



ANNALES SCIENTIA POLITICA

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2, 2017

ANNALES SCIENTIA POLITICA

Vol. 6, No. 2, 2017

LAINÉ, J. P.: Understanding Borders under Contemporary Globalisation. *Annales Scientia Politica*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2017), pp. 6 – 18.

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Recognising the close interrelationships between social change and paradigm shifts, this article contributes to an interpretation of conceptual change in the study of borders. While borders continue to have considerable relevance today, we need to revisit them in light of their constantly changing historical, political, and social contexts, grasping their shifting and undetermined nature in space and time. The article underlines the multilevel complexity of borders – from the geopolitical to the level of social practice and cultural production at and across the border at different levels and, thus, not only along the dividing lines of nation-state sovereignties. It seeks to make a constructive contribution to debate within border studies by encouraging a productive understanding of the processual, de-territorialised, and dispersed nature of borders and their ensuring regimes in the era of globalisation and transnational flows, as well as showcasing border research as an interdisciplinary field with its own academic standing. Adopting the borderscapes concept as a central organising element, this article advocates for a relational approach to borders which takes into account complementary perspectives that consider the interaction between political visions and everyday sociocultural practices, as well as social representations and artistic imaginaries.

Keywords:

Borders, Borderscapes, Bordering, Globalisation, Social Change, Everyday.

UNDERSTANDING BORDERS UNDER CONTEMPORARY GLOBALISATION

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Introduction

Against the backdrop of optimistic scenarios of globalisation and increased levels of international cooperation, the significance of borders has been fluctuating. The premature enthusiasm during the 1990s for a 'borderless world' was, it seems, short-lived, and has been superseded by greater realism and securitisation, underlining the increasing complexity and instability in the world system. We have not, however, progressed simply from *debordering* to *rebordering*; rather, there are various tendencies and countertendencies as well as a multiplicity of bordering processes and practices at play. The bordering processes occur largely simultaneously, as nation states increasingly integrated in and dependent on the global economy struggle to encourage cross-border flows of goods, people, and capital at the same time as the desire to securitise and control their borders remains.

While political borders have proven their endurance, their contemporary role has become increasingly contested, manifesting contradictions related to post-colonial conflict, nationalism, and

struggles to create or reinforce political communities and territorial identities (Laine and Casaglia, 2017). Political borders are themselves not only political, but, as Raffestin (1993) has claimed, political borders must also be understood as a bio-ethno-social constant of human society's life, because without membranes it is impossible to regulate the exchange between the ethnic and/or the state territory and the outer world, protecting a territory from the chaos and the waste of human and material resources. Within the political, there are also subtle social and cultural processes at work as a result of everyday forms of transnationalism, border-crossing, border-negotiating, and networking (Laine, 2016). To better understand these developments, this article suggests that borders should be understood as complex, multidimensional and -scalar, yet dynamic entities that have different symbolic and material forms, functions, and locations.

The obvious focus for research thus lies in seeking to understand this complex construction of borders – in grasping the shifting and undetermined nature of the border both in space and in time. Appropriately, research interests have gradually moved from their early focus on borders as territorial dividing lines and political institutions to borders that are regarded as socio-cultural and discursive practices, and bringing to bear a more processual understanding of borders. There is, therefore, an apparent need to study not only what borders are, but also how they are perceived, understood, experienced, and exploited as political and social resources.

Border research has also developed from a sub-discipline of political science and international relations into an interdisciplinary field of investigation in its own right combining expertise, knowledge, and approaches from political science, geography, geopolitics, anthropology, and sociology, but also from cultural, literary, and media studies. In reflecting contemporary border studies debate, this article argues for a more prominent use of comprehensive and productive concepts that would allow the complexity of the current border to be grasped in its multiplicity. It discusses the concepts of bordering and borderscapes as interpretational tools that broaden the perspective of the traditional notions of state demarcation. Combining these perspectives provides a powerful link between the various processes of social and political transformation, conceptual change, and local experience. If the complexities of the current era are to be understood, and its broad socio-political transformations interpreted, a nuanced and critical re-

reading of borders both as challenges and as resources in terms of the exercise of power, the management of conflict, identity construction, cross-border cooperation, networking, and the everyday forms of transnationalism and negotiation of borders will be required.

Complementary Forms of Borders

The increased velocity and volatility of globalisation have shaken the previously stable border concept, but the globalised world is far from a borderless world. We have witnessed an apparent and even growing disjuncture between the increasing complexity and differentiation of borders and the simplicity and lack of imagination with which they continue to be treated (Vaughan-Williams, 2012, p. 7). The politics of the line endures (Walker, 2010), but borders are now commonly understood as multifaceted social institutions rather than as solely formal political markers of sovereignty. The nature of borders is changing, as are their strategic, economic, and cultural implications. We are witnessing the emergence of complementary forms of border that depart from the norms of territorial linearity by becoming embedded into flows that can travel and be monitored continuously across space.

While globalisation has certainly caused the institutional crumbling of borders, compaction of cross-border social relations, increased interdependence and cross-border activities, and the intensification of flows, the scalar model of identity and society remains primarily anchored in national space at both the theoretical and popular levels (e.g. Edensor 2002, p. 1). Indeed, an over-emphasis on the novelty of contemporary forms of globalisation and an incapacity to recognise the distinctiveness of contemporary state borders deceptively discount the extent to which we continue to live in a "world of diverse states" (O'Dowd, 2010).

State borders are continuously reconstructed and effectively utilised as markers of social-political organisation. Although interdependence and processes of globalisation have complicated the picture, the continuous (re)construction of borders based on forms of social-political organisation and processes of nation-building remains a central problem in border studies. As Paasi (2012, p. 2307) maintains, understanding borders is still inherently an issue of understanding how states function

and how borders can be exploited to both mobilise and fix territory, security, identities, emotions and memories, and various forms of national socialisation. The state-centred perspective does not condone or reify the state as historically inevitable but rather as historically contingent (Kolossoff et al, 2012).

Nation states are inescapably defined by their respective borders. Geographical borders continue to function as physical manifestations of state power, but they also serve as symbolic and mental representations of statehood to citizen and non-citizen alike. While the nation state has undoubtedly endured the pressures of globalisation, the exclusively state-oriented approach, with its focus on interstate relations, serves only to confirm the already existing political borders. It is therefore necessary to broaden the scope to include more regionalised and localised narratives. As some borders are removed, it does not necessarily follow that the border no longer has an impact on the daily life practices of the people residing in close proximity to it (Newman, 2011). In seeking to determine the actions and behaviour of people at and within national borders, they are themselves no longer seen merely as territorial lines at a certain place in space but as symbols of processes of social binding and exclusion that are both constructed or produced in society.

It seems clear that the concept of the nation-state is not disappearing – yet it is hardly the *only* conception of space to be applied in explaining human interaction (Laine, 2017). A conscious effort has thus been made to ‘de-centre the border’ from its anchorage in the apparatus of the state and problematise it as a taken-for-granted entity (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012, p. 728 – 729). Globalisation does not erase borders, but it does erode some of their constitutive functions. We are witnessing substantial changes in the geographical imagination from rigid, fixed, and unchanging borders towards a more polyvalent perspective. Reconceptualising borders as a set of performances injects movement, dynamism, and fluidity into the study of what are otherwise often taken to be static entities (ibid.). Such fluidity of movement along global networks takes little account of fixed borders if and when the network requires greater (or lesser) intensity of movement in any particular direction. Accordingly, classical dichotomies

typical of the territorial world of nation states have been overcome by understandings of borders embedded in new spatialities.

Borders are in flux, but instead of shifting from one form to another they are becoming increasingly multiple. They must be understood as complex and multidimensional, yet dynamic, entities that have different symbolic and material forms, functions, and locations. Borders have migrated from being merely nation-state lines and have become considerably more diffused throughout society (e.g. Balibar, 2001; 2003); they look different depending on from where they are viewed (Sidaway, 2012); and are more porous for some than for others (Salter 2003). For these reasons, the scholars of so-called Critical Border Studies in particular have sought to problematise the traditional ‘line in the sand’ (Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2012, p. 728) approach in their call for more ‘alternative border imaginaries’ (Andersen, Kramsch and Sandberg, 2015). Borders mean different things to different people. They are not substantive, but rather structural, entities and as such they can generate different effects in different circumstances; borders can enclose as well as relate, facilitate, and divide, and function equally well in encouraging and hindering movement (Piliavsky, 2013).

At the same time borders themselves are products of a social and political negotiation of space; they frame social and political action and are re- and deconstructed through institutional and discursive practices at different levels and by different actors. Borders are not only the business of state, and there are many other borders than simply those of states. Borders are not given, but are made, remade, and unmade. As such they are products, but also processes, ceaselessly practised, performed, produced, and reproduced through various bordering practices. This understanding allows us to transform the border from something that merely exists in an objective, unmediated way into a site of investigation, and move the analytical frame from the state to the border itself (Rumford, 2012).

Borders are not just a by-product, but as Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) assert, they possess a productive power of their own, thus playing a strategic role in the fabrication of the world. Accordingly, Rumford (2012) proposes that instead of ‘seeing like a state’, as earlier

suggested by Scott (1998), border scholars should dispense with an exclusive nation-state frame and move towards 'seeing like a border': i.e., disaggregate the state and the border in order to conceptualise the multiple actors and sites of what he calls 'borderwork'. With his broader call for multiperspectival border studies, Rumford (2012) provides a non-state-centric approach to borders and bordering which is sensitive to the multiplicity of borders as well as the range of actors who create them. The argument he advances underlines that borders cannot be properly understood from a single privileged vantage point and bordering processes can be interpreted differently from different perspectives.

Although the emphasis on the multiplicity of borders and bordering processes is certainly a major advance from the traditional line-in-the-sand agenda, it has another dimension. An increasingly expansive understanding of borders has actually obscured what a border actually is (Johnson et al 2011, p. 61). Salter (2012, p. 749) goes as far as to claim that the fluidity of the concept has resulted in borders losing some of their constitutive function to create distinctions between insides and outsides. If borders are indeed everywhere, as Balibar (2003) and his followers advocate, can everything be a border? In the recent attempts to reconceptualise borders many have indeed dropped into a dizzying array of practices and venues located within and beyond, especially European, space (Andersen, Kramsch and Sandberg, 2015, p. 461). In performing borders, we continue to multiply them, and there therefore seems to be no limit to what actually constitutes a border: every space can be a space of the border, as Galli (2010) argues.

Borders as a Bridge to Understanding Change

While the often referred to Westphalian notion of borders has projected political borders as fixed, taken-for-granted lines, the concept of the border has evolved amidst the fundamental political struggles of the modern period. During this progression, the border concept has become a fundamental part of political discourse and challenged the existing notions of the legitimisation of power by introducing revolutionary claims for reframing and recasting

social arenas and political landscapes (Ball, Farr and Hanson, 1989; Kalmo and Skinner, 2010). This politicisation should not, however, be understood simply in terms of the emerging hegemonic ethnic-national claim for self-government, but rather as part of political innovation and the reframing of social and political arenas – and the internal contradictions of the democratic principles of popular sovereignty and popular representation (Rosanvallon, 2007). Evidently, the politicising, reframing, and recasting potential of the border concept remains vivid – and as a concept it is thus still very much a valid tool in discursive struggles for steering historical movement.

Accordingly, it is argued in this article that conceptual change in the study of borders must be seen in the context of the fundamental social, economic, and geopolitical transformations that have taken place in the past decades. The way borders are viewed and interpreted has evolved in relation to predominant geopolitical visions – as well as the broader paradigmatic and discursive shifts in the social sciences. The traditional definitions and understandings of borders have been challenged primarily because the context in which they were created and existed has changed. This is also to say that if we are to appreciate how borders can be eroded, we must first understand how they came to be (see Scott, 2012; Laine, 2015). This must be done, as O'Dowd (2010) points out, because many contemporary border studies fail to acknowledge the historical context, and thus arrive at a disfigured perspective of the present. An over-emphasis on the novelty of contemporary forms of globalisation and a failure to recognise the 'past in the present' lead to a discounting of the extent to which we continue to live in a world of diverse states (ibid., p. 1032 – 1034).

Although borders have long been one of the most central topics in political geography, the understanding of the concept in itself has changed significantly (Laine, 2015). The geodeterministic understanding, epitomised famously by Ratzel and Maull, depicted borders determined by the physical and cultural environment as either 'good', i.e. corresponding with physical conditions, or as anti-structural 'bad' borders. Bloch, Febvre, Vidal de la Blache, and Reclus among others, in turn,

emphasised historical geography and anthropology by arguing that borders had been wilfully created by society. The more scientific take advanced, for instance, by Christaller, Lösch, and Hägerstrand saw borders as elements of the physics and geometry of social relations (Laine, 2015).

The neo-Kantian functionalists, such as Hartshorne, Kristof, and Jones, presented borders as functions of historical evolution and events that exhibited essential and necessary characteristics for the consolidation of the state, whereas the Marxian/Critical understanding has depicted borders as systemic elements of capitalist accumulation and concomitant forms of stateness and territorial control. More recently, scholars such as Paasi, Balibar, and van Houtum have maintained that borders are complex social constructions in terms of socio-cultural contention and the exercise of socio-political and cultural power, as well as manifestations of irrational rationalities, fear, exclusion, or paranoia. The cultural turn in the social sciences has opened yet another set of new research perspectives in border studies that would not have been developed under earlier traditional geopolitical and functional approaches.

In addition to these temporal shifts, it is essential to understand that borders can also possess various functions at the same time and seem very different to different people and for different purposes. While the politics of borders remains, a more multifaceted understanding of the political, social, and symbolic significance of borders is needed to better interpret the broad socio-political transformations now taking place. The recognition that borders are an intrinsic element of human life and represent a fundamental social need in the constitution of difference has fuelled a move away from an exclusive concern with state borders in the international system to the study of borders at diverse socio-spatial and geographical scales, ranging from the local and the municipal to the global, regional, and supra-state level (Kolossoff and Scott, 2013, p. 2). The growing interdisciplinarity of border studies, then, has also moved the discussion away from a dominant concern with formal geographical, physical, and tangible borders to those which are cultural, social, economic, religious, and, in many cases, invisible, but with major impacts

on the way in which human society is bordered, ordered and compartmentalised – which in itself has made the traditional division between the domestic and the international – between what is ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ specific socio-spatial realms – increasingly blurred.

Another significant departure from the traditional conception of borders as physical outcomes of political, social, and/or economic processes is so-called bordering, i.e. the approach to making borders. It seeks to bring diverse spatialities and diverse types of borders within a single frame of analysis and underlines that the ability to make and unmake borders is no longer an exclusive prerogative of state actors (Rumford, 2006; 2012). Bordering can be defined as the everyday construction of borders through ideology, cultural mediation, discourse, political institutions, attitudes, and everyday forms of transnationalism (Scott, 2009). Bordering is a multilevel process that takes place, for example, at the level of high politics, manifested by physical borders and visa regimes, as well as in media debates about national identity and migration. Another important and closely related element in bordering is the embedding of everyday border-crossing experience and issues of family, gender, sexuality, and cultural and personal understandings of borders. The various forms of bordering produce social orders premised on drawing unambiguous borderlines of a binary nature between various social categories that situate actors in relation to each other.

Nevertheless, borders are also about power relations – and bordering can also occur at the state level. The geopolitically weaker and stronger states tend to see the border as separating them from different perspectives. Legal status, functions, regime, and the various processes of borders (delimitation, demarcation, management, control) are all products of the power relations in a society. In their various forms borders are effectively used to sort people according to the degree of their belonging to certain ethnic, cultural, political, and social groups or classes. The power to determine the criteria through which these borders are demarcated thus constitutes a major factor in the ordering of society. As it is still principally the power elites who get to decide when, and in whose interest it is, to construct and deconstruct borders, borders also inevitably continue

to be associated with discrimination, social injustice, and inequality. Borders are not the same for all, but are unevenly transparent, depending on one's origin, citizenship, material condition, and socio-professional status: 'the law of birth' largely determines people's mobility across the world.

As already argued, the bias of contemporary border studies towards nation-states is largely a legacy of the impact that state-building and consolidation have exercised on our understandings of history. While the situation before the famous 'Westphalian revolution' has been downplayed as a subject of study, it is important to remember that border studies has its origins in historicist and cultural determinist traditions. Although it cannot be denied that modern 'nation states' continue to serve as the highest form of effective social organisation and the source of political, cultural, and social identity, in the past borders and identities were rarely defined in terms of allegiances to territories, but rather to rulers and religions. The emergence of nation-states and their borders was understood as an expression of historical necessity, if not 'God's will' (Scott, 2015, p. 29).

The Westphalian order can be seen as an attempt by European powers to impose strict borders on the world, delimiting and compartmentalising the space of states' sovereignty. This partition of the world suggests controversial implications – as famously captured by such notions as the territorial trap (Agnew, 1994) and, more recently, the territorial allure (Murphy, 2013). The reality, however, seems less clear-cut, as neither nature nor society knows many rigid lines. Rather, different areas are usually separated from and/or connected to others by transitional spaces where a set of attributes and features is gradually replaced by another (cf. Kolossov and Scott, 2013). Political boundaries only rarely match ethnic, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. Presenting the multiplicity of and divergence between borders of territory, citizenship, nation, and identity as a single box coloured in one particular colour in cartographic projections only reaffirms the illusion that social processes should unfold neatly within its borders.

Because many people do not recognise or associate themselves with these ossified and fixed lines, van Houtum (2005) argues, the

world political map showing the lines separating container boxes is only a representation of political elites. Instead of merely reflecting reality, these maps have been more successful in influencing the realities of people and enforced a statist understanding of world geography. The crisis of state sovereignty has also provoked the protracted existence of uncontrolled territories around the world, as a result of which unrecognised states have become relevant actors in international relations – one of the most obvious evidences of the processes of de-territorialisation and re-bordering (Kolossov and Scott, 2013, p. 6).

Borders also have a profound psychological significance for territorial identities and world geopolitical visions. At least part of the continuing allure of borders can be explained by the psychological comfort and sense of control over a space that confinement, enclosedness, and demarcation bring about. This is a prime example of human territoriality and an attempt to enforce control over a specific geographical area (Sack, 1983). The role, perception, and use of space are therefore constantly changing with social practice (Harvey, 1989). What is crucial here is that this practice also includes political discourse, which often tends to strengthen or modify certain social representations, shaping in so doing human territoriality. Every social and regional group has its own image of territory and its boundaries. Sometimes they match, but they are often in sharp contradiction. The world geopolitical vision is a normative mental political map of the world or of a region in combination with representations of political actors, elements of political space, national security, and the advantages and shortcomings of different foreign policies (Dijkink, 1996; 1998). It includes the representations of the territory and boundaries of a state and/or an ethnic group, and is built on the perceptions of cultural distinction between the populations on different sides of a state boundary (Paasi, 1996).

Despite the increased circulation of both goods and people enabled by the increasingly open circumstances of the global era, borders continue to be about control, management, and security. The once common discussions of global de-bordering, supported by optimistic notions of globalisation and the new post-Cold War world order, have succumbed to the reali-

ty of the increasing complexity and instability of the world system. Growing global inequalities, renationalisation, state-led development patterns, securitisation and increasingly restrictive visa regimes and border controls, pragmatic and protectionist behaviour and policies, assertive power politics, territorial disputes and their associated crises, the surge of refugees and displaced people, and the rise of national populism are but a few examples that demonstrate that we continue to live in the world of borders and that the state's allure has not faded, in spite of the fact that many contemporary processes are clearly beyond its scope (Laine, 2016). However, instead of focusing only on either de- or rebordering, these two discourses might be better understood as parallel processes that occur simultaneously. The crossing and control of borders compete constantly with each other for hegemony: open and more flexible borders are vital for economic reasons, while tighter and more closed borders are seen as important security measures (Kolossov and Scott, 2013, p. 9).

While in the recent past this delicate balance has been swaying towards increased securitisation, this cannot be taken simply as an attempt to close state space and territories, but rather to filter and sort transnational flows. This also moves the focus away from state security to a more personal and physical-factual safety against threats or other undesirable influences – whether factual or perceptual – from ‘across the border’. The more ontological notion of security is applied here, because it allows us to better understand the concept of security from the perspective of an individual at risk in the turbulent and unpredictable environment of the contemporary era, i.e. as an individual's important social and psychological need. The associated paradigmatic shift of bordering logics, from securing territories to securing flows, effectively illuminates how forces of globalisation complicate traditional static notions of borders, sovereignty, and security.

An essential link between globalisation and the nation state is the concept of sovereignty. According to the traditional understanding, borders exert power as markers of sovereignty and thus as institutions that make it possible for states to use and to manage their human, economic, natural, and other resources and to claim exclusive rights to territorial authority

(Murphy, 2010). Border studies has long remained focused on territorial fixation, the notion that territories and spaces are physical outcomes of a political process, supported by the supposed co-evolution of borders and states. According to this view, borders appear as geometric lines running along the frontier territories at the edges of nation states, which in themselves are seen to form clear-cut and mutually exclusive political-territorial blocs with which we can compartmentalise the earth's surface into more manageable shapes and territories. Such a perspective considers space in absolute terms as a rigid object that can be broken into neatly quantifiable pieces and rationally explained. However, it is now broadly understood that the situation is more multifaceted and complex.

The Cartesian view has been increasingly challenged by a number of academics (e.g. Popescu, 2014, Amilhat Szary, 2014; Amilhat Szary and Giraut, 2015;), who postulate a world which functions according to networks, flows, hubs, and connecting nodes that are qualitatively different from the notion of space defined by territorial proximity and distance decay. We have therefore witnessed a changing geographical imagination that incorporates a more polyvalent perspective, acknowledging the relational nature of space. While we cannot shut our eyes to the persistence of political borders, this approach is very much needed, as it accentuates that far from merely existing as political state-led creations, borders are complex and dynamic multiscalar entities that have different symbolic and material forms maintained by a multiplicity of bordering processes and practices. Borders are territorial in nature, but increasingly multiperspectival (Rumford, 2012) complex assemblages (Sohn, 2015) that are diffused throughout society and that are inherently part of the political, discursive, symbolic, and material orders that reflect the transformation of space into territory by various social groups and actors (Laine, 2017) – as has recently been most convincingly captured in the concepts of *borderities* (Amilhat Szary and Giraut, 2015) and *border-scapes* (Brambilla et al, 2015).

A Way Forward?

If the complex construction of borders is to be better understood, it is essential to adopt an approach that expresses their multilevel complexity – from the geopolitical to the level of social practices at and across them. Borders are not exclusively political, but also inherently social and cultural creations (Kramsch and Brambila, 2007; Scott and van Houtum, 2009). The bordering (border-making) perspective is particularly useful here, for it not only transcends disciplinary boundaries, but accentuates that borders are not only semi-permanent, formal institutions, but that they are also processes that cannot be finalised. Accordingly, bordering can be defined as the everyday construction of borders through ideology, cultural mediation, discourse, political institutions, attitudes, and everyday forms of transnationalism (van Houtum, 2002; van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002). In this context borders can be read in terms of a politics of identity (feelings of belonging, us versus them, who is ‘in’, who is ‘out’), in terms of a regionalisation of difference (defining who is a neighbour, a partner, a friend, or rival), or in terms of a politics of ‘interests’, in which issues of economic self-interest, political stability, and security play a prominent role (Scott, 2009, p. 235).

Bordering is, by its nature, a multilevel process that takes place, for example, at the level of high politics, manifested by physical borders and visa regimes, as well as in media debates about national identity, legal and illegal immigration, and language rights (van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002; Newman 2006; Lindelaursen, 2010; Scott, 2012). Its perspective is based on a notion of conceptual change involving shifts from largely functional to more cognitive and symbolic perspectives concerning borders, and highlights interconnections between territorial and relational perspectives in border research. The bordering approach can be used in several different ways that help us to better understand the making and un-making of a border in all its multiplicity. The geopolitical discourses that create or confirm categories of cultural difference are not privileged over popular forms of identity politics or media representations of ‘otherness’ (Scott, 2012, p. 88), but the more everyday geograph-

ical imaginations and popular geopolitics play a key role in the way borders appear to many.

In a discursive sense (political and social framings) the bordering approach can help uncover the ways in which commonality/difference between groups is framed and referenced in cultural, ethnic, geographical, and historical terms, and the ways in which strategies, threats/common concerns, and cooperation are framed through the use of border concepts. More practically, bordering manifests itself in both material and substantive areas through pragmatic avenues of cross-border interaction and conflict amelioration, economic agendas of cooperation, and political agendas. Perceptual bordering refers to group/individual/place-based interpretations of borders and various groups or locally specific conceptions of borders in terms of identity, community, belonging, everyday needs and strategies, as well as everyday experiences. Representational examples of bordering (cultural, media-generated images) can be found in literary and artistic works that may reference borders in terms of resistance and challenges to their exclusionary nature, the transformation of their symbolisms, and/or expressions of identity and alienation related to them. (cf. Scott, 2012, 88.)

Another evocative notion that helps us to better capture the multiplicity of the border concept and the changing scenarios of globalised contemporaneity is that of ‘borderscapes’.¹ Rather than as a concrete empirical category, the concept of borderscapes is better used as a way of approaching bordering processes in specific geographical and social contexts, both in borderlands but also wherever a specific border has impacts, is represented, negotiated or displaced. Borderscapes are local configurations of bordering processes connecting different communities, case-specific reflections of how notions of border and perceptions of identity are conditioned by the interplay of historical, socio-cultural, geographical, and political narratives, as well as by the experience of living at and with borders. Borderscapes also reflect the local politics of borders understood as a framing of social arenas and political landscapes and strategies of accommodation, adap-

¹ The notion of borderscapes is inspired by the work of Appadurai (1990) as well as Rajaram and Grundy-Warr (2007).

tation, and contestation – challenging their top-down geopolitical control.

The borderscapes concept provides an analytical angle to develop a wider understanding of the contemporary spatiality of politics and a political insight into critical border studies based on a multi-sited approach at different levels (Brambilla, 2015, Brambilla et al, 2015). To investigate the borderscape is to return to the question of who decides where the border is going to be and what it will mean (Schimanski, 2015). It involves a highly inclusive understanding of borders in space, while drawing attention to the multiplicity of social spaces where borders are negotiated by different actors: various individuals, groups, and institutions at the state and local levels. As discussed, borders as multidimensional entities are constituted in different symbolic and material forms and functions as well as in socio-political and cultural practices. The borderscape lens makes it possible to grasp their dynamic character in space and time (Brambilla, 2015); rather than disappearing, borders are instead moving (Balibar, 2003). Thus, one of the main advantages of the borderscapes concept is that it underlines the necessity of investigating borders not only as taken-for-granted entities exclusively connected to the territorial limits of nation states, but rather as mobile, relational, and contested sites, as is needed when exploring alternative border imaginaries ‘beyond the line’ (Brambilla, 2015, p. 17).

As Schimanski (2015) explains, the borderscape concept provides a useful way of thinking about the border and the bordering process not only on, but also beyond, the line of the border, beyond the border as a place, beyond the landscape through which the border runs, and beyond borderlands with their territorial contiguities to the border. It is thus a flexible concept interweaving on the one hand flows and connections, but, on the other, it is an inclusive concept not necessarily limited by any clear spatial border. Rajaram and Grundy-Warr (2007, p. x, xxviii) use the concept to uncover ‘the complexity and vitality of, and at, the border’. Because the borderscape is not contained in a specific space, they argue, and because it is more wide-ranging in its material practices of demarcation than any specific borderline of territorial sovereignty, the concept

provides an inherent resistance to state demarcation.

The borderscapes concept unravels the relationships between borders and the systems that maintain them. It brings under investigation the forms of power, territory, political systems, citizenship, identity, otherness, and ‘normative dimension’ of borders by interrogating the interaction of in/visibility, space, and power that each border regime entails in reflecting the peculiar de-territorialised politics of b/ordering (Brambilla et al, 2015). It also entails different sociocultural, political, economic, and legal and historical locations where a space of negotiating actors, discourses, and practices is articulated by shedding light on borders as multidimensional entities, while having different symbolic and material forms and functions (ibid.). It is built on a relational approach to borders that takes into account complementary perspectives, considering the interaction between political visions and everyday sociocultural practices as well as social representations and artistic imaginaries. Indeed, borderscapes enable the adoption of complementary viewpoints on contemporary borders, considering the dialogic nature of bordering processes and imaginaries and the tension between institutional and formal modes of political agency and social non-formal modes of agency that inhabit the borderscape (Dittmer and Gray, 2010).

But the significance of borderscapes goes beyond mere aesthetic images, and the polysemicity of the concept has important (geo)political implications that also help to clarify the relationship of borderscapes to the social imaginary. Borderscapes – as sites of multiple tensions between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic imaginaries – highlight the conceptual potential of the term for contributing to the liberation of the (geo)political imagination from the burden of the ‘territorialist imperative’ (Agnew, 1994; Brenner, 1999). Through the borderscape lens it seems to be possible to foster a careful exploration of the epistemic and political implications of the interactions between different border imaginaries, thereby shedding light on the material basis for imaginary transformations and on the politics of the imagination as a concrete social practice (Appadurai, 1996, p. 31).

In departing from the traditional understanding of political nation-state borders projected as lines on the bi-dimensional surface of the map according to the modern territorialist geopolitical imaginary, borderscapes in their various forms are instead multidimensional and mobile constructions. They tell us about geographies of actions and stories of the border place, as well as about the itineraries of the mobile subjects that cross it, at the intersection of experience and representation (Brambilla et al, 2015). The borderscapes lens allows us to bridge the metaphorical-material border gap, enabling a reconsideration of what a border actually is and a recognition that there are many different and productive vantage points from which to study it. It allows us to appreciate borders as decidedly contentious zones, places that are different from other spatial demarcations, and encourages us to think of them not only in terms of their territorial specificity, but as incomplete, dialectical processes that generate multiple borderlands spaces, and sometimes at a distance from the political border itself. Appropriately, borders are persistently made and remade, reordered and debordered, in concert with larger circulations of migration, the projects of states, the implementation of trade accords, and the political responses of those living through and in these processes.

Conclusions

If we are to understand the complex construction of borders and their mediated effects, we must revisit them in light of their constantly changing historical, political, and social contexts, grasping their shifting and undetermined nature both in space and time (see Brambilla et al, 2015). Acknowledging the close interrelationships between social change and paradigm shifts, this article has endeavoured to shed light on to an interpretation of conceptual change in the study of borders. Broadening the understanding of borders by providing diverse ways of conceptualising borders, it is suggested, allows us to better cope with the danger of a growing disjuncture between the increasing complexity and differentiation of borders in global politics on the one hand and the apparent simplicity and lack of imagination with which borders and bordering practices conti-

nu to be treated on the other, as called for by Vaughan-Williams (2012, p. 7). In order to better interpret the broad socio-political transformations and the contemporary geopolitical reality, it is posited that a more nuanced yet critical understanding of borders as resources and as potential elements of political innovation is needed. Accordingly, this article maintains that it is necessary to rethink borders and in this process deconstruct the conventional epistemological suture between political practices of inclusion/exclusion and the images that are created to support and communicate them at the cultural level by Western territorialist modernity.

Bordering and borderscapes are posited as concepts and tools that challenge nation-state exclusivity and shift the focus to the border multiple. Merging these two perspectives affords a potent link between the various processes of social and political transformation, conceptual change, and local experience. Taken together, they form not only a theoretical, but also an empirical, tool for a border analysis with which to understand the deeper significance of borders in different political and cultural contexts. These inclusive concepts pay attention to the multiplicity of social spaces where borders are negotiated by different actors, and are built on a relational approach to borders that effectively takes into account the different complementary perspectives that consider the interaction between political visions and everyday sociocultural practices, social representations, and imaginaries

As it is now widely understood that borders are far more complex and manifold than was previously thought, so too must our approach be. We need to apply tools that are sufficiently flexible to allow us to capture the various nuances of current borders and the processes that maintain and transcend them and, as called for by Parker and Vaughan-Williams (2012, p. 729), to interrogate not just what and where borders are, but also how they function in different settings, with what consequences, and for whose benefit. While it now seems more impossible than ever to arrive at a single comprehensive metatheory concerning borders, there are, however, ways to go forward which may help us better understand borders and borderings universally. Bordering and borderscapes are very helpful in this regard in that

they draw our attention to the production and reproduction of borders, and allow us to investigate them as processes and not as givens.

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