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Editorial

# Re-Visioning Borders: Mobility, Connectivity, and Spaces of Exception

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## Abstract

Already, the 21st century has seen an unprecedented increase in cross-border movements of people, goods, information, and financial capital. Numerous incentives and facilitators have expanded international interconnectedness and mobility, so altering the conventional nature and functions of state borders, as captured by the "new mobilities" paradigm. Yet the weaponization of global economic interdependencies and other trends towards deglobalization mean there is now a growing pressure on governments to re-establish the conventional attributes of borders. Against the current mobility and security backdrop, this collection of articles takes stock of the meaning, roles, and practices of border activities. Now is the moment to consider the special role that borders perform as an institution of state security in a contemporary world exposed to massive international flows of people and goods, as well as technologically-driven control and management systems.

The articles constituting this thematic issue show that borders have lost none of their prominence as sites of security governance when it comes to transnational mobility. Geographic borders are regaining their classical properties of territorial protection, security checks, and everyday management of migrating people. But this is a "back to the future" moment, and the disinterment of old practices has actually led to generation of new border types and experiences reflecting the emergent complexity and diverse temporal and spatial trajectories of migrants. Physical entries into geographical territory have classically been subject to peculiar regulatory practices; today those practices are spurring a proliferation of the social networks and informal methods which are used to circumvent them. Moreover, proven old methods of controlling cross-border movements have been given a new lease of life precisely because of the novel ways that geographic borders have shifted into society, the economy, and non-geographic spaces. The authors of this issue make an attempt to explain the meaning of borders in several interrelated contexts, re-visioning borders as part of a serious reflection on contemporary meanings of freedom, security, connectivity, and exception.

Mobility and transboundary exchange have been the most prevalent features of 21st century globalization and transnationalism. There has been a significant increase in the volume, diversity, scope, technique, practice, and territorial reach of the cross-border movement of people, goods, information, and financial capital (Rumford, 2014). Economic incentives (from relatively open labor markets to low-cost travel), heavy investments in communication infrastructure (airports and seaports, communication hubs, transport corridors, highway networks, etc.), cultural diffusion, and of course social networking have produced an immense potential for global interconnectedness and international mobility. The "new mobilities" paradigm which emerged in the present century captured the mobile nature of the contemporary

world, with an analytical focus that encompassed diasporic communities, global (neo-)nomads, and transnational advocacy networks (Mau, 2020; Mazlish, 2017; Ribas-Mateos, 2015).

However, this new paradigm is already being challenged by some familiar risks and threats, and state institutions are now scrambling to put in place appropriate, familiar, and reassuring border policies with the aim of addressing effectively sources of insecurity and instability. But this is not a simple return to the status quo ante. In the interconnected world system that emerged over the past 30 years, borders were massively adapted and continued to perform a special role as an institution of state security, a site of control of international flows of people and goods, as well as a technologically-driven management system. Even advanced liberalization arrangements worked out by regional groupings, including the Schengen area as probably the most advanced shared border regime. These fundamentally reconfigured border techniques did not alter the principal functions of borders: protection, deterrence, and regulation. Rather, mobility itself (that is, the circulation of goods, ideas, and orders) became a prime target for political intervention (Beauchamps et al., 2017, p. 3).

As acknowledged by Anderson and O'Dowd, borders have come to perform a growing range of sometimes rather contradictory functions, as:

> [A]reas of opportunity and/or insecurity, zones of contact and/or conflict, of co-operation and/or competition, of ambivalent identities and/or the aggressive assertion of difference. These apparent dichotomies alternate with time and place, and—more interestingly—they can co-exist simultaneously in the same people, if they have to regularly deal not with one state but two. (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999, pp. 595–596)

Despite the supposedly homogenizing pressures of globalization, moreover, different societies and polities continue to combine borders (and identities and orders) in very different ways (Heisler, 2001, pp. 226–227).

The articles collected in this thematic issue deal with this growing variety across time and space and recognize that, even if there is now a trend towards deglobalization and an attempt to return to earlier forms of border control, the variety of borders, borderlands, and bordering processes is only going to increase. The contributing authors thus present something of the variety of concepts, frameworks, and accounts of bordering (as well as de- and re-bordering) processes which have been developed in the present century—and they examine whether these concepts are capable of explaining current trends. They focus particularly on "border-free" travel areas, which have been the sites of heaviest experimentation and change. The Schengen area, following its launch in 1995, facilitated the free movement of persons at internal borders, but at the price of strengthened and

detailed control at external border crossing points as well as eventual stoppings within the Schengen area, away from the border, by mobile patrols. This process saw the deferral of the actual borders beyond the borderline, and not just outside the EU (the familiar concept of "externalization") but also *inside* (Balibar, 2009, p. 206).

Artur Gruszczak attempts to capture the current turn in bordering processes (Gruszczak, 2022). He looks at the current dynamics of bordering processes in Europe, identifying an inflexion in the historical development of the principle of freedom of movement of persons epitomized by the Schengen area. Gruszczak identifies an increasing tension between the integration forces of transnational processes, and a politicization of domestically-embedded issues of security governance. He discusses the lingering discrepancy between longstanding derogations from the Schengen regime and efforts towards a full restoration of the free-travel area after the Schengen crisis.

Caterina Molinari likewise focuses on the Schengen area and its recent politicization, and argues that EU institutions have lately exploited this trend and used migration crises to mobilize actors, allocate funds, and determine procedures and remedies (Molinari, 2022). The migration crisis in Europe in 2015–2016 saw the EU formalize and regulate whole new mobility policies and practices. These changes have been widespread and bewildering, but Molinari narrows such moves to three instances: (a) physical borders subject to a peculiar regulatory regime operational in specific peripheral spaces; (b) legal borders increasingly independent from their physical and geographical dimensions; and (c) legal borderlines applicable to certain groups of travelling migrants. Molinari interprets the EU's stance as an attempt to disconnect the full protection of fundamental rights from the real status of migrants residing on national territories of EU member states.

Molinari's research thus adds to the growing body of analysis on borders that focuses on the experience of those crossing them—something curiously absent from early analysis of the Schengen area. If Molinari conceptualizes the tendency toward the decoupling of legal and regulatory standards from migration and mobility practices, this is further illustrated in this collection by two articles dedicated to the migratory experiences of a specific category—unaccompanied minors and adolescent migrants. In the first of these articles, Orsini et al. (2022) examine the negative and disquieting practices performed on unaccompanied minors by European and non-European state authorities particularly since the recent migration crises. Based on ethnographic research carried out among over 300 minors in Libya, Italy, Greece, and Belgium, the authors make insights into "loops of violence" (that is, violent events perpetrated on migrants by a variety of institutional and non-institutional actors). These—as they maintain—are now ubiquitous within the EU's management of migration and asylum.

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The situation of unaccompanied minors is also discussed by Uzureau et al. (2022) in an article focusing on exception from normal rules and abandonment experienced by migrants as part of securitization practices at the internal borders in the EU. They take the case of the northwestern Italian city of Ventimiglia as a "space of exception" at the French-Italian border and take it as evidence of deterrent practices carried out by local authorities and their effects on minors' psychological well-being and self-identity. The findings of the ethnographic field study made by the authors underline the conflicting needs and feelings of institutional abandonment of the unaccompanied migrants in Ventimiglia augmented by insufficient institutional protection in the border space.

These two articles show that unaccompanied young migrants are, due to their vulnerability and relative lack of agency, heavily affected by restrictive and deterrent measures commonly used by national and local authorities in receiving countries. By contrast, other groups of migrants enjoy altogether greater agency. Labor migration regimes offer daily evidence that excessive regulatory practices imposed by states may be avoided or bypassed (sometimes even simply disregarded) by informal networks. Polese et al. (2022) show convincingly how the reliance on informal structures substitutes the expectations of an active welfare state policy. Based on two case studies—Romanian migrants in Spain, and ethnic entrepreneurs in Croatia—the authors explore informality as a way contributing to the shaping of everyday governance curbed by discontent with state policies and values and by the praise of non-compliance.

The final article deals with new sites of border transformation. De-bordering processes and tendencies have been associated over the past three decades with experiments in the territorial/geographical dimension as epitomized by the Schengen area. But today they increasingly unfold in the *de-territorialized* virtual space created by information and communication technologies (ICT) and infrastructure. Dominika Dziwisz explores the changing nature of borders in cyberspace and examines the impact of non-war activities on the functions of state borders (Dziwisz, 2022). Modern technologies seem to accelerate the tendencies toward the blurring of physical borders; yet they also increase the use of those boundaries as security policy tools.

## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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