereign – and this is particularly visible at borders when the self-evidence of the state’s control over populations, territory, political economy, belonging, and culture is so clearly in question.

The ability to formally define and control territorial borders is the sine qua non of sovereign states. Earlier work by Agamben drew critical attention to the formal, extra-legal powers of states to determine the limits of the territory, the population, and indeed the political, found initially within the legal theory of Schmitt (Agamben, 1998 and Schmitt, 1985). Despite frequent invocation of thresholds in that book, with few empirical or material examples, Agamben (1998, p. 110) does highlight the important power of the legal power of the “ban”, which “is the force of simultaneous attraction and repulsion that ties together the two poles of the sovereign exception: bare life and power, homo sacer and the sovereign [...] more original than the Schmittian opposition between friend and enemy, fellow citizen and foreigner”. The exiled or banned is both included in the sovereign’s power, but excluded from the space of the state, and as such, its definition is always before the law. As a consequence, there are analyses of border politics in terms of the limits of the law and the invocation of the (permanent) exception, both in the general case and in specific instances, such as the airport (Feldman, 2007, Minca, 2006, Rosas, 2006, Taylor, 2005 and Ticktin, 2005). The dominant Agamben/Schmittian narrative of the formal legal power of states to create and enforce their own threshold, however, faces some criticism by practical border scholars (Vaughan-Williams, in press). Bigo (2007, p. 12) disputes this understanding of the ban, and argues that this reductionism undermines the richness of the concept of the ban, which can account for both the historical tracing of boundaries in society and the complexity and capacity of resistance to the sovereign pronouncements of inclusion or exile. Doty (2007) makes a similar point by suggesting that non-state actors, in this case citizen border-patrol groups, are engaged in declaring and policing an exception, even though they are no

sovereigns in the Schmittian sense. This leads us to the second form of performativity: the practical.

Building on Bigo and earlier work in sociology and anthropology, there is a growing number of scholars who use sociological and anthropological methodology to understand the specific practical performances of the border, and in particular border security. As Wonders argues “although states attempt to choreograph national borders, often in response to global pressures, these state policies have little meaning until they are “performed” by state agents [and] by border crossers. Border agents and state bureaucrats play a critical role in determining where, how, and on whose body a border will be performed” (2006, p. 66). Taking performativity theory seriously (whether in Goffman’s terms, audience, or Foucault’s term, resistance), I argue that border crossers and border agents each perform complementary and antagonistic roles, which can be understood in terms of confession (Salter, 2007). Some work focuses on the “thought-work” of bureaucrats (Heyman, 2001), while others such as Ticktin (2005) and Bigo (2002) focus on the field of lawyers, security professionals, and advocates that constitute the complex zone of decision. Consequently, work by scholars such as Neal (2009), and Pratt (2005) demonstrate through careful work the particular bureaucratic dynamics of the actual policies at the border.

To focus exclusively on the state agents, however, would be to radically underestimate the resistance of citizens to these popular bordering practices. In short, borderwork is no longer the exclusive preserve of the nation-state” (Rumford, 2006, p. 164). An engaged citizenry, for example, can alter both the meaning and the practices of borders through “acts of citizenship” (Isin & Nielsen, 2008) and other kinds of strategic political intervention. A great deal of this kind of work looks at refugees and asylum seekers as those who experience borders across social spaces, and not simply at the limits of a state’s claim to territorial jurisdiction (Nyers, 2006 and Soguk, 2007). The key text of this cluster is Balibar’s (2002, pp. 78–79) “What is a border?” in which he argues that borders are overdetermined, polysemic (“that is to say that borders never exist in the same way for individuals belonging to different social groups”), and heterogeneous. Since the definitions of borders and boundaries have often been conflated, social and political exclusion are often misunderstood as having the same legal character as exile or expulsion. The question for these popular performances of border politics, or borderwork, is their political impact – and whether this challenges the key workings of sovereign authority or is simply representative of its dispersal.

These three registers of border performativity share the same assumptions about the need for the constant articulation and rearticulation of the central claim of the sovereign state: that there is an inside/outside division in global politics that has some meaning. These scholars are engaging

with the most interesting part of this question, the way that formal, practical, and popular performances of sovereignty can be found, and resisted, at the dispersed and heterogeneous sites at which the border function of exclusion from the political community takes place.

Seeing like a border

Chris Rumford

In a world of security alerts, enhanced personal mobility (for many, but not all), and transnational flows of goods, finances, and services we encounter not a borderless world but a plethora of borders which are not only found “at the border”. They “now occupy ‘a multiplicity of sites’ and ‘seep into the city and the neighborhood’ in addition to existing at the edges of a polity” (Amoore, Marmura, & Salter, 2008). Ordinary spaces are saturated with “borders, walls, fences, thresholds, signposted areas, security systems and checkpoints, virtual frontiers, specialized zones, protected areas, and areas under control” (Multiplicity, 2005).

Borders are no longer seen only as lines on a map but as spaces in their own right (as in the idea of “borderlands”) and as processes; in short, there has been a shift from borders to bordering (or rebordering, on some accounts). The argument advanced here is that the changes to borders are in fact more far-reaching than can be captured by either the idea that “borders are everywhere” or a security-driven rebordering thesis. I propose that to understand borders fully scholars need to “see like a border”.

Three key dimensions of borders/bordering are generating a distinct research agenda and associated literature. First, borders can be “engines of connectivity”. Rather than curtailing mobility, borders can actively facilitate it; many key borders are at airports, maritime ports, and railway terminals. Borders can connect as well as divide, not just proximate entities, but globally. This means that more conventional views of interactions across borders (e.g. Minghi, 1991) are in need of revision. It also means that border scholars must take issue with the idea, expressed by Häkli and Kaplan (2002, p. 7), that “cross-border interactions are more likely to occur when the ‘other side’ is easily accessible, in contrast to when people live farther away from the border”. For van Schendel (2005) borderlanders are able to “jump” scales (local, national, regional, global) and therefore do not experience the national border only as an immediate limit. People can construct the scale of the border for themselves; as a “local” phenomenon, a nation-state “edge”, or as a transnational staging post: the border can be reconfigured as a portal.

Second, bordering is not always the business of the state. Ordinary people (citizens and also non-citizens) are increasingly involved in the business of bordering, an activity I have previously termed “borderwork” (Rumford, 2008). Citizens, entrepreneurs, and NGOs are active in constructing, shifting, or even erasing borders. The borders in question are not necessarily those (at the edges) of the nation-state; they can be found at a range of sites throughout society: in towns and cities, and in local neighborhoods. Examples (in the UK) include: the local currency schemes in several English towns (Stroud, Lewes, Totnes) designed to prevent the leeching of money from the local economy; securing Protected Designation of Origin status (from the EU) for local produce such as Melton Mowbray pork pies and Stilton cheese (Cooper & Rumford, in press) which creates bounded regions for branded products. What is distinctive about these activities is that they result from initiatives by entrepreneurs, citizens/residents, and grass roots activists. They are not top-down, state-led processes of bordering. This activity does not necessarily result in borders that enhance national security but it provides borderworkers with new political and/or economic opportunities: the uses of borders are many and various.

Third, borders provide opportunities for claims-making. This has long been recognized to be the case in respect of the nation-state, where national borders are not always imposed by the center. For example Sahlins’ (1989, p. 9) work on the Spain–France border in the Pyrenees shows that “local society brought the nation into the village”. But borderwork also has a post-national dimension and is consistent with what Isin and Nielsen (2008) term an “act of citizenship”: “they are part of the process by which citizens are distinguished from others: strangers, outsiders, non-status people and the rest” (Nyers, 2008, p. 168). Moreover, acts of citizenship and borderwork alike are not restricted to those who are already citizens; they are means by which “non-status persons can constitute themselves as being political” (Nyers, 2008, p. 162). Borderwork can also be associated with a range of claims-making activity, not only claims to national belonging or citizenship, but also demands for transnational mobility, assertions of human rights, and demonstrations of political actorhood, all of which can comprise acts of citizenship. This leads to the possibility of viewing bordering not only in terms of securitization but also in terms of opportunities for humanitarian assistance targeted at those (refugees, migrants) who may coalesce at the borders.

Some common themes are evident in these three dimensions of bordering, most importantly bordering as a societal phenomenon and the importance of individual experience in making/negotiating borders, pointing to a vernacularization or cosmopolitanization of borders (Rumford, 2007). The resultant diversity and multiplication of border studies provokes a key question: from what perspective should this multiplicity of borders be viewed? The danger is that even when acknowledged that borders can be diffused throughout society border scholars still choose to look at borders from the perspective of the state, by considering for example the extent

to which the development of borderlands is compatible with conventional notions of securitized borders. But what would happen if a different, non-state perspective were adopted? Rather than “seeing like a state” (Scott, 1998) what would it mean to “see like a border”?

Seeing like a border shifts the emphasis in border studies in several important ways. First, as borders can be found “wherever selective controls are to be found” (Balibar, 2002, pp. 84–85) seeing like a border does not equate to “being on the outside and looking in” (or looking out from the watchtower to the wilderness beyond). Bordering processes permeate everyday life, well captured in Urry’s (2007) notion of “frisk society” in which passing through public spaces is akin to the experience of airport security. In aspiring to see like a border, the constitutive nature of borders in social and political life must be recognized.

Second, borders are not necessarily always working in the service of the state. When seeing like a state one is committed to seeing borders as lines of securitized defense. Borders do not always conform to this model. In a desire to shore up what may be perceived as the ineffectual borders of the nation-state borderworkers may engage in local bordering activity designed to enhance status or regulate mobility; gated communities, respect zones, “resilient” communities of CCTV watching citizens.

Third, seeing like a border does not necessarily mean identifying with the subaltern, the dispossessed, the downtrodden, the marginal. The border, and the borderwork which has led to its construction, may be the project of those seeking to gain further advantage in society: entrepreneurs or affluent citizens, for example. Why remain passive in the face of other peoples’ borders when it is possible to obtain advantage by becoming a proactive borderer? If borders are networked throughout society and more and more people can participate in borderwork, then the capacity to make or undo borders becomes a major source of political capital. Seeing like a border means taking into account perspectives from those at, on, or shaping the border, and this constituency is increasing large and diverse.

Fourth, borders can be “invisible” (to some but not to all). This assertion runs counter to one of the most established truths in border studies: that “a border that is not visible to all has failed its purpose” (van Schendel, 2005, p. 41). But borders may be invisible, as when they are designed not to look like borders, located in one place but projected in another entirely. This is the case with the “juxtaposed” borders established by the UK along the Eurostar routes, UK passport control being situated at the French terminus Gare du Nord in Paris, French controls at London’s

St. Pancras. There are many other examples of invisible borders: the UK’s “offshore borders” – established at points across the world where people apply for visa to enter the UK – or the EU’s Frontex boat patrols along the coast of West Africa. Such bordering activity is designed to constitute a formidable physical barrier to those beyond the EU’s border while not necessarily affecting those living on the inside. Borders can be highly selective and work so as to render them invisible to the majority of the population. ‘Seeing like a border’ leads to the discovery that some borders are designed not to be seen.

Border studies now routinely addresses a wide range of complex “what, where, and who” questions. What constitutes a border (when the emphasis is on processes of bordering not borders as things)? Where are these borders to be found? Who is doing the bordering? It is still possible to ask these questions and receive a straightforward and predictable answer: “the state”. This is no longer a satisfactory answer. Seeing like a border involves the recognition that borders are woven into the fabric of society and are the routine business of all concerned. In this sense, borders are the key to understanding networked connectivity as well as questions of identity, belonging, political conflict, and societal transformation.

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