Fences and neighbours in the postmodern world: boundary narratives in political geography

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Abstract: State boundaries have constituted a major topic in the tradition of political geography. Boundary analysis has focused on the international scale, since international boundaries provide perhaps the most explicit manifestation of the large-scale connection between politics and geography. The past decade has witnessed a renewed interest in boundaries, both within geography and from the wider field of social theory. Geographers have sought to place the notions of boundary within other social theoretical constructs, while other social scientists have attempted to understand the role of space and, in some cases, territory in their understanding of personal, group, and national boundaries and identities. Recent studies include analyses of the postmodern ideas of territoriality and the 'disappearance' of borders, the construction of sociospatial identities, socialization narratives in which boundaries are responsible for creating the 'us' and the 'Other', and the different scale dimensions of boundary research. These can be brought together within a multidimensional, multidisciplinary framework for the future study of boundary phenomena.

I Introduction

> The boundary is the place of intercourse with the foreigner (Fawcett, 1918).

Boundaries have constituted a major topic in the tradition of political geography. Typically, they have been analysed at the scale of the state, since international political borders provide one of the most explicit manifestations of the large-scale connection between politics and geography. The 1990s have witnessed a renewed interest in boundaries and frontiers within diverse academic fields. Territorial transformation at a global scale, and the deinstitutionalization of territories in eastern Europe and elsewhere have, once again, raised questions relating to boundaries and territorial identities. This

interest has manifested itself in diverse, sometimes conflicting, ways. On the one hand, the rise of nationalism has created a new interest in the meanings of boundaries. In contemporary discussions, national identity has become a slogan for the cultural constitution of the nation-state (Schlesinger, 1991; Billig, 1995). This interest in identity and boundaries has also been a consequence of the revival of ethno-regional movements, dislocation as a consequence of migration, forced movement or exile, or displacement in response to the imposition of a foreign culture by colonization (Bammer, 1994; Welchman, 1996).

One indication of the new interest in boundaries is the institutionalization of boundary studies, as indicated by the recent establishment of various associations for border research, such as the International Boundary Research Unit (IBRU) in Durham, the Association of Borderlands Scholars in New Mexico, the Geopolitics Research Center at the University of London, and their respective postgraduate degrees in boundary studies. There has been a proliferation of research and publications concerning boundary questions (Blake and Schofield, 1987; Sahlins, 1989; Grundy-Warr, 1990; Rumley and Minghi, 1991a; Dodds, 1994; Donnan and Wilson, 1994; Gallusser, 1994a; Girot, 1994; Johnson, 1994; Schofield, 1994; Schofield and Schofield, 1994; Biger, 1995; Forsberg, 1995; Newman, 1995; Anderson, 1996; Gradus and Lithwick, 1996; Krishna, 1996; Paasi, 1996a; 1996b; Shapiro and Alker, 1996; Welchman, 1996; Yiftachel and Meir, 1997). Some of these studies have attempted to set a new agenda for the future study of boundaries (Rumley and Minghi, 1991b; do Amaral, 1994; Dodds, 1994; Eva, 1994; Gallusser, 1994b; Waterman, 1994; Falah and Newman, 1995; Paasi, 1996a; Shapiro and Alker, 1996).

The discussion of the role of boundaries has been closely connected with the ideas of territory, territoriality and sovereignty. Geographers in particular seem to understand boundaries as expressions or manifestations of the *territoriality of states*, not least because geographic processes of socialization have taught us to acknowledge the state system within which we live – a spatial system which is characterized by more or less exclusive boundaries. This thinking shapes crucially the way in which we view the functioning and compartmentalization of the political organization of the world (Gottmann, 1973; Sack, 1986; Taylor, 1993; Johnston, 1991; 1995). This has also been the point of departure in studies of international relations (IR), but whereas geographers have typically evaluated the meanings of territoriality and boundaries, within IR, the state as a bounded unit has been taken for granted as a point of departure for research (Ashley, 1988; Shapiro and Alker, 1996).

Geographers have been particularly interested in land boundaries and the border landscapes of states – the areas in which these political processes have received their most concrete territorial or geographical expression and where boundaries have in fact been instruments of communication aimed at reifying, but at the same time depersonalizing, power. As Sack (1986: 32) points out, territoriality is easy to communicate since in principle it requires only one kind of a marker or sign: the boundary. Even if boundaries may exist on a variety of spatial scales, this 'communication function' is particularly obvious in the case of state boundaries.

But state boundaries are equally social, political and discursive constructs, not just static naturalized categories located between states. Boundaries and their meanings are historically contingent, and they are part of the production and institutionalization of territories and territoriality (Paasi, 1991). Even if they are always more or less arbitrary lines between territorial entities, they may also have deep symbolic, cultural, historical and religious, often contested, meanings for social communities. They manifest

themselves in numerous social, political and cultural practices. In the present international system, 'security' is typically tied to nationalist political identities which are represented as depending on the construction of boundaries with the Other (Tickner, 1995). But, as Sibley (1995: 183) remarks, 'in all kinds of political, social and socio-spatial relationships, boundaries then assume considerable significance because they are simultaneously zones of uncertainty and security'. Geographers participating in the critical geopolitics discourse, inspired by recent debates in IR theory, have increasingly challenged the geographical assumptions of IR theory and the empiricist concepts of border. They have suggested that attention should be paid to boundary-producing practices and questions of identity. They argue that all boundaries are socially constructed. This means that questions of power become crucial as far as boundaries are concerned (Campbell, 1992; Dodds, 1994; Massey and Jess, 1995; ÓTuathail, 1996; Agnew, 1993; 1997). These ideas are particularly important in the contemporary world where notions of territoriality and boundaries have become concomitant with the aims of various social groups to define and redefine the relations between social and physical space.

The language used when discussing boundaries is also changing. The ideas of borders, boundaries, borderlands, border-crossings and transgressions of borders that the representatives of various disciplines use, are increasingly employed in a metaphoric sense so that they do not inevitably refer to the material spaces with which geographers typically deal. These concepts are increasingly used not only in relation to state boundaries, which are the key object of this article, but also more generally to social and cultural boundaries as instruments through which social distinctions are constructed (Welchman, 1996). Hence, new conceptualizations and representations of space have emerged within cultural studies, differing from those which political geographers traditionally created in their accounts of boundaries, many of which are, anyway, explicit representations of space, scale and culture (Agnew, 1993). Political geographers have themselves become increasingly interested in the cultural and social meanings of (state) boundaries, and in boundaries as contested cultural and symbolic manifestations of territoriality (Leimgruber, 1991; Falah and Newman, 1995; Hasson, 1996; Paasi, 1995; 1996a).

Much of the recent literature has been characterized by the crossing of disciplinary boundaries. The use of a new postmodern language in boundary studies is simultaneously an expression of boundary changes between 'academic tribes and territories' (Becher, 1989). Geographers have sought to gain recognition among social theorists, while an increasing number of social and political scientists have discovered the importance of space and boundaries (Giddens, 1984; Gupta and Ferguson, 1992; Walker, 1993; Silber, 1995; Shapiro and Alker, 1996).

The objectives of this article are threefold. First, we set out to review concisely the traditional boundary literature within political geography, concentrating mainly on literature that deals with state boundaries. This section is largely descriptive and empirical in nature, although it will be later shown that some of the traditional classifications and descriptions of boundary types can be reinterpreted to have significance within the contemporary study of boundaries. Secondly, we review the new ideas which have been emerging in recent interdisciplinary studies of boundaries. This section draws strongly on recent 'postmodern' discussions of territory and territoriality, evaluates the changing significance of boundaries in the contemporary world, and discusses the importance of narrative in understanding how boundaries influence and are employed in the social construction of sociospatial identities. We also discuss the significance of

boundary studies at different levels of social and spatial analysis. Thirdly, we propose an agenda for the study of boundaries within political geography. We suggest that empirical studies will continue to have a role to play in the future construction of knowledge about boundaries. We argue that boundaries and their construction and representations continue to provide an important and challenging field for political geographers and that many classical geographical categories can be rethought in connection with boundaries.

II The boundary tradition within political geography

Boundary studies have had a long, descriptive and relatively nontheoretical history in geography. This is partly due to the fact that boundaries have constituted a very practical, and in some cases technical, question in international relations. Most studies have concentrated almost exclusively on international boundaries. Prescott (1987: 8) notes that attempts to produce a set of reliable theories about international boundaries have failed, although there has been greater success in devising a set of procedures by which boundaries can be (have been) studied. This partly harkens back to the fact that ideas about boundaries are related to their geographical and historical milieu (Holdich, 1916a; Jones, 1959; Minghi, 1963; Prescott, 1987). Prescott (1987) also draws on the geopolitical writings of Haushofer (1927) and Ancel (1938) to suggest that all boundaries are no more than temporary lines and 'political isobars' that continually undergo change as a result of conflict, military expansionism and territorial conquest.

The earliest discussions of territorial boundaries by academic geographers date back to Ratzel's (1897) treatment of the organic state, and are followed by such classics as Lord Curzon's imperial treatise on boundaries (Curzon, 1908) and Holdich's study of political frontiers and boundary making (Holdich, 1916b). The deterministic notions of natural boundaries were evident in much of the earlier literature (Semple, 1907; Bowman, 1921; Hartshorne, 1933; Pounds, 1951; 1954). Attempts to define the boundary and frontier terminology were accompanied by the classification and cataloguing of observed boundary types (Hartshorne, 1936; Boggs, 1940; Jones, 1943; 1945; 1959; Kristof, 1959). The literature was characterized by numerous case studies of boundary conflicts, demarcation processes and the empirical presentation of transboundary relations (Brigham, 1919; McMahon, 1935; Fischer, 1948; Minghi, 1963; Prescott, 1987).

Many studies have dealt with issues of definition, distinguishing boundaries and borders from frontiers, boundaries from borders, borders from borderlands and political frontiers from settlement frontiers. Boundaries and borders were initially conceived as being no more than lines separating sovereign territories, while frontiers were assumed to constitute the area in proximity to the border whose internal development was affected by the existence of the line. The political frontier was differentiated from the settlement frontier, the former affected by the existence of the international boundary, the latter constituting the, as yet, uninhabited region lying within the state territory and representing the spatial margin of the state's ecumene. This sociospatial construct drew strongly on the Turnerian frontier thesis, with notions of unsettled areas, pioneer frontiers and wilderness that often bore little relation to the existence of indigenous and native populations. Such frontiers were to be tamed, settled and civilized, and hence brought under the hegemony of white dominion.

Boundary classifications focused on the period of boundary formation with such notions as pioneer, antecedent, subsequent and superimposed boundaries (Hartshorne,

1936). Antecedence represented the creation of a boundary prior to the settling of a region, a catalyst for the formation of separate cultural and sociospatial entities. Subsequent boundaries were in part formed by, and in part superimposed upon, the existing patterns of human settlement, creating political compartments for existing ethno-territorial groups while, in other cases, fragmenting homogeneous ethno-territories into separate sociospatial political entities. Contemporary debates on displacements are important in this respect (Bammer, 1994; Welchman, 1996). Migrants and refugees arrive in places whose social and spatial boundaries have already been formed, are antecedent and are thus subject to pressures aimed at making them conform to existing patterns of sociospatial identity, rather than preserving their existing cultural identity within a different spatial milieu.

Functional, rather than static, boundary typologies focused on notions of open and closed boundaries, affording different levels of contact or separation between peoples and states on either side of the boundary. This influenced notions of frontiers and borderlands, areas within which different patterns of regional development are affected by the nature of transboundary relations, often creating conditions of 'double peripherality' (House, 1980; 1981). Borderlands and political frontiers have largely been studied within the context of conflict, separation, partition and barriers as contrasted with peace, contact, unification and bridges.

Theories of globalization, together with the realities of the post-Soviet new world order, have thrown up contrasting evidence with regard to the role of boundaries in the contemporary period. Many studies have dealt with the emergence of new ethno-territorial entities and states, and the consequent replacement of existing boundaries with new territorial separators and fences (O'Loughlin and Van der Wusten, 1993; Van der Wusten, 1994; Waterman, 1994). The collapse of the USSR alone created more than 20 new boundaries (Kolossov, 1992; Harris, 1993) and the re-emergence of many historical border questions stretching from Romania to Finland and on to Japan (Forsberg, 1995; Carter and Norris, 1996).

By contrast, studies focusing on the emergence of the European Union as a politico-economic entity have discussed the implications of boundary removal and transborder co-operation. In particular, much attention has been given to the co-operative approach (Gallusser, 1994a), emphasizing such diverse features as economic co-operation, the impact of transborder cooperation on local spaces and on changing cultural values, and identities of the borderland populations (Leimgruber, 1991; Klencic and Bufon, 1994; Nijkamp, 1995a; van der Veen and Boot, 1995). With few exceptions, little attention has yet been paid to the environmental effects of increased transboundary movement and co-operation. This transition from borderland studies emphasizing separation to those focusing on co-operation is seen as promoting political harmony (Minghi, 1991; 1994; Newman, 1998a) and is best summed up by Galtung (1994) as reflecting 'coexistence in spite of borders'.

III   Boundaries and their changing meaning: the multidimensional context

The past decade has witnessed a renewed interest in boundaries, both from the traditionalist political geographic perspective outlined above, and within the wider field of social and political theory. For their part, geographers have sought to place notions of boundaries and territories within other social-political theoretical constructs (Sack, 1986;

Johnston, 1991; 1995), while other social science disciplines have attempted to analyse the role of space and, in some cases, territory in their understanding of personal, group, and national boundaries and identities (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992; Johnson, 1994; Alvarez, 1995; Oommen, 1995; Zalewski and Enloe, 1995). This is part of the 'postmodern' academic discourse in which many disciplinary boundaries are being eroded (Jameson, 1983). It is particularly noticeable among geographers (Gregory and Urry, 1985; Peet and Thrift, 1989) as they continue to seek legitimacy within the wider social scientific context. At the same time, their crossing of disciplinary boundaries is such that they have largely rejected the study of international boundaries, despite the continuing importance of these lines in constructing sociospatial and national identities. Critical geopolitics has begun to challenge the idea of a fixed, territorially bounded world, and several authors have incorporated questions of boundaries and inclusion/exclusion into their theoretical frames. This has involved evaluating the contents of various geopolitical representations in foreign policy discourses, as well as some more general perspectives on the 'purification of space' (Dodds, 1994; Sibley, 1995; ÓTuathail, 1996).

Drawing on this eclectic literature from various academic fields, we identify four major themes within boundary studies: 1) the suggested 'disappearance' of boundaries; 2) the role of boundaries in the construction of sociospatial identities; 3) boundary narratives and discourse; and 4) the different spatial scales of boundary construction. While this list is by no means exhaustive, we would argue that these are the key topics to be discussed within the context of the challenges facing the uncertain future of the nation-state and, by association, state boundaries.

The four topics are separate, but linked. They do not necessarily flow into each other, but they share a common underlying theme – namely, the connection between territoriality, lines and identities. Boundaries, by definition, constitute lines of separation or contact. This may occur in real or virtual space, horizontally between territories, or vertically between groups and/or individuals. The point of contact or separation usually creates an 'us' and an 'Other' identity, and this takes place at a variety of sociospatial scales. Each of the four topics discussed in this section contributes to our understanding of the changing impact of boundaries, however defined, on the creation of these multifaceted identities.

1   Recent/contemporary discussions of territoriality: the 'disappearance' of borders

Patterns of movement and flows of people, culture, goods and information mean that it is now not so much physical boundaries – the geographical distances, the seas or mountain ranges – that define a community or nation's 'natural limits'. Increasingly we must think in terms of communications and transport networks and of the symbolic boundaries of language and culture – the 'spaces of transmission' defined by satellite footprints or radio signals – as providing the crucial, and permeable boundaries of our age (Morley and Robins, 1995: 1).

Recent and contemporary discourse on territory has raised questions concerning the normative modes of political and territorial compartmentalization. Driver (1991) has suggested rethinking the way in which we normally draw lines around territory, while Taylor (1997) proposes such notions as shared spaces and multi-identities as an alternative to the emphasis on separate spaces and single national identity. This is similar to the notion of a 'national home regime' in which concepts of nationality and citizenship are separated (Gottlieb, 1993: 42–44). Boundaries are seen to be more permeable than in the past (Morley and Robins, 1995) while, for many, boundaries are disappearing altogether and will be of no significance within the next few decades (Mlinar, 1992;

Kuehls, 1996; Shapiro and Alker, 1996) in what is predicted to be a 'borderless world' (Allen and Hamnett, 1995). The 'end of the nation-state' is perceived as following in an orderly sequence, as transfrontier economic interactions and the identification of regional and global common interests come to the fore (Anderson *et al.*, 1995; Guehenno, 1995; Sassen, 1996).

A major factor influencing this school of thought is the impact of globalization and the rise of the 'space of flows' instead of the 'space of places', to use the much cited expressions of Castells (1989). 'Globalization' is a contested process and includes conflicting tendencies, such as the relative 'shrinking' of the world and the increasing consciousness of the world as a whole (Robertson, 1992). Boundaries are doubtless significant in this process in that they have become more permeable in the global world. This is particularly the case with respect to the movement of goods, people and information.

Economists, in particular, have concluded that 'in terms of real flows of economic activity, nation states have *already* lost their role as meaningful units of participation in the global economy of today's borderless world' and that the nation-state is increasingly a 'nostalgic fiction' (Ohmae, 1995: 11). Much of the 'boundary opening' discourse has emerged from the technocratic discussions of global economic networks and the expansion of related systems (Cooke, 1993; Nijkamp, 1995b; van der Veen and Boot, 1995). Studies of information dissemination and cyberspace (Brunn and Jones, 1994; Brunn *et al.*, 1994; Wackerman, 1994) have pointed to the changing role of boundaries in their traditional role as barriers and preventers of communication. The strategic role of land boundaries has also raised questions concerning the traditional security discourse. In his advocy of a new regional order in the middle east, former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres argues that, in a world of ballistic missiles which can accurately pinpoint their target from distances of thousands of miles, there is no longer any significance in the existence of localized land boundaries (Peres, 1994).

Globalization theorists are not alone in their arguments. Several authors in critical or postmodern IR theory have challenged the traditional realist, state-centric approaches which have taken sovereignty, territoriality and boundaries of states for granted (Luke, 1993; Shapiro and Alker, 1996). Geographers have labelled this as a territorial trap (Agnew, 1994; Agnew and Corbridge, 1995). Questions relating to what is really happening to state boundaries, implicit in these discussions, have rarely been discussed (see, however, Agnew, 1997).

These interpretations are characterized by the emergence of a certain rhetoric concerning boundaries and their disappearance. It is not always clear if the concern is about the globalization of social institutions (economy, culture), globalizing consciousness or the change in networks of human action, which display much diversity in their spatial and social content. Not all authors agree with ideas that suggest the disappearance of boundaries. In discussing the cultural reconfiguration of global politics, Samuel Huntington argues that global politics is being reconfigured along cultural lines, and that political boundaries are increasingly being redrawn to coincide with cultural alignments (Huntington, 1996). Hirst and Thompson (1995) point out that, despite the rhetoric of globalization, most of the world's people live in closed worlds, 'trapped by the lottery of their birth'. They write, that, for the average worker or farmer with a family, one's nation-state is a 'community of fate' and that wealth and income are not global, but instead nationally and regionally distributed between poorer and richer states and localities. Hirst and Thompson also argue that the state is not withering away, but will remain strong in international governance. Even if the meanings of sovereignty are

continually changing, states will maintain their position because of their relationship to territory and population. Territorial borders are patrolled in the name of the state, which continues to represent the citizens within those borders (Murphy, 1996).

Implicit in postmodern thought is therefore the notion that the transformation of sociospatial organization into a postmodern 'hyperspace' is accompanied by the loss of boundaries, and that globalization processes threaten the particularity of places, borders, and territoriality (Mlinar, 1992). It can be argued, however, that the changing meanings of space raise questions about contemporary types of boundaries and identities, some of which may be aspatial or 'placeless' (Watts, 1996). This may be seen in attempts to understand social and cultural processes and phenomena in spatial terms; i.e., how they are constituted and constitutive of space, region, locality and place. In his study of *Nationalism without walls*, Gwyn (1995) argues that Canada is a 'decentred' country, one which has become decentralized 'no longer just into our historic regions and provinces but more and more into our new 'identity' communities'. Agnew (1994) points out that globalization does not inevitably mean 'homogenization', but rather fragmentation. Therefore, the world of cultural and economic flows is concomitantly also a world of structural transformation, uneven regional development and spatial differentiation. In many cases, the increased interdependence and integration among nations have changed the *meanings* of state boundaries. Territories may then have different relations with each other through their border areas, along a continuum stretching from alienated border-lands through to completely integrated borderlands (Martinez, 1994). As far as the effects of interdependence and integration inside states are concerned, this means that new voices will arise to articulate their interests. Much recent research in the field of IR has concentrated on the need to identify the political identities and social groupings which have been previously effectively suppressed by the hegemony of states (Minh-ha, 1996; Shapiro and Alker, 1996).

Fragmentation resulting from self-government in 'fourth world' nations (Nietschmann, 1994; Griggs and Hocknell, 1995) could also result in an increase, rather than decrease, in the number of territorial, and perhaps new state, boundaries. Processes of conflict resolution, euphemistically labelled peace processes, bring about new lines of separation and physical barriers as conflicting nations retreat into their own territorial compart-ments. Conflict resolution is, more often than not, characterized by separate, rather than shared, spaces (Harbottle, 1994; Williams, 1994; Newman, 1996a; 1996b).

The contemporary world is thus characterized by both diverging social, political and economic processes and very different interpretations of what they mean. Sociologist Oommen (1995) argues that the world we live in is characterized simultaneously by *endisms* (the end of history, geography, nature, ideology), *postisms* (postmodern, post-industrial, postcapitalist) and *beyondisms* (beyond the nation-state, beyond the cold war), and that these developments signify contradictory trends and tendencies. If endisms indicate a world without boundaries, postisms announce the emergence of fresh boundaries and beyondisms allude to the elongation of boundaries. Concomitantly, there is a set of *newisms*, such as 'new international economic order', 'new information order', 'new division of labour', which also create additions and accretions to the existing borders. Even when old, existing boundaries are perpetually contested and desacralized, new boundaries are concomitantly recreated and resacralized (Oommen, 1995). He further argues that the rise and fall, the construction and deconstruction, of various types of boundaries, is in fact the very story of human civilization and of contemporary social transformation.

2   Constructing sociospatial identities

> While a country could avoid Cold War alignment, it cannot lack an identity. The question: 'Which side are you on?' has been replaced by the much more fundamental one, 'Who are you?'. Every state has to have an answer. That answer, its cultural identity, defines the state's place in world politics, its friends and its enemies. (Huntington, 1996: 125).

Bourdieu (1991) argues that, to establish and institute something – giving it a social definition or identity – means, at the same time, the establishment of sociocultural boundaries. The key word here is *distinction*. Campbell (1992: 8), for his part, argues that identity is an inescapable dimension of being and that it is constituted in relation to difference. Both these arguments put stress on the meanings of boundaries. State territoriality and ideology effectively exploit these differences and distinctions in the construction of identities. Boundaries are therefore both symbols and manifestations of power relations and social institutions, and they become part of daily life in diverging institutional practices. As institutions, they embody implicit or explicit norms and values and, therefore, legal and moral codes. Boundaries may also be visible or invisible, physical or symbolic, and even all of them at the same time. The boundaries between states are both material and symbolic at one and the same time (Paasi, 1996a; 1997).

Identity and boundaries thus seem to be different sides of the same coin. It has even been argued that boundaries are more important than identity as such, since the classification that constitutes the ground for identities means the construction of boundaries (Barth, 1969). Boundaries are also constitutive of social action and may be both barriers and sources of motivation. Boundaries both create identities and are created through identity. As Tester (1993: 8) points out, 'without boundaries, without direction and location, social and cultural activity would itself be a simply pointless thrashing about in the world'. Boundaries create practices and forms, which, for their part, are the basis of meaning and interpretation. The relationship between regional and national identity on the one hand, and the spatial compartmentalization of political territory on the other, has been discussed within geography (Knight, 1982; 1985; 1994) but only as it relates to postcolonial territorial restructuring of the state system and the rights of national self-determination.

Boundaries not only separate groups and communities from each other but also mediate contacts between them. Mach (1993) points out that they provide normative patterns that regulate and direct interactions between members of social groups, as well as the rules of exchange of people, goods and symbolic messages, which at times can be crossed and transgressed. These are as applicable to physical boundaries as to perceived and imagined boundaries. Local populations do not necessarily perceive social and spatial boundaries, as determined by transboundary interaction and/or shared or separate identities, according to the same categories that are determined by government officials (Newman, 1994).

In recent social and cultural theory, the idea of boundary refers increasingly to the social and symbolic construction of boundaries between social collectivities rather than state boundaries. Cultural researchers have been interested in historic relations, struggles and symbolic links between various social groupings and communities (Barth, 1969; Cohen, 1982; 1986; Eisenstadt and Giesen, 1995). The hegemonic and counternarratives regarding the boundaries of 'race', ethnicity, gender, class and nation have been key topics in social and cultural sciences (Bhabha, 1990; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992). In anthropology, new approaches have challenged assumptions about the isomorphism of space, place and culture, emphasizing the need to evaluate the symbolic roles of state

boundaries and borderlands (Donnan and Wilson, 1994; Hage, 1996). Gupta and Ferguson (1992) note that the representations of space dealt with by social scientists have, to a great extent, been dependent on images of break, rupture and disjunction. The social sciences have typically assumed a nonproblematic division of space and have operated within the context of 'naturally' discontinuous territories. Society and culture have typically been connected with the concept of the nation-state. They argue that conceptualizing the meanings of space, displacements and deterritorializations inside and between territories is a challenge for contemporary cultural research.

During the past decade, geographers have also become interested in the social and cultural meanings of boundaries, along with the study of social constructionism. The notion of boundary is explicitly connected with such categories as nation, 'race', ethnicity or state (Jackson and Penrose, 1993). Nevertheless, boundaries have not been theoretized to the extent that the other categories have been. In most studies, the existence of boundaries has been taken for granted, or it has been understood mainly in a metaphoric sense. An exception is Sibley's (1988; 1995) discussion of the 'purification of space', in which he points to the rejection of group and cultural differentiation. Groups use boundaries as a means of securing sociospatial and ethnic homogeneity. Sibley (1995) demonstrates how the construction of otherness takes place at all spatial scales and between various groupings, and that attempts to 'purify space' are used by dominant power groups in an effort to exclude and marginalize other groups. This idea has been employed in political geography by Falah and Newman (1995) in their analysis of the search for a 'good border' by Israelis and Palestinians. Both national groups have developed their own strategies for the purification of space and these are accompanied by discourses and practices that express the respective images of threat felt by one towards the Other. This desire for exclusive and homogeneous territories often spills over into discriminatory practices, the implementation of policies aimed at maintaining spatial segregation between groups and, in some cases, explicit racism.

3   Territorial narratives: boundaries of exclusion and inclusion

Questions of postcolonialism, 'otherness' and the transgression of boundaries have challenged the power and meanings of boundaries as they relate to our understanding of space and place, insiders and outsiders, us and them. IR researchers have also been concerned with the politics of identity and how distinctions between 'us' and 'them', 'inside' and 'outside' or 'domestic' and 'foreign' have been crucial in the political construction of identities (Campbell, 1992; Zalewski and Enloe, 1995). Not only does this provide new theoretical and methodological challenges for political geographers (Dodds, 1994; Paasi, 1996a) but it also means that political geographers have to take questions of *narrativity* far more seriously than in the past (Sayer, 1989; Entrikin, 1991).

The construction of boundaries at all scales and dimensions takes place through narrativity. Somers (1994) notes that social life is typically 'storied', and that it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand and make sense of the social world and constitute our social identities. These narratives are mediated through a large number of social and political institutions which experience perpetual development and transformation. The boundaries of the national imagined communities and the narratives that constitute their collective cultural discourses are also changing continually (Bhabha, 1990). The construction of identity narratives is itself political action and is part of the distribution of social power in society (Somers, 1994). In the study of state boundaries, it

is important to know whose 'plots' or 'turfs' dominate these identity narratives, what is excluded or included by them and how the representations of 'us' and 'them' are produced and reproduced in various social practices, such as the media, education, etc. (Paasi, 1996a).

Duchacek (1970) uses the term *territorial socialization* to describe the specific focus on territory as part of the wider socialization narrative. This is reflected in geography and history books and atlases (Newman, 1991) and often lays the basis for the justification of claims to territorial control and sovereignty (Burghardt, 1973; Murphy, 1990). Taylor (1995) notes that we are socialized into interterritoriality and interstateness, both before and after school, and this is part of the continual construction of our taken-for-granted modern world. Socialization is a life-long process. Various forms of political, territorial and national socialization are factors in most theories of nationalism (Schleicher, 1993). The *pedagogy of space* focuses on the role of education and the media as major institutional forms of ideological reproduction of the state. It also helps us to understand the construction of institutionalized forms of 'we' and the 'Other', which are produced and perpetually reproduced in educational texts, narratives and discourses (Paasi, 1998). The changing meanings and interpretations given to state boundaries in the course of continuous nation-building processes are also expressions of various interstate ideologies, as well as interpretations of the broader international geopolitical landscape, such as supposed or represented 'threats'. Examples of the latter are USA discourses of explicit Soviet threat, or the discourse on 'Finlandization' as an implicit threat to the international order (Dalby, 1988; 1990; ÓTuathail and Agnew, 1992; Hasson, 1996; Paasi, 1995; 1996a).

As far as national socialization is concerned, boundaries are thus one part of the *discursive landscape* of social power, control and governance, which extends itself into the whole society and which is produced and reproduced in various social and cultural practices. This landscape concretizes and attempts to legitimize relations between territorial structures. In this discursive landscape, a boundary has a dual role, reflecting both collective and individual consciousness. The boundary does not limit itself merely to the border area or landscape itself, but more generally manifests itself in social and cultural practices and legislation, as well as in films, novels, memorials, ceremonies and public events. These boundary-related narratives also constitute contested frontiers, inasmuch as they exist by virtue of the boundary. Within these frontiers, the contest for identity socialization takes place, as institutions and agencies attempt to create exclusive 'us' identities and, by definition, outsider images of the 'Other' (Paasi, 1996a). Geographic and historical education in the school system also produces and reproduces the consciousness of this system of signs – an 'iconography of boundaries'. This tends to make space incontestable and exclusive (the purification of space), inasmuch as it provides a specific 'reading' and system of norms and values (Paasi, 1996b).

The iconographies of boundaries form textual entities which are open to analysis. The study of the Finnish–Russian border and the Israel–Palestinian dispute, the empirical laboratories of the respective authors of this article, are good examples of these processes of territorial socialization and creation of national identities. School geography textbooks, atlases, newspapers, magazines, novels, poems, paintings, photographs, popular posters, folk songs, the Bible and even the Lutheran hymnal were analysed as a means of deconstructing the changing meanings of the Finnish–Russian border and their historical and ideological connections. These materials reveal explicit messages about the roles of the border, some of which are hidden beneath metaphorical and allegorical meanings (Paasi, 1996a). Within the Israeli context, the study of geography texts (Bar Gal, 1991;

1993), the writings of early Zionist leaders, and religious texts and narratives (Newman, 1998b) brings out notions of 'our' territory and the exclusivity of the 'promised land', as contrasted with the competing claims for territorial control made by the Other (the Palestinians) (Peleg, 1994). Some of these materials also make clear that professional geographers, both academic and school teachers, are in a key position in the construction, representation and reproduction of sociospatial consciousness and boundaries (Newman, 1996c; Paasi, 1996a). Understanding territorial boundaries as a specific type of narrative will considerably broaden the field of concrete boundary studies. This approach suggests that boundaries are not located merely in the empirical contexts of border lines and landscapes, but also in 'literary landscapes' which have shaped and continually shape mindscapes and the perceptual images of the observer.

4   Boundaries and spatial scale

Although this article focuses on the contemporary significance of international boundaries, lines of separation operate at a number of different scales. At a simple level, boundaries exist in different spatial contexts, ranging from the international and national to the regional and local/administrative and metropolitan. In many ways, administrative boundaries have a far greater impact on the daily behavioural patterns of most individuals than do national and international boundaries. For many, the national boundary is only important inasmuch as it may provide the territorial dimension within which the individual identifies with a national community. Beyond national identity, most of life's functions take place within the context of local boundaries, both real and perceived.

The different roles and functions of territoriality at different spatial scales have provided an important focus for some political geographers (Sack, 1986; Johnston, 1991). Scale plays an important part in the process of boundary construction, while national boundaries can have a differential impact at different scales of analysis (Minghi, 1963; Paasi, 1996a). State boundaries, for instance, are not universal phenomena in their territorial meanings and functions, but exist in varying concrete and symbolic forms simultaneously as part of the international geopolitical landscape, the nation-state system and local life. The everyday life meanings, for their part, differ crucially in border areas and elsewhere in states. Boundaries and territoriality are therefore contextual. At the global scale, this context is the geopolitical and economic landscape of the world, while, at the scale of the state, it is the continual nation-building process which manifests itself in different social practices. The third significant scale is the sphere of everyday life experience (Agnew, 1987; Taylor, 1993; Smith, 1995; Paasi, 1996a), where the meanings of (state) boundaries are ultimately reproduced and contested. The state makes a difference as far as boundary functions are concerned. Taylor (1994) argues that the state as power container tends to preserve existing boundaries; as a wealth container it tends towards larger territories; and, finally, as a cultural container it tends towards smaller territories.

As far as the basic parameters of the global geopolitical landscape are concerned, and in spite of the globalization argument, the state still appears to provide the basic frame for discussing boundaries. We live in a world of some 190 states. Our world is a world of 'territorial containers' but it is also 'interterritorial' – almost every portion of the settled ecumene is part of the sovereign territory of some state (Taylor, 1995). The relationship between state and nation has become increasingly complicated, partially evidenced by the increase in the number of separate entities: at the turn of the 1980s, there were some

160 states; at the turn of the 1960s, 90; and before the second world war, fewer than 70. In the contemporary world, there exist 800 nationalist movements or groups and several thousand cultures, among and between whom new questions regarding territorial and social identity may continually arise (Rapoport, 1996). Thus questions of national identity are also tied up with different spatial scales, as ethnic territories become smaller and smaller.

Whereas national identities are expressions of general sociospatial consciousness, at the local level and in daily life, dimensions of identity and the meanings of history and heritage become complicated. The national narratives of state borders, therefore, may have different meanings in different contexts. Local experience and folklore mediate the national forms of identity, and it is impossible to understand the latter without knowledge of the former (Cohen, 1982; Paasi, 1996a). Clearly people come to terms with a relatively small number of representations of general sociospatial consciousness in their daily life and local experience, and most of these are representations set forth by the media and education. Billig (1995) argues that, in local experience, these national symbols become expressions of banal nationalism that are 'flagged' and lived in daily life. This also holds true in the case of boundaries. For people living in border areas, boundaries are an essential part of the activities and discourses of daily life, which are not necessarily translated into the collective and historical meanings that manifest themselves in the more general sociospatial consciousness and its concrete manifestations, such as national literature, monuments, curricula, etc. For people living elsewhere in states, boundaries are typically 'present' in the form of this general social consciousness (Paasi, 1996a). Local contexts therefore present several theoretical and methodological challenges for boundary studies, not least in the case of research methods, where qualitative, interpretative and ethnographic methods may be useful. This also provides a framework for bridging the gap between political geography and contemporary approaches within cultural research (Cohen, 1982; 1986; Sahlins, 1989; Krishna, 1996).

IV   Concluding discussion

1   Are boundaries really disappearing?

The purpose of this article has been to present the multidimensionality of boundary studies from spatial, thematic and disciplinary perspectives. Contrasting types of boundary narrative have been reviewed in the preceding discussion. The postmodern discussion of state territory suggests that boundaries are in the process of disappearing. The study of sociospatial identities takes the discussion of boundaries into another realm, focusing on the social construction of distinctions, differences and boundaries at a variety of interpersonal, group, and national scales. Discursive analysis would appear to be one way in which these contrasting themes and scales can be brought together within a single, albeit wide-ranging, framework.

Recent and contemporary discourse on territory and boundaries presents an optimistic view of the state of international affairs. Boundary disappearance, shared spaces and the peaceful realization of local and regional identities and self-empowerment are not reflected in the new world (dis)orders which are emerging. The former USSR is rife with territorial discord, while those in other areas of ethno-tribal instability struggle to transform their spaces of conflict into spaces of conflict resolution and spaces of peace (Newman, 1996a; 1996b; Rapoport, 1996).

We would suggest a number of reasons which account for this seeming dissonance between the 'postmodern' optimism and the observed territorial realities. Reflecting on ethno-territorial conflict, we adopt Tester's (1993) argument that postmodernity is not a harbinger or expression of a new world; it is a reflection of the unresolved paradoxes and possibilities of modernity.

The postmodern discourse has its roots in the western European territorial narrative, propagated by scholars within the western European and North American tradition. This is perhaps no surprise since Dijkink (1996: 142) notes that, in the geopolitical visions of Britain and the USA, boundaries and relations with neighbours have been comparatively unimportant. Many authors, then, perceive their own contexts as constituting 'The Texts' of the current world. But there are few territorial parallels to be drawn between the gradual opening of boundaries in western Europe with the reorientation of, and in many cases establishment of, new boundaries in central and eastern Europe. The disappearance of boundaries and all that it entails is, at this stage, relevant to only a small part of humankind. For the rest, territorial partitioning seems to remain the order of the day.

It is also important to note that the postmodern discourse has been greatly influenced by processes of economic globalization and information cyberspace. But beyond the shared spaces of virtual communities, territorial sharing and transboundary co-operation take place at the local level. While globalization may provide an important explanatory factor for some of the changes in international power relations, this is not necessarily reflected in changes in local or regional identities. Two to three generations of changed socialization messages and shared narratives may bring about a change in the way groups relate to notions of exclusive territories and local identities. But then again, they may not. This will be tested by future generations of sociologists, historians and geographers.

The impact of virtual space on the transboundary dissemination of information and ideas also has a dual effect. While the 'blocking' effect of boundaries has largely been removed, cyberspace has also enabled the creation of global-based national identity communities. Members of national diasporas, often located thousands of miles from their national 'core' territories, are now able to interact with other members of their national group residing at diverse locations throughout the globe. As such, cyberspace may serve to strengthen national identities and separation at a global, rather than a local, scale of analysis.

We would also note that the theories of boundary removal are largely based on the observation of economic realities. Both the western European and North American (USA–Canada) experiences have been characterized by an opening of markets, a removal of trade barriers and a 'global' economic environment. The postmodern discourse on boundaries has used these observed realities within a specific sphere (economic) of human activity to suggest that similar changes will take place within additional, cultural, national and social, spheres. This is a highly determinist argument, one that assumes that changes in the economic environment, normally defined in terms of technocratic networks, will automatically produce similar results in other spheres of life activity (Taylor *et al.*, 1995). The western European experience has taken 40 years of increased economic interaction and the identification of common interests to bring about the current level of political rapprochement and mutual awareness between states and nations. At the same time, it has also given rise to the emergence of local regional identities that were previously hidden beneath the state structure (Newhouse, 1997). The

fourth-world nations operate at one and the same time at the regional (European) level and local levels, often bypassing the state itself. To the extent that this signals the ultimate disappearance of boundaries, or alternatively the creation of many new socio-spatial boundaries, it is yet another test for future historians.

While not rejecting the postmodern discourse and critique on territory, we accept its plurality and often conflictual nature (Best and Kellner, 1991: 2), as contrasted with the automatic assumption that the emergent processes of change and transformation are creating a new postmodern society (Best and Kellner, 1991: 3).

2   Setting an agenda for the study of boundaries

In setting an agenda for the continued study of boundaries by geographers, a number of key topics are presented for further discussion:

1) Geographical studies of boundaries should reinsert the spatial dimension of these phenomena more explicitly back into the discussion. The geographers' quest for legitimation among other social theorists has resulted in space having taken a back seat, while in some cases it has been ignored altogether. The meanings, roles and manifestations of state boundaries have therefore not yet been reflected to the extent that different territorializations and deterritorializations of the contemporary world have been discussed. Geographers continue to have an important role to play within boundary studies inasmuch as space, physical-material, symbolic and imagined, lie at the heart of the boundary discourse.

2) Geographers should become more aware of the multidimensional nature of boundary studies. Issues of geographical scale are important, with boundaries operating at a variety of levels, ranging from the international to the local and micro. The dynamics of boundary impacts should be examined equally at all these scales. One example of this form of study would be a more detailed examination of the environmental impacts of transboundary externalities and spillovers, and the promotion of trans-boundary responsibility for safeguarding the environment (Kuehls, 1996). The study of transboundary migration patterns and the associated creation of exclusive and inclusive group identities is another area, the implications of which embrace all spatial scales of analysis.

   Both geographers and other social theorists should also become much more aware of the diverse types of boundary. These range from the physical and territorial to the social, personal and symbolic. At present, these are studied from alternative perspec-tives and disciplines, with little attempt to link them into a more holistic approach. The two types of scale are enfolded within each other. As we move down the geographical scale, we enter the realm of personal, group and symbolic boundaries. The study of the links within this multidimensional, multilayered framework presents a major challenge for all boundary scholars.

3) The implications of creating or removing boundaries should be understood through a multicultural perspective. Just as many of the classic boundary studies focused on the impact of European notions of fixed territories, and hence territorial boundaries, within both European and non-European societies, so too much of the contemporary discourse is in danger of making the same mistakes. It is equally fallacious to suggest that the removal of boundaries, if indeed that is what is happening in western society,

is taking place in the same way, or is having the same effect, within other cultural traditions. We require new and alternative boundary narratives to emerge from those societies that hold different representations of space and social identities. It is important to encourage scholars from these societies to present their own narratives unapologetically, even, and perhaps especially, where such narratives contrast with our own Euro-centred notions of territorial and spatial fixation.

4) States and other territorial entities, as well as their boundaries, are not static; neither are they permanent structures. As human constructs they are historically contingent processes, which emerge, exist for some time and disappear. The number of states and their boundaries has been continuously changing as have their respective meanings and roles. This means that boundary studies should be approached historically as part of a dynamic process, rather than as a collection of unrelated unique case studies.

5) The idea of nature should be expanded within the context of boundaries. Nature can be understood equally as a physical, environmental and/or ideological construct. Nature, in the broad sense, has held a key position in the national iconography of many nation-states. One important question to examine concerns how the meanings of nature are constructed and exploited in the continuous nation-building process; i.e., in the construction of the external boundaries of sovereign states. Another perspective is provided by 'ecopolitics', which challenges the ideas of strictly bounded territories and sovereignty: pollution and other ecological problems are not cognizant of these social constructions, and pay scant regard to them (Kuehls, 1996).

6) The study of narratives and discourse is central to an understanding of all types of boundaries, particularly state boundaries. These narratives range from foreign policy discourses, geographical texts and literature (including maps), to the many dimensions of formal and informal socialization which affect the creation of sociospatial identities, especially the notions of 'us' and the 'Other', exclusive and inclusive spaces and territories. The lines, fences and edges, some visible and many invisible, which separate the 'us' and the 'Other' are often hidden within these life texts or 'cartographies of power' (Krishna, 1996). It is particularly important to deconstruct these texts and narratives within conflict situations, especially in terms of understanding who creates these texts and for what purpose.

Finally, we would note that, despite the focus on empirical descriptive studies within the traditional boundary literature, some of the concepts and classifications raised can be reworked to have significance for other types of boundary study. Such notions as 'antecedent' and 'subsequent' relate equally to the impact of lines and fences on the formation of sociospatial identities; closed and open boundaries are significant in terms of the degree of intergroup relations which may evolve in different social and political contexts; and nature has to be understood not as a physical feature of delimitation, but rather as an environmental and ethical value to be protected. There is no reason not to use terminologies with which we are familiar, providing they can be injected with new meaning in the construction of a new boundary knowledge. Empirical studies will, no doubt, remain the focus for much future research. This partly reflects the practical needs behind most boundary studies. What is also required, however, is the creation of a suitable framework which can bring much of this traditional research into line with the emphasis on social constructs and identities which is central to contemporary social science research.

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