Mobilities

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmob20

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Tim Richardson

Department of Development and Planning, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark


To cite this article: Tim Richardson (2013): Borders and Mobilities: Introduction to the Special Issue, Mobilities, 8:1, 1-6

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2012.747747

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Borders and Mobilities: Introduction to the Special Issue

TIM RICHARDSON*

*Department of Development and Planning, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark

ABSTRACT The aim of this special issue is to stimulate conceptual development in the fields of borders and mobilities studies through theoretical and empirical contributions of scholars working at the interface between them. The introduction argues that there is both a need to strengthen the conceptual vocabulary through which the mobilities field engages with borders, and a corresponding need to rethink how border studies engages with mobilities. The contributions provide theoretical and empirical insights into the governing of mobilities, and into the ways that borders both prevent mobilities and afford new potentials for connectivity.

KEY WORDS: Borders, Mobilities, Governing mobilities

Introduction

Studies of mobilities, and of borders, have both been argued to be central to the social sciences (e.g. Urry 2000; Rumford 2006). Both empirically and conceptually, research on borders and bordering raises questions that are intricately entwined with movement and mobilities. Similarly, it is difficult to conceive of mobilities without confronting the ways in which mobilities are constrained and regulated by borders and bordering practices. Recently, in advocating such an engagement, Cresswell (2012) has argued that scholars, in thinking about the ways that mobilities are resisted and regulated, become involved in the rethinking of borders. With notable exceptions (see for example Heyman and Cunningham 2004; Amoore, Marmura, and Salter 2008), little attention has so far been devoted to the interrelations between the fields of border studies and mobilities studies.

The departure point for this special issue is the premise that both conceptual and empirical opportunities may emerge from approaches that seek to engage mobilities from a borders perspective, or borders from a mobilities perspective. More broadly,
it is argued through the diverse contributions collected here, that research across the social sciences may benefit from engaging borders and mobilities together. This special issue, then, assembles articles reflecting a range of disciplinary influences from across the social sciences to explore these interrelations in both empirical and conceptual terms. The overall aim is to stimulate debate at the intersection of these two fields, to explore where parallel conceptual developments may be mutually interesting, and through this engagement to reflect on the possible benefits for broader social science research.

The contributions in this special issue explore the strategies being directed towards different types of borders, and the consequent practices of bordering, to explore how such differentiation is being operationalised, in terms of relational and other spatial logics, actual and potential mobilities and territorial reconfiguration. The special issue builds on this focus on the strategic aspects of borderwork and regulation of mobilities. This concern with governing is located alongside an everyday life perspective, of how such bordering logics and governing practices relate to everyday practices of mobility and border making and crossing. Overall, through the collection of papers, a secondary aim is to shed light on the interactions between these strategic and everyday life perspectives.

Among the contributors are academics who have been active in conceptual development and empirical research in the fields of borders and mobilities studies. There are also papers from newer researchers engaged in PhDs, who are explicitly working on the interconnections between borders and mobilities within different disciplinary environments.

Many of the papers in this collection were presented as early drafts at ‘Borders and Mobilities’, one of four international seminars, funded by NORFACE, on the overall theme of ‘Globalization and the transformation of Europe’s borders’. The seminar took place at Aalborg University, Denmark, in September 2009 (http://www.norface.org/seminar7.html). The remaining papers were discussed at the roundtable on ‘Politics of Walls and Corridors: Comparing Spatialities in Asia and Europe’, A Panel Discussion organised by Moving Matters, Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research, and the International Institute for Asian Studies, Amsterdam University, May 2010 (http://www.iiias.asia/events/politics-walls-and-corridors-comparing-spatialities-asia-and-europe).

**Mobilities Studies and Border Studies**

This special issue, then, aims to make conceptual contributions to the fields of borders and mobilities studies through engagement between them. It rests on two propositions.

First, that there is a need to strengthen the conceptual vocabulary through which the mobilities field engages with borders. Often, borders raise the spectre of differentiated mobilities, of elites and immobilities. For example: ‘The study of mobility also involves those immobile infrastructures that organize the intermittent flow of people, information and image, as well as the borders or “gates” that limit, channel and regulate movement or anticipated movement’ (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006, 11).

Second, within border studies, Rumford (2006, 2010) in particular has pointed out that the increasing attention to mobilities and flows within contemporary social theory – alongside globalisation, cosmopolitanism and networked community –
leads to a need to rethink borders. He argues, further, that ‘In short, borders are central to the social theory agenda: to theorize mobilities and networks is at the same time to theorize borders’ (Rumford 2006, 156). He argues that there exists, however, a tension between accounts ‘which emphasize the openness and/or the transcendability of borders as a feature of globalization and accounts which draw attention to massive processes of securitized rebordering’ (Rumford 2006, 157).

From both perspectives there is a need for conceptual development and mutual engagement. The remainder of this introduction highlights the key contributions of each of the papers, grouped (tentatively) into two sections: papers that aim to theorise mobilities, strengthened by their treatment of borders; and papers aiming to theorise borders, enriched by an engagement with mobilities.

**Governing Mobility**

The first two papers introduce conceptual approaches inspired by and seeking to contribute to the mobilities turn: *mobility assemblages* (Salter) and governmobility (Bærenholdt).

Mark Salter’s concern, in ‘To Make Move and Let Stop: Mobility and the Assemblage of Circulation’, is to draw connections between the governing of mobility and everyday mobilities. He focuses on what he sees as an intrinsic and unhelpful bipolarity of the mobilities field. He argues that the mobilities field divides into two separate communities of scholars that do not communicate: alternatively agent-centric and state-centric in nature, privileging either ‘the mobile subjects, or the structures, policies, or authorities that constrain those mobile subjects’ (xxx). He proposes that the introduction of the concepts of assemblage and of circulation may be helpful in bridging these perspectives. Salter’s contribution, whilst aimed squarely at the mobilities turn, has implications for the field of border studies, because of his argument that the separation of migration and border studies is a reflection of the same bipolarity.

In ‘Governmobility: The Powers of Mobility’, Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt seeks to extend Foucault’s work on governmentality, and through it the mobilities literature, by placing attention on mobilities as a means of governing societies rather than simply as an object of governing. His argument, inspired by Foucault’s 1978 lectures on security, territory and population, is that whereas governmentality focused on the self-government of population, ‘governmobility’ in late modern societies concerns the ‘self-government of connections, enabled through mobile technologies and the environment’. It therefore becomes an important concept in understanding how societies are governed.

The next two papers focus on the issue of governing mobility, and explore how interventions in mobility trigger new forms of borderwork. A common thread in these papers is the view that the everyday politics of managing mobility (in different contexts) has consequences for borderwork. The interactions between mobilities and borders are conceptually handled in several ways, as the authors attempt to extend several emergent theories of governing mobility through this engagement with borders. A common conceptual approach in two of the papers, inspired by the mobilities turn, is that of *mobility regimes* (Jensen, Kloppenburg).

In ‘Mobility Regimes and Borderwork in the European Community’, Anne Jensen analyses how policies designed to manage mobility have consequences for bordering. Her case shows how pricing policies, being pursued at the EU level, play a part
in subtle rebordering within this ‘imagined community’. At the same time as EU policies envision a networked cross-border territory, she argues, the new pricing policies create intangible borders between an emergent European elite and the less mobile masses who do not have access to the networked trans-European infrastructures.

In ‘Mapping the Contours of Mobilities Regimes. Air travel and Drug Smuggling between the Caribbean and the Netherlands’, Sanneke Kloppenburg’s concern is the regulation of aeromobilities, in this case in relation to drug smuggling between the Caribbean and the Netherlands. Here the problem for those responsible for managing transnational mobility is one facilitating the movement of some people and goods while restricting others. She suggests the concept of a mobilities regime to describe the regulatory practices that emerge to handle this specific problem. Conceptually, the mobilities regime requires thinking across the fields of mobilities studies and border studies. Using the concept, she is able to demonstrate how a particular mobilities regime may challenge several types of borders and boundaries: ‘boundaries between public and private actors and their tasks and responsibilities, geographical borders, and legal boundaries’.

**Mobilising Borders Theory**

Several papers share the parallel aim of contributing to the theorisation of borders through an engagement with mobilities.

The first stands squarely in the intersection of mobilities and borders. In ‘Through Metal Fences: Material Mobility and the Politics of Transnationality at Borders’, Malini Sur departs from the everyday mobilities of people and things. She examines the mobility of colourful commodities – rotten fish and garments – across India’s new border fence with Bangladesh to illustrate her engagement between border studies and mobilities studies. She argues that ‘border studies needs to engage with the study of trans-border mobility’, and, following Urry (2000), that fixed border structures give meaning to and shape mobility. Sur seeks to transcend what she sees as an unhelpful dichotomy commonly drawn in research between official/desirable and illegal/impeded flows. She argues that the political is to be found somewhere in-between, and calls for a focus on undocumented flows, as part of mobility turn in border studies. An important consequence of this shift of emphasis, she argues, could be a challenge to the dominant view of border as enclosure of unwanted mobilities.

In ‘Rebordering France and Denmark: Narratives and Practices of Border-Construction in Two European Countries’, Sarah Scuzzarello and Catarina Kinnvall explore the social implications of the dynamics between governing practices and narratives of bordering. They argue that the institutional practices involved in the making of physical borders interact with the circulation of stories of security and control that play a part in establishing the boundaries of communities. Using cases of border practices and narratives in Denmark and France following the Arab Spring, in 2011, they argue that the positioning of both narratives and governing practices concerning migrants is often a response to pressures on governments from the political far right. The consequence is the exclusion of certain migrant groups from the national polity. An important contribution of this work is that it highlights the complex political contestation that lies behind the governing of borders. Through their examination of the politics of border practices, Scuzzarello and Kinnvall are able to connect strongly to current debates in the mobilities field. In
particular they demonstrate how motility (the potential for mobility) depends on both institutional power structures and narrative (re)bordering.

In ‘Monumentalizing the Border: Bordering Through Connectivity’, Anthony Cooper and Chris Rumford advance a theory of cosmopolitan borders. They take issue with a standard view of ‘cosmopolitan agency’ comprised of easy border crossings, and of life across borders. They argue that this approach fails to consider the changing nature of borders, and border processes, and set out to incorporate sensitivity to such concerns. Through cases of post-national border monuments they argue for a rethinking of borders as mechanisms not of division, but of connectivity and encounter, where ‘connection does not by definition take place at the expense of borders but rather as a result of them’ (108).

However, Wendy Pullan, researching a very different context, argues that despite a theoretical shift towards relational spatial understandings, in contested cities across the world differences are often still materialised in the ‘rigid division and bounding of territory’. In ‘Conflict’s Tools. Borders, Boundaries and Mobility in Jerusalem’s Spatial Structures’, she reports that in many urban contexts the situation of more borders/less mobility prevails, and is manifested in contemporary borders and mobility regimes. The consequences, she argues, are lack of balance and inequality. She concludes, further, that the politically driven planning system has removed the relational space that could lead to the more productive sorts of interactions pointed to by Cooper and Rumford (this issue).

If borders, through their multiple spaces, practices and meanings are implicated in regulating, differentiating and preventing mobilities, the argument between these papers is that they are also critical to connectivity. This adds interesting nuances to the complexities of both understanding and governing borders and mobilities.

In ‘Towards a Cosmopolitan Cinema: Understanding the Connection between Borders, Mobility and Cosmopolitanism in the Fiction Film’, Maria Rovisco shares a common departure point with Cooper and Rumford in the intersection between mobilities, borders and cosmopolitanism. Here, though, her subject is cosmopolitan cinema, seen from a cultural sociological perspective. She is interested in how images and experiences of borders and mobility are significant for the constitution of a cosmopolitan cinema, which can facilitate new affective and intellectual engagements across cultural divides. Using two examples, the films In This World and Kandahar, she considers how human dignity and its violation can be represented in film so as to inspire public dialogue in a cosmopolitan public discourse.

**Endpoint**

Finally, Rovisco’s paper contributes a rather different voice to this collection. It provides a signal endpoint by opening up a critical issue that concerns all of the contributors to this special issue: the possibility of raising to consciousness, confronting and mediating the oppressive, productive and pragmatic engagements between attempts to govern borders and mobilities, and the everyday lives of people. This resonates with Bærenholdt’s question: ‘What are the powers of mobility studies?’, a critical question which we can of course extend to border studies, through the contributions here. We argue, together, that scholars of mobilities and borders should bear in mind the need to reflect on the contributions of their interconnected fields of study to the reproduction of the phenomena they are investigating.
It is hoped that this collection of papers will encourage scholars in the fields of mobilities and border studies to further explore how the intersections are mutually enriching. We have seen how borders can be understood differently when approached from mobilities perspectives. And reciprocally, how theories of mobilities can be rethought when their interactions with borders are placed at the centre of inquiry. Thinking mobilities and borders together, in the sorts of ways explored here, may encourage the development of critical perspectives in both fields.

**Guest Editor’s Note**

The Guest Editor and authors would like to thank the editors of *Mobilities*, in particular Mimi Sheller and the anonymous referees for invaluable comments on advanced drafts of the manuscripts. Special thanks are also due to Pennie Drinkall for her support in bringing this Special Issue together.

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