Borders, distance, politics

Paolo Novak

Pn4@soas.ac.uk

ORCID 0000-0002-2259-8707

Abstract

Over the last two decades, the deployment of ever more sophisticated border management techniques for the purposes of controlling human mobility has engendered an equally sophisticated set of theorisations concerned with conceptualising the spatialites emerging out of these processes. The expansive understanding of borders deployed by such contributions has promoted a conceptualisation of borders as mobile and fluid institutions of social control, to the point that the borderless narrative of globalisation, seems to have been replaced by one that depicts borders everywhere. The chapter engages with these contributions and their critique to suggest an investigative perspective that distinguishes between borders, as lines constitutive of a state-centred cartography of world spaces, and border functions, as the place-specific and embodied manifestation and experiences of such cartography. Analytically accounting for the socio-spatial distance between these two dimensions, the chapter suggests, may offer analytical and political insights.

Introduction

The 'borderless world' narrative was, perhaps, nothing more than that: a narrative associated to a specific, and specifically neoliberal, project -that of globalisation in the 1990s. Yet, at the turn of the millennium, the idea that state borders were becoming less significant in a globalised world was widely shared across the academic field. Classic texts of the globalisation debate deploy a similarly de-territorialised understanding of the transformations associated to neoliberalism. Whether concerned with networked societies (Castells 2000), global cities (Sassen 1991), transnationalism (Guarnizo & Smith 1997), or, more broadly, with theorising "new" spatialities of globalisation (Amin 2002), these and other contributions privileged connections, horizontality, and circulation, over territorial boundedness, verticality, and immobility/immobilisation, as explanatory tools for global transformations. In capturing and condensing into a soundbite these complex set of processes, however, Keinichi Ohmae's (1990) book title became the strawman for those who wanted to contrast the "flat world" (Friedmann, 2005) depicted by these accounts and to re-emphasise its bordered, unequal and difference-inflected nature.

Amongst the many analytical angles in which "difference" was accounted for, a voluminous body of literature coalesced around the study of borders as key institutions of our times. Albeit re-asserting

borders' continuing significance, these contributions did not advocate a return to container-like understandings of the state and its territory (e.g. Taylor, 1994). On the contrary, albeit disparate in their analytical insights, empirical attention or political commitment, they all shared a fluid and dynamic understanding of border lines. This was so in the early contributions associated to the renaissance of border studies (see Paasi, this Volume) which saw the "us/them" and "here/there" dichotomies defined by borders as dispersed across space, being made real, challenged, or ignored in place-specific ways. It is also so in relation to more recent contributions concerned with border management techniques geared towards the control of migration flows, which render borders mobile and ubiquitous by dispersing their social control functions across space. Indeed, perhaps paradoxically, the 'borderless' narrative seems to have been replaced by a 'borders everywhere' one.

Both narratives, however, leave several questions unanswered in relation to what seems to be the continuing analytical and political significance of bordered state territories, and of processes, such as nationalism or the construction of fences and walls along border lines, that seemingly reinforce those state-centred cartographies. Borderless-ness and borders everywhere-ness seem to focus on 'horizontal' encounters between migrants and bordering practices and they may risk missing the 'vertical' nature of contemporary border transformations, whether we think of them in terms of hierarchies across the interstate system, or governance regimes within and across countries. Furthermore, and more profoundly, while sharing a desire to map borders and migration away from methodologically national frameworks, these contributions offer seemingly competing visions of the spatialities associated to borders and migration, and of the social forces driving such process. Which one is to be preferred?

This chapter engages with this debate by conceptually distinguishing between border lines and border functions and by suggesting to re-focus it around an empirical concern with the place-specific and embodied *distance* between the two dimensions. The distinction attempts to recuperate the socio-spatial significance of border lines, as constitutive of the interstate system, while accounting for the multiple locations where their social control functions are activated, reproduced and experienced. Focusing on the socio-spatial distance between border lines and their place-specific and embodied manifestations, it is argued, not only captures the ways in which borders are simultaneously open and close, significant and irrelevant, scaped and linear for different individuals and social groups, but also for the systemic and historically-shaped significance of these selective openings.

The chapter proceeds as follows. Next section enters the debate on borders location discussing various attempts to move out of methodologically national understandings of borders and migration and associated critiques. The following section re-frames this debate in terms of competing epistemological understandings of the process of spatial production, by reference to EU border management practices. Subsequently, the distinction between border lines and functions is developed using Balibar (2002) and Paasi (1999). Finally, the analytical potentialities of such distinction are detailed.

Where is the border?

In a contribution that perfectly captured the crux of the debate at the time, Jones et al. (2011) interrogated the field through the question "Where is the border in Border Studies?" Their contribution wanted to shape the direction of the debate given what they perceived as a marked departure from traditional border studies –namely, the recognition that the exercise of states' bordering practices increasingly takes place away from the border itself. The authors were taking the cue from the consolidated perception that borders do not manifest themselves exclusively at the line or in border zones, but rather move inwards and outwards. Indeed, by then, Balibar's (1998) conviction that "borders are everywhere" had acquired almost hegemonic status within the field.

This conviction and the shared concern with moving the study of borders and migration out of methodological nationalism and its territorial traps, grew out of, and rested upon, a fertile and increasingly solid intellectual ground.

First, two different strands of literature within Border Studies had convincingly engrained the idea that borders are not fixed lines, but rather mobile and fluid. On one side, the so-called processual turn assertively advanced a dynamic understanding of borders as historically contingent, multi-dimensional and place-specific human fabrications (Paasi and Newman, 1998). As such, They are stretched and scaped across space, or ignored, as they are made real by the situated practices and negotiations of those involved in the process of borders' construction. On the other side, contributions framing the study of borders as a prism to capture systemic processes of social bordering (see Sidaway, 2011 for an explanation of this distinction) similarly emphasised the dispersed and dynamic ways in which borders appear and disappear to account for their multiplication and heterogenization under contemporary capitalism (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013), or for their being in themselves a form of social motion (Nail, 2016). Whether concerned with the dispersed agency of actors in border zones, or with the ubiquity of border control functions vis-à-vis mobile populations, both strands reinforced the conviction that "borders are not where they are supposed to be" (Vaughn Williams, 2009).

Second, the field of Migration Studies had itself been undergoing something like a renaissance. The latter was concerned with "remapping migration" away from state-centred, push-pull, sedentary cartographies, and to account for the vast array of multidirectional and multi-scalar social relations defined by/that define migration. Alternative- and counter-mapping exercises aimed at capturing migration's emergent spatialities, similarly moved away from the methodological nationalism that has traditionally characterised the field to emphasise instead migrants' transnational connections, agency and/or emergent political subjectivities (King, 2002; Walters, 2002; Dalton & Deese, 2012; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Ferguson & McNally, 2015; to name a few that have engaged in such exercises from radically epistemologically different perspectives).

Third, and perhaps most importantly, the conviction that borders are everywhere grew out of and rested upon the circumstantial evidence provided by the increasingly sophisticated and complex array of methods deployed in the management of borders for the purposes of migration control. The offshore relocation of detention facilities (Mountz 2011), the spread of biometric borders (Amoore 2006), and the extra-territorial projection of migration controls (Kumar Rajaram 2004), all seemed to require new theorisations. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) for example explain borders' multiplication and heterogenization in relation to their systemic significance as spatio-temporal devices aimed at slowing down the entry of migrants into labour markets. DeGenova (2017) uses the dialectic between bordering tactics and autonomous dynamics of human mobility to depict the contours of a planetary regime geared towards the control of human mobility. Others have dissected these processes by unsettling traditional state-centred cartographies through radical counter-mapping exercises (Tazzioli 2015), by offering heuristic tools and empirical evidence that capture the relation between mobility and states (Vigneswaran and Quirk 2015), or by ethnographically accounting for embodied migrant journeys stretching borders into transcontinental borderscapes (Andersson 2014).

The result of the intersection between increasingly sophisticated border management techniques and such a fertile intellectual set of contributions has been highly productive. Concerned with tracing the emergent spatialities of borders and migration through more imaginative geographies and topologies (Rumford 2008; Vaughn Williams 2009; Mezzadra and Neilson 2012), these contributions have advanced our understanding of the ways in which borders are externalised, internalised and multiplied, and of their differentially inclusionary nature (Andrijasevic 2009).

Yet, in uncovering the complexity and fluidity with which borders manifest themselves in ways that cannot be subsumed within methodologically national epistemologies, these theorisations have

perhaps left many questions open. For example, too expansive understandings of borders, it was suggested (Jones et al 2011), may have obscured what a border is. Equating borders with borderlands, for example, may insightfully emphasise processes of border construction that stretch and scape borders into frontier zones, but may also risk underplaying the significance of those social forces able to shape such processes within each borderland and to assert their structuring influence across several borderlands at the same time (Novak, 2015). Equating borders with social difference (as in Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013), or with bordering tactics (as in DeGenova, 2017), may short-shrift the historicization and significance of states territorial construction (Sharma, 2014). It risks disregarding, in other words, the inherited structures that enable, constrain or channel contemporary border management practices (O'Dowd 2010), and that structurally characterise migration flows, patterns and composition (Novak 2017). If borders are everywhere, as Thomas Nail (2016) suggests, then they are also nowhere in particular, and this may dilute the analytical significance of studying such institution.

Even focusing exclusively on border management techniques and technologies geared towards migration controls leaves several questions unanswered. Do fences and walls built along border lines, for example, confirm the notion that borders are everywhere or do they express the continuing significance of states' territoriality? And do fences along the so-called European Balkan Route express meanings and functions similar to those expressed by fences almost completely encircling Turkmenistan? Further, how do state-centred legal and institutional categorisations and labels such as refugee and economic migrant, however analytically inaccurate and politically pernicious, play out in relation to borders and migration's spatiality? To what extent are the emergent spatialities traced by the above contributions useful to capture border management processes taking place outside the EU, the US or Australia, where externalisation and virtualisation are far less advanced or non-existent?

Furthermore, conceiving borders primarily in relation to their functions vis-à-vis the taming of human mobility makes these theorisations too international migrant-centred, replicating dangerous characteristic of the field of migration (Anderson 2013) and offering few tools for understanding how borders relate, for example, to internal migrants, or to those that are unable or unwilling to move. To what extent are expansive understandings of borders significant for understanding the spatialities of internal migration or for non-migrants?

Indeed, even in light of contemporary transformations, many scholars have recognised the continuing significance of the state-centred territoriality expressed by borders. This is so, for example in relation to the ways in which nationalism and national identity shape their character, functions and manifestation (Paasi and Prokkola 2008), or to their functional role within capitalist development (Anderson 2012). Such recognition may require charting analytical trajectories that recuperate the significance of states borders territoriality, at least to an extent (ibid; Novak 2011; Martin and Prokkola, 2017; McGrath, 2017). Even accepting the notion that borders and migration's emergent spatialities require more imaginative geographies, in other words, many have questioned the extent to which it is possible to completely abandon a conceptualisation of borders as lines that delineate a state-centred cartography of world spaces.

There is a more fundamental question underpinning these debates, which relates to the epistemological understanding of the process of spatial production advanced by each of the contributions discussed. The different positions on whether borders are everywhere, are stretched into borderlands, or are "still" precisely where they are drawn in maps, congeal seemingly competing understandings of who or what drives the process of spatial production. The point is better developed through the example of EU border management.

EU borders everywhere

The emphasis on the portability and ubiquity of borders has been particularly prominent in contributions concerned with the European context. Over the last decade and a half, in fact, the EU, much like the US and Australia (e.g. Brigden and Mainwaring, 2016; Rajaram, 2003), has embarked on an "unprecedented process of externalisation and virtualisation" of its borders (De Genova, 2017: 23) aimed at the activation of migration controls as far away from the EU as possible. Such multiplication of the locations and forms through which the inclusion and exclusion of bodies in movement is performed, involves the establishment of new border agencies (e.g. FRONTEX, see Moreno Lax 2017), the implementation of border controls through networks of surveillance (e.g. EUROSUR, see Casas-Cortes et al., 2013), the establishment of regional governance mechanisms (Scott et al, 2017), and the proliferation of everyday forms of bordering (Yuval Davis et al., 2017). This makes EU borders seemingly omnipresent. In line with the epistemological turn highlighted in the previous sections, several scholars have dissected this process to assert that "new" spatialities are emerging out of this process.

However, first, while sharing a desire to map borders and migration away from methodologically national frameworks, these contributions mobilise a variety of heterogeneous scalar metaphors to conceptualise such spatialities. For instance, Andersson (2014) asserts that the far-reaching, diffuse, and technologized EU border regime in West Africa constitutes a Euro-African borderland, and Vives (2017) accounts for the same process in the same geographical context by understanding the spatialities of externalisation as a set of inter-connected spaces of migration (see also Tazzioli book). Others emphasise instead regional imaginaries and the institutionalisation of macro-regions in EU Neighbourhood policies (Bialasiewicz et al., 2009; Scott et al., 2017), or the transformation and reconfiguration of sub-national administrative units' functions at the service of migration management (Novak 2018), thus recuperating state-centred spatialities to an extent. While some talk of mobile itinerant assemblages aimed at governing mobility (Casas-Cortes et al., 2016), others underline the significance of state-centred jurisdictions and labour regimes in shaping unfree labour mobility, and migrants' personal experiences of accumulation by dispossession (Cross, 2013). Others still are concerned with biometrics and conceptualise the ubiquity or EU borders in embodied terms (Ajana, 2013). The emergent spatialities traced by the EU border regime, in other words, are conceptualised through seemingly competing scalar understandings. The heterogeneous understanding of the significance, or lack thereof, of the state-centred territoriality expressed by borders discussed in the previous section is thus replicated in these contributions.

Second, and more fundamentally, the wildly different scalar concepts deployed, which involve regional, network-based, state-centred or scaped spatial ontologies, is driven by a profoundly different understanding of the social forces producing the 'emergent spatialities' associated to EU borders transformations. Some scholars assert that borders and migration are co-implicated in the process of spatial production (Bryce and Freund, 2015). Rather than one working against the other, they co-constitute "fluid fields" (Brambilla, 2015: 26) in an ongoing and situated b/ordering process. Borders are not where they are supposed to be, from this perspective, because they are socially constructed through political, cultural, and economic claims and counter-claims (ibid). Accounts inspired by autonomous understandings of migration assert instead that migrants are not simply co-implicated in the process of spatial production, but rather its constituent force (Papadopolous and Tsianos, 2008), as EU border management reacts to the turbulence of their political subjectivities. Borders are not where they are supposed to be, from this perspective, because they are externalised and virtualised in an attempt to tame the autonomous dynamics of human mobility (de Genova, 2017). Scholars drawing from historical materialist perspectives conceive instead of borders as institutions produced by and reproducing the conditions for capitalist development, and thus understand EU border management in relation to underdevelopment, dispossession, illegalisation, control and exploitation (Cross, 2013), or read it through the lens of capitalist socialisation and its inherent surplus of objectivity (Buckel et al, 2017). Borders are exactly where they appear on maps, from this perspective, as their linear inscription has specific functions under capitalism (Anderson,

2012) and as their management responds to the latter's imperatives as mediated by powerful states' strategic interests (Smith, 2015).

The existence of competing understandings of borders and migration's spatialities and of the social forces driving the process of spatial production is perhaps not surprising. As I argue elsewhere (Novak 2016), scholars in the field are as much driven by methodological rigour as they are by their attempt to assert their own epistemological projects. Indeed, while radically different in their interpretation of the location of borders and of their constitutive social forces, all these contributions seem to share a social-to spatial analytical trajectory. Their understanding of borders and migrations' spatial manifestation is shaped by a (prior) epistemological understanding of the social forces and processes that define them. They, first, define the social forces, practices and relations that, more than others shape the process of externalisation, i.e. the content of externalisation. Second, they find in the mechanisms through which externalisation takes place, i.e. the form of externalisation, a spatial confirmation of such (pre-defined) ontology of the social. They resolve the articulation between the social and the spatial, by using (their own understanding of) the social as an explanatory tool for the spatial (ibid).

Three consequences stem from this, however. First, each of the conceptualisations of the spatial manifestation of EU borders on offer exposes, but simultaneously obscures, certain social forces and relations. Thus, while epistemologies inspired by the autonomy of migration convincingly foreground the irreducibility of migrants' claims and political subjectivities to the order of citizenship and the force of capitalism, they are arguably less convincing in their reading of history, and, perhaps less attentive to forms of exploitation, subjugations and unfreedom beyond those specifically related to human mobility. While historico-material readings help us understand the contemporary through their emphasis on long term material trajectories of exploitation and domination and are applicable to migrants and non-migrants alike, they offer few and perhaps too functional tools to capture diversity, turbulence and political subjectivities beyond the realm of surplus value extraction, even if the latter is set in movement. While readings concerned with the situated practices and negotiations that make borders real or imaginary or stretched, alert us about the transnational circulation of everyday practices and dynamics, their lack of structural concerns feels inadequate to address political questions associated to the current conjuncture.

Second, it is not clear, on these bases, which of these readings of borders and migration's emergent spatialities is more analytically accurate or politically useful to move beyond methodological nationalism, and/or the extent to which this is possible at all. Adopting one kind of "non-methodologically national" or, instead, a state-centric reading of borders and migration is not just a matter of academic inclination or intellectual persuasions. It is also a matter of political action, alliances, and claims at a time when decisive forms of mobilisation are required. How to read migration and borders is thus a crucial analytical and political question too important to be left to a competition between epistemological projects.

Indeed, third, the most pernicious consequence of the social-to-spatial analytical trajectory deployed by most of these contributions relates to the definition of their politics away from the border itself. The social-to-spatial analytical trajectory of the above accounts, in fact, the spatialities of borders and migration function as a confirmation of a predefined ontology of the social (Novak, 2016). On the contrary, as described next, distinguishing between border lines and border functions forces us to investigate, rather than to assume, which social forces, more than others, are significant in producing such spatialities in place-specific and embodied ways.

There and elsewhere

The above discussion suggests that there may be the need for an investigative perspective that *simultaneously* accounts a) for the spatialities engendered by contemporary border transformations

and for those associated to the sediments of long-term historical processes of state formation and state development b) for spatially mobile *and* territorialised forms of border controls c) for the letter's differential significance to both mobile *and* non-mobile populations. To begin tracing the contours of such an investigative perspective, it seems useful to distinguish between border lines and border functions.

Border lines are the demarcations that define states jurisdictions. They are state institutions which aim to delimit and demarcate the areal extent of those jurisdictions and, most importantly for this discussion, they are the constitutive pillars of the interstate system, as they delineate a state-centred cartography of world spaces. They express the historical and material processes leading to their emergence and explaining their continuing transformations. Border functions relate instead to border roles as institutions of social control and, most importantly for this discussion, to their management in relation to cross-border flows. Lines relate to the abstract spatial inscription defined by borders; to the state-centred geographies that they define. Functions relate to the place-specific and embodied manifestation of that geography. The two are, obviously, inseparable.

Neither of them is static, and this is not only about the always incomplete and ongoing geopolitical process of boundary demarcation taking place across the world. Rather, their fluid nature is to be understood in relation to the historically structured but situated meanings associated to border lines and their functions over time and in different places, and to their heterogeneous embodied effects at any point in time and space. The distinction thus does not undermine or contradict any of the views expressed in the contributions discussed in the previous section. On the contrary, it builds upon them as it allows to account for the multiple locations in which border functions are manifested and experienced, while analytically retaining the structural significance of border lines as constitutive of the interstate system.

Both concepts possess a spatial connotation. One linearly delimits an abstract state-centred cartography. It territorially defines an (unstable) nexus between a national territory, a sovereign authority and a community of citizens, and linearly inscribes in space the effects of regulatory regimes, such as migration laws, that use them as spatial frameworks. The other reflects the embodied location where the control functions of borders are manifested and experienced, which may or may not be juxtaposed. This may refer, quite simply, to the location of border checkpoints and fences erected a few kilometres "inside" the border, or, in more sophisticated ways, to the process of externalisation and virtualisation of EU borders described above, or to the differently-located manifestation and experience of the same border for different types of migrants. Once again, this distinction does not deny the multiplication and heterogenization of borders but sees it only in relation to their functions, while retaining the significance of state-centred territoriality in relation to legal and institutional regimes concerned with migration management.

In making this distinction and asserting its analytical potential I am guided by a series of contributions. In a chapter titled "What is a border?", Balibar (2002) denies the possibility of discovering the essence of borders, but rather identifies three dimensions simultaneously constituting them. Overdetermination refers to their world-configuring significance. Borders are the territorial pillars upon which the interstate system is premised, as every inch of every border is sanctioned, reduplicated and relativized by others. As lines constitutive of the interstate system, borders are "distinctly global" (O'Dowd, 2010: 1023), from this perspective. Polysemy refers to the different meanings that they possess for individuals and social groups. Borders manifestations can only be captured, from this perspective, through place-specific and embodied investigations (Novak, 2016b). Ubiquity, finally, refers to the falling apart of the coincidence between border lines and the places where border functions are activated. As these functions are externalised, internalised and, more broadly, multiplied and heterogenized (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013), they render borders seemingly omnipresent. The much-popularised notion that borders are everywhere, usually taken from his (Balibar, 1998) essay "The border of Europe", seems to refer exclusively to this third

dimension: the dis-location and activation of border controls away from the border lines. Yet the imperative that Balibar poses is to account for the three at the same time.

Writing at the same time as Balibar, Anssi Paasi (1998), provides a different understanding of the everywhere-ness of borders, one that insist on the continuing analytical significance of border lines. Exploring the significance of borders in the construction, organisation and reproduction of social life, territoriality and power, Paasi conceives border(line)s as dynamic social processes that "extend into society" (ibid: 84). Borders are institutionalised at different scales, as they are produced and reproduced through social and cultural practices. The ways in which they are (re)produced exposes the aims of those attempting to shape their meanings and functions, the "landscape of power", in other words, which animates borders. Borders are everywhere, in this sense, not only because of the ever more pervasive forms of control and surveillance that are manifested everywhere through the national territory, a "technical" landscape of control akin to Balibar's understanding, but also because they are reproduced and inserted into everyday life by state-centred institutions, whether at national (e.g. education or the media, see Paasi and Prokkola, 2009), regional (Paasi, 2004) or international level (e.g. tax and migration laws, see Novak, 2011). They are thus relationally significant to migrants and non-migrants alike. Once again, the challenge posed by Paasi is to capture the simultaneity through which borders attempt to shape social life across scales, from the international to the everyday.

In spite of the profound differences between these two understandings, two points seem to emerge out of their analysis. First, border lines are crucial analytical vantage points that cannot be excluded from the analysis of migration, in spite of the ever more mobile locations where border controls are manifested and performed. This is so, according to Balibar, because they are overdetermined. This is also so according to Paasi, because they express landscapes of power that confer them with meanings. Second, they are ubiquitous (Balibar) as they dynamically extend into society (Paasi). Yet the polysemic reverberations of their spreading across society remains to be discovered. Indeed, both understandings seem to pose an empirical imperative. In what ways is polysemy overdetermined? In which ways is ubiquity polysemic? How does the multi-scalar institutionalisation of borders heterogeneously manifest itself in everyday life? To what extent are the attempts to assert social control through borders successful in doing so?

Distinguishing between border lines and border functions forces us to investigate, rather than to assume, how the simultaneity between overdetermination, ubiquity and polysemy heterogeneously plays out in place-specific and embodied settings, how and where the attempt to tame human mobility is un/successful and for whom. Accounting both for borders as lines located where they appear on maps, or, more precisely, where International Treaties assert they are, and for the everywhere-ness of the manifestation of their social control functions shifts the analytical focus from the location of borders, to the tension between state- and non-state centred cartographies. It is a distinction that has the potential to harness the insights of the various epistemological perspectives discussed above, as it accounts both for the historical and material trajectories that explain the exact location of border lines and their contemporary reverberations, as much as for the fluid, situated and dynamic social processes that render the significance of those lines place-specific and embodied.

So where are EU Borders located? EU borders are both where they appear on maps and wherever their social control functions are reproduced and subjectively experienced. First, border lines and the state-centred cartography that they trace are significant for EU borders and migration management's in many respects. Their overdetermined nature, i.e. their being reduplicated and legitimised by every inch of every border across the world, provides the basis for such management. Border lines define the territorialised institutional framework upon which migration management is premised. Distinctions between economic and refugee migrants, for example, or between internal and external migration express and reproduce such cartography, however inaccurately or perniciously. The institutionalisation of these distinctions at multiple scales functions as a systemic

regulator of activities. This is so through international, bilateral or regional agreements between states, which reinforce such cartography. It is also so through the operationalisation of these distinctions in migration management's laws and procedures which operate through territorialised forms of migration management. It is also so considering these distinctions in national(ist) contexts as forms of social spatialisation that strengthen nationally bordered identities (Paasi and Prokkola, 2008). Border lines are key regulators of economic, political, cultural, and military activity across the interstate system (O'Dowd, 2010), in other words. They "overdetermine" social life. Of course, that cartography cannot be taken at face value, but needs to be situated.

Second, the "polysemic" nature of its overdetermination needs to be accounted for. EU border management agreements with countries in Africa or in Central Asia, for example, rests on the profoundly unequal "landscapes of power" shaping the interstate system. Considering the contemporary significance of border lines as *unequal* (polysemic) regulators of those activities continuously returns these agreements back to histories of state formation and state development (Novak, 2016b), as it explains the structural conditions that made these agreements possible in the first place, as well as their resilience. Accounting for hierarchies in the interstate system brings the past in the present (O'Dowd, 2010) and thus actualise border lines world-making functions in ways that go beyond the "primitive accumulation of space" associated to them (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013).

Third, perhaps most importantly, the polysemic nature of borders' ubiquity similarly needs to be accounted for in respect to the place-specific and embodied manifestations of their social control functions. On one side, the significance of EU borders internalisation/externalisation for the purposes of migration controls is differently configured across space, whether we think about border fences along the so-called Balkan Route in Europe, airport checks across the world, or Search and Rescue operations across the Mediterranean. Combining both spatially mobile and territorialised forms of migration control, the spatialities of EU border management need to be captured in their articulation (Novak, 2018). They are also likely to be shaped by different forces, whether we think of networks (ir/regularly) facilitating migration across the Sahara Desert or (ir/regularly) providing support within Europe to migrants (e.g. Dimitriadis, 2017), or police forces in countries collaborating with the EU (e.g. Vives, 2017).

Even more significantly, in any of these locations, the spatiality of EU border management is polysemically experienced by different types of migrants or indeed by the same group (Sigona, 2015). EU border management extends into society both for migrants and non-migrants alike. It may reinforce nationalist discourses and practices of socio-spatial exclusion and marginalisation that affect vulnerable populations, regardless of where they are from. It privileges certain forms of mobility and belonging over others, regardless of who performs them. Indeed, borders are everywhere not only and not so much because they are being relocated and activated everywhere, but because of the social order that they attempt to impose.

Distance and politics

The distinction between border lines and functions obviates some of the dilemmas associated to the debate on the "where" of the borders, as it differentiates the dis-located exercise and experience of their functions from the linear state-centred cartography that they inscribe, attempting to capture the socio-spatial significance of both (Novak, 2011). If on one side, border lines define a set of abstract us/them or here/there dichotomies that so significantly shape social life for migrants and non-migrants alike, on the other side, their social control functions are animated by and experienced as deeply contextual and situated processes. Indeed, the distinction is useful because of the place-specific and embodied empirical imperative it imposes. Paraphrasing Balibar, if border lines express overdetermination, and border functions their ubiquity, their polysemy, at interstate level, in place-specific settings and in terms of embodied experiences is something that can only be captured

through empirical research. Similarly, paraphrasing Paasi, if border lines express a landscape of power that extends into the whole of society attempting to assert particular kinds of spatial order through their social control functions, the place-specific and embodied extent to which this attempt is successful can only be a matter of empirical investigation.

This empirical imperative provides the bases for developing a research agenda that attempts to capture the socio-spatial *distance* between lines and functions. Investigating the place-specific and embodied manifestation of borders, rather than assuming it on the bases of predefined epistemological perspectives, captures both the differential manifestation of the everywhere-ness of border lines as constitutive of the interstate system and of border functions' ubiquitous manifestations, relationally. EU borders, clearly, manifest themselves differently in relation to people escaping war and poverty or to high-skilled workers, whether from Syria or Nigeria, for men or women, both in terms of its configuration and its subjective experience. This distance is both deeply contextual and systemic. It expresses the tension between the abstract cartography delineated by border lines and the "geosocial", understood as a constitution of subjects and spaces within transnational relations (Mitchell and Kallio, 2016).

Indeed, the socio-spatial distance between border lines and the manifestation of their functions is full of analytical potential, as the place-specific and embodied evidence of inequalities between and across individuals in societies. Accounting for the ways in which lines and functions articulate to reproduce inequalities that are both systemic and situated, captures the experiential, agency-driven and subjective significance of borders in its overdetermined nature. Those interstices are thus also full of political potential, as they represent the unequal and difference-inflected nature of borders articulations. They express the distance between what is and what ought to be, the ethical imperative for intervention, as De Certeau (1986) suggests. By empirically accounting for the place-specific and embodied manifestation of such distance may provide some practical avenues to define such interventions.

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