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The Role of Borders as Sites and Progenitors of Conflict: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract: The growth of transnationalism through the technological advances offered by modernity have forced a reconsideration of the way that we think about borders in the analysis of conflict. This essay examines the issue from two sides, that of borders as the site of conflict, and also as the progenitor or enabling factor. The way in which borders no longer necessarily operate as the site of conflict, and, in the conclusion, sites of cooperation, is examined, demonstrating the growing tendency for events to take place with great distance between actors and in non-contiguous zones. For borders to operate as the progenitors of conflict, it is necessary for them either to act as a necessary or sufficient cause. It is asserted that borders are necessary in order to signify the division of identity that conflict requires, but that their existence does not preclude cooperation. The methods through which borders are constructed are examined through the use of the Copenhagen School's method of securitisation analysis, which provides the assertion that conflict is the result of the violating of practices of intersubjective understanding rather than the existence of borders as such. Ways in which the strength of borders may vary, and their limits are discussed, before asserting their continuing importance, and it is claimed that globalization works toward relocating, without undermining or challenging, the concept of borders.

Introduction

In this essay, I consider the role of borders in conflict through a critical redefinition of what it is that borders represent. While the traditional conception is initially defined, it is found that the conception of uniform power distribution that it entails is largely inadequate for conceptualising a world where the greatest immediate threats contain a transnational component. Through examining the ideas of Amartya Sen in *Identity and Violence*, it is asserted that borders are a signifier by which it is possible to both differentiate self from other, and identify when core values attributed to the self are violated, thus causing conflict.

With this definition, the possibility of conflict becomes impossible without the institution of borders as identity, creating the space where conflict is able to take place. It is thus considered that borders are a necessary condition for conflict. By understanding this identity-led conception of borders, we are capable of reconceptualising many past conflicts in a manner that both operates according to, and moves beyond, the spatially based understanding that has limited utility in the modern

world, where many conflicts take place without existing directly within, or taking very little account of, limits enforced by distance, space or geography.

In order to qualify this definition – which makes a huge amount of issues border, and potentially conflictual situations, I consider the limits of borders when linked to identity. The third section of the essay examines this, by using spatial metaphors to illustrate the way in which various identities are ‘harder’ or ‘softer’ than others, allowing certain degrees of tolerance. The way in which these are constructed is then examined through a securitisation lens, in order to understand the ways in which elite discourse creates and reinforces particular identities, while discouraging others in the name of unity. I then consider that it is the sharp breaking of this negotiation that is the initiator of conflict, which in the past has often been symbolised by the crossing of borders.

Finally, and to address the idea of borders as the site of conflict, I assess whether, as following the globalization optimists, borders are becoming irrelevant to the conduct of politics and conflict. Concessions are made in the way that state borders are changing, but it is asserted that the assertions of a ‘borderless world’ fail to take into account the way in which borders and the separation of identity remain present, but in moving beyond states, move beyond the conventional means of international relations analysis. This means that ultimately, borders remain at the genesis of most conflicts in the identity sense, while conventional spatial analysis is becoming increasingly incapable of useful analysis as modernity continues to erode the link between state borders and the ability to cross them. The essay concludes with a final assertion of the changing role of borders, and the necessity of not undermining their importance in conflict analysis, as well as some suggestions for the expansion of current research programmes on borders, as well as critical security studies more generally.

Defining Borders

Borders in the traditional sense, and when considered by traditional international relations theory, are considered as a line separating two sovereign territories.¹ This idea can be traced to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which delineated the territories within Europe and instituted the principle of non-interference, attempting to ensure that a state’s internal affairs are to be considered as separate from its external relations. As such, power in the modernist conception flows uniformly up to the territorial limit of its operation at the border, the crossing of which is considered as a violation of sovereignty.²

¹ Border at Dictionary.com. Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, Inc. Available at <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/border> accessed: May 19, 2010).

² Browning and Joenniemi note, and proceed to overturn the modernist conception of borders by examining the way that modernist discourse permits uniform projection of power outward from the centre, but not back inwards from the margin, limiting the power of a marginal actor within a given territory. See Browning, C.S. and Joenniemi, P. (2004), ‘Contending Discourses of Marginality’ in *Geopolitics*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 702

However, in considering the existence of a border as a given, this modernist conception fails to appreciate the inherent instability of their existence. In formally instituting a regime of borders, an agent acknowledges that the previous system was not the same as that to come, and so has some role in constituting the divide. This is acknowledged in political theory, with Rousseau noting the role that the construction of ‘fences’ played in the development of *amour propre* and thus the conflicts of contemporary society.³ In more contemporary times, there are numerous instances of changing borders, such as the negotiation over the location of the border between Israel and the Palestinian territories, or the constitution of a border between Finland and Russia.⁴ Borders in many cases are not therefore a fixed geographical feature, but are instead subject to change based upon the changing identities of those that define them, with the numerous cases proving this demonstrating a process at work – known as ‘bordering’ – as a persistent and variable phenomenon. The old adage claiming that ‘good fences make good neighbours’ does not acknowledge the quality or location of the fence as subject to the interests of parties that are liable to change.

Globalisation, as has been extensively documented, poses severe challenges for the traditional idea of borders.⁵ While it may not be a new phenomenon, it may be that the Westphalian state system represented the most embedded and rigid conception of territory and borders thus far, and the development of technology poses a strong challenge to the spatial delineation of borders and sovereign territory. The debate has been particularly interesting in the field of International Political Economy, where globalised production has made it increasingly difficult to tie down a ‘national’ manufacturing industry or financial system in modern capitalist economies.

While globalisation and the dissolution of borders may occur in political or economic terms, it is not certain that this has led to a homogenising identity. In crude terms, borders are a representation of the ability to distinguish ‘self’ from ‘other’, whether the referent is the state or otherwise. It is now common practice to define identity as primarily constructed through a negative process of separation between what an entity is, and what it is not.⁶ As identity operates outside of the conception of the state system, and continues to operate beyond the systems perceived reduction in influence, so must borders. This has been analysed by Huntington in the *Clash of Civilizations*, where he argues that civilisational divides, imposed *ex ante*, are a more significant border than those of individual nation states, and that this will play a, if not the defining, role in the political map of the future. While the divides imposed by geographical and spatial limitations are constantly changing, and are even subject to

³ “The first man who, having fenced in a piece of land, said "This is mine," and found people naïve enough to believe him, that man was the true founder of civil society.” See Rousseau, J.J. (1754), *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*

⁴ Paasi, A. (1999), ‘Boundaries as a Social Practice: The Finnish-Russian Border’ in *Regional Studies* Vol. 33 No. 7, pp. 671

⁵ As described at length by Ohmae, K. (1995), *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy*, Harper Business, Introduction pp. XX

⁶ See, for example, Wendt, A. (1994), ‘Collective Identity Formation and the International State’ in *American Political Science Review*, vol. 88 no. 2, pp. 389

natural processes that contain little human agency, the identities that we inherit and shape through our own actions are far more difficult (if not impossible, according to Huntington), to overcome in any permanent sense.⁷

This essay therefore considers borders as the construction that divides identities in agreement with Huntington, and sees some form of border as a necessary constituent of a unit's identity. However, the idea that such identities are primordial or fixed is rejected.⁸ As such, the act of bordering is considered the discursive practise that upon repetition reifies this divide. This conception is intended to take account of the way in which borders do not operate purely in spatial terms, but are also a necessary constituent in areas of life outside of politics between states. This holds true for the metaphorical 'wrong side of the tracks', a border that may operate within a single state, but is no less pervasive in the mindsets of people within that area. The possibility that a unit may hold more than one identity, as asserted by Amartya Sen in *Identity and Violence*, precludes the use of a single unitary identity for each, as well as the idea that borders operate only at a state level – people's identities are not held purely in common with the state of which they are a part. Sen is often quoted in this context, and is worth repeating:

There are a great variety of categories to which we simultaneously belong. I can be, at the same time, an Asian, and Indian citizen, a Bengali with Bangladeshi ancestry, an American or British resident, an economist, a dabbler in philosophy, an author, a Sanskritist, a strong believer in secularism and democracy, a man, a feminist, a heterosexual, a defender of gay and lesbian rights, with a nonreligious lifestyle, from a Hindu background, a non-Brahmin, and a nonbeliever in an afterlife.⁹

Notable is the way in which many of these identities are associated with an ideological stance rather than that of a state. To the extent that his various identities do not coincide with those of another, it can be considered that a border is constituted in the assertion of the identity itself. This is done through binary opposites – in being a feminist, Sen asserts that he is not a male chauvinist, and in asserting his nonreligious lifestyle, he separates himself from those that strictly adhere to religious practices.

Also interesting is the way in which Sen's assertions of identity are often split into different regions that may conflict with each other. What would he do in the context of war between India, his place of origin, and the US or Britain, where he currently resides? The only potential explanation would be that borders can vary in strength, according to the affinity to a particular identity. This holds true even for sovereign geographical borders – a British citizen may need a visa to visit a country such as China, but not for a country such as Germany, where a sense of shared identity has fostered agreement over the right of travel. A key example of this would

⁷ Huntington, S. (1992), 'The Clash of Civilizations?' in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, pp. 22

⁸ Further discussed below.

⁹ Sen, A. (2006), *Identity and Violence*, US: W.W. Norton & Company, pp. 19

be the Schengen agreement, which allows citizens of member states free access to any country that is a signatory to it. In line with international security dynamics, however, this has led to a hardening of the external border, necessary to maintain a minimally coherent common European identity.¹⁰ The extent of this is determined by the function of the unit in question – increasing levels of ‘stateness’ with regard to the EU’s functions, economically, politically and socially, have an impact on the extent to which the outer border of the EU takes on state-like attributes, such as ‘hard’ borders and increasing visa requirements, while internal borders are reduced in relative importance.

The conception of sovereign state borders is therefore a function of the discursive practice of bordering when linked to territory, but is not the only possible outcome. Analysing borders in this sense provides a broader and significantly greater source of explanation that offers far more potential for coping with the changing nature of borders in an increasingly ‘postmodern’ world.

The role of borders as sites or progenitors of conflict is thus to be analysed in two ways. Firstly the extent to which, in a conceptual sense, borders are necessary in the production of conflict. In this case, conflict would not occur in the absence of borders. Secondly, whether borders are sufficient factor in causing conflict, or whether they must be complimented by other factors in the process. This by turns provides an answer as to the significance and necessity of borders in conflictual situations.

Borders as a Necessary Condition for Conflict

The possibility of conflict is based upon the assumption that the parties involved are capable of perceiving themselves as separate from an ‘Other’, and therefore are able to distinguish between harm done to themselves and another party. It would be impossible for conflict to occur between parties if there was no ‘between’ to speak of. In political theory, accounts of utopian society are often predicated upon this possibility and the narrowing of the ensuing gap, including Marx’s future society and Rousseau’s general will.¹¹ Indeed, contemporary cosmopolitan conceptions of justice and the mitigation of conflict are based largely on reducing this divide and forging a shared identity based on identification of self with the other.¹² A number of civil society groups have latched onto this concept, including Doctors Without Borders, Reporters Without Borders, and now even Clowns Without Borders.¹³ These organisations are based on a conception of a common right of humans to healthcare,

¹⁰ Grabbe, H. (2000), ‘The Sharp Edges of Europe: Extending Schengen Eastwards’ in *International Affairs*, Vol. 76 No. 3, Pp. 520

¹¹ As accounted for in, among others, Rousseau (1762), *The Social Contract* and Marx (1848), *The Communist Manifesto*

¹² Caney, S. (2000), ‘Cosmopolitan Justice and Cultural Diversity’ in *Global Society*, Vol. 14 No. 4, pp. 526

¹³ Official websites can be found at <http://www.msf.org/> (Doctors Without Borders), <http://www.rsf.org/> (Reporters Without borders) and <http://clownswithoutborders.org/> (Clowns Without Borders). Accessed 21st March 2010.

information and laughter respectively. These factors are based on the commonality of these aspects of identity found between individuals, often asserted through discourses of human rights.¹⁴

According to this logic then, conflict must arise only with the institution of a separating factor, which comes to be constituted, initially at least, as a border between separate identities. Under the contemporary system of states, the territorial limits of the state have come to be considered as the point at which the identity of one state stops, and another begins. As is to be expected with this view, the linking of territory to identity and the resulting territoriality complex can be seen as the cause of a large number of conflicts, and is at least partially explanatory of the way in which conflicts are highly likely to occur along contiguous borders when compared to non-contiguous borders.¹⁵

We can therefore say that a form of border is a necessary condition for conflict, not by proof that borders cause conflict, but through the assertion of the opposite – that is, it would be impossible for a conflict to take place were there not some separation of the self and other. In this case, the fact that conflict has happened is evidence that borders have been involved in its occurrence.

So in a conceptual sense, borders and the attribution of a subjective identity are necessary for conflict to be possible in a perceptual sense. This assertion makes it feasible to adapt the study of borders beyond the geopolitical sense to the nature of conflict itself, as is necessary in a world which is experiencing conflicts that are no longer based upon territorial disputes. This allows a reconception of many contemporary conflicts in ways that are not necessarily linked to an impartially located and given territory. Examples such as the war in Bosnia, or the repeated conflicts between Israel and the Arab states, become cases of high level securitisation where borders have become merely a symbol for a heavily prioritised identity.

However, it is clear that should the sovereign conception of borders be bypassed, the modernist conception of their function, with its uniform projection of power over a given territory is also problematic. Spatial metaphors can be used to describe the various ways in which borders are categorised, and are analogous to the way in which a given unit can have multiple and potentially conflicting identities, as well as the way in which communities are able to coexist.

Conceptualising the Limits of Borders

Transplanting the modernist conception of borders as inviolable limits is a limited notion of borders when applied in the wider sense, largely because of the tolerance with which people act in their day-to-day lives. An example might consist of the growing culture of backpacking among young adults before or after university, who

¹⁴ The idea of human rights is, of course, a contestable concept, which itself leads to discussion on universality and applicability outside of a judeo-christian ethical system.

¹⁵ Vasquez analyses the link between contiguity and conflict in Vasquez, J.A. (1995), 'Why Do Neighbours Fight?' in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 32 No.3, pp. 281. His explanation, however, takes the link between territory and identity as given – an assertion that is challenged here.

place value on the experience of foreign culture and identity, rather than immediately taking offence upon being required to perform an action (such as the removal of headwear in a temple) that lies outside of their immediately constructed conception of themselves. As such there must be some way of conceptualising borders in a ‘softer’ sense, acknowledging the power games that operate in their construction and change.

This may be achieved through the conceiving of a space ‘in-between’ the areas dominated by one or another core identity, whether that be a state or otherwise. Subject to negotiation, this zone may be considered a zone of tolerance, inclusion, or exclusion for the parties involved. Tolerance is demonstrated through the Ottoman Empire, a publicly Islamic entity, which nonetheless allowed the settling of private status legal matters (marriage, funerals etc.) to take place under the practices of another identity, such as that of Christianity or Judaism. Inclusion is demonstrated through the many divided contemporary societies that attempt to integrate other identities into political and economic processes, while allowing them to maintain themselves as fully as possible. This method is often realised through the founding of political parties and a party-based democratic system. The modernist conception of coherent identities within contiguous sovereign territories may be considered at the ‘coercion’ end of the scale, where deviation from the identity in question may be ‘corrected’ through coercive practices. An example may be considered in the form of the exclusion of headscarves from the French school system.¹⁶ At the extreme end of the spectrum, zones of exclusion permit no action within a certain ‘buffer zone’ that operates at the border, such as the demilitarised zone that separates North and South Korea.¹⁷



This characterisation gives a clear illustration of how borders, whether in the spatial or identity based sense, are able to intersect without immediately leading to conflict. A particularly interesting example is that of multi-faith communities that manage to live in harmony despite their differences. The acknowledgement of this occurrence is a direct rebuttal to the Clash of Civilizations’ thesis that culture is an embedded quality that inevitably causes deep divides between groups.¹⁸ The way with which the situation is dealt therefore depends directly upon the participants’ negotiation and the understanding that is reached through this.

¹⁶ Poulter, S. (1997), ‘Muslim Headscarves in School: Contrasting Legal Approaches in England and France’ in *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 43

¹⁷ Bleiker, R. (2003), ‘A Rogue is a Rogue is a Rogue’ in *International Affairs*, Vol. 79 No. 4, pp. 720

¹⁸ One example being the high diversity of India as a whole, but specifically the number of Christians in Goa, which at 27%, is very high, while Goa remains an area of India relatively immune to communal strife. Source: Indian Census 2001: http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/Census_data_finder/C_Series/Population_by_religious_communities.htm and accessed 1805 19th May 2010

Borders, Migration and Securitisation

While borders may, in a fundamental sense, be essential to the nature of conflict, it is unclear how their existence may be sufficient alone to cause it. Under the modernist conception, the existence of a border constitutes an absolute identity and a separation of zones that hold the legitimate use of physical force over their respective territories.¹⁹ However, what has been demonstrated above is that the identity, and thus the border at the margin may not be under complete control by the core. Indeed, the co-option of identity and the way in which this may reduce or include resistance has proved an important lesson for the architects of counter-insurgency strategy all around the world, not least in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.²⁰ The malleability of identity can also be seen through changing language patterns within states, such as the difference in dialect between someone from Edinburgh and someone from West Wales, or between Munich and Cologne.

Migration has proved a significant issue in contemporary security politics, particularly in the case of the US-Mexico border. A significant literature has developed regarding the application of securitisation theory to the issue, with the variability in security conditions that this allows drawing considerable analogy with the process of self-other separation described above. However, it is not the penetration of the border that is the key site of conflict in this case, but rather the threat to a constructed US identity that an influx of immigrants causes through a ‘dilution’ or mixing of what are considered ‘American values’ with those of the Mexicans that seek to settle in the US. The setting of a physical border in the spatial sense again acts as a proxy for the securitisation of identity within the space itself. Indeed, securitisation in this sense continues to operate within the US, with immigration agencies and criminal investigations into illegal migration carrying the border that prevents integration within the area that the US holds as territory. Political geography has taken note of this shift, drawing attention to the way in which, as globalisation forces the permeability of spatial borders; new borders are set up as internal society becomes securitised.²¹

The way this is done continues the securitisation approach of privileging elite discourse in the construction of borders, with the state continuing to hold sway in many of these discussions, as well as emphasising particular bordering practices. Browning has drawn attention to the way in which Kaliningrad is constructed as a part of Russia, despite being an enclave that is surrounded in its entirety by EU member states. This includes practices such as historical revisionism and forced expulsion of

¹⁹ Weber, M. (1947), *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Translated by Henderson, A. M. and Parsons, T., US: Oxford University Press, pp. 156

²⁰ See ‘Understanding FATA 2008’, summary available at http://www.wunrn.com/news/2009/04_09/04_27_09/042709_pakistan.htm, accessed 19th May 2010

²¹ Rumford, C. (2006), ‘Theorising Borders’ in *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 9, pp. 156

the German population that are led by Russian elites.²² However, despite the higher chance that elite discourse has of prevailing, there are numerous cases where the periphery has managed to influence the actions of the core itself, including the actions of the minutemen on the US-Mexican border where they have received tacit, if not explicit approval for actions that effectively constitute vigilantism.²³ This process then, in line with securitisation thinking, is fundamentally one of negotiation and competition – ensuring that conflict is also partially caused by a renegotiation of the power relations that set borders themselves.

Failed Negotiation and Conflict

Conflict does not thus arise purely from borders, but rather from a breaking of the process of intersubjective understanding and construction of identity, as described by Alexander Wendt in his seminal description of identity formation.²⁴ Furthermore, this holds true for borders as conventionally understood, as well as a despatialised conception of their operation. Conflict arising from the violation of borders can be understood from any number of conventional wars, from Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait to Napoleon's attempt to conquer Russia. Indeed, it is a common feature of the 'old' wars that the point at which one side crossed a border was the 'tipping point' that would provoke conflict. However, in the broader sense, the Rwandan crisis can be seen by the formulation of a figurative border around Tutsi and Hutu ethnicities, as the Yugoslav conflict can in terms of the securitisation of ethnicity.²⁵ While many Western analysis of the Rwandan genocide focus heavily on the speed with which it occurred, this pays little attention to the way in which the separation and formation of identity occurred over years, particularly during the colonial period. While in many cases the identity being attacked or defended against may correspond to a particular geographical border, this is by no means necessary. Wendt's famous phrase 'anarchy is what states make of it' can thus be reformulated as 'identity is what groups make of it' to demonstrate the essential flexibility of the concept.²⁶

²² Browning, C.S. and Joenniemi, P. (2003), 'The Identity of Kaliningrad: Russian, European or a Third Space?' in Tassinari, F. (ed.) (2003), *The Baltic Sea Region in the European Union: Reflections on Identity, Soft-Security and Marginality*, Nordeuropa-Institut der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, available at http://www2.hu-berlin.de/ostseekolleg/virtual/online_pdf/paper8.pdf#page=58 and accessed 1605 19th May 2010, pp. 70

²³ Glaister, D. (2005) for *The Guardian*, 'Schwarzenegger Backs Minutemen' from www.guardian.co.uk available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/may/02/usa.mexico> and accessed 1553 19th May 2010

²⁴ Wendt, A. (1992), 'Anarchy is What States Make of It' in *International Organization*, Vol. 46 No. 2pp. 404

²⁵ Newbury claims the formation of ethnic identity in Rwanda can be described as 'corporate'. See Newbury, C. (1998), 'Ethnicity and the Politics of History in Rwanda' in *Africa Today*, Vol. 45 No. 1, pp. 7

²⁶ Wendt's seminal article is essential due to the thought experiment that it utilises in order to overcome the assumption of violence that lies at the heart of International Relations. See Wendt, A. (1992), 'Anarchy is What States Make of It' in *International Organization*, Vol. 46 No. 2pp. 404

In any case, it is evident that the existence of a border is not sufficient to cause conflict. It is borders that act as a signifier for some other value – whether that is identity, or the legitimate use of force within the boundary – whose violation is unacceptable. The military crossing of the Russian border by Napoleon threatened the monopoly of coercive force controlled by the domestic governance, just as the shooting of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914 caused a diplomatic crisis due to his presumed immunity as a foreign dignitary. Conflict arose from these situations, but was not caused by the existence of a border upon its own as much as the assault upon an identity that was demarcated by a particular border that is itself based in the expression of the identity itself. In these cases, the bordering practices have not adapted to the possibility of the violation in question, thus leading to conflict.

In terms of the question, it appears that borders must always have some role in conflict, if they are conceived of in the manner outlined above. However, the location of the conflict may pay very little respect to the location of any particular border, particularly with those elements of transnationalism that have arisen due to modernisation processes. This is easily reconcilable with the idea that borders are moveable – indeed, the battles of the Second World War are often demonstrated through a series of front lines that move back and fore – but it may be impossible to conceive of actions in two-dimensional terms, as is the case with an air-launched missile strike, or a cyber-terrorism incident. The use of spatial metaphors in these cases loses utility, and the idea of a border is constituted fundamentally through opposing identities between two points bearing a relatively irrelevant geographic relationship to each other. This leads to the question of whether borders are, in effect, becoming irrelevant in our analysis of conflict – whether we are, in fact, surpassing the very symbol of a ‘modern’ conception of international relations.

Are Borders Becoming Irrelevant?

Much of the literature on globalisation has focussed on the growing irrelevance of borders in analysis, instead drawing attention to the fluidity of, in particular, the global economy and information flows. However, conflict and competition have persisted, leading to the belief that borders, in some sense, continue to be relevant in global politics, even if we (based on a particular normative framework) might consider the present to be a post-state situation.

Above, some thoughts as to the transferring of the notion of borders to identity have been outlined. In this way, it is possible for the idea of borders to operate in a despatialised sense, based on normative or identity claims. The ‘war on terror’ has operated within this framework, pitting the worldviews of neoconservatism/neoliberalism against those of radical Islam. Language games are a large part of these identity-based border disputes, notably in the labelling of North Korea, Iran and Iraq, three countries with limited relations to each other, as part of an ‘axis of evil’. While these states have no geographically based centre when combined, their inclusion as a group in Bush’s speech created, in identity terms, some similarities between the three in the eyes of the audience, enabling them, in language, to be constituted as a singular unit. It is clear that borders are, in their functioning if not their conception, very much

still operative in the language of politics. The use of borders as metaphors constitutes, therefore, a clear example of subjective perception that may, or may not, correspond to objective reality – what the postmodern theorists have labelled ‘hyperreality’.²⁷

As has been indicated, borders thus constitute narrative fictions that nonetheless play important roles in our daily lives. The intersection of borders leads to a huge complexity when they lead to conflict – an aphorism being the shedding of ‘first blood’ in war. At once, this breaks both the sovereign state boundary, as well as the lowest common denominator identity – that of humanity – that belief in the immorality of murder is based upon. While it is correct to criticise the role of borders in state politics, the relevance of borders in a conceptual sense still remains pertinent to our understanding of politics in a wider framework of analysis. Any assertion of a ‘borderless world’ is thus premature, paying insufficient attention to the shifting of borders from a physical to a normative realm.

Conclusions

While borders continue to be essential in the analysis of conflict, the increasing elements of transnationalism in politics have severe implications for the way in which we understand conflict. While I have demonstrated that some form of border is necessary to conflict, it is clear that the modernist element to the statement, that borders are necessarily the site of conflict also, is changing with modern- or post-modernisation.

The divisibility of self and other is a significant assertion in the above essay, as it allows, in the first instance, conflict to occur – it may be stated that everything else follows from this initial division. As the social sciences begin to pay more attention to the role of identity, it becomes difficult to claim state or national borders as a primeval or given assumption, and instead becomes necessary to acknowledge the fluidity, and negotiability, of their existence. Constructivism, and the securitization approach specifically; offer an extremely useful tool in broadening this analysis, and particularly for explaining the variable nature of borders, from ‘hard’ to ‘soft’. This is an important caveat to the modernist approach, and helps deal with the huge amount of different identities that may be assumed by any one person, as was illustrated by the quote above, taken from Sen.²⁸

The acceptance of borders as conflictual differences stemming from a difference in identity may initially seem broad, but takes account of the ‘opening up’ of conflict zones and conflictual action to include the rising level of violence seen among non-state actors due to the growth and dispersal of technology. This goes all the way down to the private sphere, with it becoming necessary to admit the coercive implications of banning headscarves in Turkish or French school systems.

As with much critically based security theory, these assertions are open to the criticism that they are too broad, that we should indeed be focussing on state-based

²⁷ Baudrillard, J. (1983) ‘The Precession of Simulacra’ in Natoli, J. And Hutcheon, L. (1993), *A Postmodern Reader*, Suny Press pp. 360

²⁸ Sen, A. (2006), *Identity and Violence*, US: W.W. Norton & Company, pp. 19

conflict. However, it is conventional security theory itself which is being criticised here as being inadequate to analyse the changes in conflict. Furthermore, the conceptualisation here helps fill in these gaps, as well as explaining its own limits in securitisation terms – it is becoming difficult, if not impossible to assert a uniform power distribution throughout a bounded area such as a state.

It is clear that borders continue to be necessary for the understanding of conflict, particularly as they are so necessary to its initiation. However, the likelihood of them becoming the site for conflict itself is not so sure, particularly given the extra dimensions being brought in by the processes of modernisation. While the globalisation theorists attempt to assert a kind of Kantian perpetual peace through the use of measures such as complex interdependence theory, they insufficiently explain the way in which the negotiation points of identity, borders, and therefore conflict, are moving into another space. In any analysis of borders and conflict in the future, it thus becomes necessary to understand the point at which, and over which, borders and identity are negotiated and securitised.

The question of borders, particularly when viewed as a ‘technology’ of modernisation, poses several important issues for further research, particularly as it sits at the interface of disciplines such as politics, geography and sociology. In particular, the relevance of the securitisation literature to the development of a *de facto*, rather than a *de jure* border or identity would provide useful information on the creation or recreation of perceived realities and social orders through language. Another avenue of inquiry may involve examining how, in their construction through language, geographical borders have become dominant over other language based constructions, such as religion or cultural differences. I believe that the pertinence of this line of inquiry is evident in light of the many fulfilments of the rather apocalyptic predictions of Huntington and Kaplan, as well as working toward a greater understanding of the requirements of cosmopolitan or global conceptions of justice. In short, the continuing development of border analysis and the rigour offered by developments in securitisation theory by authors such as Entman lead to the idea of the potential normative applications of understanding borders in this fashion.²⁹

In closing, then, it is essential to note the importance of borders in the initiation of conflict, but also that they are becoming less tied to those zones that are demarcated by their joining or intersection. The aspects of conflict that have been previously limited by spatial factors, in other words, are becoming increasingly redundant. In reaction to Huntington, it may in fact be that he limited his analysis by largely confining civilisations to particular geographic zones, falling short concerning growths in domestic extremism. Similarly, it is necessary to consider the limits of the EU, which in growing as a normative actor, may find no reason not to consider such isolated zones as Canada or other countries that follow similar ideological practices for membership. Enmity, similarly, may become less restricted and operate over greater distances. While speculative at this point, it is clear that the role of borders so far is changing greatly, while their importance in the analysis of conflict is not.

²⁹ Entman, R. (2003), ‘Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House’s Frame after 9/11’ in *Political Communication*, Vol. 20 pp. 415

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