

Call for Papers

Passerelles SHS Journal – Borders in all their states: A Multidisciplinary Perspective

The metaphor of "lines in the sand" (Parker, Vaughan-Williams, 2009) portrays the border as a shifting human construct, in contrast to the idea of a fixed and immutable line. This expression originates in divergent scriptural translations: some refer to sand, others to the ground. This ambiguity reflects the tension between borders initially perceived as changeable and flexible, and those later conceived as more rigid limits.

Borders were initially studied by the humanities and social sciences as geographical and physical phenomena. More recently, due to "the evolution of transport and communication technologies, the dynamics and scale of economic exchanges and also the political recognition of a greater interdependence of the world system" (Groupe Frontière, 2024), revisiting the concept has become necessary. Now regarded as a multifaceted object of study and subject to constant evolution, the concept of the border can be as much spatial as it is symbolic or social, objectively delineated or a subjective metaphor for social space.

In a recent article published on the Géoconfluences website (Acloque, 2022), the term "border" is broadly defined as follows: « A border can be defined as any discontinuity between two different forms of territorial appropriation, including within a state. This is the meaning of the word 'frontier' in English¹ ». The English concept of "frontier" was first theorised by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893. The term can be translated into French as "front pionnier." "Frontier" then refers to the "pioneer front of the American Westward expansion and the model for the construction of the United States territory. »²

The border is a space inhabited by indigenous populations, yet it is often considered conceptually uninhabited. It is thus considered as a historical civilisational process of colonisation / decolonisation. One must necessarily understand a border as the product of human societies; it is therefore not "natural." The border, understood not only as a spatial division but primarily as a construct of human societies, has thus become a subject of study within the humanities and social sciences.

Indeed, other concepts emerge, particularly within the social sciences: those of boundaries / borders. In this regard, Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár, in a paper dated (2002) but still relevant today, entitled "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences" – a key reference in the epistemology of symbolic and social borders – provide a state-of-the-art account of the concept of boundaries. They thus highlight the significance of the

concept of borders, which allows the study of various social phenomena. Borders are, according to the authors, part of the "conceptual toolkit" of social science researchers, a concept that has been present since the work of the French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858-1917). The authors also place particular emphasis on the role of symbolic resources in the creation, maintenance, contestation, and dissolution of institutionalised differences (class, gender, race, territorial inequalities). Two definitions are therefore proposed: "Symbolic borders are conceptual distinctions established by social actors to categorise objects, people, practices, or even time and space. [...] Social borders are objectified forms of social differences that manifest through unequal access and the unequal distribution of resources (material and immaterial) and social opportunities" (Lamont, Molnár, 2002).

The next issue of the Journal *Passerelles* SHS focuses on the border as an object of study, with dimensions and manifestations that are multiple: social, symbolic, etc. The selected contributions may, among other things, explore the process of bordering (Cuttitta, 2015; Van Houtum, Van Naeressen, 2002), which marks a real shift in the approach to geopolitical borders, as the analysis centres on the social relations involved in the production, negotiation and maintenance of the border. This process of constructing a border, whether spatial, social, or symbolic, raises the question of (sur)passing borders, both by literally "passing" through borders and symbolically, subjectively "surpassing" the notion of the border, thereby reconsidering the permeability and rigidity of borders (such as the crossing of a social class, state borders, etc.). Finally, this reflection on the construction of borders can also transform into a process of deconstruction and contestation of borders.

The articles may also address the following themes: spatial borders; borders of social and collective identity; those linked to class, race, gender and sexual inequalities or those separating validity and disability; disciplinary borders (science, knowledge) and professional boundaries; community, identity and civilisational borders; borders between religious spaces, etc. The aim of this issue is to highlight the multiple interactions between symbolic and social borders, the properties of these borders (permeability, durability, etc.), and their contestation.

(Re)building borders

A first area of focus for the contributions examines the construction of borders. Philosophy, history and anthropology view the establishment of borders as a foundational act for human societies. This idea lies at the heart of the reflection of Cornelius Castoriadis (2006), who asserts that every society is established by creating its own world and shaping it as "its" world. The major dichotomies of "sacred / profane" (Eliade, 2010), "human / non-human" (Latour, 1997), or "nature / culture" (Descola, 2015) seem to testify to an ordering of the world shared by both ancient and contemporary societies. The demarcation of geographical territories and social spaces subject to authority, the production and categorisation of knowledge reinforced by power structures (Foucault, 1966), can thus be seen as fundamental elements of a process of "bordering" (Van Houtum, Van Naerssen, 2002). The fundamental distinctions expressing order and otherness, similarity and difference, "inside" and "outside" are manifestations of this process.

Thus, for the social sciences, borders are not limited to their geographical dimension. As products of a history shaped by social and political dynamics, they are also symbolic. The internal and external borders of medieval societies (Société des historiens médiévistes de l'Enseignement supérieur public, 2021), the symbolic markers separating the Old and New Worlds (Vidal, 2021), as well as the "master / slave" duality inherent in imperialism or the "coloniser / indigenous" division typical of the colonial period (Mbembe, 2013; 2015), illustrate the evolving and multidimensional character of borders.

Moreover, the second half of the 20th century witnessed significant transformations that led to a reconfiguration of borders. The affirmation of neoliberal ideology, technological advances in transportation, and the rise of digital technology have challenged the modern nation-state order inherited from colonial history. This phenomenon, termed the "second globalisation" (Michalet, 2005), saw the emergence of new actors capable of overcoming national constraints, such as multinational corporations, international NGOs, and transnational communities. However, this dynamic has not led to the predicted disappearance of territories (Badie, 2013). On the contrary, we observe processes of re-composition of borders, both spatial and social. "Gated communities," urban gentrification dynamics, the affirmation of linguistic and ethnocultural identities, and the formation of economic blocs like the BRICS reflect this evolution. Additionally, the strengthening of border control zones by states, their extension to extranational spaces, and the relocation of asylum procedures reflect the persistence of borders in a globalised world.

This first axis aims to account for the dynamics of border construction and/or the modalities of their reconfigurations. Contributions are invited to explore the conditions under which borders emerge, whether they are geographical, social, or symbolic. What are the actors, logics, and mechanisms involved in the construction of borders? How are borders perceived or recognised as such by social actors? What resources and systems are implemented for the establishment, institutionalisation, or reinforcement of borders? What are the geopolitical, economic, and social issues associated with the emergence of new borders or their reconfiguration?

Crossing borders?

Whether they separate geographical territories, categories, or social groups, most borders can be crossed. However, the conditions for the possibility of this crossing must be examined. Who is allowed to cross the border? According to what criteria and in what context? What does this crossing of borders do to people and things?

On the one hand, this axis allows us to explore the rules governing the crossing of territorial and state borders, particularly through the history of the establishment of national passports and visas, or the history of exile (Diaz, Aprile, 2021). One could also focus on border controls, paying attention to the criteria for authorising the passage of people and goods. What role do immigration policies play in border controls? How do they evolve? National borders are often linguistic borders, and the translation of texts or speech can be seen as an act of crossing borders. What texts can cross borders? Who decides that a text is too specific to a national context to be translated? What does this crossing of borders do to words and ideas?

On the other hand, this axis also leads to a more symbolic examination of the crossing of social borders (Pasquali, 2021) which can be assimilated to the social mobility of individuals and groups. Article proposals could specifically explore phenomena of social ascent or downward social mobility (Peugny, 2009), highlighting the factors that make such movement within the social space possible. Contributions are also expected to be particularly attentive to the effects of this mobility on individuals, their practices, and their representations. What does one retain from one's original environment when crossing borders? What does this crossing "cost"?

The question of crossing borders also concerns other types of borders, such as gender borders (Beaubatie, 2024), race borders, and borders between disability and validity. The

concept of "passing" in American literature specifically refers to the fact that African Americans may "pass for" white people (Trépiéd, 2019). These individuals thus cross what is considered an insurmountable racial boundary. Under what conditions is such crossing possible? Based on what characteristics of the individuals or groups involved? The categorisation on either side of the border can depend on context. In the case of disability, some individuals may not perceive themselves as disabled but may seek recognition as disabled workers to receive workplace adaptations (Bertrand, Caradec, Eideliman, 2014). This resonates with the distinction made by Erving Goffman in *Stigma* (1975) between discredited individuals, whose stigma is immediately known, and discreditable individuals, whose difference is not apparent and who can control this information to some extent – for example, individuals with an invisible disability.

In turn, these crossings from one side to the other of the border signal the relative porosity of these borders. Do they have an influence on the very existence of a distinction between these symbolic categories? Do the possibilities of crossing borders challenge the very existence of these borders?

Some individuals may position themselves or be positioned at the interface between two groups, on the border. This includes individuals whose categorisation in racial or gender terms is difficult, such as certain mixed-race (Brun, 2024) or non-binary individuals – this ambiguity is often perceived as disturbing by the external observer (West, Zimmerman, 2009). Nevertheless, this positioning on the border is not always seen as problematic. In the tradition of Science and Technology Studies (STS), the concept of the boundary object (Star, 2010) allows us to understand the interactions and collaboration between groups from different scientific disciplines. One could position these boundary objects at disciplinary borders, as points of contact allowing communication across borders. How do these objects – which may not be material objects but theoretical concepts – become boundary objects? What is the effect of such contacts on the very existence of borders?

Challenging and deconstructing borders

For Pierre Bourdieu, "borders, even the most seemingly formal ones, [...] set a state of social struggles. [...] The limits here are borders that must be attacked or defended in fierce struggle, and the classification systems that establish them are not merely tools of knowledge, but tools of power, subordinated to social functions and more or less openly oriented towards the satisfaction of the interests of a group" (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 555-556).

Borders are objects of struggle. While some actors work towards the establishment of rigid borders, others contest and act to deconstruct them.

Some territorial borders, imposed at a certain moment, have disappeared after conflicts or negotiations. Contributions could show how certain borders have been or are still contested worldwide, highlighting the social groups involved and their divergent interests. On a global scale, some scholars have highlighted a process of "deterritorialisation" of power relations (Cuttitta, 2007): power no longer necessarily relies on a national referent but asserts itself through supranational entities (NGOs, supranational institutions, multinational corporations, etc.). State borders lose some of their importance, though they do not disappear entirely. We are witnessing a reconfiguration of borders. The deconstruction of national borders makes way for other types of borders, particularly intra-national ones and/or those related to the status of the groups concerned: symbolic and social borders thus seem to take precedence over territorial borders. This idea, however, is nuanced by recent events which have brought the question of territorial borders back to the forefront. Borders that were once the subject of agreements several years ago have been contested by force. This is particularly the case with the conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, or Israel and Gaza.

Symbolic boundaries are defined as conceptual distinctions that individuals establish and discuss, in contrast with social boundaries which are objectified through the unequal access to resources granted to different social groups (Lamont, Molnár, 2002). Symbolic borders are thus more often debated in terms of their location and seem more easily contestable. For example, Bourdieu considered the border between sociology and ethnology to be a "false border," having "no logical justification" (Bourdieu, 2009, p. 30). However, this does not mean that disciplinary borders are arbitrary: they were historically formed due to power relations within the academic world (Cohen, 2021). Going further, one might question the effects of the emergence of "studies" (Cultural Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Gender Studies, etc.) from the 1970s onwards (Darbellay, 2014), and more broadly, interdisciplinarity, on scientific disciplines and the borders that separate them (Heilbron, Bokobza, 2016). Contributions may thus focus on describing various forms of contestation of all types of borders, particularly disciplinary or scientific ones, and, reflecting the processes behind the emergence of new borders, the dynamics of the disappearance of older borders.

However, one must ask whether it is possible for symbolic borders to completely disappear. Can they be entirely deconstructed without leaving any trace? During the decolonisation movement, did the borders of colonial empires completely disappear? To develop this reflection, one might, for example, use the concept of "ghost borders" which

refers to "the traces left in contemporary societies by deceased territorialities" (Von Hirschhausen, 2017). These unpredictable borders can appear on maps that highlight certain social phenomena (such as the results of a specific election), but remain invisible at other times. This is the case with the former inter-German border, which continues to be an important line of demarcation (Lacquement, 2021), even in the city of Berlin (Hocquet, Garrido, Von Hirschhausen, 2017). While they no longer are state borders and while crossing is easy, these borders persist in a symbolic form.

Although there are no longer officially any colonies today, the colonial relationship between former colonisers and colonised peoples seems to persist and manifest itself through the emergence of new borders. In France, symbolic borders were drawn at the end of the 20th century between the former immigrants from European countries and the more recent waves of immigration, notably from former colonies – immigrants of African origin being considered less susceptible of assimilation into French society (Noiriel, 1988). While state borders have lost significance, other types of borders replace them, namely internal symbolic borders within society, which are "limits between racialized social categories inherited from a double history of colonisation and immigration" (Fassin, 2012). Some scholars have sought to denaturalise these borders by examining, in particular, the criteria for obtaining French nationality, especially racial and socio-cultural ones, which crystallise representations of this identity and help to capture its essentialisation (Hajjat, 2012). Contributions could follow this path and scientifically deconstruct these symbolic and social borders, showing that they were historically and socially constructed.

Submission Guidelines for Article Proposals

Passerelles SHS is a multidisciplinary journal managed by doctoral students from the "Societies, Time, Territories" (STT) and "Spaces, Societies, Civilisations" (ESC) doctoral schools. As a forum for open reflection on a variety of topics, practices, and scientific methods, *Passerelles* SHS promotes interdisciplinary dialogue within the humanities and social sciences in a spirit of multidisciplinary.

Article proposals should include the following:

A brief presentation of the author (name, discipline(s), status, institution(s), affiliated research lab(s), and email address);

A title and an abstract of approximately 4,000 characters (including spaces, footnotes, and bibliography);

The thematic axis of the call for papers to which the proposal relates.

Proposals must be submitted in .doc format by the 14th of March 2025 to passerelleshs@gmail.com or uploaded via the submission platform: <https://ojs.univ-nantes.fr/index.php/pshs>.

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