A Border Theory: An unattainable dream or a realistic aim for border scholars?

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Introduction

After a relative silence during the post-World War II decades, political borders have become highly salient objects in research during the last ten to 15 years or so. This has not been merely a coincidental change in academic winds, but has been related to major social and political transformations occurring in the international geopolitical landscape. The collapse of the rigid Cold War geopolitical divide between West and East at the turn of the 1990s and the accelerating globalization – whether related to economics, culture, consciousness or all of these – were the principal macro-level backgrounds (Paasi 2003). The rise of the political and economic importance of regions as part of the re-shaping of new state spaces (Brenner 2004), in association with the transformations of global capitalism, has provided another, spatially more diverse background. This re-shaping triggered off a new vocabulary, with such keywords as cross-border regions (Kramsch and Hooper 2004; Perkmann and Sum 2002), regional states (Ohmae 1995), or city regions (Scott 2001). The rapid development of information technology – partly generating globalization and partly illustrating it – was also a significant context.
The politico-territorial and scalar consequences of the 9/11 terrorist attack in the USA in 2001 and the transforming hegemony of the USA on the global geopolitical (Agnew 2005) and regional scene (Katzenstein 2005) were also upheavals that forced politicians and the prevailing statecraft to consider the meanings of the lines dividing societies, nations, states and even cultural realms. In this situation, new fears, images of friends and enemies, dividing lines between us and them, and insides and outsides have emerged, perhaps mocking the optimism of the early post-Cold War period and challenging the seeds of cosmopolitanism that emerged after the collapse of the dividing lines which characterized that period (see Cunningham 2004). This has not, however, discouraged the representatives of critical, socially situated cosmopolitanism from searching for a new basis for their cosmopolitan thinking, which seems to have become more differentiated spatially in the current global world (Delanty 2006; Delanty and He 2008). This also challenges us to recognize such emerging asymmetries related to borders as the gendered and generation-based features of de-bordering and re-bordering (Yuval-Davis 1997).

The expansion and political and economic integration of the European Union have rapidly transformed the continent of Europe as the major context and laboratory for current border studies (another perpetual major laboratory being the US-Mexico border). Many of the previous new tendencies have re-appeared in this context. European integration was set in motion originally in order to maintain peace between the old enemies of the World Wars, and the European Union (EU) has invested a lot of resources and effort in promoting cross-border cooperation, regional economies and the development of infrastructures. There are currently about 150 new, unusual regions within the EU, varying greatly in their areal scope and economic functions (Deas and Lord 2006). The borders of the EU are nowadays
often seen rather stereotypically as simply becoming lower inside the Union and stronger around its outside. The Union’s area is more complex, however, and such features as the Schengen zone make a major difference. The situation of the EU and its internal and external borders serves to characterize more broadly the key issue related to borders: their selective openness. This also implies that some local borders were more meaningful than others in the construction of previous global dichotomies.

This is the complex setting that border scholars have faced from the 1990s onwards. It is no wonder, then, that contrary to much of the social science dominated by Anglophone scholars, border studies are today more international than many other fields of social scientific inquiry. Correspondingly, much of the current research and many of the conceptual ideas come from scholars working outside the Anglophone linguistic realms. But in spite of this fact, the accelerating flow of new book titles and journal articles published in the English language implies that one more new dimension behind the mushrooming of border studies is academic capitalism. This phenomenon, which is related to the globalization of knowledge production and international competition between states, becomes apparent in the first instance in the increasing numbers of researchers in various countries (several border research institutes, for instance, have been established since the 1990s) and secondly in the demands expressed for scholars to operate internationally. The simultaneous establishment of academic merit systems around the world, based on competition and publications, also brings the corporate interests of international publishing businesses into play (Paasi 2005). The relative numbers of researchers and published scientific articles have become indicators of the international competitiveness of a state.
Paradoxically, it may then be argued that such a tendency towards internationalization and border crossings is based on academic nationalism.

This chapter will scrutinize the current state of border studies and reflect particularly on the role of theory in a situation where borders and border studies are becoming more diverse, more integrated – and more international. The major motive for looking at such a theme is the fact that claims have recently been made regarding the need for a theory that would bring together the hierarchical nature of borders, both spatial and a-spatial aspects, and their multidisciplinary character (Newman 2003). The role of theory has been touched upon by political geographers on several occasions, but the theme has still not been studied sufficiently. The key aim here is to reflect the rhetorical question put forward in the title: Is border theory a realistic aim, an unattainable ideal or perhaps something that is not needed at all, as the empiricist tradition of political geography has implied? Or is this a question that is, as this paper suggests, crucially related to our concept of theory and the need to see this as a verb, that is theorization?

Theoretical ideas in border studies have often evinced the broader intellectual changes in academic fields and the philosophical and methodological ways of thought dominating various disciplines. Furthermore, such trends have often reflected more general philosophical approaches that have provided somewhat different conceptual and methodological tools for theorizing and for studying borders in concrete terms (Paasi 2009a, b). This chapter will not only look at how the need for theory has been expounded and justified in border studies but will also illustrate how our understanding of borders is itself perpetually transforming and that this continual striving to re-define them has been a
crucial part of theorization, whether the aim has been to work towards universalistic certitude or to recognize historical-geographical contingency (Agnew 2006).

The chapter is organized as follows. It will first discuss the complexity of political borders as research objects and then go on to investigate the purported shaping of the interdisciplinary field of border studies. This will be followed by a discussion on how various concepts of theory could inform border studies, after which it will scrutinize some recent debates in which the concept of border has been challenged, re-interpreted and expanded. This discussion aims at showing how there can be gaps not only between various camps in academic debates but also between such debates and the concrete world, and that such gaps may ultimately be unfortunate and prevent the development of new theoretical approaches in border studies. Finally some conclusions will be set out.

The complexity of borders as research objects

Political borders are currently very attractive but at the same time complex objects of research. This section will look at the backgrounds to this complexity, namely the perpetually increasing numbers of state, sub-state and supra-state borders, the complexity of the bounded state in terms of territorial ideologies, and the methodological problems entailed in studying borders.

Firstly, the perpetually increasing number of state borders, their changing roles and functions in the globalizing world and the stress (Pratt and Brown 2000) existing in border areas are all factors that make a difference. The current world harbors some 200 states and more than 300 land borders between them, and in addition there are scores of sea boundaries. This corpus has been perpetually expanding along with the rise of new states, especially after major upheavals such as wars. This is exemplified by the fact that there are
some 600-800 cultural groupings or purported nations in the world (according to some opinions as many as 4,000, based on diverging languages), many of which are struggling to establish a state of their own. These efforts are balanced and managed by international law and other agreements and by certain regional systems of rules such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Such systems often draw on the principle of collective security, placing states into an alliance of shared responsibilities, as it were. One of the European Union’s key requirements for new candidate members, for example, is that they should not have unresolved border conflicts with their neighbours. One further important variable that complicates this constellation arises from the perpetually changing meanings of sovereignty (Murphy 1996; Krasner 2001).

Political borders are processes that emerge and exist in boundary-producing practices and discourses, and they may be materialized and symbolized to greater or lesser extents (Paasi 1996). Ó Tuathail and Dalby (1998) have pointed out that approaches looking at boundary-producing practices should investigate both the material borders at the edges of states and the conceptual borders that designate material boundaries between an apparently secure interior and “an anarchic exterior”. It will also be argued below that such conceptual borders may be located outside the border areas proper. Some of existing boundaries are relatively closed and strictly guarded (for example that between the two Koreas), while some others are very open (for example most Schengen zone boundaries inside the EU). Still others may be selectively open, so that flows between states are strictly controlled in one or both directions (for example the external borders of the EU or the US-Mexico border). The meanings of borders are not constant, as the case of the EU shows, and political transformations may cause some borders become lower or softer fairly rapidly,
while some others become *harder*. This is also illustrated by the situation of *failing states* with corroding and porous borders (Juss 2008), most of which are currently to be found in Africa, with Somalia, Sudan and Zimbabwe as the most recent examples.

While conflicts rarely occur nowadays between states, for example across their borders, internal conflicts are still common, often displaying the perpetual power of ethnicity. The year 2007 was the fourth consecutive year in which no interstate conflict existed in the world, the last such conflicts having been between Eritrea and Ethiopia, India and Pakistan and Iraq and the USA. According to statistics compiled by Stockholm’s International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 14 major armed conflicts were actively going on in 13 locations around the world in 2007, implying that the number of active conflicts of this kind has declined globally over the past decade or so. The decline has been uneven, however, and has varied on a yearly basis, with major drops occurring in 2002 and 2004 and an increase in 2005 (SIPRI 2008).

Even though the number of border-related conflicts has been decreasing, we have again been reminded of the power of military and strategic interests by the recent events in Ossetia, where the citizens of this territorial unit have suffered severely from the conflict between Russia and Georgia, which seems to have shaken the international order more seriously than any other dispute since Cold War and the post-9/11 events. For some observers this has represented a return to both power politics and the sphere-of-interest way of thinking that characterized the geopolitical order during the Cold War. Of course, the activities of the US-led coalition in Iraq have been much wider examples of this thinking for some time, and Georgia’s aspirations towards the North Atlantic Treaty Organization
(NATO) and its close relations with the US may be regarded as one more example of sphere-of-interest thinking.

Secondly, the complexity of state borders as research objects is based on the fact that the meanings attributed to such borders are *inward-oriented*: They are closely related to the ideological state apparatus, ideological practices such as nationalism (and related national identity narratives) and the material basis of such practices, which manifests itself in territoriality. Territoriality is an ideological practice and discourse that transforms national spaces and histories, cultures, economic success and resources into bounded spaces (Sack 1986; Anderson 1988; Paasi 1996). The most significant and widely exploited territorial form of ideology is nationalism (Anderson 1988), the proponents of which often gain some of their ideological power from discourses and practices that make a contrast between a community (*We*) and *The Other*. This phenomenon has been recognized by border scholars in various contexts since the 1990s and has been seen to manifest itself in foreign policy discourses, educational practices and popular culture. The processes of *Othering* and the means by which such processes become part of a banal or mundane nationalism, a theme invented in cultural and postcolonial studies (Said 1978), have been scrutinized in many International Relations (IR) and geographical studies (Campbell 1992; Dalby 1990; Paasi 1996, 2002).

It is, indeed, difficult to find any book on nationalism and nationhood that does not somehow recognize the historical importance of territory and boundaries in the practice of state territoriality and in the making of a *homeland* (Sack 1986; Anderson 1988; Schulze 1994; Paasi 2000; Kaiser 2002; Guibernau 2007). Everywhere, the legislation generated by the state and its instruments of socialization aim at constructing the limits of nationality,
citizenship and identity by defining the borders of inclusion and exclusion (Isin and Wood 1999). And this again raises complicated questions regarding the power and operation of social institutions, symbols and national iconographies. Identification with a territory may occur in various more or less material practices, for example in economic or political spheres, and not purely at the level of mental acts and discourses as identity is often understood.

Thirdly, the spatial scale also makes a difference with respect to the complexity of borders. While state borders are often regarded as both local and national phenomena, some borders are doubtless also global and their meanings fluctuate in the sense that so much in the way of economic and symbolic practices, discourses and emphasis on difference can be associated with them – factually or not – (for example the changing meanings of the US-Mexico border or the EU’s external boundaries). Besides state boundaries, which are relatively hard in terms of purported territorial control and nationalist ideologies and practices, each state also harbours a number of soft internal political boundaries that are perpetually being produced and reproduced (some of these sub-state borders in all states are concomitantly state borders, which fuses their spatial meanings with those associated with such borders). Sub-state borders (and territories) are produced and institutionalized by the state in various forms of territorial governance or through processes of devolution. Such changes and the corresponding new regionalizations may also be expressions of efforts to manage and control the activities of ethno-nationalist or regionalist groupings (Paasi 2009b). In spite of globalization and the apparent opening of borders, states still have a great interest in maintaining their relative power in the governance of the economy of space, the minds and well-being of citizens’, and thereby social order and cohesion. The
key administrative vehicle in this process is modification of the structures of regional governance and policy. The multi-scalar importance of borders is accentuated by the fact that while the number of states has quadrupled since the World War II, the number of sub-national units of governance has multiplied even more (Lovering 2007).

A reappraisal of state spaces towards higher scales has occurred simultaneously with this, and an increasing number of supra-state boundaries have been drawn, some of which are crucial to the organization of international economic and strategic relations and the control of flows of various kinds, for example in the context of blocks such as the EU, NAFTA, Mercado Común del Sur (Mercosur), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and so on (Paasi 2009b). The importance of such units is increasing, and some scholars have suggested that normative regionalism and cosmopolitanism are currently significant factors, for example in Asia and Europe, and that they could serve as alternatives to nationalism and narrowly defined globalism (Delanty and He 2008).

Fourthly, as in any field of social science research, there are several partly competing methodological approaches to border studies that draw on diverging theoretical principles. Such approaches often operate at different levels of abstraction and can be used in relation to diverging conceptual apparatuses (state theory, theories of nationalism, identity theory, and so on), and at the same time are available on different spatial scales. For some political economists, for instance, it is the macro-level mobility of capital across borders and the possible control of such flows that is at stake and which normally forces researchers to reflect the changing faces of capitalism and the changing global conditions and strategies of capital accumulation (Strange 1996; Hudson 1998; Sparke 2006). For those interested in the power of statecraft and foreign policy elites in shaping images of threat and associated
fears in international relations it has been the analysis of foreign policy texts, media space
texts and various popular texts (written, pictorial, cinematic) that has attracted the attention
of scholars. Such textual approaches originally drew on the poststructuralist thinking on
borders that was proposed by dissident international relations scholars and representatives
of critical geopolitics, who strived to deconstruct the self-evident traits associated with
bounded territories and the meanings of mobile identities and shifting boundaries
Accordingly, attention has been paid to the state and governmental boundary-drawing
practices and performances that characterize the everyday life of states and their relations to
each other.

For researchers interested in the local narratives that people associate with borders
and border crossings in their everyday lives, it is often ethnographic approaches, participant
observation, depth interviews and narrative analysis that draw their attention (Paasi 1996;
Meinhof 2002; Vila 2003). Such approaches may draw on normal neutral mapping of
border life and experiences, but they may equally well be based on participatory action
research, where researchers may actively struggle to lower boundaries between social
groups living in separate territories. Such cross-border work can be based on approaches
where scholars together with border citizens make a critical examination of national or
regional stereotypes, for example, consider the content of national or regional identity
narratives and their impact on interaction, and correspondingly try actively to transform
existing inclusive and exclusive practices and discourses (see Paasi and Prokkola 2008).

The complexity of borders and the need to conceptualize various dimensions of them
has been usefully summarized by the political scientist Malcolm Anderson (1996), who
also gives some guidelines for recognizing the features of boundary producing practices. For him, as for many political geographers today, borders are not merely simple lines on maps or between states but rather elements that are inseparable from the development of the states that they enclose. Some scholars have labelled this process as the institutionalization of territories, which brings together such processes as the shaping of borders, symbols and institutions (Paasi 1996). Like many geographers, Anderson (1996) also regards borders as institutions and processes. As institutions they are established by political decisions and regulated by legal texts. Indeed, borders are basic political institutions in the sense that no rule-bound economic, social or political life in complex societies could be organized without them. We can also add here the cultural and symbolic meanings of the regions that become institutionalized along with the territory.

**From separate academic fields to the shaping of an interdisciplinary field of border studies**

International political borders were regarded for a long time as unique research objects, which they certainly are to some extent. Researchers in different academic fields have by tradition studied borders largely from their own disciplinary perspectives and premises. Prescott (1965, 1987), for example, condensed the long tradition of political geography by suggesting that borders are concrete, empirical phenomena that have to be studied using empirical material, and that generalizations about them are very difficult. The development of geography towards positivist thinking led scholars to attach more weight to models and generalizations, and political geographers also followed such trends and set about studying the functional roles of borders and trying to make generalizations about them (Minghi 1963). They also gradually recognized the psychological and perceptual meanings attached
to borders and border landscapes, again following more general academic trends and the rise of behavioural approaches in the field (Rumley and Minghi 1991). It was only during the 1990s that new approaches drawing on post-structuralism and ethnographic standpoints emerged, for example (see Newman and Paasi 1998), and it may be argued that it was at this stage that geographers took some steps towards the emerging interdisciplinary field of border studies and began especially to rely on approaches developed in anthropology and other social sciences (see Wilson and Donnan 1998; Donnan and Wilson 1999; Meinhof 2002).

The functional roles of borders, their meanings as barriers and questions of how to cross them have been crucial for economists. The ongoing process of economic integration, for instance, has led economists to develop new dynamic approaches to the transformation of border regions from barriers into active spaces (van Geenhuisen and Ratti 2001). This tendency has been especially significant in the EU, where the key motive of spatial politics has been to lower the boundaries between states. Anthropologists, ethnologists and sociologists, for their part, have often looked at the cultural and social boundaries affecting communities and the identities of border citizens (Cohen 1986, 1998; Donnan and Wilson 1999). Although some classical sociologists such as Georg Simmel discussed the roles of boundaries in social life, sociologists in general have been relatively silent on issues regarding political borders, but this situation is now seemingly changing (Oommen 1995; O’Dowd 2007). Meanwhile political scientists have often regarded boundaries as lines separating and stabilizing the system of states as sovereign power containers in a supposedly anarchic world, a view that was questioned during the 1990s by dissident IR
scholars, whose ideas were soon adopted by critical geopoliticians, for instance (Alker and Shapiro 1996, Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1998).

At the same time new common keywords have emerged among border scholars. Identity, for instance, is one of watchwords in current interdisciplinary border studies, often associated with others such as difference and inclusion/exclusion or inside/outside. These ideas are shared by political geographers (Newman and Paasi 1998), international relations scholars (Walker 1993; Albert et al. 2001; Inayatullah and Blaney 2004; McSweeney 1999), anthropologists (Mach 1993; Donnan and Wilson 1999) and linguists (Benwell and Stokoe 2008), so that they are clearly not a monopoly of any field.

The same holds good with general categories such as de-territorialization and re-territorialization that many border scholars have readily used since the 1990s. These categories were originally coined in somewhat cryptic ways by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) when depicting the impact of capitalism on the fragmentation and reorganization of the social world. In cultural studies, de-territorialization has referred to loss of the naturalized relation between culture and geographical and social territory – a theme discussed by border scholars as well (Paasi 2003) – and this has also been taken to include the relocation of old and new forms of symbolic production (Lull 1995, 151). Correspondingly, re-territorialization embraced two coactive phenomena, in that while the foundations of cultural territory (ways of life, artifacts, symbols and contexts) were seen to be open to new interpretations and understandings, this idea implied that culture is perpetually reconstituted through social interaction (Lull 1995, 159). Lull points out that cultural re-territorialization is not something done to people, over which they do not have any control.
Most border scholars have been much more straightforward when using these ideas, so that de-territorialization has simply referred to the purported situation characterized by the disappearance of borders in the globalizing world, or at times to the need to deconstruct their fixed or apparent meanings. Re-territorialization, for its part, normally refers in border studies to the situation where new borders are created or emerge. Both de- and re-territorialization occur in various institutional practices and discourses and display economic, cultural and political power relations. Since both processes are taking place continually, they are overlapping and intermittent, and they inevitably result in differentiation of the already complex spatialities of borders. Furthermore, it may be argued that these two expressions are often used in a metaphoric sense in border studies, not referring to specific, concrete borders. In many of the recent debates concerning the re-location of borders (or to be more exact, debates on new forms of surveillance of border crossings) inside states, for example access to airports, streets or shopping centres, or on the future of global borders in the globalizing, post-national world, borders in general have been used as metaphors referring to processes of establishing borders.

It may be argued that now, following the first wave of the broadening interest in borders that initially emerged in separate academic fields, the terrain of border research is now fusing and it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish separate academic realms with their own objects, concepts or methods of border research. Correspondingly, some scholars have called for anti-disciplinarity or rather transdisciplinarity (Lugo 1997). This is evident in current research. Thus political and other human geographers may now well be interested in border-related personal, collective and literary identity narratives, as traditionally studied by anthropologists. The multifarious roles of the state in the production
and reproduction of borders are nowadays being studied not only by political geographers and IR scholars but also by anthropologists, historians and literary theorists. Scholars concerned with literary or cultural theory, for example, have looked at both real hard borders and soft borders and also considered border crossings in multicultural locations, through concepts such as benevolent nationalism, cultural essentialism or multiculturalism (Michaelsen and Johnson 1997). Some of them have even mapped the social boundaries of bodies and human subjectivity (Kirby 1996). It is also typical nowadays for border scholars to cross the borders of academic fields in edited collections and even to engage in cooperation.

But what would a theory of such a complicated constellation of borders and related social institutions and ideologies actually deal with? Is it a theory of borders or should it rather be a theory of bounding and boundary producing practices – that see borders as specific forms of practice, symbols and institutions – as has been suggested by political geographers (see Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1998; Paasi 1996, 2003; Newman 2003)? It is obvious that the challenge for border studies lies in the perpetual theorization of borders and boundary producing practices rather than in a solid border theory of some kind. This means that, rather than fixed ideas, our theorizations on boundaries should be tractable heuristic tools that could be used and re-conceptualized further in various empirical settings (Paasi 2009c). To follow Sayer (1992), the role of theory for the organization of facts and empirical observations should be a secondary one and the key aim of theorization should be to conceptualize the directly and indirectly observable elements of the research object(s). This is often the case with objects of research in the social sciences when studying abstract economic relations, social cohesion, values or emotions, for instance. The major task is to
recognize conceptually dimensions and relations of the research object that are significant for its production, reproduction and functioning (Sayer 1992). This approach lays stress on the fact that observations are theory-laden, but it also identifies the significance of empirical observations. Correspondingly, theory is not a separate realm that should be freely circulated as such, but it should inform concrete research practice, which should in turn help to shape the theory. On the other hand, while such conceptualization should be contextual, it should not be bound only to a specific local context but should be related to broader social and cultural theory.

**Bounded spaces – a mobile world: borders and the changing contexts of politics**

To show how complicated, and at times contrasting, the views expressed on the roles of boundaries may be (and this complexity doubtless has its impact on the way they are theorized), this section will discuss briefly some alternative paths for conceptualizing borders that have been proposed in recent debates. The first challenges the existence and dominance of borders in current political-territorial grammars and the second strives to make the current complex roles of borders visible by expanding our understanding of what borders mean and where they are actually located. Whereas the former perspective often looks at boundaries as lines of separation that exist between social entities, somehow leaning on traditional views on borders, the other approach strives to expand this understanding by conceptualizing them as practices and discourses that are sedimented all around society and not merely in border areas. The third example discusses a traditional border-related theme, nature, but does this in the context of ecopolitics and biopolitics.

*Wishing boundaries away?*
At the same time as new theoretical viewpoints and empirical border studies have been mushrooming, there has been a parallel, somehow paradoxical discussion on the roles of boundaries, a discussion that simply seems to be progressing, superficially at least, in the opposite direction. Contrary to the lively debates on the changing meanings of borders, their functions on various spatial scales and how they should be conceptualized, this discussion has been somewhat more academic and normative, in the sense that it is not related to any specific political border. New ideas have been typically represented by relational thinkers, by scholars such as Amin (2003) among geographers. He argues against the conceptualization of territories as bounded and suggests that they should be regarded as spaces of relation in which ‘all kinds of unlike things can knock up against each other in all kinds of ways’ (Amin 2003, 6).

It is interesting that, in spite of making suggestions and claims regarding the meanings of borders, relational thinkers such as Amin or Doreen Massey (2007) are not border scholars in the sense that they have not been studying concrete political borders and their sedimentation in the social meanings produced and reproduced by social collectives or individuals, that is the power relations sedimented in boundary producing practices. Rather, they are interested in borders as hindrances to normative, progressive politics, and therefore regard boundaries generally as regressive and, in a way, as optical illusions associated with the cartographic legacy of measuring location on the basis of geographical distance and territorial jurisdiction (Amin 2007, 103). This legacy is not unfamiliar for political geographers and political scientists, who have been reflected on it for a long time and have used such expressions as ‘methodological nationalism’ (Agnew 1998), ‘embedded statism’ (Taylor 1996), ‘territorial trap’ (Agnew 1994) or ‘cartographic
anxiety’ (Krishna 1996) to characterize the persistence of this phenomenon. But while often being consistent with the normative arguments of relationalists, these scholars have related their arguments to the operation and power of the state.

The discussion on the need to erase borders has not arisen of the blue but echoes voices raised earlier in critical anthropology, for example when scholars challenged the conventionally accepted links between bounded spaces and people’s assumed fixed identities (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). More recently, the representatives of the mobility paradigm have also questioned the naturalized relations between bounded spaces and certain groups of people. Correspondingly, ‘the emerging mobility paradigm thus argues against the ontology of distinct places and “people”. Rather there is a complex relationality of places and persons connected through both performances and performativities’ (Hannam et al. 2006, 13).

Such ways of thought as postnationalism and transnationalism similarly suggest that sovereignty is diffusing away from the nation-state, which would weaken the link between political identities, participation and the territorial state. Especially for extreme transnational theorists, identities and political activities are now multilocal and loyalties are no longer seen to correspond to the nation-state, for example territory and politics are not in a one-to-one relation (Nagel 2004). This thinking has also produced certain forms of rhetoric and lines of thought which force us to consider especially the current and future roles of citizenship, a status that is quite dramatically related to borders and border crossings.

Similar, a rather normative approach is taken at times by scholars who make claims regarding cosmopolitanism and imply that attachment to a nation’s territory should ideally
be replaced by an attachment to the whole planet. Guibernau (2007, 168-9) argues critically that today’s cosmopolitans tend to belong to the middle and upper classes, often speak English, enjoy sufficient resources to take advantage of the goods and life-styles associated with post-industrial societies, and feel comfortable using the continually emerging new ranges of sophisticated information technology and communications goods bombarding the market. She thinks that the cosmopolitan identity is the privilege of an elite and does not envisage its expansion among the masses in the near future. Critical cosmopolitanism, however, is a new line of thought that differs from such a stereotypic world polity cosmopolitanism. This viewpoint is not reducible to concrete identities (national or global) but rather is a form of cultural contestation (Delanty 2006).

It is clear that such a principled challenging of borders must be a crucial issue for any border scholar who is interested in the moral and ethical issues involved in the definitions, practices and discourses of border crossings, the right to cross borders, to change one’s place and to seek opportunities for a better life elsewhere (see Lee and Smith 2004). Such concerns are not merely academic, of course, but rather networks of activists that operate across borders are becoming increasingly significant in challenging the politics of borders that many would take for granted. Such activism has by tradition included diverse groupings such as anti-slavery and women’s suffrage campaigners and more recently the environmental and anti-globalization movements. Keck and Sikkink (1998) have noted how such movements can be significant as sources of identity, values, norms and new ideas, and refer to them as ‘transnational advocacy networks’. Such social movements often develop common interpretations of the world to nurture solidarity and identifications (della Porta et al. 2006).
Without leaning uncritically on realist accounts of the importance of states and of the anarchy rampaging outside them, it is still useful to remember that only three per cent of the world’s population are currently living outside the state where they were born (O’Dowd 2007). Of course it is mostly the people belonging to this three per cent – for example asylum seekers and refugees – that will face the most serious impacts of borders and the construction of global lines of exclusion and inclusion. Academic guest workers and high-flying international business people are part of this minority, but may be subject to different rules. Sparke (2006), for instance, in analysing the new biopolitical production of citizenship and control mechanisms in the post-9/11 neoliberal USA, speaks about new forms of citizenship that are divided between business-class civil citizenship that extends across transnational spaces concomitantly with economic liberalization and new forms of national security that have curtailed the citizenship of others and led to various forms of exclusion.

Such new divisions force us to ask what is the lesson to be learned by a border scholar from the fact that 97 per cent of people still live in their country of origin and are normally effectively wrapped and subjugated under the national ideological apparatus and national practice designed to take individuals politically into the possession of the state. Rather than closing our eyes to such practices and downplaying their importance, we still need to scrutinize how and in what practices and discourses such border-producing national identity narratives are produced and reproduced. Is it so that nationalism is only a more aggressive label for an apparently harmless identity narrative, a label that can actually be rapidly changed into a political and discriminatory practice which gives concrete shape to such apparently neutral identity narratives? I think that we still know very little of such
nation-building processes and the roles of borders in them. The key reason for this is that border scholars more often than not seem to be interested in the present situation prevailing in border areas rather than tracing borders as historically contingent processes (Paasi 1996, 2000).

These are serious questions for border scholars. Even though national boundaries are becoming lower in some areas of the world and are losing their at times dramatic roles as obstacles to mobility, each international border normally has a specific place in the history of nation-building processes and national identity narratives that may sometimes be highly conflict-ridden and sometime be based on long periods of peaceful development. Such memories and related performances are often unscrupulously exploited in nationalist ideologies, which hide them in the rhetoric of national identities and heritage. It is also known that, historically, people originating from border areas have been strongly represented in many nationalist movements (Hutchinson 2005).

The above discussion does not mean that relational claims or claims regarding the need for cosmopolitanism are not highly important politically and most laudable in terms of human values – on the contrary. It is simply intended to remind us that making such claims without studying concrete border practices and ideologies does not help us very much in understanding how these practices of producing and reproducing borders work generally and contextually. But where will the borders be if we rethink their location?

*Borders are everywhere*

Another strand in the ongoing debates on boundaries has been the suggestion that borders have perhaps not disappeared but have rather become so diffuse that they have transformed whole countries into borderlands (Balibar 1998). Their meanings are thus changing. As
Rumford (2006, 2008) suggests, surveillance technologies associated with increasing border control – to prevent terrorism, for example – may exist everywhere, even beyond the borders proper: at airports, in shopping precincts, in streets, and so on. This may in fact strengthen border creation in a society (Rumford 2006) and be constitutive of social, cultural and political distinctions.

It is possible to argue that this *borders are everywhere* thesis exists in two forms, which are historically and spatially contingent (Paasi 2009c; Paasi and Prokkola 2008). If borders are understood as marking the spread of societal and political control into society (and at times even outside of existing state borders, see the examples quoted by Rumford 2008), there must also exist other ways in which borders are present more widely. As discussed above, borders as expressions of territoriality are normally crucial to what can be called the discursive landscape of social power. This is a construct that has become institutionalized in a society in the long term and manifests itself in material landscapes, military commemorations, ideologies and nationalist performances all over that society’s territory (Paasi 1996). That these things often draw on banal forms of nationalism (Billig 1995) makes them even more persistent in daily life. It is not difficult to understand how much emotional bordering is loaded into national celebrations, flag days, independence days, military parades, selective national landscapes and other elements of national iconographies. Given that the current mechanisms of surveillance and societal control are expanding deep into society, it may similarly be argued that the key *location* of a national(ist) border does not lie at the concrete line but in the manifestations of the perpetual nation-building process and nationalist practices, and the roots of these manifestations have to be traced to the histories of these practices and iconographies.
It may be suggested that the boundaries are everywhere thesis has correspondingly two societal contexts that may actually operate in the same direction, to strengthen the national community as a bounded unit (Paasi 2009b, 2009c). The fact that borders are part of the discursive landscapes of social power, which are based on symbolic and physical violence, simply means that we have to be sensitive to the meanings associated with national borders. Children and young people already learn through their education at school and in the family, and especially through the printed and electronic media, that such borders (often defined on historical grounds), are the justified (and at times when we are being taught that they are wrong, ‘non-natural’) territorial borders of ‘our’ community or ‘us’.

We are also forced or persuaded to learn what are the legitimate and hegemonic national meanings attached to these borders and what are the pools of emotions, fears and memories that we have to draw on in this connection (such meanings can, of course, always be challenged and can even change as a consequence of revolutions, occupations and the like). These pools of meanings can be labelled as emotional landscapes of control.

The power of borders for nationalism and national identity narratives is not a homogeneous phenomenon; rather it is crucially context dependent, and even the power and salience of the individual borders of a state can vary dramatically. To take one example, for instance, the role of the relatively open border of Finland with Sweden and Norway has been quite different from that of the Finnish-Soviet/Russian border, which has been perpetually been exploited as a border that divides. It still has deep symbolic meanings even though its ideological role between east and west has largely disappeared as a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Union and of the division between East and West. And while this border has become much more open since the collapse of the Soviet
Union, it is still a cultural, political and economic dividing line that exists deep in the national memory and even in the national iconography. A fitting example is the memorial to Olli Tiainen, a peasant leader named the border captain (see Figure 1). He has a heroic reputation (part of which appears to have been fabricated by the authorities later) for his activities during the war between Sweden-Finland and Russia (1808-09), after which the Finnish areas of Sweden-Finland became an autonomous part of Tsarist Russia for more than 100 years before Finland gained independence in 1917 (see Paasi 1996). The statue was erected in 1932 and reflects the nationalist overtones of the 1930s, as it carries the coat of arms of Karelia, which represents the perpetual opposition between the East (a scimitar) and the West (a sword), and the inscription ‘Freedom germinates from blood and iron’.

On the other hand, the long period of openness on the Finnish-Swedish border and the close cultural and linguistic relations between the people living in the adjacent border areas does not mean that this has automatically led to a diminishing of the border in the national imagination or socialization. Even the current active EU-based cross-border projects have not caused such meanings and horizons to disappear (Paasi 1996; Paasi and Prokkola 2008).

[insert Figure 1 here – portrait]

Now, to return to the thesis of Balibar, borders have become elements of control and surveillance infrastructures in the current dynamic world characterized by flows of people, ideas, ideologies and goods and by a fluctuating fear of terrorism, even though they are often apparently invisible and diffuse, no longer existing as border landscapes (although
they can still be of great importance in other contexts). If the landscapes related to nationalist ideas and a national identity can be labelled as ‘emotional landscapes of control’, such ‘technical landscapes of control and surveillance’ are also gaining importance (Paasi 2009c), and although emotional landscapes of control exist in all national states, such technical landscapes of control are also gaining in strength. The manner in which these exist in various societies is a context-bound feature, however. We certainly have cases where emotional landscapes (and symbolic violence) do not work, while effective use is made of technical landscapes (and physical violence). Fitting examples would be weak, conflict-ridden states run by dictators who do not care about local, regional or national legitimacy. While the number of major armed conflicts has declined globally and there have been no interstate conflicts for several years, this has not reduced the struggles over democracy, justice and power inside states. In many states the boundaries created in media spaces and education, are controlled very effectively. In China, for example, 40 authors and journalists are currently in prison and in many countries the life of dissident journalists can be very risky and even murders are sometimes reported.

*Borders, ecopolitics and biopolitics*

In common with Friedrich Ratzel, many later pre-World War II scholars discussed the importance of natural and artificial boundaries. This terminology has since been rejected in border studies, as all borders are based on human decisions whether they follow the lines of nature or not. However, natureculture relations have gained new currency in debates on borders and this accentuates certain ecopolitical and biopolitical aspects. I will take some examples to illustrate these aspects.
Reflections on the relations between borders and nature have led to the development of the idea of ecopolitics (Kuehls 1996), referring to the fact that while – due mostly to human aspects associated with control – borders may be crucial obstacles to social life and the movement of citizens, goods and ideas, they can at times have a very limited role in relation to nature, which seems to imply a need to reject borders. Think of major natural catastrophes (floods, earthquakes), for instance, or environmental accidents caused by human agency, like the Tshernobyl nuclear power accident in 1986 or the oil catastrophes that have polluted the coastal areas of Europe or Alaska. The results of such accidents are harsh reminders that the state borders drawn on maps do not stop the effects of such catastrophes, but as institutions, such borders can effectively complicate measures taken to alleviate the effects of such catastrophes or simply to obtain information on them. In the face of large-scale transborder environmental problems individual sovereign states simply have to pool their resources. The EU, for example, has attempted to promote renewable energy resources, conserve fisheries, manage agriculture in more sustainable ways, address sulphur dioxide emissions and regulate chemical waste disposal. Smith and Pangsapa (2008, 175) argue that such events and processes also challenge traditional state-bound ideas of citizenship and show how environmental activism has become important around the world. As one new example of the importance of nature in border studies, the management of border areas in relation to the environment has become an interesting theme among border scholars. Fall (2005), for example, has studied border areas profoundly in a number of European contexts to bring together the ideas of nature and politics, but much remains to be done in this area of border research. Ramutsindela’s (2004) study, for its part, displays how traditional spatial scales are challenged in nature conservation areas:
Processes and events occurring on local and other scales become fused in the environmental management of border areas.

Borders are crucial elements of biopolitical practices that are exploited to produce and reproduce state territoriality. Such practices are often related to health and disease issues, and these phenomena are crucially related to mobility, which challenge the fixity of borders in many ways although states still try to maintain control over such unpleasant and potentially uncontrollable flows. The collection edited by Bashford (2006) demonstrates that control over the movements of people for health reasons is certainly not a recent thing but actually emerged in parallel with the need to define the modern nation-state and when developing its administrative structures and forms of governance. A civilized nation was seen to be able to protect its borders and its citizens against health risks. Health and control over space were thus crucial elements of nationalism. This was often taken into national narratives in the form of images of an enemy and the other, seen as a transmitter of diseases and vermin. One example could again be the Finnish-Russian border. In Finnish pre-World War II nationalism the Russian Other was regarded as dirty and ignorant and this idea was instilled even into school geography textbooks (Paasi 1996). Diseases also motivate the creation of structures of political control, as in the recent cases of mad cow disease, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and bird flu (H5N1 virus) and the ways in which state authorities everywhere have been prepared to fight against these by imposing more effective mechanisms of control. Health issues have been a neglected theme in border studies, but they will certainly become more important in the increasingly mobile world.

Discussion
One of the most striking features of the post-Cold War period has been expansion of border studies into a broad interdisciplinary field. Researchers with different academic backgrounds have co-operated and have published in edited collections, but this new interdisciplinarity has perhaps more often expressed itself in the flow of research ideas across traditional disciplinary borders, which has given rise to new mixtures in approaches. Think, for example, of how the ideas of difference and the other, which originally developed within cultural studies, soon became significant in many different fields. Scholars in IR studies, political geography and critical geopolitics have scrutinized the ways in which difference has been constructed historically and reproduced in various geographical contexts and how such ideas have been used on various spatial scales. This led to analyses of the images of threat that have been exploited in many contexts for hundreds of years. One major issue is how scholars can work constructively with borders and difference and contribute to the development of respect towards those living on the other side of the border. This must be based on a historically sensitive understanding of border cases.

One of the recent claims in border studies has been to develop a border theory. This paper suggests that it is a demanding undertaking, and forces us to reflect the meanings of the idea of theory itself. Borders are a very complex set of social institutions that exist on and through various spatial scales and are related to a number of social practices and discourses in which they are produced and made meaningful. Such institutions are linked to a variety of social realities that often go beyond the border – and might be labelled as representing the relational aspect of apparently rigid borders. This also provides some clues regarding how a theory of borders should perhaps be understood. Instead of a fixed,
all-encompassing theory, it is perhaps the idea of theorizing or conceptualization that could provide more tools for border scholars.

A general border theory would thus seem in many ways unattainable, and perhaps even undesirable. Why would such a theory be undesirable? There are two main reasons, I think. Firstly, since individual state borders are deeply characterized by contextual features and societal power relations and their meanings change in the course of time along with broader, typically state-related societal relations and conditions, there can hardly be one general theory that would be valid everywhere (Paasi 2009c). Of course there have been generalizations regarding the roles of borders like the often – but not always – peripheral position of border areas and the consequences of this for economic and regional development. On the other hand, since borders are context-bound phenomena and are deeply rooted in social, cultural, political and economic practices and discourses, a general theory of borders would suggest that they are more or less separate objects of social research that can be universalized in the form of a theory that would obviously then be, contrary to the variegated nature of contexts, more or less fixed. A general theory of borders is hence problematic not because the borders between states are unique – although each of them indeed is – but rather because borders can be theorized reasonably only as part of a broader effort towards social-cultural theory (Paasi 2009c).

There is an obvious need to theorize both boundary producing and reproducing practices in context. Any valid contextual theorization of boundaries should combine at least such processes, practices and discourses such as the production and reproduction – or institutionalization – of territoriality/territory, state power, human agency and human experience. These practices are normally institutionalized, involve both formal and
informal institutions, and may be deeply symbolized. They are rarely only local, but may have their origin and constitutive power at a distance, on various scales (which are not fixed), from local to global. This simply means that the strands of power that constitute the spatialities of complicated boundary-producing practices make it increasingly difficult to think of certain borders as local and of others as global. But the context makes a difference, and it remains a challenge for the imagination of the researcher to conceptualize and study empirically contextually manifested practices that may have their origins on diverging spatial scales and bring together events and processes from these.

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