

Editorial:

Revisiting Borders and Boundaries: Exploring Migrant Inclusion and Exclusion from Intersectional Perspectives

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Abstract

In recent years, scholarly interest in boundaries and boundary work, on the one hand, and borders and bordering, on the other, has flourished across disciplines. Notwithstanding the close relationship between the two concepts, “borders” and “boundaries” have largely been subject to separate scholarly debates or sometimes treated as synonymous. These trends point to an important lack of conceptual and analytical clarity as to what borders and boundaries are and are not, what distinguishes them from each other and how they relate to each other. This Special Issue tackles this conceptual gap by bringing the two fields of studies together: we argue that boundaries/boundary work and borders/bordering should be treated as interrelated rather than distinct phenomena. Boundaries produce similarities and differences that affect the enforcement, performance and materialisation of borders, which themselves contribute to the reproduction of boundaries. Borders and boundaries are entangled, but they promote different forms and experiences of inclusion and exclusion. In this introduction, we elaborate the two concepts separately before examining possible ways to link them theoretically. Finally, we argue that an intersectional perspective makes it possible to establish how the interplay of different social categories affects the articulations and repercussions of borders and boundaries. The contributions in this Special Issue address this issue from multiple perspectives that reflect a variety of disciplines and theoretical backgrounds and are informed by different case studies in Europe and beyond.

Keywords: *Borders and bordering; boundary work; intersectionality; migrant exclusion.*

Introduction

Much research on migration, mobility and citizenship revolves around instances of inclusion and exclusion. There is, however, growing concern that work on these areas of inquiry tends to rely on often unquestioned nation-state- and ethnicity-centred epistemologies (e.g. Anderson, 2019;

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Dahinden, 2016; Nieswand & Drotbohm, 2014; Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). In response to such criticism, this Special Issue collates novel approaches in the study of the dimensions, experiences, practices and politics of migrant inclusion and exclusion that combine theories of boundary work with insights from border studies.

In recent years, scholarly interest in boundaries and boundary work, on the one hand, and borders and bordering, on the other, has flourished across disciplines. Notwithstanding the close relationship between the two concepts, borders and boundaries have largely been subject to separate scholarly debates. This points to an important lack of conceptual clarity on what borders and boundaries are and are not, what distinguishes them from each other and how they relate to each other. Fassin (2011) is one of the few scholars to have explicitly addressed the links between borders and boundaries, without however clarifying the distinctions between the two concepts (Fassin, 2020). Given the on-going salience of borders and boundaries in the literature and in different spheres of everyday life (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, & Cassidy, 2019), there is a need for more thorough reflection on the conceptual and empirical underpinnings of the two phenomena.

Theories of boundary work (e.g. Barth, 1969; Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Wimmer, 2013) and contributions to border studies (e.g. Van Houtum, 2012; Wilson & Hastings, 2012b) both focus specifically on the processes, practices and experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Analyses of boundaries typically examine how difference and social or symbolic exclusion are socially produced and organised, by which actors and with what effects. Boundaries thus involve the creation, maintenance, institutionalisation and contestation of social differences and concomitant forms of inclusion and exclusion. Border studies, in contrast, is predominantly concerned with borders and bordering practices. In this field, borders are not understood as mere physical lines that can be seen on a map. Instead, scholars in this field explore how borders and bordered territories are produced, regulated, governed, circumvented, lived and shaped by power relations, thus producing particular forms of inclusion and exclusion (Kolossoff, 2005; Wastl-Walter, 2011; Wilson & Hastings, 2012a). Work in this field includes research on migration control focusing on the territorial and political dimensions of – sometimes de-territorialised – borders that delimit sovereign jurisdictions and define how access to and presence in the national territory is regulated and practiced (e.g. Coleman, 2012; De Genova, 2017; Walters, 2006). It also encompasses a growing number of contributions that engage with borders as part of cognitive and affective processes (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2012). While the concepts of borders/bordering, on the one hand, and boundaries/boundary work, on the other, are usually employed in distinct fields of inquiry, the contributions to this Special Issue demonstrate that they should be treated as interrelated rather than distinct phenomena. Boundaries produce similarities and differences that affect the enforcement, performance and materialisation of borders, which themselves contribute to the reproduction of boundaries.

The seven contributions to this Special Issue draw on empirical research conducted in various social fields and at different geographical sites. They all expand on recent calls for more reflexive analyses of the migration apparatus (Favell, 2014; Horvath, Amelina, & Peters, 2017) and conceive of inclusion and exclusion as relational concepts that describe how access to participation, resources and opportunities is granted or denied to certain persons or groups (Achermann, 2013; Ataç & Rosenberger, 2013). Drawing on borders and boundaries as conceptual entry points supports this reflexive stance. Both concepts revolve around forms of inclusion and exclusion that mostly result from a nation-state-centred logic and therefore support scholarly inquiry that goes beyond a normalising understanding of differences.

Introducing the key concepts and the relationship between them Borders and bordering

In his anthropology of borders, Donnan (2015) argues that the term “border” tends to be used in many different ways – to allude, for example, to the social, cultural, territorial or political nature of borders. Given such a variety of uses and meanings, there is a need to define what we understand by “borders” and “bordering”. In a very general sense, borders delimit sovereign territories and jurisdictions and function as sites of control over the movement of people, services and goods by a sovereign authority. The first essential characteristic of borders is that they are both political and territorial. While for Wilson and Donnan (2012a, p. 18) the nation-state remains “the central thread running through” border studies, others (Van Houtum, 2005) stress the need to acknowledge that borders are best conceived of as multi-scalar phenomena. A key feature of borders is that they denote authority over a certain territory. However, they may delineate different spatial entities that are formally politically governed, ranging, for example, from cities to supra-national institutions like the European Union. As Paasi (2011, p. 22) argues, “borders are everywhere”. Second, borders are also essential to cognitive processes, since they allow for the establishment of both the taxonomies and the conceptual hierarchies that structure our thought (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2012, p. 65). In Balibar’s (2009) terms, borders make a world rather than divide an already-made one. In any case, borders rely on ideas of fictive communities, symbolically and cognitively constructed, and political will to become reality (see also Anderson, 1983). As such, they drive objectification processes, meaning that the “power practices attached to a border [...] construct a spatial effect and [...] give a demarcation in space its meaning and influence” (Van Houtum, 2012, p. 412).

It is important not to restrict borders to the specific, geographically determined lines we see on maps. According to Parker and Vaughan-Williams (2012, p. 730), borders “increasingly form a continuum stretching from within states, through to the conventional ‘flashpoints’ at airports, ports, and territorial outer-edges, and beyond to ‘pre-frontier’ zones at the point of departure”. It is not the borderline itself that is relevant or the main site of interest, but rather the infrastructure, regulations and practices related to the belief in the existence and the performativity of the border (see Green, 2010; Weber, 2019). This is what van Houtum et al. (2005) strive to capture when introducing the concept of “b/ordering” as a way to describe the interplay between social ordering and border-making. B/ordering underlines the processual nature of borders – the ways they are created, maintained, performed, internalised and externalised (see Parker & Vaughan-Williams, 2012). The concept conveys a sense of open-endedness. It invites us to study the continuous construction of borders, how they are objectified in everyday socio-political practices (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, & Cassidy, 2018) and deeply engrained in socially constructed mindscapes, identities and meanings (Van Houtum, 2012) and how they produce differentiated forms of inclusion and exclusion.

Still, one of the primary purposes of the border in a physical and political sense is to control, filter and govern the cross-border movements of people and goods. Although the link to migration, as van Houtum (2012, p. 405) notes, “is not necessarily a self-evident characteristic of the border”, national border posts are one of the physical and symbolic instances where the selection between wanted/belonging and unwanted/non belonging is re-produced and performed. While borders fix the nation-state in space and time, they also regulate human mobility by demonstrating control over access to national territories, a phenomenon that De Genova refers to as the “border spectacle” (De Genova, 2017).

Borders not only produce territorial and spatial differentiation, but are also decisive to physical presence in a specific, formally delineated territory. Territory matters for access to rights because most rights are still tied to a certain jurisdiction and authority, usually a state (Dauvergne, 2014). By virtue of their legal status, persons either count as members of or aliens to a territory. Citizenship is the most obvious example of a status that determines access to not only rights, but also resources and opportunities.

Borders thus play an important role in enabling or restricting human mobility, in defining legitimate and illegitimate residents of a national territory and in determining the rights those residents have vis-à-vis the state in question. However, upon arrival at a destination, if not earlier (see the contribution by Dahinden et al. in this volume), migrants confront not only legal borders, but also boundaries as markers of distinction between different – imagined – national and cultural identities.

Boundaries

The concept of “boundary” finds its origin in the work of Frederik Barth (1969), who insisted that ethnic groups must be understood as the outcome of self-definitions and external ascriptions. Barth was the first to introduce an interactional, dynamic and relational perspective on the formation of ethnic groups. A large group of scholars took up and developed Barth’s initial advances in the study and theorisation of boundaries. There is widely shared agreement that boundaries, as social constructs, establish symbolic differences between classes, genders, races, religions and so on. They produce identifications based on these markers of classification. Boundaries thus separate people into groups that foster feelings of similarity, membership, belonging and exclusion (Lamont & Molnar, 2002).

In her critical reflections on the prevalence of nation-state-centred biases in migration studies, Dahinden (2016) offers a poignant summary of boundaries and boundary work. The former result from dynamics of internal and external categorisation, in which a broad range of actors – including nation-states, the media, political parties and actors in everyday life – may be involved. Depending on the context and the actors at play, categorisation can be symbolic or institutionalised. Either way, categorisation and its underpinnings are fundamental to inclusion and exclusion (Jenkins, 1997). The analysis of boundary work thus provides insights into how difference is socially organised and produced, be it between, for example, nation-states or groups within them (Pachucki, Pendergrass, & Lamont, 2007). Nation-states, in this sense, are paradigmatic for institutionalised forms of social closure through boundaries, whose criteria for membership and access are clearly defined (Bauböck & Rundell, 1998; Dahinden, 2014). The principles of national or ethnic boundary work and concomitant forms of belonging, solidarity and groupness can, therefore, be considered to result from social processes that are at the heart of social inclusion and exclusion.

Borders and boundaries: How do they relate to each other?

The above sections suggest that borders and boundaries are closely related to each other, because both create differences and order by means of categorisation and classification. Parker and Vaughan-Williams (2012, pp. 729-730) note that “Borders are intimately bound up with the identity-making activities of the nation-state and other forms of political community. The modern political subject is ‘bordered’ in the same way as the state of which s/he is a citizen and this marker is performed through identity cards, national insurance numbers and so on”. Bordering has inclusionary or exclusionary effects in the sense that it results in people being granted or denied

access, rights and entitlements to participate in different realms of society. For instance, migration involves a constant process of re-invention and (self-)definition of both migrants and the national societies they enter. Similarly, van Houtum and van Naerssen (2002, p. 134) hold that “making others through the territorial fixing of order [...] is intrinsically connected to our present image of borders”. As they argue, others are both necessary for the creation of borders and the result of the creation of these borders. In other words, the territorial fixing of borders contributes to the making of others.

By being bordered, the modern political subject is also subjected to boundaries in the sense that they are categorised as a member of or an alien to the national community of citizens (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012, 729-30). Formal markers of belonging, like nationality or a passport, are closely related to other, informal markers of classification, including ethnicity, race, religion, culture, gender and class. These markers reinforce the view of national societies as ethnically, racially, religiously and culturally homogenous entities, but the interplay of borders and boundaries can be contradictory: while someone may be formally included in the national community via nationality, they may still experience exclusionary boundaries deriving from, for example, racialised ascriptions of difference (see e.g. Fischer in this volume).

While borders/bordering and boundaries/boundary work intersect and are mutually constitutive and performative, they are often conflated or used in ambivalent ways. One example of this blurred distinction between borders and boundaries is the concept of “everyday bordering” recently introduced by Yuval-Davis et al. (2019). They observe that we have entered a period in which bordering has come to play a much more central role in everyday life. However, they use “everyday” to refer to both territorial state borders and social or symbolic boundaries, and they treat borders and boundaries as synonymous. Similarly, Brambilla’s concept of “Borderscapes” (Brambilla, 2015) exemplifies how the concept of “border” becomes fuzzy when it is stretched to cover too much ground. We argue that bordering and boundary work are not the same, and that conceptual clarity requires that we maintain and theorise the distinction between them. At the same time, however, it is crucial to specify the relationship between the two concepts.

The contributions to this Special Issue demonstrate that borders and boundaries should be treated as distinct but interrelated phenomena. Boundaries produce both similarities and differences, which in turn affect the enforcement, performance and materialisation of borders, which themselves contribute to the reproduction of boundaries.

In contrast to boundaries, borders are necessarily related to states, which are territorial (Brubaker, 1992). Yet, as indicated earlier, this does not imply that border control and enforcement are necessarily limited to the specific territory of a given state. All the practices that fall under border control and border regimes involve filtering and controlling who is present in the national territory and who is subject to the jurisdiction of a given state. Boundaries can be but are not necessarily related to states, political entities or a given territory. They are broader phenomena involving multiple social and cultural differences whose creation and reproduction result in the creation and reproduction of different groups. Thus, boundaries define nation-states as “associations of citizens” (Brubaker, 1992). But boundaries are not limited to the state and the citizenry.

This distinction is important because it reveals that these two processes and phenomena require specific terminology. At the same time, it is necessary to reflect on how specific relationships between borders and boundaries promote distinct forms and experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

Adopting an intersectional perspective for the study of borders and boundaries

Because people are differently situated in the societies and social hierarchies that are delineated by borders and structured by boundaries, the relationship between borders and boundaries affects different people in different ways. As a result, it is vital to account for the social positioning or situatedness of the social agents (Yuval-Davis, 2013) whose experiences, reasoning and action are shaped by and contribute to shaping the interplay of borders and boundaries. Although there is no automatic correlation between a person's social location and their standpoint (see e.g. Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; Smith, 1990), knowledge and meaning are indicative of certain locations that themselves are embedded in particular systems of power (Yuval-Davis, 2006). An intersectional perspective is helpful in determining and explaining the characteristics and effects of such situatedness.

An intersectional perspective makes it possible to establish how the interplay of different social categories affects the articulations and repercussions of borders and boundaries as reflected, for example, in particular forms of social behaviour and the social positions someone is assigned or chooses to adopt. Race, class and gender constitute the classical triad of categories included in intersectional analyses (Crenshaw, 1994). More recent feminist scholarship has extended the list of categories that can contribute to shaping an individual's position in society (like sexuality, age, migration and so on) (Winkler & Degele, 2010). Amelina (2017) argues that an intersectional perspective highlights the interplay and mutual shaping of various types of boundaries. It, therefore, lends itself to analysing multiple systems of classification. By means of categorisation, specific categorical distinctions are transformed into unequal life opportunities (McCall, 2005).

Overview of contributions

Informed by case studies from Europe and beyond, the articles in this Special Issue focus on the effects of intersecting categories of difference and illuminate the links and discontinuities between borders and boundaries while reflecting a variety of disciplinary and theoretical backgrounds. The analyses here go beyond a nation-state-centred epistemology while taking the potential relevance or irrelevance of national ethnic and other categories into account. Individually and together, the contributions demonstrate how combining theories of boundary work with border studies enriches our understanding of the dimensions, experiences, practices and politics of migrant inclusion and exclusion.

The articles share several themes. The first is the importance of an intersectional analysis. In the first – theoretical – article, Amelina and Horvath argue that an intersectional regime perspective makes it possible to better understand the interrelations between borders, boundaries and inequalities in migration contexts. Their argument implies that already existing analyses of intersectional effects should be amended to also include a focus on the intersectional dynamics of political rationalities that give rise to boundaries and borders. Amelina and Horvath explain how migration has been securitised, economised and humanitarianised, and how these changes are related to boundaries and borders.

A second theme common to many of the articles collected here is a focus on gender and gender equality as boundary markers in the dynamics and politics of cross-border migration. Based on the narratives of two ethnic-Hungarian women, Eröss et al. demonstrate how cross-border labour migration in the post-socialist context reinforces and repositions gender roles and boundaries. They argue that male and female cross-border migration has accelerated various shifts in family life.

Focusing specifically on the interplay of gender and cross-border migration, the article reveals the ambivalences of gendered boundaries in the post-socialist context.

Dahinden et al. examine how European nation-states and the EU continuously reproduce themselves in a globalised world by producing particular outsiders. Through a case study of cross-border marriages among Tamil women in Sri Lanka, they demonstrate the co-constitutive nature of bordering practices and boundary making. Most European countries restrict cross-border marriages by simultaneously internalising and externalising their borders and by mobilising specific understandings of gender (in)equality as a symbolic boundary. By combining border and boundary perspectives, this article reveals new processes of exclusion and inclusion that reinforce global inequalities and postcolonial governmentalities.

Another pair of contributions examine how different – often racialised – boundaries are mobilised to legitimise one’s own position in society or to question or retain social hierarchies or institutions in bounded national contexts. In her contribution, Rezzonico explores immigration detention in Switzerland. She examines how staff working at detention centres construct and reproduce boundaries by distancing themselves from detainees. This boundary work enables officers to remain aloof from the pain experienced by detainees, and to legitimise their role in an exclusionary institution. Through the construction of detainees as culturally and morally different, illegal and undeserving, as well as potentially dangerous, detention officers contribute to the reinforcement and legitimisation of borders.

To demonstrate how the effects of borders and boundaries coincide in people’s everyday lives, Fischer examines the normative principle and politics of migrant integration. To this end, she explores how descendants of migrants in Zürich mobilise notions of integration to describe their experiences and sense of belonging or non-belonging to society. She demonstrates how persons who were born and raised in immigrant families experience, interpret, appropriate and modify their understanding of integration in regard to themselves and perceived others. These understandings of integration demonstrate how the interplay of borders and boundaries affects individual meaning-making, perceptions of self and other and the way people situate themselves in society.

Finally, several of the articles examine the role of emotions and affect in the construction of borders and boundaries, on the one hand, and in shaping individual experiences of borders and boundaries, on the other. Drawing on two cases from Austria, Scheibelhofer argues that a focus on emotion and affect improves our understanding of how borders and boundaries are constructed and negotiated. First, he demonstrates how the state used the politics of fear in the aftermath of the 2015 “refugee crisis” to re-impose control after a brief period during which it permitted relatively free movement. Second, in examining sponsorship relationships between volunteers and young male refugees, he unpacks the effects of pity, intimacy and solidarity in a context of complex power hierarchies. Scheibelhofer demonstrates that emotions can both contribute to maintaining boundaries and legitimating restrictive border politics and instigate transgressions of established boundaries between “us” and “them”.

In her case study of Romanian citizens living in the United Kingdom, Cassidy examines how their experiences not only exemplify the intersection of borders and boundary work, but are also influenced by the ways in which they manage their emotions. Cassidy demonstrates how members of minoritised groups unconsciously perform border and boundary work. Her contribution also demonstrates how the complex entanglements of (re)bordering and socio-cultural boundaries are experienced by a specific migrant group.

With their variety of case studies, analytical entry points and theoretical perspectives, the contributions to this Special Issue make important advances in bringing together the study of borders and boundaries as prominent fields of inquiry in contemporary migration studies. Through the questions they raise, they also offer intriguing points of departure for future inquiry.

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