

ARTICLE

Recent geohistorical research on boundary-making. Challenging conventional narratives on borders and modern state-building

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Abstract

The paper aims at providing an overview of recent scholarship from the last 3 decades on boundary-making, borders, and the territorial shaping of modern states between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries. Scholarship in various languages (namely English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Italian) and from various fields of inquiry will be reviewed in order to highlight their shared themes and common concerns from a comparatist, transdisciplinary, and international perspective. We contend that the field has seen an improvement in knowledge about boundary-making, methodological changes, and a widening of primary sources and research materials. As a result, conventional narratives on state-building, as well as the accompanying understanding of boundary lines as the mere result of institutional imposition by central state agencies, have been nuanced and enriched. We claim that expanding on these remarkable outcomes of recent scholarship on boundary-making would help to further bridge the gap between traditional/geohistorical and postmodern/contemporary approaches to border studies.

KEYWORDS

borders, boundary commissions, boundary-making, cartography, sovereignty, state-making, territory

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Over the last 3 decades, there has been a noteworthy improvement in knowledge about boundary-making processes and the territorial shaping of modern states between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries (Maier, 2016; Readman et al., 2014). Historians, geographers, anthropologists, political scientists, and international relations scholars have carried out in-depth analyses of the historical and territorial processes that forge current boundaries in various geographical areas. The shifts within this scholarship have taken place at a rather steady pace. However, the increasing awareness of the distinct geographical transformations occurring in a rapidly globalising world, along with the growing geopolitical tensions and security demands that have arisen since 9/11 and the upsurge in migration crises across various regions, have all heightened the visibility of international borders in recent years (Foucher, 2016; Schofield, 2015).

As scholars have set out to analyse and make sense of all these real-world geographical and political transformations, many historically oriented researchers have similarly strived towards a more accurate understanding of the modern genesis of territorial formations (Elden, 2010, 2013). Consequently, different fields of study have converged and, in turn, new avenues for research and dialogue have opened up, epitomising a reinvigoration of boundary, border, and borderland studies.

This is certainly good news for geographers given their long-standing interest in borders. More importantly, it reveals a rather promising horizon, for, as some scholars had already noticed (Freeman, 2020; O'Dowd, 2010; Van Houtum, 2005), until very recently there seemed to be a rather worrying gap between more contemporary border studies (Paasi, 2011; Parker & Vaughan-Williams, 2013; Sevastinov et al., 2015; Wastl-Walter, 2012; Wilson and Donnan, 2012) and geohistorical studies¹. Whereas the former studies have been deeply anchored in postmodern approaches and fully engaged with ongoing theoretical discussions or current pressing issues, the latter studies have been commonly perceived as quite scattered and diverse or even limited in character, that is, hinging on specific research questions and agendas, empirically focused, and often with little theoretical concern.

As we intend to show in this review, what is novel about many of the recent geohistorical studies on boundary-making processes², in addition to their empirical contribution, is that they have paid an increasing amount of attention to some of the key themes and approaches of postmodern-inspired border studies, thus helping to build bridges between traditional and contemporary lines of research. As a matter of fact, the specificity of boundary-making processes in different geographical areas is undeniable and, within the framework of the so-called 'spatial turn' that has entailed a growing sensitivity to the variation of phenomena across geohistorical contexts, it would be rather pointless to diminish the particularity of the issues at stake in the multiple case studies addressed in this growing scholarship. Nevertheless, recent methodological transformations within historical studies, and more particularly the rejection in Global History of the primacy of national perspectives and correlated historiographical approaches structured around the nation (Amelina et al., 2012; Faist, 2012), have been key to laying the foundations for the comparison of different boundary-making processes (Akbari et al., 2017; Mog, 2017). In that sense, historians have come to display highly micro and localised approaches to transregional and global processes (Di Fiore & Meriggi, 2013; Soen et al., 2017). Therefore, an enriched and non-essentialized understanding of historical space has emerged, and historians have become better equipped to grasp the complex spatial nature of many modern phenomena and the historically shifting geographical patterns through which they have found expression (Alcalde, 2018; Müller & Torp, 2009).

On this basis, this review aims to show how not only are there common threads weaving together recent geohistorical literature on boundary-making to contemporary-oriented postmodern borders but, more importantly, how it is worth analysing that scholarship by relying upon the aforementioned grounds for comparison (between different case studies) that have been established by Global History during recent years (Middell & Naumann, 2010; Conrad, 2016, p. 75; Sachsenmaier, 2012, p. 81).

With this in mind, we can argue that providing such a comparatist reading of recent scholarship may help to build a fertile ground for geographers to work through both historical and contemporary case studies across different fields.

And, more importantly, to do so without losing sight of the fact that similar concerns and a similar understanding of bordering and boundary-making weave these bodies of literature together.

To achieve this goal, the paper provides a comprehensive overview of recent scholarship on boundary-making, borders, and the territorial shaping of modern states between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries. We foreground two major elements of this scholarship that seem particularly innovative and timely.

Firstly, we argue that new interpretations of boundary-making have been brought about through an analysis of these processes envisioned as a multi-scalar set of practices in which a wide variety of actors (with diverging goals, interests, and territorial visions) interacted. In this vein, we outline the role of joint boundary commissions as particularly relevant in boundary-making, as these institutions became mediating agents between different groups, contexts, and levels of power. Likewise, we claim that boundary treaties appear in this literature as pragmatic tools for the management of border areas.

Secondly, we highlight the central place that cartographic practices and other forms of geographical and scientific knowledge have been given when it comes to boundary-making processes, and how this has reinforced contemporary awareness about the artificiality of borders (even in the case of so-called 'natural borders').

Finally, the paper concludes that remarking upon and discussing the aforementioned common threads within the revitalised field of geohistorical studies should enhance our awareness about the existence of converging elements across different fields on how to understand and examine bordering and boundary-making, and thus reduce the gap between so-called 'traditional' and 'new' border studies.

2 | BORDERS AS COMPLEX, CHANGING, AND LAYERED SPACES

For quite some time now, political and historical geographers have been struggling with various 'territorial traps' (Agnew, 1994), that is, taking the nation-state as a given unit of historical and political analysis. It comes as no surprise that the aforementioned methodological changes in historical studies converge very much with many of the advancements and pleas made in the recent research on boundary-making. Geohistorical scholars have repeatedly shown through their enquiries that multi-scalar, multi-site, and actor-centred approaches are needed to properly account for the complexities and intricacies of bordering practices (Di Fiore, 2015; Duinat, 2019b; García-Álvarez & Puente-Lozano, 2017b; Truett, 2008; Vaillot, 2021). Accordingly, two remarkable outcomes of this scholarship are worth mentioning here.

On the one hand, the variable and layered character of borders has been highlighted since delimitation and demarcation have been performed historically through a complex array of practices, technologies, and doctrines that were mobilised throughout both processes (Branch, 2016). The negotiation and accommodation of actors' diverging interests have proved to be key elements for the successful establishment of state boundaries (Brunet et al., 1995; Stopani, 2008). As far as local communities are concerned though, a distinction should be made between the delimitation processes that took place in Europe and those that occurred in territories under colonial rule. Regarding European territories, recent geohistorical research has shown the importance that local interests and needs acquired in the drawing of modern boundaries—as part of a complex dialectic which, in Sahlins' words (1989:165), involved 'a nationalising of the local and a localising of the national'. While this was generally true, it was not the case for those countries whose borderlines were strongly influenced by the geopolitical interests of the great powers, such as many of the Central and Eastern European states, as well as of the Balkans (Crampton, 2006; Ginsburger, 2010; Guy, 2008).

In the case of colonial territories, the interests of indigenous populations were generally much less considered (if not outright ignored), except for when they helped to reinforce the colonising powers' own interests. Nevertheless, there is a growing number of studies showing how indigenous communities were involved in the drawing and mapping of several colonial borders, either because of their in-depth knowledge of the local territory and landscape or because of the need to avoid further conflict in the newly delimited boundaries (Blais, 2011, 2014; Casentini, 2010; Ellis, 2019; Rodríguez Esteban, 2011; Shook, 2019; Valsecchi, 2010).

Even taking into account the distinction noted above, the production of state spatiality in the borderlands has proved to be a far more multifaceted process than conventional top-down perspectives have assumed in the past. So, as scholars have put the spotlight on the changing interplay of groups, institutions, forms of knowledge, acts of resistance, strategies, and interests that converge in boundary-making, it has become possible to overcome previous, limited perceptions. If these perceptions tended to oversimplify the complex dynamics of state- and boundary-making, it was because they were overly dependent on rigidly defined political relations (e.g., core-periphery, top-down, local-global, or local-national). This made it difficult to fully grasp the intricacies and liveliness of transboundary social interactions (Craib, 2004; Torre, 2011).

On the other hand, scholarship has paid close attention to the subtleties of various border actors' strategies as deployed on the ground, particularly including how rather complex strategic convergences and tactical arrangements of multiple actors' goals occurred (Di Fiore, 2017; Duinat, 2019a, 2021). By placing primary sources in the wider context in which they first emerged, actors' own changing understanding of borders has been uncovered. As a result, actors' various forms of agency throughout the process (their perceptions, positionings, rejections or invocations of state powers, and their continuously fluctuating alliances with other groups) have also been unveiled. Significantly, as ordinary people's everyday practices have loomed large in this scholarship, it has become possible to properly elucidate local populations' own contribution and role within the production of modern state territorial formations (Kinossian, 2005; Gaeta and Buoli, 2020, p. 10; Vaillot, 2021). For instance, this literature has covered a wide variety of sources containing: local authorities' claims, complaints, or contestations with regard to boundary-making; testimonies from locals involved in transborder conflicts or so-called 'violations of territory'; requirements addressed to central agencies on the part of many different local or regional actors about resources, lands, or practices being compromised by new layouts of the boundary line; various forms of local opposition to boundary-making, etc. A careful analysis of these sources has proved essential to assessing the way non-state actors showcased their interest vis-à-vis central state agencies, or, in other words, how they displayed their '*habitus frontaliér*', that is, a transboundary *habitus*. Duinat (2021, p. 6) uses Bourdieu's terminology here to refer to the set of skills, knowledge, and tactics that border populations historically developed to support their own interests and understanding of borderlands.

This close-to-the ground approach has become particularly evident and fruitful when applied to two specific topics that have attracted much attention in recent scholarship: the multifaceted role performed by joint boundary commissions and the particularly flexible nature of boundary treaties. The former have been shown to be 'crucial catalysts' (Rankin, 2008, p. 422) in defining, establishing, and entrenching the state's territoriality (Donaldson, 2008). The latter have been widely interpreted as pragmatic instruments which are rather context-sensitive (García-Álvarez and Puente-Lozano, 2017a, 2017b).

By putting this approach to work, boundary-making scholarship has underscored the practical goals and features that modern boundary treaties share and how they relate to, and actually express, larger political assumptions proper to both enlightened absolutist and emerging liberal governments (Ricuperati, 2001; Rowe, 2014). For centuries, borderlands retained significant degrees of autonomy, as their territorial patterns had traditionally been shaped by local customs and actual forms of use and possession of land (Herzog, 2015). This situation often included, on the one hand, smuggling and other illegal transborder practices that resulted in heavy economic losses for state coffers and significant flaws in taxation systems; and, on the other hand, long-standing local disputes which in many cases entailed violent conflicts and significant disturbances among border populations over access to agrosilvopastoral resources and local lands, most often shared by those groups (for the case of the Iberian Peninsula, see Poujade, 1998; Dornel, 2002; García-Álvarez & Puyo, 2015). As conflicts in these territorial fringes continued to worsen throughout the nineteenth century, borderlands became a key object of state-driven territorial management and were increasingly made amenable to states' territorial patterns and political framework (Branch, 2013, pp. 120–141).

Nonetheless, bringing full clarity to borderlands frequently entailed the suppression of non-territorial structures of authority (those linked to feudal and jurisdictional rights or privileges) and of enclaves and spaces of unclear or shared sovereignty. These were very common in the Ancien Régime and were frequently found along borders (García-Álvarez, 2019). Within the political culture underlying modern boundary treaties, these jurisdictionally ambiguous spaces

had to be eliminated, exchanged, or divided between states so that they could be clearly integrated into one or the other (Blomley, 2003). However, what is less widely known, and frequently overlooked in the previous literature on state-making and modern territoriality, is the fact that boundary treaties frequently conveyed a deep understanding of borderlands as dynamic, permeable, and fluid spaces (García-Álvarez & Puente-Lozano, 2017a; Zusman, 2006). The case has been made by foregrounding the eclectic, pragmatic, and empirical criteria that boundary treaties embraced, and the wide variety of solutions adopted therein. This has become clear in scholarship because of the close attention paid to the functioning of the joint boundary commissions that were established to prepare, negotiate, and effectively execute boundary treaties. Joint boundary commissions were bilateral institutions appointed by border states and composed of diplomats and technical officials, with the latter being mostly military personnel. They were dispatched to border areas to perform important tasks such as: gathering information and documentation about contentious issues or suspect situations; carrying out field examinations and topographical surveys of the borderlands; holding periodic meetings; and, particularly in European cases, consulting with local authorities or collecting declarations from locals who could testify to the longevity of certain customs or usages concerning the existing demarcation, the possession, or legal titles of certain disputed lands or the actual location of the boundary line where demarcation was confusing (García-Álvarez & Puente-Lozano, 2015b; Godinho, 2011, pp. 316–328; Capdevilla, 2009, pp. 59–67).

Accordingly, boundary commissions have been described as decisive instruments in the creation of an institutional space that brings together the different actors involved in the process, either to request a clear and durable boundary line or to reject existing ones (Blais, 2011; García-Álvarez & Puyo, 2015). All in all, these procedures make it possible to assess border disputes on a case-by-case basis. In turn, general and abstract principles (whether a tenet of international law or a geographical or physical criterion) were rejected and negotiations were carried out by mobilising a rather large number of delimitation criteria by different actors and at different stages of the process (García-Álvarez & Puente-Lozano, 2017b). The emergence of this eclecticism, empiricism, and context-sensitive outlook was made possible not least because of the continued interaction of commissioners with local actors when carrying out fieldwork (Guy, 2008). This created a keen awareness of the need to adapt the boundary line to local (social, economic, topographical, historical) features, because otherwise the boundary line fixed by the treaties would be doomed to fail (even once marked out on the ground), reigniting the long-standing cycle of unrest and violence, as several case studies in the French-Spanish border have shown (Arvizu, 1997, 2001; Capdevilla, 2009; Dornel, 2002; Duinat, 2019b, 2021; Puyo & García-Álvarez, 2016; Sahlins, 1989).

3 | NATURAL BORDERS AND THE CARTOGRAPHIC PRODUCTION OF TERRITORY

Two other topics worth mentioning in these geohistorical studies are: firstly, the rather ambiguous and controversial role played by 'natural' borders in boundary-making; and, secondly, the centrality of cartographic practices and other forms of geographical and scientific knowledge in these kinds of processes. In both cases, illustrating the 'artificial' character of borders has been a major driver of this recent scholarship given the emphasis that has been placed on historicising boundary-making analysis (Di Fiore, 2020).

Contrary to the traditional 'reifying' tendency to imagine territories as being naturally separate from one another (fixed, discrete spaces on maps, frequently outlined by natural features which define their contours), recent scholarship has called into question the 'enduring geographical myth of natural borders' (Fall, 2010). Without a doubt, the fact that natural features have long been used to outline boundaries has contributed significantly to the reification of borders.

As a matter of fact, the rather ancient doctrine of natural boundaries—that is, the widely held assumption that natural geographical features, such as mountain ranges and large rivers, were suitable elements for the establishment of the borders of political communities, an assumption clearly expressed in Roman geography and law (Hekster & Kaizer, 2009)—was given a more solid grounding and was practically applied by modern states during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Foucher, 1991; Sahlins, 1989). Throughout the nineteenth century, the virtues previously

attributed to natural borders continued to be defended on an international level and figured prominently in international law and treaty practices around the globe (Bouchez, 1963; Cafilisch, 1989; Teclaff, 1991; Prescott & Triggs, 2008, pp. 215–232). However, and as is well known, criticism of the latter concept—or more specifically the tendency to use it to the advantage of the geopolitical expansionist interests of certain states—was a common practice for some geographers, such as J. Brunhes and C. Vallaux or J. Ancel, and geographical schools of thought during the interwar period (García-Álvarez and Puente-Lozano, 2017a; Kolosov, 2015; Schofield, 2015; Van Houtum, 2005).

In this vein, recent scholarship has pointed out that the general acceptance of natural border theory was already much more qualified in terms of practices and discourses concerning territory. What this empirical research has shown is that the more the accurate clarification of the natural boundary was sought and attempted, the more new and unanticipated problems emerged as the social, historical, and geographical intricacies of these fluvial or mountainous spaces' actual reality became evident. Interestingly, many works (Catala et al., 2011; Desplat, 2002; Di Fiore & Meriggi, 2013; Donaldson, 2008; Kaplan et al., 2009; Nordman, 1998; Salvatici, 2005) have pointed out that tracing the boundary between two countries based on natural features was much less stable, more contested, and far more impractical and abstract than it appeared in theory or on maps (Sahlins, 1989, p. 1441). Indeed, reports and discussions held throughout boundary-making processes, as well as the wider geographical, political, and technical scholarship of the time, are marked by an intense awareness of the zonal character of certain borderlands separated by mountains and watercourses. One example is the intense political and technical debates held in Spain on the most appropriate criteria for drawing the provincial division associated with the establishment of the liberal state (finally approved in 1833). In geographical, economic, and social terms, river courses and mountain valleys functioned in practice as a single unit rather than as a boundary line, since such areas in modern societies were spaces propitious to settlement, exchange, and joint development or exploitation by the inhabitants of both sides (Burgueño, 1996, pp. 232–234; García-Álvarez, 2002, pp. 264–267). Even in the case of mountain crest lines located in the border between two states, similar problems were observed because, regardless of the political borders, the spatial organization of traditional mountain economies meant that villages on one side often maintained (either exclusively or jointly) rights of usage and property over land located on the opposite side (Arvizu, 1997; Capdevila, 2009; Puyo and García-Álvarez, 2016). This spatial awareness was actually heightened by the tracing and fixing of borders (or, as in the case above, of provincial administrative boundaries), not the other way around.

These insights go very much in the same direction as the geographical scholarship that has recently claimed that territory and state-making are to be approached as a heterogeneous socio-technical assemblage in which cartographic practices figure prominently (Painter, 2010; Strandsbjerg, 2008, 2012). Similarly, surveying, mapping, and other cartography-based activities have proved to be essential in boundary-making because of the 'epistemological structuring of territory' (Hannah, 2009, p. 68) they brought about. In this sense, the different forms of geographical and cartographical knowledge mobilised or produced by boundary commissions made it possible to accurately represent the actual location of the boundary line. More importantly, they also made it possible to assess the diverse nature of the issues and interests at stake in many border conflicts. Consequently, maps and topographic reports helped the parties (local communities from both sides of the border and central agencies) to flesh out their arguments and to reach workable agreements (O'Kelly, 2012).

Recent literature has argued that borderlands, local populations, and nature itself have become enmeshed in broader institutional, statist cultures of quantification, scientificity, and efficacy. Likewise, a number of 'calculative techniques'—which were named as such following Foucauldian governmental analysis (Elden, 2007a, 2007b)—have recently gained traction as a key explanatory element of modern state territoriality. Looking very closely at these practices and technologies as seen on the ground is a fundamental methodology shedding new light on the multifold material assemblage that effectively allows modern borders to come into being (Crampton, 2010; Laboulais, 2008; Zusman, 2001). Significantly, it has been shown that these practices were intrinsically entangled within broader power practices and systems, as they made both populations and lands amenable to scientific classification, measurement, ordering, and calculation, and therefore to governance (Jesooop, 2007). It is in this sense that Goettlich (2019a, pp. 44–76) has talked about 'survey rationality' as a mode of territorial governance.

Along the same lines, following the fruitful path traced by Brian Harley's works (Harley, 2001), Branch (2013) coined the term 'cartographic state' to claim that map-making was key to the emergence of modern territoriality. This was because the division of space into discretely drawn units was necessary for the shift from a medieval to a modern understanding of political authority. Further elaborating on the theses put forward by previous works on this topic (Akerman, 1995; Biggs, 1999; Black, 1997; Steinberg, 2005), Branch has posited that boundaries 'appeared first in the representational space of maps and only subsequently in political practices on the ground' (Branch, 2013, p. 3). In a similar vein, Jeppe Strandsbjerg (2012, p. 818) has coined the term 'cartopolitics' to describe 'the process where questions pertaining to sovereign control over space are decided through cartography and law'³.

Besides focussing on the overarching link between cartography and sovereignty, it is worth stressing the rich and diverse functions that maps have been shown to hold in boundary-making (Lois, 2010). Indeed, maps and statistics gathered or purposefully developed by boundary commissions gave diplomats and statesmen first-hand knowledge of the current state of borderlands—for example, population, surface area, land uses, and the agricultural qualities of the disputed lands. These were essential parameters both for assessing the relevance and strategic nature of the terrains at stake and for understanding the actual needs of the local populations involved in those conflicts (García-Álvarez, 2019; Hoffmann, 2016; Ruy, 2016). Reflecting carefully on these commissioned maps, governments were able to quantitatively and qualitatively appraise the territorial exchanges, transfers, or compensations that were offered as a solution to border issues and thus enhance the centuries-long drive to homogenise state territory.

Cartography as developed during negotiations of boundary treaties and throughout demarcation processes led the boundary to be conceived of as a sharp line separating the sovereign territories of states, as well as firmly integrating borderlands (their particularities and issues) into the wider grid of abstract and homogeneous state spatiality. It has been claimed that it is precisely the fact of having states' territories bounded and fixed on and through maps which has led to a 'naturalization' of territory, borders, and sovereignty themselves, and is at the origin of the unquestioned entanglement of these three elements (Neocleous, 2003).

4 | CONCLUDING REMARKS. BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TRADITIONAL/ GEOHISTORICAL AND POSTMODERN/CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO BORDER STUDIES

Over the last 3 decades there has been an outstanding improvement in knowledge about boundary-making processes. Firstly, an enriched understanding has emerged on how the production and reproduction of borders actually takes place on the ground. These multifaceted processes have been claimed to be integral to the development and accomplishment of a modern conception of territory, sovereignty, and statehood. As a result of this, conventional narratives on boundary-making have been nuanced and even dismantled at some points, particularly when it comes to the widely assumed idea of the boundary line as the mere imposition of central state agencies on passive local populations. Significantly, this renewed explanation of the close link between boundary-making and the political configuration of modern statehood has turned this geohistorical scholarship into an apt and timely speaker in the face of current debates on shifting patterns of statehood and territoriality in the global age (Elden, 2005, 2010, 2013; Agnew, 2005, 2009; Axtmann, 2004; Sassen, 2013).

Secondly, both the fruitful, theoretically informed approach and the thorough scrutiny of primary sources that lay at the core of the literature examined have allowed scholars to bridge the existing gap between the so-called traditional or classical border studies and contemporary or postmodern ones. According to the usual contraposition between these two approaches (Kolosov, 2015; Van Houtum, 2005), the former approach has been characterised as empirical and atheoretical, predominantly focused on boundary lines and their location: namely, in Van Houtum's terms, on 'where the border is, how did it come about, evolve, change over time, became the topic of (military) disputes, and what are the political consequences of its (changes in) location' (Van Houtum, 2005, p. 674). This type of approach has also been outlined as understanding borders as the static, material, and linear outcome of political decisions taken by

state governments and international actors (Paasi, 1999). In contrast, postmodern border studies mobilise a broad theoretical apparatus and focus predominantly on a conception of borders as social constructs (i.e., on how the border is socially constructed), as well as on the analysis of bordering processes, understood as the everyday construction of socio-spatial differences at different scales and through multiple practices and discourses that are no longer restricted to border regions.

Against this troublesome dichotomy, the reviewed geohistorical studies have overcome many of the limitations that used to be attributed to this type of approach: on the one hand, they have increasingly incorporated a postmodern theoretical outlook (in a broad sense, i.e., post-structuralism and postcolonialism, among others). They have thus become particularly attentive to discourses and representations and their relationship with power practices, as well as dependent on a predominantly comparative and multi-scalar approach. In that methodological sense, the supranational scales of Global History have come to the fore in this scholarship with the groundbreaking consequence of envisioning state borders as ambiguous and multilayered processes. These processes are negotiated at various socio-spatial scales which bring together different territorial interests and visions and in which the boundary commissions have played a fundamental mediating role between local and central actors. This enriched analysis of the so-called process of 'linearization of borders' (Goettlich, 2019b) has also made it possible to highlight the role of these commissions, as well as of the boundary treaties they established and executed, as fundamental agents in the construction of the modern state and the territoriality associated with it. More significantly, the production of borders has not only been related to state enforcement of sovereignty, but it has also been approached from the much more complex perspective of the regulation of the social, economic, and territorial practices and the overarching management of border regions.

Through their detailed and thoroughly researched case studies, recent geohistorical scholarship has come to show how the complex, multifaceted, and layered process of the construction of borderlands unfolded historically, while contemporary border studies have convincingly made their point about the artificiality and changing nature of borders by relying on postmodern fluid, polysemic, mobile, and practice-based notions of bordering and border areas (Balibar, 2002; Bauder, 2011; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013).

On balance, as objects of study, boundary-making and bordering processes are no longer confined to the circles of various regional and historical specialisations (Kadercan, 2015), nor exclusively tied to contemporary epistemological concerns or political anxieties around globalisation (Diener & Hagen, 2009). Instead, they have become a thriving object of inquiry in their own right, which is allowing for cross-fertilisation between seemingly disparate literatures and a productive dialogue among scholars from different backgrounds.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ More precisely, Kolosov (2015, p. 35) has used the label 'historic-cartographic approach' to refer to one of the main approaches of traditional border studies, broadly based on the mapping and analysis of changes in boundaries over space and time.
- ² The following works in different languages might be referred to. For European cases, see: Stoklosa and Besier (2014); for Italy: Salvatici (2005), Meriggi (2016), Di Fiore (2015); for Switzerland: Schroeter (2007); for France: Sahlins (1989, 1998), Sermet (1983), Arvizu (1992, 1997, 2001), Desplat (2002), Capdevilla (2009), Catala et al. (2011); for the Portuguese-Spanish border: García (1996), Dias (2009), Godinho (2011), Herzog (2015), García-Álvarez and Puente-Lozano (2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b), García-Álvarez (2019); for Germany: Demandt (1990), Dunlop (2015), Polak-Springer (2015), Kulczycki (2016); for Central and Eastern Europe: Bjork (2008), Evans (2006), Bartov and Weitz (2013), Murdock (2011); for

the British Islands: Ellis (1995), Gray (2008); for the Northern maritime borders: Morieux (2016); for the French Flanders: Baycroft (2004); for Eurasian borderlands: Rieber (2014), Barret (1999). For colonial cases, see: for Africa, Casentini (2010), Valsecchi (2010), Blais (2011, 2014), Rodríguez Esteban (2011), Lefebvre (2011), Sandouno (2014), Ellis (2019); for the Middle East: Ates (2013), Shook (2019); for New Zealand: Byrnes (2001). For Latin America, see: for Mexico, Rebert (2001), Weber (1992); for the southwestern border of the United States, Mandrini (2006), Mandrini and Paz (2003). For North America, see: Johnson and Graybill (2010), Hämäläinen and Johnson (2012); for the southern border with the Spanish Empire: Adelman and Aron (1999), Aron (2006), Blackhawk (2006), Guy and Sheridan (1998), de la Teja and Frank (2005). For Asia, see: Schendel (2005), Misra (2011), Breyfogle (2005).

- ³ Similar insights underpin literature on contemporary case studies proving the point about this link between map-making and state-making, and how much the former has been oriented by the 'spatial configuration of modern politics: territory and property rights' (Wainwright & Bryan, 2009, p. 153), even when the mapping is attempted by non-state actors, as in the case of indigeneous communities advancing legal claims to land through alternative maps or contesting central agencies' maps and spatialities (Preci, 2020; Sletto, 2009; Warren, 2019).

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