

**Contemporary Research Agendas in Border Studies:
An Overview**

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The study of borders has undergone a renaissance during the past two decades. From a descriptive analysis of the course and location of the lines separating States in the international system, to the study of the dynamics of the bordering process as it impacts society and space, borders have taken on a multi-dimensional meaning. No longer the exclusive domain of the geographer, cartographer or diplomat, the study of borders is discussed by sociologists, anthropologists and border practitioners, focusing on the functional significance of the bordering process as a dynamic in its own right at different social and spatial scales. Borders may signify the point or line of separation between distinct entities, separating one category from another, in some cases institutionalising existing differences, while in other cases creating the difference where none existed previously. Contingent upon social and political conditions, borders experience processes of opening or closing, reflecting the degree to which cross-border separation or contact takes place. As borders open, so trans-border frontier regions, or borderlands, evolve, areas within which borders are crossed, the meeting of the differences takes place and, in some cases, hybridity created. This is as true of territorial spaces in close proximity to the physical borders of the State or urban neighbourhoods, as it is of the social and cultural borderlands which interface between religious and ethnic groups, or economic categories.

This chapter seeks to identify the common themes of the bordering process, themes which are common to all border scholars and practitioners. The way in which the diverse border functions are expressed on the ground, between countries, groups or social categories, may be vastly different one from the other, but they reflect a common concern with the way in which borders are created (demarcated and delimited) subsequently institutionalised and perpetuated (managed) and eventually crossed, opened or even removed altogether, in a world of changing social, economic and political conditions.

There is no single border situation. Borders are neither opening or closing throughout the world. Borders are differentiated through society and space, such that while they are becoming more porous and amenable to crossing in one place, they are becoming more restrictive and sealed to movement in other places (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999; Berg & Piret, 2006; Blake, 2000a). During the 1990's, border research in North America focused on the ways in which borders became more flexible and easier to cross within the context of globalization and the opening of economic markets spurred on by NAFTA and the widening trade links between neighbouring countries. Since the events of 9/11, the focus has shifted back to the ways in which borders can be closed and sealed in the face of perceived global terror threats. As part of the renewed securitisation discourse. Equally, borders may be opening to certain social, cyber and economic functions while, at one and the same time, they can be closing to other political and security functions. This causes tensions between different institutional interests, ranging from the government, the military, the welfare and health, the economic, the human rights and the NGO's. Thus, power relations, reflecting the different

interests of the social and economic gatekeepers, are a major determinant in the way that borders are demarcated and managed through space and time.

This discussion of border research agendas does not limit itself to the physical and the geographical. It moves beyond the disciplinary boundaries to examine the nature of borders as delimiters of social, economic and cultural categories no less than the geographical. The paper also discusses the dynamics of the bordering process as it is relevant to all types of border – geographical and non-geographical – drawing some of its terminologies and categorizations from the former for an understanding of the latter.

Boundary Demarcation and Delimitation as Agents of Inclusion and Exclusion.

The demarcation of boundaries has been one of the main areas of traditional research into borders. Boundaries have been classified into diverse categories and typologies, relating to their genetic or time phases (Hartshorne, 1936; Jones, 1943; 1959; Minghi, 1963; Prescott, 1987). The temporal categorisation of borders reflected existing ethnic and linguistic differences, or was the catalysator which brought about the evolution of ethnically different groups on both sides of the border. Other demarcation classifications have related to the legal status of the border, the extent to which they resulted from warfare or from bilateral agreement and, to a lesser extent, some simple functional classifications reflecting the extent to which international boundaries were open to trans-boundary movement.

Much of the boundary demarcation categorization is seen as descriptive in nature, but with little reference to the functional and political significances of the bordering process as a dynamic process in its own right. It focuses on borders as a static outcome of the political process, rather than a factor which is as much an input as it is output. Moreover, the traditional categories, such as demarcation, delimitation, superimposition, antecedent and subsequent (terms borrowed by early boundary scholars from the realm of physical geography and fluvial geomorphology) have contemporary significance if transformed to the realms of social, cultural and political behaviour.

Demarcation is not only about the lines on the map which are then transformed into physical fences and walls on the ground. It is as much about the way that the societal managers determine the nature of inclusion and exclusion from various social categories and groups. Such demarcations may be contested in the same way that the location of geographical boundaries are often contested. The inclusion of one person in a religious category may, for instance, depend on a particular interpretation of religious law and the extent to which any particular sect within the religion enjoys greater influence than others in determining the demarcation procedures. Classifying populations into various social and economic categories, as a result of which an individual may be eligible for government assistance and benefits, or may have to pay taxation at a certain higher or lower rate, is also an arbitrary demarcation of borders which determine who is included and who is excluded from any particular category. The demarcation of fixed borders creates the ecological fallacy, where some who should be included are left out, while others who should be excluded find themselves inside. This

social construction of compartments and their borders is necessary for the ordering of society, but will always be contested, because there can rarely be a single border which is totally congruous with the absolute category. In some cases, the incongruity between boundary demarcation and the spatial or social category is due to a lack of accurate information and data, while in other cases it is because categories change over time through social and economic dynamics while the borders, once created and imposed upon the social or spatial landscape, remain inert and unchanging. In other cases still it is because of the power relations and the imposition of systems of control over spaces and groups which are subservient to their political or economic power.

Power Relations and the Management of Borders

Borders are social and political constructions. Someone creates them and, once created, manages them in such a way as to serve the interests of those same power elites (Newman, 2003). Borders are always initially created as a means of separation, the construction of a barrier between two sides, normally as a means of perceived defence from outside influences, be it the invasions by foreign troops, the unhindered movement of migrants, or the flow of cheap goods which would undercut the local producers. Thus, borders are often created by those who see themselves as acting in the interests of the collective whom they represent, be it the State, the religious faith or the private country club. Borders are created by those who have the power to “keep out” those people and influences which are perceived, at any point in time, as being undesirable or detrimental to the home territory or group.

Equally, the opening of borders is also undertaken by power elites. These may be different power elites than those who constructed them in the first place, resulting from a change in government, changing social mores and /or the defeat of a group or country by an external power elite who have overcome the barrier function of the existing border. Where social or economic mores have changed, it may be the same power elites who, previously having created and closed the border in the first place, now decide that it in their political or economic interests to open the borders to movement and trans-boundary circulation. This would be particularly true with respect to the economic elites who create the borders of customs tariffs when it is in their interest, but equally open up the borders to the free movement of goods and global capital when it serves their interests in a changing economic and global environment.

Once created, borders become transformed into a reality, a default situation which impacts upon daily life patterns and social mores, determine the parameters of exclusion and inclusion, and creates the categories through which social and spatial compartmentalization is perpetuated. As such, borders are transformed into institutions which have their own set of rules, part of which are implemented for the sake of self perpetuation, as in all institutional structures. The institutions which are borders are managed in such a way as to control the movement of people, goods and ideas from one side of the border to the other. This is the single most important function of border management, controlling the means of border

crossing. But this involves much more than technical aspects of institutional management. By controlling the crossing function, border management fulfils the role determined by the power elites, for whom the border is an agent of control in defining societal parameters.

Contextually, the demarcation and management of borders can be bilaterally negotiated by two power elites, one on each side of the border, or they can be imposed by the powerful upon the weak.. Bilateral borders are always better than the unilaterally imposed borders, but it does not necessarily make them any more or less effective. Only when the existence, or specific parameters, of the border can be challenged by the “other” side, do they experience change or potential removal. Conflict over the existence of borders exist, sometimes because of dissatisfaction with the way in which the borders were created in the first place, or because of changes in the political, economic and global conditions which make the existing boundaries increasingly out of synchronization with changing territorial or social realities (Newman, 2004). This is perhaps less the case with the territorial and physical borders separating States in the international system, than it is with a diverse range of social, economic and cultural boundaries which, for long periods of time, delimited the categories of a hierarchical and class based society and which, in a classless meritocracy, have become relict – to be replaced by a new set of socio-economic borders.

Borderlands, Frontiers and Zones of Transition / Hybridity.

Borders are lines. They constitute the sharp point at which categories, spaces and territories interface. One category ends, the adjoining category begins. Historically, this has been of greatest importance in terms of the territorial boundaries separating States, determining the territorial extent of sovereignty and exclusive State control. This is true of any type of border where the demarcation process is rigidly defined in absolute locational terms. It is less the case where borders are defined in general terms, allowing for a degree of movement within the border zone, within which the absolute notions of inclusion or exclusion are fuzzy and undefined.

These fuzzy definitions of borders give rise to the concept of borderlands, areas in proximity to the border which constitute a transition zone between two distinct categories, rather than a clear cut-off line (Blake, 2000b Martinez, 1994; Minghi, 1991; Pavlakovich et al, 2004). It is an area within which people residing in the same territorial or cultural space may feel a sense of belonging to either one of the two sides, to each of the two sides, or even to a form of hybrid space in which they adopt parts of each culture and / or speak both languages.

Borderlands exist on both sides of borders. Where the border has been imposed upon a previously single cultural landscape, this is easy to understand. Ethnic groups continue to have a natural affinity with the people living on the other side of the border, rather than with the majority population of their own country of residence but with whom they have no common religious, cultural or linguistic past. In these cases, such as in the Balkans, the Kurdish regions of Iran, Iraq and Turkey, the former line of separation between East and West Germany, or in Israel / Palestine, it is the context of ethnic conflict which has brought

about the imposition of borders and, as such, States attempt to seal the border and to prevent contact between the two sides/ for fear of secessionist demands and boundary redrawing. Notwithstanding, there exists in these regions a natural ethno-cultural borderland straddling both sides of the border, even if the rigidity of the border prevents it from becoming transformed into a functional region. States have often attempted to dilute minority ethnic population who live on close proximity to this type of border, in some cases through the forced out-movement of ethnic groups from the border region, or through land settlement policies which encourage other population groups to reside in these areas, populations whose orientations are towards the State core and the interior, rather than external and beyond the border.

Borderland regions are an important part of the process through which borders are opened. Prior to the removal of borders in the expanding European union, the EU created a series of trans-boundary regions, within which people from both sides who did not share ethnic characteristics, came into contact with each other through common economic and cultural cooperation (Anderson et al, 2002; Blatter et al, 2001; Perkmann, 1999; Perkmann & Sum, 2002). Through meeting and interaction, people become less fearful of the other, acknowledging the common concerns of daily life practices in the fields of commerce, education and recreational pursuits, rather than the distant considerations of statecraft and international diplomacy.

There is no set limit for the existence, or extent, of any particular borderland. They can exist on one side of the border but not on the other. They may extend for large distance (spatial or cultural) on one side but are much more limited on the other. Their existence is contingent upon the extent to which development, social or economic interaction which takes place in these spaces is influenced by their location in proximity to the border. The existence of the border impacts the activities which takes place in these spaces, partially explaining why development in these regions is different from the expected patterns of urban and regional planning. In areas where borders are contested, governments may decide to invest development resources into the region as a means of influencing the local resident population to stay in what may be a potentially volatile environment, or because they want to make a point to the government on the other side that they are rooted in the area and have no intention of withdrawing from the region. Equally, the government on the other side of the border may decide that it is too dangerous for human habitation and will transform the region from a civilian ecumene to a fortified and military zone. In each case we have a borderland, within which development is a function of the proximity to a contested border, but the characteristics of which are significantly different on each side of the border.

Conversely, borderlands can become transformed into zones of transition in regions of stability and cross-border cooperation. Where borders are opened after long periods of being closed, the borderland becomes a space in which contact takes place and in which the threat of difference is gradually removed. Transition zones may result in cross-border hybridity in which local populations take on characteristics of both sides of the border, enabling a continuum from the absolute characteristics of one group to the absolute characteristics of the other. But meeting, particularly after periods of length conflict and cross-border tensions,

does not always result in spatial hybridity. The meeting may serve to strengthen national or group uniqueness, as each side seeks to cultivate its own feelings of difference and cultural superiority. As Oskar Martinez has pointed out, there is a borderland continuum stretching from a situation of full cross-border integration in which the existence of the border is hardly felt, to a situation of borderland alienation in which there is no contact at all between the peoples on either side of the line of separation (Martinez, 1994).

Cultural and social borders are also characterized by borderland spaces and zones of transition, even if these cannot be defined in spatial or territorial terms. Belonging to a religious group is varied. There are those who are included within the border by virtue of their adherence to the dogma in its totality, while there are others for whom a less dogmatic and less segregated form of religious affiliation is combined with the characteristics of the wider environment. Moving from one religious category into another often requires a process of conversion, through which the crossing of the border means leaving one form of social behaviour behind, while taking on another.

Equally, someone whose economic status has moved from one category to another by virtue of becoming wealthy, may not necessarily share the social attributes of his / her new economic status and, as such, may find themselves in a transition zone between highly stratified socio-economic class distinctions. The list is endless. There is always movement beyond the border, as people try to move from one social or spatial category to the other. Some succeed in crossing the territorial or the cultural border, others do not. Some succeed in crossing the territorial border but find themselves unable to cross the cultural border and are transformed from a member of an ethnic majority in their place of origin into an ethnic minority in their new destination, finding that the cultural borders of integration are much more difficult to cross than were the land borders between the States. The crossing of the cultural borders, the movement out of the ethnic ghetto may never take place, or it may wait for the second and third generation descendants of the original border crossers to undertake the necessary cultural and socio-economic adjustments.

Globalization, Securitization and the Porosity of Borders.

Are borders opening or are they closing? During the 1990's, almost all border related research focused on the perceived impacts of globalization on the opening of borders and, in some cases, their total erasure. Globalization posited the notions of deterritorialized and borderless worlds (Dittgen, 2000; Hudson, 1998; Kolossov & O'Loughlin, 1998; Newman, 2006a; Newman & Paasi, 1998; Ohmae, 1990; Paasi, 1998; Shapiro & Alker, 1996; Toal, 1999; Yeung, 1998). In a world of unimpeded global flows, especially flows of capital and information, borders were considered as being redundant. No amount of government attempts to erect barriers in the form of walls, fences and stringent boundary management, could stop the force of cyber flows which no longer took account of the existence of borders. The relative political stability of the 1980's and 1990's, coupled with the collapse of the Iron Curtain, resulted in the easing of border restrictions, making it easier for more people

throughout the world to cross borders than in the past. In the extreme case of the European Union, borders between States, which only fifty years previously had been embroiled in one of history's bitterest acts of warfare, were removed altogether, such that the only border relicts were those chosen by the government to remain in situ for purpose of tourism and historical memory.

The opening and crossing of borders was reflected in the research and publications on border related issues of the 1980's and 1990's. Although the absolutist notion of a totally borderless world was seen as being a step too far, the impact of globalization on the functions of borders could not be ignored, as they became easier to negotiate and to cross. Even where the boundaries were not removed altogether, many governments cooperated with each other in the creation of trans-boundary regions, in which peoples on both sides of previously closed and sealed boundaries came together for reasons of commerce, culture, tourism and even education.

Just as the globalization discourse had a significant impact on the opening of borders, so too did the events of 9/11 and the subsequent securitization discourse have a major impact on the re-closing of many borders (Andreas & Biersteker, 2003; Andreas & Snyder 2000; Laitinen, 2003). The threat of global terror resulted in governments reimposing stringent management procedures aimed at preventing "undesirable" elements from crossing the border, all in the name of a potential "security threat". Nowhere has this been more marked than in the case of the USA borders, with Mexico in the south and, more surprisingly, with Canada in the north (Andreas, 2000; 2003; Ackleson, 2004; Brunet-Jailly, 2004a; Coleman, 2004; Nevins, 2002; Nicol, 2005; Olmedo & Soden, 2005; Purcell & Nevins, 2004). It has become more difficult for people to cross the border, even for the legitimate purposes of employment and / or tourism. For the Department of Homeland Security, every one of the million Mexicans who cross in and out of the USA on a daily basis, are a potential security threat until proven otherwise. This has been accompanied by the construction of walls and fences along previously unfenced sections of the USA-Mexico border, as well as the formation of localised private militias, known as minutemen, who patrol the unpatrolled parts of the border for illegal migrants. Thus the securitization discourse is being used as a means of addressing another issue altogether, the flow of "illegal" migrants from Mexico seeking nothing more than employment and a better life in the territory of the world's economic superpower. Equally, the outer border of the expanding European Union, the Shengen border, has become transformed into the point at which entry is denied to economic migrants, while in some cases the transit camps where potential migrants are checked are located in neighbouring countries outside the territorial domain of the EU itself.

Contextually, scholars of borders in North America note the fact that during the 1980's, the main funders for border related research came from NAFTA (North American Free Trade Association) and related economic organizations, interested in making the borders easier to cross for capital, goods and people, strengthening the economic relations between the countries. But since 9/11, most of this funding has fallen away and has been replaced by agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security who are interested in the opposite question, namely how borders can be made more difficult to cross, how they can be re-closed

and re-sealed as a means of preventing the movement of people and suspect goods. Thus the respective economic and securitization discourses fight it out with each other over their contrasting visions of the border as agents of national policies, one seeking to ease restrictions to strengthen American economic prosperity, the other seeking to impose more stringent restrictions as a means of strengthening American security and safety.

Both discourses serve the interests of the State but in different spheres. Although they have changed the ways in which borders are perceived by national governments, they are not absolute in the sense that borders are neither totally opening (in the 1990's) or closing (in the post 9/11 period). The opening of borders remains highly geographically differentiated, opening in some places, remaining closed and even being constructed for the first time in other places. The extent to which borders undergo functional change is contingent upon political and geographical conditions which, in turn, is mediated by the securitization turn of the past decade. It is somewhat ironic that the European colonial superimposition of borders in regions such as Africa and Asia, in which the past territorial orders were very different to European notions of territorial fixation, is now perceived by those same powers as being largely irrelevant. In the name of their superimposed borders, tribal warfare, refugee displacement and even genocide has taken place almost continuously during the past 70 years. But just as many of these States begin to come to terms with the recently imposed State territorial orders, along comes Europe and tells them that in an era of globalization and post-nationalism(sic) these borders are no longer relevant. In reality, contemporary Africa and Asia live with a duality of territorial orders – territorial fixation imposed by the physical borders, with tribal and nomadic movement continuing to take place within many of these countries, albeit far less across the State borders which now constitute a barrier (often a ruthless barrier) to their unhindered seasonal movement and search for pasture and economic livelihood.

Daily Life Practices: Localised Border 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 the border, or that the representations of the border and its influence disappear from individual and collective memories. Even when borders exist, but their physical attributes (walls, fences, guard posts) are removed, they impact the life practices of the local inhabitants. Our understanding of this localized impact is gleaned from localised border narratives, grass roots empiricism creating the border stories and representations even where governments may argue the border has been removed and is no longer of relevance (Sidaway, 2005; Wastl-Water et al, 2002).

Until July 2007, residents of villages straddling the non-existent physical border between Northern Ireland and the independent Republic of Ireland, continued to frequent pubs and night clubs “beyond” the border where smoking was still allowed in public places until, that is, the United Kingdom also adopted the no smoking laws which had gone into effect in the

Republic some years earlier. Prior to the extension of drinking hours in the UK some years earlier, residents of the North had equally walked down the road and crossed the non-existent border into the South when they desired to continue their drinking beyond the limited hours which were permitted in the UK.

Following the Six Day war in Israel / Palestine, the Israeli government announced that the Green Line boundary separating Israel from the West Bank had been removed. But for the ensuing forty years, it continued to be an important administrative boundary, determining the citizenship of people residing on both sides of the “non-existent” line and, when necessary, constituting the point where barricades and curfews were implemented following terrorist incidents. Israeli civilian law was applicable on one side of the line, the military administration on the other. Until, that is, the line was re-established with the construction of the Separation Barrier (Fence / Wall) from 2003 onwards and the reincarnation of the Green Line boundary as the potential border for the new State of Palestine, if and when this is to occur (Newman, 1993; 2009).

Travelling through and beyond the boundaries of Western Europe, travellers may be unaware that there ever was a border in these areas. But the rapid removal of all signs of the previous borders has made some governments step in and prevent the demolishing of the last border posts and fragments of fences, transforming them into attractions for American and Japanese tourists who can learn their European history through these last border relicts and, at the same time, providing a commercial boost for local shops and stalls who sell souvenirs of previous borders. Dutch residents close to the border with Belgium send their children to schools beyond the “non-existent” border because, they argue, the education and the discipline is better on the “other side”. Many Danish residents of Copenhagen have now relocated their place of residence to the “other” side of the Denmark – Sweden border just across the newly constructed land bridge linking the two countries, because, they argue, taxes are lower and quality of life is higher on the “other” side of the “non-existent” boundary.

Clearly, boundaries impact daily life patterns and practices. For most people, far removed from the realms of international diplomacy and statesmanship, it is the small matters of schooling, food, taxation and drinking hours which affect them most. If the existence or formal removal of a boundary enables them to enjoy better conditions in any one of these, or many other, parameters of daily life, then the border becomes an instrument through which life quality is improved. As such, the borders which may have originally been constructed as barriers between peoples and their separate spaces, are now transformed into places which are manipulated for the common betterment of life, rather than disappearing altogether. The governments and local authorities on both sides of the “open” border exploit the border crossing to mutual benefit of populations on both sides, rather than remove them altogether.

Ethics and the Bordering Process.

An important question on the contemporary border agenda concerns the ethics of the bordering process (Buchanan & Moore, 2003; Van Houtum & Van Naersen, 2002). This

relates back to the question of power relations, although the focus here does not concern those who create the boundaries but rather those who are impacted by the establishment of borders. The restriction of movement, the nature of the management and detention process at the border and the ways in which some are allowed to enter and others are prevented from crossing the border, raise significant questions of ethics and human rights. As border management becomes more stringent than in the past, due to the securitization imperatives, so too many potential border crossers are treated more harshly. Not only are their documents checked more thoroughly, but they are often subject to increased body searches, are held in holding rooms or cells for longer periods of time and may even be subject to various x-ray and / or dog sniffing mechanisms.

The question discussed above: “In whose interests are borders created, and by whom? , does not deal with the question “do we have the right to create borders which, by definition, make movement more difficult?”. It runs counter to modern and post-modernist understandings of a free world, in which people have the basic right to move, to have freedom of employment and residence, as long as they do not threaten the physical well being of their new co-habitants and neighbours. The securitization discourse is an excuse for the closing of borders, but this does not mean that the resultant closing, even sealing, of the borders is morally right.

This is even more problematic in cases where borders constitute the barriers which prevent people from reaching health care facilities, or from using their families and loved ones. Using borders as means of entry prevention is bad enough, while using borders as a means of preventing exit from a place of origin is even worse. In such cases, borders constitute the equivalent of the walls of the prison, a situation which may be decreasing in a globalised world but has by no means disappeared altogether. There remain plenty of regimes which prevent their citizens from leaving their country, and this is separate from the question of whether these same people would be successful in crossing the borders into a new place of destination.

The most blatant examples of exit prevention are those places where physical fences and walls continue to be constructed. The Separation Barrier which has been constructed between Israel and the West Bank may serve a securitization objective (the prevention of suicide bombers) but it has caused much hardship for innocent civilians whose daily life patterns have suffered severe dislocation. Prior to the construction of this barrier, the walls and fences in Germany (finally removed in 1990), Cyprus, Korea and, more recently, along parts of the USA-Mexico border create a sense of invisibility and threat which go far beyond any legitimate political or security objectives, enabling States to manage these borders in such a way as to question the basic values and ethics of a supposedly more humane world. Achieving the right balance between the legitimate needs of the State in defending its population, and the extent to which this justifies the negation of the human rights of innocent civilians, has become increasingly complex in the post 9/11 era, where notions of securitization have become the keyword to justify actions on the part of the State, actions which were assumed to have disappeared from the western world in the utopianised era of globalized and borderless (sic) worlds.

Concluding Comments: Is There a Single Model for the Study of Borders?

Is it possible to combine the notions of borders discussed in this chapter into a single model or theory of borders? Perhaps borders are too diverse and varied for a single model to be applied, not least given the vastly different empirical understandings of what constitutes a border as perceived by an anthropologist, a geographer or an expert in International Relations, respectively (Brunet-Jailly, 2004b; 2005; Kolossov, 2005; Newman, 2003; 2006b; Paasi, 2005; Van Houtum, 2005). Notwithstanding, this chapter has highlighted a number of common themes which would appear to be applicable to most, if not all, understandings of borders, especially when the focus is shifted from the physical dimension or location of the border to an analysis of the dynamics and functionality of the bordering process.

All borders either create or reflect difference, be they spatial categories or cultural affiliations and identities. All borders are initially constructed as a means through which groups – be they States, religions or social classes – can be ordered, hierarchised, managed and controlled by power elites. It is the latter who determine the demarcation and delimitation criteria for the construction and the perpetuation of the border as an institution which is strongly linked in with the agencies of power. There will always be groups and individuals who desire to cross the border, either as a means of escaping the category (social or spatial) in which he / she are located, and / or because he / she believes that the grass is always greener on the other side of the border. Transition zones, frontiers and borderland spaces exist in close proximity to all types of border, in some cases creating a trans-boundary zone of meeting, interaction and hybridity in and around open and porous borders, while in other cases emphasising the differences which exist on either side of sealed or closed borders. This ties in with the fact that most borders, by their very definition, create binary distinctions between the “here” and “there”, the “us” and “them”, the “included” and the “excluded”.

In this sense, there are common themes which are relevant to all types of border, even if this does not constitute a single model or theory in its own right. Social scientists have much to contribute to our understanding of these border dynamics, taking them beyond the limited understandings which are limited to a single academic discipline, by virtue of their inability, or lack of willingness, to cross their own professional borders which separate one discipline from the other. An important step in this respect is the creation of a common language, or glossary of terms, which are recognisable by border scholars, regardless of their specific compartmentalised discipline. Some of this common language has been created during a decade of intensive border research and inter-disciplinary workshops, although it remains to be seen whether this has created any meaningful common discourse over and beyond the physical meeting in the transition or frontier zone between disciplines.

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