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Book Review

Holding the Line: Borders in a Global World

by Heather N. Nicol and Ian Townsend-Gault (eds.)
Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press (2005)

Reviewed by Bruno Dupeyron*

Holding the Line: Borders in a Global World is a collection of papers, edited by Heather Nicol and Ian Townsend-Gault, which were originally presented at the Permeable Borders and Boundaries Conference in Vancouver (B.C.) in August 1999. This book presents a series of nineteen case studies and conceptual papers organized in eight parts. According to the editors, they “offer different perspectives on the nature of the new seismic forces” (2) at work on and around borders and borderlands as they are transformed by globalization.

Part one, *The World Stage: New Opportunities and Problems*, sets the stage with three chapters linking border issues with globalization and regionalization. Chapter one, written by Gerald Blake, discusses how general views on the permeability of borders may blur and over-simplify complex realities. In chapter two, Thomas M. Edward provides a normative view on how and why transnational corporations and national states should share a common space of interest. In the third chapter, Robert Adamson offers a legal and political point of view on how public policies have acquired a growing dependence on relatively latent international and transnational issues in the past decades. Part two, *Regionalism and Subregionalism in Europe*, discusses European boundaries whose functions are increasingly defined by the regional integration process. In chapter four, Eberhard Bort compares internal and external borders as they obey cyclical re-definitions to accommodate politics (e.g. they are open and regulate migratory flows). In the fifth chapter, James Wesley Scott examines infra-national activities in the Baltic Sea area and concludes that such cross-border activities constitute necessary dynamics to EU building. The third part of the book, *Emerging Perspectives*, is particularly original because it introduces discussions to the little-known border regions of Africa and Southeast Asia. In chapter six, Anthony I. Asiwaju promotes non-national perspectives in post-colonial Africa. Clive Schofield’s chapter focuses upon trans-maritime cooperation in Southeast Asia and helps to understand how maritime borders reflect transnational cooperations within joint development zones for fishing—in the Gulf of Thailand for instance. Part four, *Redefining Boundaries in the Americas*, sheds light on Latin America. In chapter eight, Heather Nicol shows how the Caribbean states have attempted to promote a regional identity and political links in developing a

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common neo-liberal project. Roy Bradshaw's chapter reminds us of the very specific nature of South American borders that are historically rooted in the colonial Spanish Vice-Royalties and Portuguese colony and Empire: Bradshaw's analysis reflects current aspects of Latin American regional integration dilemmas, in spite of the recent widening of MERCOSUR. Part five, *A Borderless North America?*, examines the Cascadia cross-border region with three chapters (eleven-thirteen) by Donald K. Alper, Alan F. J. Artibise, and Daniel E. Turbeville III and Susan L. Bradbury. They focus on the economic, historical, and political perspectives of this Northwestern cross-border region. Theodore H. Cohn, in chapter ten, compares transportation and infrastructure issues in Cascadia and the San Diego-Tijuana areas.

The last three parts and six chapters of this book change focus from case studies to theoretical discussions. Part six concerns the idea of *Borders as Metaphors*. In chapter fourteen, Mathew Coleman emphasizes the discursive dimensions of borders that are spatial markers as well as symbolic, textual, and social constructions. In chapter fifteen, Steven Jackson presents Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor to suggest that common optimistic perspectives on information technologies hide a more bordered socio-spatial organization of society. The seventh part, *Rethinking Borders: Lines, Spaces and Continua*, then focuses on cartographic and textual views of borders. William B. Wood, in chapter sixteen, shows how the recent humanitarian agenda of NGOs and international organizations has contributed to an increased use of geographic information systems. These, in turn, have led the way to new international operations. In chapter seventeen, Alan K. Henrikson argues that the concept of "good neighbourhood," though pertinent in matters of diplomacy, implies that a boundary policy "should be a 'Mending Wall'" (355) or, in other words, should result from a "consociative" initiative. In the eighth part, Stanley D. Brunn *et al.* underline that boundaries and borderlands have a constant significance in spite of the siren song of a borderless world. In chapter nineteen, David Newman suggests that the tools to measure dynamic objects such as borders and borderlands should be adaptable as well.

Holding the Line thus offers a multi-disciplinary perspective to border studies, taking into account recent global and local events. Three main comments may be suggested. First, it is successful in refusing a deeply rooted border "doxa" (Bourdieu 1998) since it exclusively focuses on questioning practical knowledge of borders. It is also successful in confronting scientific approaches in vogue in the 1990s that depicted the world as "borderless" and globalized. Finally, it provides rich readings that represent a solid toolbox for further comparative and "self-analytical" (Touraine 1995) researches about borders and borderlands.

In conclusion, Heather Nicol reminds us of the role of border "doxa" through the eloquent metaphor of "the framework of the grade-school political map (to which we have all become accustomed)" (418). Arno Peters' work in cartographic studies imposed a healthy distance from European-centered maps that jeopardize our scientific attitude regarding border studies in particular (Peters 1989). In the same vein, the various authors of *Holding the Line* give a multi-disciplinary picture of boundaries. What is striking is the diversity and richness of this volume, not only because most continents are studied, but also because they let us become aware of the relative stability and permanence of borders over time, as reflected in the title.

This volume has another virtue: the editors and each contributor reject the 1990s "borderlessness" principle. Instead, finely shaded scientific analyses make us think about borders according to broad norms but also as "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu

1984; 1993) as they are emerging from the rich perceptions, discourses, and “instrumentalizations” of borders. To do so, the authors focus on specific topics such as: *border security*—whose transgression is, at present, mainly reflected in trans-national terrorism and criminalized migratory issues (e.g. Wacquant 2006); *corporate uses of boundaries and territories*—with global products but differentiated local marketing strategies and inventive fiscal tactics; or *variable social and political re-territorialization*—with various distinct effects in Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, North America, and Europe. In the end, the call for a “conceptual framework for boundary studies” (419) is extremely well documented and justified.

This volume will be very stimulating for scholars. Students, scholars, and political decision-makers will most likely be the first readers of this book. However, a much wider audience interested in understanding the current socio-political environment will also be interested.

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