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INTRODUCTION



Securitized Borderlands

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ABSTRACT

Borders have recently attracted a lot of academic scrutiny. Two very distinct types of literature have attempted to capture the current evolution of borders. The first one, leaning more toward the field of security studies, puts the emphasis on the rampant securitization, the coercive dimension of borders, and their divisive consequences. The second, looks at the rich environment surrounding borders, where boundaries are seen as the meeting point of a variety of cultures and communities. Those social spaces, known as borderlands, are the cradle of hybrid identities and transnational networks that contest the State's claim to ultimate sovereignty over its territory. Against this backdrop, the ambition of this special issue lies in its aim to fill theoretically and empirically this gap by looking at securitized borderlands. This introductory article delineates the contours of and puts together the main findings of both security studies on borders and borderlands studies. It announces the objectives of the subsequent articles, which together look into the interaction between the securitized borders and the social spaces they both obstruct and dynamize. In spite of and within this peculiarly adverse environment of "securitized borderlands," cross border societies remain in existence, resist, comply, and adjust.

Paradoxical border(land)s

Borders encircle the territory on which a State claims sovereignty and demarcate its spatial boundaries. They materialize the far edges of the State's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. They are thus limits that need to be defended and simultaneously contact points between states and their respective citizens.

On the one hand, borders are the outer limits to the spatial scope of State's power and, as such, strategic lines that need to be defended against unwanted intrusions. From a historical perspective, States formation resulted from the successful waging of wars. It meant that new territories were integrated and powers centralized (Tilly 1992). Therefore, borders created States as much as States created borders (Anderson 1996). On that basis, the management of borders—and their much-discussed degree of permeability—

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is usually framed as a security issue. For borders were originally thought of as defensive military lines that needed to be carefully manned and fortified to deter neighboring States from invading the country. Borders were potential front lines that needed to stand prepared to the ever-present possibility of large-scale aggression. However, despite some exceptions such as Kosovo or South Sudan, the times of widespread States formation are long gone. Currently, military conquest of territories is judged illegitimate and deemed unjustifiable by virtually all political and ethical traditions (Buchanan and Moore 2003). In our post-Cold War world, most international actors indeed recognize and respectfully observe the territorial integrity norm (Zacher 2002). The norm is enshrined in the United Nations Charter (Art.2, Para 4) and forbids States to contest the territorial integrity of other States. In other words, irredentism, though still a thorny issue in a few parts of the world, no longer figures very high on the international political agenda and full-scale military invasions rarely occur, even though they remain a possibility as shown by developments in Crimea in 2014.

The association between borders and defensive lines appears to be receding but it does not mean that the constitutive role of borders in international politics belongs to a past era. Borders' institutional functions and purposes might be shifting but borders remain highly charged markers. Borders are not mere geographical lines on a map; they are symbolic distinctions that crucially set apart a collective self from others (Sibley 1995).

On the other hand, borders are contact points between neighboring political powers and societies. Borders are constructed socio-political institutions that cut across landscapes, cultures, and peoples. However, there never is a perfect match between territorial and functional lines of any given country (Albert 1998). In other words, no matter how they are drawn, borders do not neatly coincide with one people, one culture, one economy, and one set of political institutions on a single territory. For, each of these social dimensions responds to different imperatives and will expand spatially according to its own dynamic and therefore set distinct territorial boundaries. Consequently, the areas surrounding borders are nothing like their representations on political maps, swiftly shifting from a uniform color to another one on each side of a paper-thin line. Instead, they are made of local economic interests spanning across borders, transnational ethnic communities seemingly ignoring the border that divides them politically or cultural influences moving seamlessly from one country to the next (Faist 2004).

From that viewpoint, borders are messy meeting points rather than neat divisions. Cultural identities, economic interests, and political allegiances are best described in the areas surrounding borders as overlapping folds (Balibar 2009) or even entangled networks. Though the presence and impact of the border is undeniable and oftentimes drives the social and political interactions in the territories adjacent to it, the border should not be characterized as a watertight distinction that separates two self-contained social and political worlds.

Borders are both a door and a bridge. Because they are operating at a critical juncture between security expectations and intense cross-border exchanges, they appear to be Janus-faced. To some, they are demarcating lines that call for extensive protection and a regime of strict closure. To others, they are a gateway to transnational opportunities and their opening should be carefully but liberally managed. *The very same paradox affects the regions located alongside borders*, that is the borderlands or frontier zones.

Borderlands were originally described as areas burdened by their geographical and institutional distance from central powers. It was assumed that their “double peripheral-ity”—added to the insecurity of being directly exposed to the threats lying beyond the borders—would negatively affect them and hamper their political and economic development (House 1980). Ironically, their very remoteness has turned a number of them into lands of opportunities and renewed social, economic and cultural activism today. Be it in the Cascadian regions between Vancouver and Seattle, in the Benelux or at the border between Romania and Moldova, active social and economic environments span across political boundaries and transnational exchanges are numerous. Such borderlands are the cradle of sustained transnational interactions that often confer them a unique cultural and political status (Anderson and O’Dowd 1999), allow for the cultural hybridization of identities (Papastergiadis 2000; Anzaldúa 1999), the development of thriving regional economies (Anderson and Waever 2003) or challenge traditional political allegiances (see respectively Liebich and Danero Iglesias in this issue).

This rosy picture of growing exchange, mutual benefits, and hybridization has been overshadowed recently by the risks associated with unchecked cross-border flows and potentially clandestine and illegal activities (Andreas and Snyder 2000). Because of their remoteness and opening to the outside, borderlands are seen as a harbor for all kinds of illegal and potentially dangerous activities—be it smuggling, human trafficking or international terrorism—and as such singled out for increased scrutiny and monitoring (Pratt and Brown 2000). To sum up, just as borders can be characterized both as a door and a bridge between countries, borderlands can be simultaneously depicted as epitomizing the growth of mutually beneficial transnational ties *and* as offering a privileged but bleak glimpse into the importation of international threats into domestic politics.

The selective re-bordering of states and the securitization of borderlands

An additional development has further heightened the paradoxical nature of borders and borderlands over the last decades and greatly impacted their evolutions. Borders and borderlands have recently attracted a lot of scholarly attention, and deservedly so. Contrarily to what some have argued (Friedman 2005), technology and free trade have not turned customs, culture and inequality barriers into relics of the past. In a world that stubbornly refuses to become flat, borders have not only proved their relevance but they have also defied most attempts to predict and anticipate their institutional evolutions (Rumford 2006). Globalization may have increased interdependence between countries and blurred some cultural or social boundaries but it has not changed the world’s political fragmentation. In spite of grand prophecies made in the 1990s (Ohmae 1990), the world has become neither a village, nor borderless. Societies have been shaken to their core by the exponential growth of transnational trade of all kinds—be it goods, capital, ideas, or persons. Social worlds are now organized around flows rather than places (Urry 1999) and they increasingly adopt the features of a network (Castells 2000). Still, territorial entities—States—remain the key political units shaping international relations. Current trends may alter the role of spaces and territories and even downplay their political importance, they do not render them meaningless.

Now, borders are unparalleled political tools when it comes to asserting a sovereign monopoly over a territory. In the turmoil of a changing world, States have shown that,

far from giving up their borders, they were more than ever at pains to demarcate them clearly (Foucher 2007). States are often threatened by a large devolution of their prerogatives to supra- and infra-national actors and by the obligation to subject themselves to an increased cooperation with private actors. Despite this waning of their sovereignty—or perhaps because of it—States appear to be ever more inclined to build physical walls at their borders (Brown 2010). Such walls seem utterly inefficient but, in the eye of some policymakers, they restore spectacularly a semblance of control over transnational flows. Moreover, divisive walls are not only propping up at the physical location of borders, they have also become endemic in discourses. As it has been aptly shown by Newman (2006), border studies cannot restrict themselves to scrutinizing borders as a physical, spatial or cartographic object. They also have to take into account that borders are shaped by the dynamic processes of evolving social relations. The interplay of those social relations can either tilt towards an incremental vanishing of the borders, or towards their social reinforcement and political institutionalization (Newman and Paasi 1998). Indeed, borders have traditionally provided the State and its elites with a symbolic ideological marker for the construction of political identity and social communities (Paasi 1996; Newman 2003). Lately the emphasis has been put on the exclusive dimension of this marker. States resort to the process of singling out an “other” with the sole purpose of defining themselves by contrast. The discriminating process of “othering” has the twin advantages of creating a shared sentiment of belonging while restoring a feeling of order (Van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002). The process of bordering therefore appears inextricably entangled with—and must be thought alongside—the integration of political communities (Delmotte and Duez 2016).

Thus, *pace* the mainstream discourse on globalization, borders keep closing, including in the very same European Union that had hoped to abolish them (Bigo and Guild 2005; Huysmans 2006). They disrupt migration flows, restrict transnational exchanges, and shatter life plans. As fragmentation lines of our political space, they remain one of the key factors of inequality and exclusion. But Westphalian reality is partially deceiving. As Andreas (2003) pointed out, borders are neither impermeable nor vanishing; they are rather being recrafted to fulfill new purposes. The impact of globalization with regards to borders and borderlands must be nuanced. Instead of acting as military barriers that indiscriminately stop all flows, borders in a globalized world are expected to be “smart,” that is to selectively police certain transnational flows while allowing others to move along uninterrupted. In other words, globalization did not abolish borders but led to a sophisticated process of de-bordering and re-bordering (Sassen 2005).

Against a simplistic open/close dichotomy, most borders went through a transformative process that turned them into a discriminatory instrument tasked mainly with the duty to sort out populations on the move (Delanty 2006). In an interconnected world in which domestic issues gradually become indistinguishable from global issues (Beck 2000), many States, under the pressure of public opinions that gave a favorable echo to national populist discourses, singled out migrants as the main vector of instability and insecurity (Bigo 2002; Huysmans 2006). According to the theoretical framework first designed by Buzan, Waever, and De Wilde (1998), no issue is *per se* a security issue. Rather, according to the so-called Copenhagen School, they are constructed as such through a specific speech act. That is, some issues are selectively depicted as posing an existential threat to a given community. Once construed as such, security experts and

professional politicians are responsible for taking the threatening matters into their own skilled hands (Waever 1995). This is exactly what has happened with transnational flows of migrants since at least the 1990s. They have been described as a massive tide threatening to overflow the financial capacity of Welfare State or overthrow cultural values and core political norms. Against them, policy-makers and security experts have designed a selective re-bordering of States aimed at stopping unwanted migrants while at the same time creating as little friction as possible for profitable transnational flows—such as high-skilled migrants, cheap goods, or foreign capital.

As a result, and as attested by the exponentially growing literature on the question (Guiraudon and Lahav 2000; Walters 2006; Vaughan-Williams 2009; Mezzadra 2015), borders are being reconfigured due to a widespread wave of securitization. The phenomenon is not without repercussion on the borderlands themselves. It is nothing less than the very sustainability of a unique cross-border social environment that appears to be put in jeopardy. Yet transnational contacts in borderlands have proved to be extremely resilient to the disruption and divisiveness introduced by new security measures and restrictive border regulations. Borderlands dwellers have had to adapt to the new situation and adopt new strategies to maintain regular crossings of borders.

Partly due to the discrepancy between their premises, borderlands studies and security studies have virtually no dialogue. Security studies remain focused on the discriminatory function of the border while borderlands studies document the social dynamics of cross border societies. The former rarely pauses to ask how it is that, in spite of the supposedly all-invasive and coercive border, transnational networks are thriving more than ever. The latter tends to downplay or even ignore the extent to which the securitization of the borders impacts and over determines the daily life of the borderlands' dwellers. Against this backdrop, the ambition and originality of the current special issue lie in its aim to fill theoretically and empirically such a gap by looking at what we have called "securitized borderlands."

Overall, the authors of this special issue apprehend "securitization" following the recent debates that go beyond the rather narrow understanding of the Copenhagen School. Besides the speech acts that define threats, they look into actors constructing security through everyday practices and categorizations (Bigo 1996, 2002). Such a political-sociological approach to securitization goes hand in hand with the so-called Paris School (Van Munster 2007, 236). The authors look at the security technology and expert knowledge (Huysmans 2006; Coman and Lemaire in this special issue), the social and historical processes in which the construction of security takes place, the mutual constitution between security and identity (Danero Iglesias and Liebich here), the societal receptivity and resistances to the securitization from above (Weinblum, Danero Iglesias and Sajn in this issue). In so doing, and following the criticisms of the Copenhagen School voiced by McDonald (2008), "securitization" in this special issue goes *beyond the speech act* by exploring routines and practices, and the dynamic interplay between societal and state sectors in this construction process. It goes also *beyond the dominant voices* by drawing attention to practices and speech acts by actors other than political leaders. Finally, it goes *beyond the "moment"* by paying attention to the historical context and to the parallel discourses and representations at play in which securitization acts are embedded. Drawing from the main findings of both security studies and borderlands studies, the authors of the articles in the special issue investigate how cross border societies still exist, resist, comply and adjust in spite of and within this peculiarly adverse environment (Andreas 2000), the

so-called “securitized borderlands.” In order to do so, the authors approach them from different angles and disciplinary perspectives. Still, all papers link the two literatures by looking into the interaction between the securitized borders and the social spaces they both obstruct and dynamize.

As a theoretical preamble, Martin Deleixhe introduces a critical reflection on the shortcomings of the notion of biopolitical sovereignty. It takes issue with Agamben’s claim that modern sovereignty walks on two legs. Firstly, sovereign power would be embedded in an ever expanding and ever more intrusive network of social institutions meant to discipline individual behaviors. Secondly, sovereign power would amount to the capacity to make an abrupt existential decision that engages the whole community in times of severe crisis. The article contends that Agamben cannot have his cake and eat it too. Either sovereignty is a discreet form of power that acts diffusely or it is a spectacular decisionist political act. The article then goes on to claim that the flawed notion of biopolitical sovereignty is misleading as a critical tool and should not be applied to borders and borderlands studies. For, its emphasis on the rampant securitization unjustifiably overshadows the social dynamism of borderlands. This argument provides a theoretical foundation to the special issue by pre-emptively dismissing the objection per which the concept of “securitized borderlands” would make no sense.

The contributors to the special issue look then at various original case studies across Europe to show on the basis of their fieldwork the different features of present-day securitized borderlands. They not only document the peculiarities of distinct borderlands but they also highlight different possible articulations between the resilience of cross-border activities and securitization discourses and practices. The overall aim of those case studies is to highlight how such articulations are created, negotiated and sustained in a wide array of contexts.

Alexandra Liebich focuses on two States—Russia and Hungary—whose borders have never been consensually defined, a situation that created unstable borderlands. She pays a special attention to the political efforts those two actors have developed to reach out to their co-ethnics in spite of the securitization of the existing borders. In doing so, she documents how the creation of a transnational community in the borderlands is instrumental to their nationalist agenda of borders’ contestation.

Ramona Coman wonders who are the actors pushing for the re-securitization of the internal borders of the Schengen space, potentially implying its fragmentation and the subsequent vanishing of its borderlands’ features. Focusing on the debates that took place at the top political level of the Schengen governance, she traces back the transformation of the securitization discourse to the rise of technocratic arguments in non-majoritarian bodies and points to competing discourses on borders among European actors.

Sharon Weinblum scrutinizes the opposition of two competing political discourses in Israel’s public sphere regarding refugees from Eritrea and Somalia. More specifically, she looks at how a dominant political narrative was constructed to frame African asylum seekers as a homogenous threat, and present border securitization as a necessary tool. She also observes that, against this securitizing narrative, a more marginal counter-narrative has attempted—with little success—to de-securitize the presence of African migrants and articulate the border as an open gate to those in need.

Léa Lemaire takes an ethnographic approach to look at the migrants’ arrival in Malta. She argues that the island’s geographical location and status in the EU’s border control

policies amounts to it being an open-air detention center. In her article, she wonders whether an island can be considered a borderland and documents the views of migrants on the apparatuses that keep them isolated from the island's social life.

Julien Danero Iglesias looks at regions in Moldova, Serbia, and Ukraine that used to bear all the quintessential features of a borderland: fluid mobility, mixed cultural heritages, and overlapping political affiliations. He investigates how the re-securitization of borders in those areas—as a result of the inclusion of neighboring countries into the EU—has prompted some of the citizens living in those regions to develop instrumental identities.

Sarah Sajn casts a critical glance at the opening commemoration of WWI in Sarajevo in 2014. As securitization discourses are often played out through competing historical narratives, she shows that the dominant construction of memory that emerged from the event framed Bosnia and Herzegovina as a borderland in dire need of securitization, thereby legitimizing the interventions of the European Union in the area.

Conclusion

To sum up, in this introduction, we tried to make three distinct but related points. First, we argued that borders are paradoxical in nature. Located at the extreme stretches of national societies' territories, they are both the separation lines between States and the first point of encounters between foreign societies. This Janus-faced character is the main reason borders have proved so resilient in the face of their announced obsolescence. Secondly, such a paradox affects in turn borderlands regions. The unique social environments found in borderlands appears to be both, though not simultaneously, privileged locations for the development of intense transnational social relations and hotbeds for divisive processes of othering and bordering. Finally, globalization has had no soothing effect on those paradoxes. For, globalization has not erased borders but it has recrafted their functions and turned them into key political instruments to police irregular and clandestine transnational activities. This redefinition of the core tasks of borders has led to a selective process of de-bordering and re-bordering. Though some transnational flows have been greatly facilitated, others have been put under heightened scrutiny and monitoring, leading to their securitization. This new and complex situation created unprecedented social environments that are *securitized borderlands*. The aim of our special issue is to shed a light on this issue by casting a critical but non-exhaustive glance at how their political institutions function, their transnational communities interact socially, and their individual actors' put forward new strategies to adapt in a newly securitized environment.

Disclosure statement

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