Introduction: borders and political geography

Borders have provided perhaps the most enduring research object in the tradition of political geography; the history of border studies is as long as political geography itself. Already the first major text, Friedrich Ratzel’s *Politische Geographie*, published in 1897, included a survey of the functions of borders and he took some steps to develop the terminology of border studies. In his organistic thinking borders were an expression and measure of state power. States were ‘living organisms’, thus reflecting the social Darwinist *Zeitgeist* of the late 19th century. Respectively, all ‘vigorous states’ try to expand in spatial terms while declining states contract to physically easily defensible land contours. After the horrors of World War II borders maintained their position as research objects, being now often understood as empirical categories, material ‘border landscapes’ related to given state territories or functional spaces rendering possible – or not – economic and social interaction (Prescott 1965, Paasi 2011).

Border studies witnessed a major revival in the 1990s. This was related to several international events and tendencies, such as the collapse of the ideological divide between the capitalist and communist blocks, the acceleration of the ‘globalization’, and the development of information and communication technologies. In Europe the deepening integration and the EU’s active tendency to lower the borders between member states motivated scholars. National security has been closely related to borders but the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA gave a new boost to this idea and security related border studies and also partly twisted the scale of such studies.
by bringing on stage new supra-state dividing lines such as the much criticized Huntingtonian (1996) idea of the “clash between civilizations”.

As to the academic impulses behind the new interest in border issues, a crucial element was the rise of post-modern and post-structuralist thinking in social and cultural sciences. New theoretical literature both expanded and ‘homogenized’ conceptual views that border scholars adopted in various fields. Borders were now understood as social constructs rather than being naturally given entities (Newman and Paasi 1998). Critical or ‘dissident’ IR scholars challenged the state-centric assumptions of realist IR theory and questioned the self-evidence of such divides as inside/outside, self/other or domestic/foreign that were typically exploited in the maintenance of the discourses on ‘national security’ (Ashley 1987, 1998, Campbell 1992, Walker 1993). New IR studies looked at how such national moral spaces – made possible by the ethical borders of identity as a much as by the territorial borders of the state – were often constituted by leaning on images of threat and enemy in foreign policy (e.g. Campbell 1992).

The emerging post-structuralist, post-modern, feminist and postcolonial language was soon adopted by critical geopolitics scholars and keywords such as power, discourse, and de- and re-territorialization soon appeared in their vocabularies. The representatives of critical geopolitics were greatly influenced by the dissident IR theory that was interested in discursive practices (Dalby 1990a, 1991, Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992). The key tenets of dissident IR inspired critical geopolitics scholars who were from the first beginning interested in the geopolitical dimensions and ideologies hidden in foreign policy discourses. The first major books in the field, Simon Dalby’s (1990a) *Creating the Second Cold War* and Gearoid O’Tuathail’s (1996) *Critical Geopolitics*, also draw on this theoretical basis but both took also
further steps to develop the theoretical language of critical geopolitics. Especially ÓTuathail strove to contextualize his account into the history of power-knowledge relations and their spatialization in geopolitical thinking and, against this background, to develop new conceptual ideas.

As to border studies, these books were at the same time both intriguing and paradoxical. The paradox was that while both books were crucially related to the issues of boundedness, that is the real and imagined lines that bordered and ordered political life, and, further, while both of them scrutinized how these lines manifests themselves in foreign policy discourses, or in the definitions of the State, territory and the Other, contrary to the accounts of some dissident IR scholars (e.g. Ashley 1987, Campbell 1992), these books did not include theoretical discussion on borders that would somehow bring the new themes of critical geopolitics into a dialogue with the long tradition of border studies. Concrete borders and border contexts thus seemed to be, in a way, too prosaic and material to become topical in the early accounts in critical geopolitics that were dealing with wider themes, such as foreign policy discourses and that leaned on textual strategies when looking largely at different texts (written texts, maps etc.).

The aim of this chapter is to make sense of the previous paradox by asking questions such as what was the role of ‘boundedness’ and borders for early critical geopolitical thinking, what were the key sources of inspiration for this thinking and how the choice of certain perspectives – and the neglect of others – led simultaneously to neglect the theorization of borders. ‘New’ border studies that emerged gradually paralleling critical geopolitics, took inspiration partly from similar sources as critical geopolitics scholars but built also on other premises to theorize borders and power as part of production of territory and territoriality. Neither did new border
studies and critical geopolitics match at first. Later, especially after the turn of the millennium, critical geopolitics and border studies have become partly fused.

This chapter will look at these themes in seven sections. At first it will scrutinize how the works of early critical geopolitics tackled with the issue of boundedness (rather than theorizing borders). Secondly, it will reflect the rise and characteristics of new border studies that are increasingly interdisciplinary. This section will also discuss some research themes that have been studied by border scholars inspired explicitly by critical geopolitics. Then the role of borders in the making of territories is discussed. The next section looks at the role of maps in bordering. Then the meanings of borders in everyday life and how critical geopolitics has tackled this issue are scrutinized. This is followed by a discussion on current and future challenges in borders studies that will especially problematize the one-sided view on the ‘location’ of borders on border areas alone, an issue that was almost self-evident, given ‘fact’ in the tradition of border studies but which is increasingly problematic in the current relational world of interactions. Finally, some conclusions are drawn.

**Critical geopolitics and the issue of boundedness**

Early studies in critical geopolitics leaned on a number of sources of inspiration that were related to the boundedness of social life. The general idea of the roots of social and political distinctions, that were present, for instance, in Bachelard’s (1969) and Said’s (1978) key texts, motivated political geographers. Dalby (1990a), for example, draw on Said’s thoughts to develop his ideas of the Other and otherness that he then used to study empirically the security discourses and images of ‘Soviet threat’ in the writings of the members of an influential political lobby organization in the USA, the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD). Many
conceptions developed by critical geopolitics scholars closely resonated with “dissident IR“ studies, where researchers had scrutinized critically how the dividing lines between inside/outside are constructed in the context of state and sovereignty (Ashley 1987, Walker 1993). This theme was soon theorized also by political geographers (the best known conceptual analysis related to this issue is John Agnew’s (1994) idea of territorial trap).

Yet some IR scholars had reflected the issue of bordering even more explicitly. They analysed the meanings of boundaries mainly in the context of foreign policy discourses, relating borders to *boundary-producing practices*. Particularly important was Ashley’s (1987) comment that accentuated foreign policy not merely as behaviour across boundaries but rather as a “specific sort of boundary producing political performance”. Ashley suggested that this political performance – taking place in a historically carved out social space – has important effects such as the constitution and reaffirmation of socially recognizable boundaries separating fields of practice on a global scale. Later Ashley (1989:311) draw explicitly on poststructuralism when reflecting the roles of the boundary that the state patrols and marks and that separates the total ‘other’ from the total ‘same’. He wrote how

“Displacing the state, poststructuralism puts this boundary in doubt. The boundary itself is never simply there, poststructuralism knows. It is always in the process of being marked, transgressed, erased, and marked again. The questions to be asked are not: Where is the boundary? What marks the boundary? …Instead, the sort of question to be asked is … a *how* question. How, by way of what practices, by appeal to what cultural resources, and in the face of what resistances is this boundary imposed and ritualized” (Ashley 1989:311).
Another IR scholar David Campbell (1992) leaned on this idea in his *Writing security*. Campbell was interested in the relations between identity and difference and how they are exploited in the construction of threats in foreign policy discourses. The representations of threats, for their part, are often used to secure the boundaries of a state’s identity. He suggested that foreign policy needs to be understood as giving rise to a boundary rather than acting as a bridge (p.56),

“Foreign policy shifts *from* a concern of relations *between* states which take place *across* ahistorical, frozen and pregiven boundaries, *to* a concern with the *establishment of the boundaries* that constitute, at one and the same time, the ‘state’ and ‘the international system’

Many geographers adopted Ashley’s idea on foreign policy as boundary producing practice that seemingly both directed the choice of research topics and the conceptual basis in critical geopolitics (Dalby 1990a, Dodds 1994). Dalby (1990b:173) followed Ashley’s lead and wrote that “Geopolitics is about that ideological process of constructing spatial, political and cultural boundaries to demarcate the domestic space as separate from the threatening Other; to exclude Otherness and simultaneously to discipline and control the domestic political sphere” (Ashley, 1987). While discussing ‘boundedness’, Dalby did not reflect more deeply the idea of border in relation to existing border studies and how these studies could be developed further in the new research framework that accentuated discourse, power and practice. This is somewhat surprising since new perspectives clearly forcefully challenged and claimed to radically broaden the ideas of borders that were simultaneously set forth by political geographers, such as “boundaries as human creations are an expression of territoriality, *reflecting a basic human need to live in a bounded space*” (Leimgruber 1991:41, emphasis A.P.).
The representatives of critical geopolitics thus followed the pathway opened by IR scholars but actually did less to contribute to border studies than IR scholars. Neither did all of them agree that geopolitics is a boundary producing practice. Indeed, O’Tuathail (1996:182-183) commented on Dalby’s post-structuralist idea that geopolitics is a boundary producing practice whose ‘essential moment’ is the exclusion of the Other and the inclusion of the same. He argued that Dalby’s view essentializes geopolitics within the terms of an identity politics narrative and is a reductionist reading strategy of foreign policy texts that allows one to read off the production of otherness from foreign policy texts. O’Tuathail suggested that in producing Otherness geopolitical actors are not only specifying a dangerous external Other beyond the territorial borders of the state, as Dalby seemed to imply, but that these actors are also projecting an image of their own subjectivity and its Other and respectively the Other is not only “a beyond” but “a within”, a threat not only from abroad but also within domestic and personal sphere. Ó Tuathail’s conclusion was that reading geopolitics-as-spatial-exclusion solely in territorial terms limits other possible productive readings of this suggestion.

However, two years later ÓTuathail and Dalby (1998:3-4) were largely on the same track in their introduction to an edited volume, Rethinking Geopolitics:

“it [critical geopolitics] pays particular attention to the boundary-drawing practices and performances that characterize the everyday life of states. In contrast to conventional geography and geopolitics, both the material borders at the edge of the state and the conceptual borders designating this as a boundary between a secure inside and an anarchic outside are objects of investigation. Critical geopolitics is not about ‘the outside’ of the state but about the very construction of boundaries of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, ‘here’ and ‘there’, the ‘domestic' and the ‘foreign' (Walker 1993)"
They referred again to Ashley (1987), Walker (1993), and Campbell (1992) to support their arguments, and accentuated that “geopolitics is already about more boundaries than those on a map, for those boundaries are themselves implicated in conceptual boundary-drawing practices of various kinds…. The boundary drawing practices we seek to investigate in this volume are both conceptual and cartographic, imaginary and actual, social and aesthetic” (ÓTuathail and Dalby 1998: 4).

Rethinking Geopolitics included two articles that took the idea of border further by analysing how borders have been exploited in the geopolitical national identity construction. Rygiel (1998) analysed these processes in the case of Turkey and Bonura (1998) discussed boundaries on a more theoretical level when looking at the geopolitics of nation and culture.

The same lack of deeper reflection of “border studies” and the idea of border characterizes many publications at the beginning of the 1990s. While ‘boundedness’ was thus an implicit or at times even explicit theme in publications, their authors did not simply pay attention to simultaneous border studies. This neglect of can be understood only in relation to wider theoretical, interdisciplinary academic backgrounds that were major sources of inspiration to early critical geopoliticians and to the dominant features of the long, empiricist tradition of border studies. This tradition clearly did not provide similar theoretical inspiration as the emerging post-modern and post-structuralist theories regarding social and political life and the discourses and power relations hidden in all kind of texts (written texts, maps, images, etc.). Political geographers thus looked beyond the disciplinary boundaries but neglected perhaps the potential of their own tradition. The comment by John Agnew (1996: 181) is probably telling of the Zeitgeist. In a book review he wrote how border studies had long been one of the
most torpid sub-fields of political geography that seemed largely oblivious to theorizing about
gerographies of political identity and the spatialities of power. New interdisciplinary
perspectives, raised by new academic generation of political geographers and the old political
geographic thinking on borders simply seemed not to match.

One of the few explicit references to the tradition of border studies was put forward by Dodds
(1994: 202), who states, again reflecting the more theoretically oriented Zeitgeist that “Given
the tenor of much of the recent work in critical geopolitics, it might seem strange to propose a
return to the study of boundaries”. Yet his return was not to re-theorize borders but to
accentuate, in the spirit of the then ongoing debates in media studies, philosophy and dissident
IR, how old apparently fixed political spaces seemed to be outdated in the dynamic world of
all kinds of interactions. The challenge to develop border studies thus remained while at the
same critical geopolitics scholars expanded their ideas of boundaries to such issues as state-
everyday life or masculine-feminist relations (Dalby 1994b, Sharp 1996).

Perhaps the strangest feature in the rapid rise of critical geopolitics and its leaning on dissident
IR literature was that IR scholars continued their life largely as if there were no critical
geopolitics at all, i.e. they very much ignored the works of critical geopolitics scholars.
*Challenging Boundaries*, a 500 page long volume edited by Shapiro and Alker (1996), for
example, included only a couple minor references to critical geopolitics. And if critical
geopolitics scholars did not cite, use and develop border literature produced by political
geographers, neither were the emerging critical geopolitical perspectives familiar among
political geographers working at the same time. A fitting illustration is the edited collection
*Political Boundaries and coexistence* based on papers of a border symposium organised in
Basel, Switzerland in 1994 (Galluser et al. 1994). This book includes almost 50 articles on
borders but there is not a single reference to critical geopolitics literature. Critical geopolitics and border studies where hence still travelling forward in different trains.

The rise of border studies

In spite of the fact that the early work in critical geopolitics did not pay particular attention to the re-conceptualization of borders, ignored this issue, regarded earlier accounts of borders as examples of a fixed world view, or leaned on the general ideas of border suggested by IR scholars, a lot happened simultaneously in border studies that began to mushroom in political geography, anthropology, literary criticism and sociology (Paasi 2011). Often publications were located in two ideological extremes: for few scholars borders were passé in a new borderless world, for some others they were perpetually fascinating objects of research. To take but a few examples from various fields, the disappearance of state borders was proposed by globalization propagandists like Ohmae (1995) and partly followed by some IR scholars like Luke (1993) who was excited about the rise of transnational trends, ‘informationalization’ and the rhetoric related to all kinds of flows that inspired many scholars during the 1990s. For Luke, “flows are decentering, despatializing, and dematerializing forces, and they work alongside and against the geopolitical codes of spatial sovereignty”… “the flows create new transnational communities that are blurring the old geographics of ‘them’ and ‘us’, ‘I’, or ‘friend’ and ‘foe’ in new informational modes if ideography, technography, demography, or plutography” (p. 240).

Also sociologist Levine (1996) suggested that major developments in the social world are weakening the claims of national boundaries, whereas another sociologist Oommen (1995) tried to show how new boundaries do not replace the old ones but rather they tend to co-exist.
Philosopher Balibar (1990), for his part, scrutinized the historical contingency of state-nation relations and problematized the production of people, national belonging, ‘fictive ethnicity’ and ideal nation. He discussed the role of ‘translators’ (politicians, writers, journalists) in the creation of national languages, as well as the roles of family and schools. Also Balibar emphasized the roles of borders for identities. Anthropologists, who had a long tradition in border studies (Barth 1969) looked now critically at the relations between state and nation and the territorialization of national identities (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Feminist scholar Yuval-Davis (1997) reflected emerging asymmetries related to borders, such as the gendered and generation-based features of de-bordering and re-bordering.

On the basis of new heterogeneous theoretical literature and empirical approaches on boundaries, four themes seemed to be important to political geographical argumentation: a) the suggested ‘disappearance’ of boundaries in the post-modern world, b) the role of boundaries in the construction of socio-spatial identities, c) boundary narratives and discourse, and d) the role of different spatial scales of boundary construction (Newman & Paasi 1998). These forced to re-think the classical political geographic question on the relations between borders and territories. New interdisciplinary but internally somewhat contradictory literature on boundaries made soon clear that the answers to the questions regarding the persistence or disappearance of boundaries are not simple either-or type, because boundaries were no more understood as mere physical, static and immovable spatial entities. For most borders scholars the issue of a borderless or bordered world was more complex and respectively questions of power, knowledge, representation and context became crucial in reflecting and understanding of borders and boundedness. The challenge was now to develop abstractions to make ‘theoretically’ visible the dimensions of territory and boundary building.
Borders and the making of territory

Political geographers have recognized the role of borders for (state) territory and territoriality for a long time. Sack (1986), for example, argued that borders are crucial in the making of a territory and in the exercise of territoriality. He suggested that circumscribing things is space or map does not itself create a territory. Territory is related to control and certain delimited areas become territories only when their boundaries are used to affect behaviour, resources and power by controlling access. This is most obvious in the case of international state borders where border-crossings are policed and controlled very effectively and practices related to state sovereignty, such as admitting citizenship are crucial in this process. Yet Sack (1986) did not relate his theoretical discussion on territoriality to the political geographic ideas of borders. Border was for him a fundamental but largely given element of territoriality.

Paasi (1996) attempted to bring together his earlier theoretical work on the institutionalization of regions/territories, the issue of spatial scales, and power relations, and respectively analysed the construction of territories, and the making of borders as both institutions and symbols. His study on the Finnish-Russian border follows a geohistorical approach which accentuates the contextuality of borders and the need to relate their making to both wider international context, nation-building process and the everyday lives of ordinary people. The idea of the institutionalization of territories led him to conceptualize boundaries as a phenomenon that are ‘located’ not only on edges but are ‘spread’ around the territory, in diverging institutional and discursive practices and that the perpetual making of the territory (represented as the creation of “us” or “we”) can actually extent outside of the territory. Paasi integrated the dimensions discussed by cultural theorists and IR scholars (Bachelard 1969, Said 1979, Walker 1993) and showed that both ‘we’ and ‘the Other’ can be both ‘here’ and ‘there’, dividing lines between
these socio-spatial elements may be fuzzy (Fig. 1) – an idea suggested also by ÓTuathail (1996). This inevitably complicates the idea of making national bounded spaces on the basis of categorical othering and the distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This issue is increasingly significant in a world characterized by immigrants and refugees that often “transport” symbolic boundaries from one cultural context to another (Lamont and Molnár 2002). In analytical terms, the symbolic construction of space, territoriality and borders are based on a dialectics between two languages, the language of integration and the language of difference. Whereas the language of integration aims at homogenizing the contents of collective spatial consciousness and experiences, the language of difference strives to distinguish this homogenized experience from the other (Paasi 1996).

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<td><strong>We</strong></td>
<td>Integration within a territory</td>
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<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>Distinction within a territory</td>
<td>Distinction between us and the Other</td>
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Figure 1. An analytic framework for forms of socio-spatial integration and distinction (Source: Paasi 1996:14).

By looking at the construction and historical contingency of the Finnish-Russian border, this work showed how boundary making was closely related to foreign policy discourses and but also to certain prosaic forms of banal nationalism that entered everyday life and were present in media discourses and school textbooks. This led to a theorization of spatial socialization, i.e. the process through which individual actors and collectivities are socialized as members of certain territorially bounded spatial entities and through which they more or less actively internalize collective territorial identities and shared traditions (Paasi 1996:8). Respectively
‘othering’ and the construction of images of threat, for instance, occur in many forms that are related to daily lives of citizens. Moisio (1998:120) has shown how geopolitical images of order and threats to security have been crucial in the Finnish identity project and related boundary construction.

**Maps, territory, and bordering**

One important theme raised by critical cartographers (Harley 1988, Wood 1992) was the relation between power and cartography, an issue that is crucially related to the ‘bordering’ themes raised by critical geopoliticians (ÓTuathail 1996) and by IR scholars (Krishna 1994). Paasi (1996) leaned on Wood’s and Harley’s works when analysing the discursive roles of cartography and maps in Finnish geopolitics during World War II and scrutinized their role especially in the making of borders. He also showed how human bodies, especially female bodies, are often used as allegories of the nation so that bodies become ‘maps’, in a way mixing spatial scales. Later the power of maps in the making of territory and borders has motivated several scholars who have grounded their work in critical geopolitics. Berg and Oras (2000) studied post-Soviet Estonia and how this ‘new’ entity was written on the world map in diverging boundary producing practices. Other examples of studies inspired by critical geopolitics are Herb’s (2004) analysis on the territorial strategies that were in use in the making of national identities in Germany (1949-1979) and Culcasi’s (2006) study on the geographical construction of Kurdistan. Herb looked at the period when there were two ‘Germanies’. In the initial situation both governments claimed to represent German national identity but this changed gradually and both states developed their own strategies in identity work. The border between the two states was a crucial element in this work. Culcasi’s (2006) study, for its part, analysed the U.S. journalist cartography to look at how it represents the
geopolitical conflict in Kurdistan. She found out that cartographic representations did not only reflect social and political narratives but also constructed and communicated subtle and blatant positions towards Kurds and Kurdistan. All these studies were explicitly using discursive perspectives and leaned on the ideas developed within critical geopolitics.

**Borders, everyday life and critical geopolitics**

O’Tuathail and Dalby (1998) made a division between formal, practical and popular geopolitics that all are related to the spatializing of boundaries, dangers and geopolitical representations of the self and other. At the turn of the millennium some critique was raised against the dominance of formal and practical geopolitics research perspectives and the related ‘geopolitical remote sensing’ approach that looked at boundary producing practices from a distance and largely through official texts, that is by not paying attention to the geopolitical issues, problems and struggles, affects and emotions in the *context* of everyday life (Paasi 2000, 2009, Power and Campbell 2010, Ó Tuathail 2010). Feminist scholars have argued that the exclusive focus of critical geopolitics on texts – as opposed to the embodied and the everyday – left it open to charges of elitism and academic distance (Sharp 2007). This critique emerged partly from theoretical grounds but one concrete background was the lack of the local (ethnographic) studies and the lack of deeper knowledge of the contextual features of political cultures. The importance of studying the meanings of borders in everyday life is obvious since borders provide most individuals with a concrete, local, and powerful experience of the state, for this is the site where citizenship is strongly enforced (through passport checks, for instance) (Lamont and Molnar 2002).
Paasi (1996) had brought together depth interviews and participant observation and leaned on ideas from visual anthropology to study local experiences and meanings of borders and combined them with a broader societal analysis of the production of space and scale. Later Megoran (2004, 2005, 2006) has developed ethnographic, focus group-based and participating methods in a series of articles were he leaned on the theoretical ideas of critical geopolitics and brought this literature into a dialogue with border literature. He analysed how a critical geopolitics of danger emerged in the context of Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan boundary dispute and claimed that more cross-cultural work is needed in the world where western narratives tend to dominate border studies. Similarly Ó Tuathail’s (2010) long-term project on Bosnia has aimed at developing the conceptual and methodological basis of ‘localized geopolitics’.

Also Sharp (1993, 1996, 1998) had made claims on the need to take the perspective of critical geopolitics beyond the formal boundaries of the state. For her this meant the analysis of the products of popular and media culture. These can be effective boundary producing artefacts and are useful in the analysis of gendered dimensions of geopolitics. The research materials she used were the popular American magazine Reader’s Digest and its changing perception of the Soviet Union and communism between 1930 and 1945, and post-Cold War American movies, for example. Similarly political cartoons have motivated research in critical geopolitics (Dodds 1998). Cartoons can be effectively used both to create geopolitical imaginaries and borders, as well as to deconstruct them (Dittmer 2005). This perspective continues e.g. in studies that have scrutinized the so-called Mohammed cartoons and the cultural dividing lines and conflicts associated with them (Ridanpää 2009).

Where are borders? Going beyond the lines
The increasing border crossings, all kinds of mobilities, post 9/11 security-related control mechanisms of travellers and refugees and the simultaneous diversification of border studies have led to a situation where scholars have started to ask where borders actually are located. While Paasi’s (1986, 1996) work on the institutionalization of territories expanded the traditional idea of border from being a mere line between territories and by accentuating the location of borders all round territories in discourses, symbolisms and social practices, this idea has gained new ground in literature. There seem to be two main strands of thought where ‘bounded spaces’ are challenged: relational thinking (and the related topological idea of space) and ‘borders are everywhere’ –thesis.

The first of these ideas is closely related to network-based thinking (e.g. actor network theory). Relational thinking sees bounded spaces generally as politically regressive and suggests that territories should be seen as open networked or topological spaces of social relations (Amin 2004). It may be argued that contrary to the current vibrant theoretical and empirical research on the meanings and functions of borders, relational thinking has been more general and normative. Relational thinkers have not studied concrete state borders but have rather reflected and challenged their ontological roles as products of modernity.

The “borders are everywhere” thesis is related to the Balibar’s ideas that have gained currency during the last ten years or so. He suggests that borders have perhaps not disappeared but have rather become so diffuse that they have transformed whole countries into borderlands (Balibar 2004). New technologies of border control that have been developed in the post 9/11 world to prevent terrorism, for example, do not locate merely on border areas but may exist literally ‘everywhere’: at airports, in shopping precincts, in streets, and even in other states. Such complexity and networking becomes clear in the homepage of UK border agency, for
example, which is now global organization with 25,000 staff operating in local communities, at UK’s borders and across 135 countries worldwide (http://ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/).

These new landscapes of control constitute something that can be labelled as technical landscapes of control and surveillance (Paasi 2011). These landscapes are monitored by increasingly technical devices that have gained importance in the post 9/11 world. This may simultaneously strengthen bordering in a society, be constitutive of social, cultural and political distinctions between social groups and also contribute to the making of ‘calculable territories’ that each state tries to produce and reproduce to govern space and population (Hannah 2009).

These tendencies have also forced researchers to expand the concepts of security that have by tradition characterized border studies. Feminist scholars have defined security beyond classical binaries – such as inside-outside or same-different – and thus also challenged the militarized, bounded version of security “which posits an identity which needs protection from the danger posed by a different external other” (Sharp 2007:383). Feminist scholars have reminded how also other scales than that of the nation-state have to be studied in critical geopolitics (Hyndman 1997, 2001). Indeed, the body, nation and global are seen now indicative of the same processes rather than as separate scales (Sharp 2007). Hyndman (2001) has discussed how people’s bodies are often construed as ‘territories’ in conflict situations and how, for instance, in civil wars they may become sites of public violence on which the symbolic construction of the nation and its boundaries occurs.

The new interest in the (mobile) bodies and security has given rise to new conceptual perspectives in current border studies. Amoore (2006), for example, speaks about ‘biometric borders’ which are, on the one hand, related to digital technologies, data integration and
managerial expertise in the politics of border management; and, on the other hand, to the exercise of biopower such that the “body itself is inscribed with, and demarcates, a continual crossing of multiple encoded borders social, legal, gendered, racialized and so on” (p.338). Biometric borders have motivated border scholars to study new increasingly technical security practices in such networked places as airports (Martin 2010).

However, borders are simultaneously typically rooted in historically constructed, contingent practices and discourses that are related to nationalist ideologies and identity narratives, that is discursive or emotional landscapes of social power that often draw on banal forms of nationalism (Paasi 2011). The persistence and almost universal power of such nationalist landscapes is related to the observation that only 3% of the world’s population resided (at the turn of the year 2000) in a state other than the one in which they were born (Cunningham 2004: 333). While physical borders may at times be significant symbols and institutions, the ‘location’ of the national(ist) border is therefore not only in the borderland but rather in the wider manifestations of the perpetual nation-building process and nationalist practices. The roots of these manifestations are contextual and have to be traced back to the histories of these practices and existing iconographies. A lot of emotional bordering and ‘othering’ may be hidden in flag or independence days and other national celebrations, military parades, international sports events, nationalized and memorialized landscapes and other elements of national iconographies (Paasi 2011). These practices may ‘stretch’ across borders in both time and space and can be ultimately very international.

It is important to recognize that the role of the state is also changing. It is increasingly the case that traditional self-other and friend-enemy distinctions between states in foreign policies are surpassed or at least paralleled by practices and narratives related to geo-economic rivalry
between states (Moisio 2008). Such narratives may accentuate the openness of borders simultaneously as cultural identity narratives maintain ideas of the boundedness of the state. This shows, as Taylor (1994) has earlier suggested, that the practice of territoriality may take simultaneously different overlapping forms.

**Conclusion**

Earlier accounts on the evolution or ‘development’ of border studies have accentuated the historically contingent nature of such studies and that each generation of scholars seems to create their own vision of what is relevant and topical (Paasi 2005). The role of generations challenging traditional thinking has been recognized also more generally in science studies literature (Johnston 1991). New developments of theory and research practice reflect not only institutional developments in academic fields but also wider academic and societal contexts. This tendency can be seen, for example, in the rise of positivist, humanist, behavioural or Marxist geography.

The origin of critical geopolitics can also be understood as a rise of a new generation of scholars in political geography, a generation that was drawing effectively on interdisciplinary, mainly post-modern and post-structuralist literature. Its representatives used actively interdisciplinary conceptual ideas to develop their disciplinary thinking. They leaned particularly on the influences from IR, and soon constituted a visible ‘community of circulating ideas’ when citing widely each other’s publications.

In terms of border studies the start was much slower. At first critical geopolitics scholars seemed to be happy with the general border ideas that they adopted from IR literature. In
particular, Richard Ashley’s idea about foreign policy as boundary producing practice motivated critical geopolitics scholars interested in foreign policy practices. Gradually the idea of the border itself gained more attention and became an object of theoretical endeavour. Yet it is difficult to say, to what extent new ideas reflected exactly “critical geopolitics” which itself had developed to a heterogeneous set of ideas and perspectives. Increasing attention was now paid to how geopolitics exists in popular forms and further how it may modify everyday life in certain contexts. Feminist scholars have simultaneously challenged the ‘self-evidence’ of militarized, bounded versions of security and the ideas of fixed, linear borders.

The language used when discussing boundaries also partly changed. The ideas of borders, boundaries, borderlands, border-crossings and transgressions of borders that the representatives of various disciplines used, were increasingly employed in a metaphoric sense so that they did not inevitably refer to the material border contexts of states that political geographers typically had dealt with. New interest in boundary producing practices gave rise to studies analysing the practices and discourses in which hegemonic ideas representing certain forms of ‘boundedness’ are produced. This led to an analysis of the images of threat, danger and, more widely, foreign policy practices. Such studies may actually be separate from concrete state borders that political geographers have scrutinized by tradition, yet be highly significant. Think, for example, the Cold War “macro level” dividing lines between capitalist west and communist east or the later, much criticized, abstract dividing lines between ‘civilizations’.

This article shows that, as far as concrete state borders are concerned, there is no specific single approach to borders that could be labelled as such as ‘critical geopolitical’. Rather the perspectives developed gradually in critical geopolitics seem to inform current border studies
in many ways by raising new questions, by opening new research materials and concepts. Thus these perspectives may help to re-direct and develop border studies (Johnson et al. 2011). Perpetual ‘updating’ of border studies will hence be a major challenge in a world where accelerating globalization, integration, economic competition and new images of security threats characterize the operations of states and economic blocs, and where the mobility of human beings and their border-crossings are crucial elements of the international human landscape.

References


