The Classics' Corner

Borders and marches. Political and geographical factors within international relations

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> To begin with and before all things: the first, original, and truly natural boundaries of states are beyond doubt their internal boundaries… From this internal boundary, which is drawn by the spiritual nature of man himself, the marking of the external boundary by dwelling-place results as a consequence; and in the natural view of things it is not because men dwell between certain mountains and rivers that they are a people, but, on the contrary, mend well together   and, if their luck has so arranged it, are protected by rivers and mountains   because they were a people already by a law of nature which is much higher.
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> (Fichte, *Addresses to the German People*, Address 13)

BORDERS AS ZONES AND AS LINES

The first impression of national borders that we gain from our school desks is *linear.* On a political map of Europe, or the world, the limits of states within each continent are marked by lines that separate areas of different sizes, and these are marked in different colours so as to stand out better. This linear impression may even be reified when we come to an actual border if, for example, by passing through a tunnel or crossing a river we are transported from one country to another. In both the above cases the border represents a line of delimitation. Nevertheless, the experience of travelling across a border is more complex than the intuition of crossing a border we get from reading a map. This is because although the human and social context, as well as language, may gradually change from one side of the border to the other, it may also sometimes remain the same in its fundamental elements. That is, change is gradual, with substantial differences only seen in expressions of public authority, such as flags and military uniforms, or the imagery on coins and banknotes, which have diverse names and values. As for physical features, their homogeneity across borders is, in general, even more pronounced. The notion of a border as a clear and precise dividing line must therefore be reconceived as a broader concept, that of a *zone*. In this sense we can overlay a spatial or zonal concept of a border onto the classical linear notion, thereby introducing the complexity of borders as a phenomenon. We can thus say that although a border is linear from a political and legal perspective   the line which marks out the spatial limits of the scope of state authority   from a geographical and cultural point of view, it may be a zone of contact between politically differentiated societies or geo-historical settlements, which creates tensions or generates isolation. What therefore stands out from this is that borders are a human construction created by and for men, even where they appear to reflect natural boundaries.

The ideas of Pascal on the relativity of ethical judgements of men, not only in time, but also in space, are well known (though in reality these take inspiration from a phrase by Montaigne and should be taken *cum grano salis*): everything becomes different, fairly or unfairly, where climates are different. Moving three degrees away from the poles will bring down jurisprudence; a meridian will dictate the truth. "Plaisante justice qu'une rivière borne! Vérité au deçà es Pyrénées, erreur au delà."[1] There is also another quote from Pascal which is relevant here, taking the form of a brief yet dramatic dialogue: "Why do you kill me? What! do you not live on the other side of the water? If you lived on this side, my friend, I should be an assassin, and it would be unjust to slay you in this manner. But since you live on the other side, I am a hero, and it is just."[2] These strong words from the French thinker provide a perfect representation of borders, not only as a linear concept, but also as a key factor in all aspects of life.

However, the most interesting conclusions we can draw from Pascal's reflections may be, even taking into account the time in which they were recorded, that they intuitively foresaw what modern political borders would represent. Indeed, the linear understanding of a border, even from the political sphere, is a recent concept. Throughout history, and well into modern times, borders have referred to an empty or sparsely populated space. As J. A. van Houtte observes, "humanity has come a long way before arriving at a linear concept of borders, and in many places this development is still far from complete."[3] But even where the process of creating hard, linear borders has been completed, there is nothing to say that things will remain this way in the future. In fact, there would appear to be a move away from hard borders, at least in Western Europe. In this sense, Vicens Vives notes, "today we can see that the rigid border of the nineteenth century arose from a combination technical and spiritual factors present at that time, and it will shortly become outmoded due to the rapid development of modern media and distribution systems. In this sense, the most relevant factor is the inability of contemporary diplomats to establish a political map of Europe following the Second World War. Rather than borders, today's great powers require extensive protective buffers and deep security glacis that distance the geo-historical heartland and state's population from the threat of aerial incursions and rapid invasion of enemy tanks." Indeed, Vives adds, "from a geo-historical perspective, borders should be considered as a periphery of cultural tension   a tension which is almost always creative, and not necessarily belligerent and aggressive. In this sense, political borders are nothing more than phenomena determined by historical and geographical contexts over the course of human societies."[4]

A brief overview of the history of political borders indeed shows us that the concept of the linear border is a relatively recent phenomenon. The great, ancient cultures of the East resembled dense geo-historical islands which were separated from each other

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[1]   *Pensées*, ed. De L. Brunschvicg (Paris, "Classiques Garnier"), nº 294.
[2]   Ibid., nº 293, ""Pourquoi me tuez-vous?
        Eh quoi! Ne demeurez-vous pas de l'autre côté de l'eau? Mon ami, si vous demeuriez de ce côté, je se-rais un assassin et cela serait injuste de vous tuer de la sorte; mais puisque vous demeurez de l'autre côté, je suis un brave, et cela est juste."
[3]   *Géopolitique. Introduction aux factors géographiques de l'Histoire et de la Politique*, Brussels, 1946, p. 107
[4]   *Tratado general de la geopolítica*, 2ª ed., Barcelona, 1956, p. 158.

not only by deserts, but also by stretches of land which were either sparsely populated or which had little geo-historical meaning. This notwithstanding, we must also note that within this context we observe the first historical record of a strict territorial delimitation. The demands of agricultural cultivation required an exact delimitation of the land belonging to each village or town. In Egypt we see the rise of a system of demarcations whose basic unit we know as *nomos*, from Greek, but which in Egypt was called *spat*. As Vicens Vives observes, *spat* derives from the root *sp*, which means 'to divide'.[5] We thus see that the Greek term shares its meaning with the original Egyptian word. In this line Carl Schmitt notes that although the primary meaning of *nemein* in Greek is 'to take', its secondary meaning is 'to divide' or 'to separat'" (according to Schmitt, these are original accepted uses prior to the transfer of the term to political and social contexts, in which it refers to 'us'", 'custom' or 'law').[6]

In ancient Egypt the geometric and linear delimitation of the *spat* or *nomos* thus arises as an internal demarcation — what we would call today a jurisdictional or administrative boundary — within an organised polity which lacks precise external limits. In Mesopotamia the issue of dividing the fertile lands irrigated by the Tigris and Euphrates was more complex, as it came about later and also, due to contextual circumstances, involved the political unification of both river basins. Hence, delimitations could be at the same time international and internal in legal terms (applying these current concepts to a time when they were used less rigorously). In fact, the oldest document of international law that we know of is a treaty setting out the limits of the realms of King of Lagash and the King of Umma, with a neighbouring prince designated as arbiter, in the IV millennium BC.[7] Of equal relevance, however, is the fact that between great constellations of power in the ancient world there were zones of isolation in the style of 'no man's lands' or zones of friction within areas of influence or security. These territories were often under an indirect regime of dependency as protected or tributary states, wherein a change of leadership (frequently with tragic consequences for 'protected' and client populations) reflected the swings and sways of great politics of the epoch. We thus see an incipient version of the modern buffer state, a concept which despite being the pride of classical European diplomacy, was actually devised much earlier. On the one hand this explains why the finely detailed and still-conserved Egypt-Hittite Peace Treaty of 1279 BC between Ramesses II and Hattušiliš III makes no mention of boundaries; on the other hand, it sheds light on the role of Palestine as a zone of tension between the empires which surrounded it.

We thus see that the phenomenon of borders in preclassical antiquity is fundamentally a human concept which arises in line with the human pressures that come from political differentiation and from the general geo-historical context of each age or historical-cultural cycle. That is, the need for borders comes from the security needs of differentiated human groups.

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[5]   Ibid., p. 159.
[6]   From the article "Apropiación, partición, apacentamiento. Un ensayo para fijar las cuestiones fundamentales de todo orden social y económico a partir de nomos", translated by ourselves for the *Boletín Informativo del Seminario de Derecho Político de la Universidad de Salamanca*, nº 2 (January-February 1955), pp. 3 ff.
[7]   Cf. A. Wegner, *Geschichte des Völkerrechts*, Stuttgart, 1936. p. 2.

The trend towards clear cultural and political boundaries manifests itself when, as Vicens Vives notes, "the original geo-historical cores develop a superior culture which must be defended against peripheral groups of *barbarians*."[8] Such is the case of China and the Mongols, or the Roman Empire and the Germanic tribes. In both cases an artificial barrier was established, using geographical features where possible. However, neither the Great Wall of China, which was begun in in 215 BC, nor the Roman limes were rigid borders in the modern sense. During the first century AD, the Roman limes were offensive in nature, conceived as strategic support for northward penetration. It was only later, when expansionist urges had been abandoned, that the limes took on the nature of a wall (although, unlike the Great Wall of China, not in the sense of being able to protect the hinterland in itself).

Following the fall of the Roman Empire, during the Middle Ages in the West borders continued to be regarded in the traditional sense as a zone of transition, unoccupied or sparsely populated, between geo-historical cores. The internal consolidation, and external expansion of these cores would, however, lead to the modern, linear border. The Carolingian Empire created marches which, after the empire's downfall, would continue to exist within the confines of the Christian world with increased autonomy. The border, in this sense, is a zone of incursions, with a legal-international status that is inherently unresolved, leading to disputes and a constant oscillation between war and peace, above all where infidels are on the other side, with whom peaceful coexistence is not a possibility (consider the relations between Christianity and Islam, and the ideas of *impius foedus* and the holy war). From this we see a unique period of lightning raids, which evoke the "romantic ballad of the border of Ben Zulema", below, which colourfully depicts one of many border incursions:

> *"De Granada partió el moro*
> *que se llama Ben Zulema;*
> *allá se fuera a hacer el salto*
> *entre Osuna y Estepa.*
> *Derribado ha los molinos*
> *y los molineros lleva,*
> *y del ganado vacuno*
> *hecho había grande presa,*
> *y de mancebos del campo*
> *lleva las trahillas llenas"*

It is highly interesting to look at the development of the Iberian Peninsula, where shifts in borders followed two perpendicular axes, which were not only geographic but also religious, cultural and political. The southward advances of the Reconquista created delimitations, from west to east, of the spheres of control of the Christian kingdoms. The unique role of marches in medieval Spain has been illustrated by José Antonio Maravall as "a process of warmaking in a situation of perpetual but not permanent war. As such it was used by the Moors, as well as Christians, and not just Frankish Christians but also

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[8]   Vicens Vives, op. cit., p. 160.

those from the western reaches of the Iberian Peninsula."[9] According to Maravall, the imprecision of territorial limits was more pronounced in the Iberian Peninsula than in other countries, becoming important constitutive factors in the development of the kingdom. In this sense the Spanish kingdoms were never 'bodies' but rather 'lands' in different phases of political incorporation.[10] Certain analogies can be drawn here with in what today is Central and Eastern Europe, with the penetration of the Teutonic Order into regions with Slavic populations.

To round off this brief overview of medieval notions of borders, we will cast a look at their long-term impact on terminology. The English term *frontier* designates a border in in the traditional sense of a liminal zone with a sparse population. This is nuanced by the historical experience of the colonisation of North America, which, unlike Mexico and Peru, did not have developed political and cultural centres. The frontier is thus characterised by its sparse population density, an economy of self-sufficiency, and the tough living conditions and unique ways of life that are found in less complex cultures. As Rupert B. Vance observes, this form of social demography has been present in modern times not only in the United States but also in the west of Australia, Latin America (especially Argentina), the north-west of Canada, Siberia and Rhodesia.[11] In contrast, the border in its legal and political sense, as the limit of the scope of state authority, is that of a *boundary*, which its etymology denotes as a delimitation and obstacle. In Germany, the current term *grenze* does not appear until the thirteenth century and, significantly, it is of Slavic origin (*granica* in Polish and Russian; *hranice* in Czech).[12] For this reason the term entered Late High German via the territories of the Teutonic Order. Like many other words, the term entered into common language through the works of Luther. The term which was traditionally used to indicate the confines of a country was *mark*, (from the Gothic and old German word *marka*, whose root was widely used in Indo-Germanic languages). This word, according to to J. Corominas in his *Diccionario crítico etimológico de la lengua castellana,*[13] quickly passed into Gallo-Romanesque via Frankish and spread into Spain from Occitan or Gaulian Latin, becoming most consolidated in Galician-Portuguese (where it possibly came from Gothic or the Suebic Germanic tribes); it signified simply a region or county, later coming to designate peripheral regions or counties. From this we see the term *Markgraf,* meaning count, or the chief of a border region. As land began to be redistributed in the East there was a need for a more precise system of delimitations, and a new term to designate them. In this line, as Otto Maull contends, the substitution of one term for another reflected the gradual transformation of borders from a frontier strip to a border line.[14]

Similar developments took place in France, leading to the substitution of the word *marche* for *frontière*. This new term begins to appear at the beginning of the fourteenth century, being used to designate those most threatened outer limits of the kingdom

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[9]   *El concepto de España en la Edad Media*, Madrid, 1954, p. 150.
[10] Ibid., p. 348.
[11] Art. "Frontier: Geographical and Social Aspects", in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, E. R. A. Seligman, VI, p. 503.
[12] F. Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, 10th edition, Berlin and Leipzig, 1924; cited by O. Maull, *Politische Grenzen*, Berlin, 1928, p. 5.
[13] Madrid, n.d., III, 259.
[14] *Polit. Grenzen*, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

until the end of the seventeenth century.[15] Here the prevailing concept in the idea of the border is that of *the front*, so rather than a linear notion, we begin to see borders represented by the idea of military tension and danger.

The process of border consolidation, at least in European terms, was accelerated by French statism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This reflects the political rationalism that can be seen in the idea of the modern state, as was embodied by the centralist French monarchy of the time. And this was accentuated by the principal of territoriality, which followed from the dogma of sovereignty. It should also be noted that strategic and economic considerations gained importance, especially economic integration, as this required a tight line of customs controls, which in turn implied the need for a continuous, linear demarcation.[16] This notwithstanding, even the borders developed by Vauban were mouldable, as in the case of the French border with the Spanish Netherlands until the Peace of Utrecht, and thereafter with the Austrian Netherlands until the French Revolution. As Charles Rousseau observes, from a poll carried out by Armand Brette, on the eve of the French Revolution it was impossible to settle on where the French borders actually lay with any precision in terms of how we understand the modern sense of the word.[17] At the end of the cycle of bloody wars of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire, Europe's borders were finally drawn with their current precision and rigidity and states now directly came up against each other all over the place. In the words of Professor Terán, we had finally reached a stage of states rubbing up against each other *face-to-face*.

Nevertheless, the linear delimitation of the border failed to supplant certain regional connections, giving rise to special border regulation regimes, of which have persisted over time.

SO-CALLED NATURAL BORDERS

The existence of borders clashes with the fact that on the ground nature does not recognise these boundaries, which explains the aforementioned references to borders as a human construction. This notwithstanding, as borders have the basic function of protecting the group, men have always attempted to use the natural and civilisational resources at hand to create limits that achieve this function. In this sense, we see the rise of the theory of natural borders.

Whilst the theory of natural borders is not exclusively French, it is strongly rooted within France. In this line, it would certainly be interesting to delve into this theory (with its focus on 'borders' in the plural) and seek out contrasts between the Cartesian spirit and the soil of the territorial state, which Promethean German thinkers (think of Ratzel's *raumsim*) have seen spatially as a single whole (*raum, lebensraum, grossraum*). Whilst German historians tend to stress the relevance of this theory, for obvious reasons their French counterparts tend to play it down. Whereas this theory was once the basis of the monarchy's foreign policy, as carried out by Richelieu (the idea of *pré carré*),

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15   Cf. C. Rousseau, "Les frontières de la France", *Rev. Gén. De Dr. Int. Publ.*, 58 (1954), pp. 28-29
16   Cf. J. Brunhes and C. Vallaux. *La géographie de l'histoire*. Paris, 1921, p. 340.
17   Op. cit., p. 29

recent French historiography has revised this interpretation.[18] What Richelieu and the French diplomacy of the *Ancien Régime* sought, according to this reinterpretation, was to consolidate the country's borders in the north east around Metz and Strasbourg (the gateway to Germany). In reality, the theory of natural borders seems to have been more relevant during France's revolutionary period. In fact, despite only being invoked *a posteriori* to justify acquisitions already attained, or for specific aims, the theory was repeatedly brandished, often in conjunction with other theories. The most well-known cases were the allegations of Abbot Gregoire to justify the annexation of Savoy, and Dantón's declaration of January 31 1791 to justify that of Belgium: "The boundaries of France were set out by nature. We will reach them in four points: the ocean, the Rhine, the Alps and the Pyrenees."

Aside from the theory of natural borders being used to justify expansionism (the supposed natural border is generally beyond rather than before the existing border), for both statesmen and lawyers the theory is worth looking at in terms of boundary making. That is, to what extent do natural factors influence the creation and maintenance of a border?

The sea would certainly seem to be the most natural and best of all borders, as authors such as Henning and van Houtte have contended. However, in reality this is far from the case. The sea only separates men from each other when we are talking about vast oceans that cannot be traversed through technology. In other cases, the sea has always been a means of linking peoples. Although it marks a clear limit, it does not, in and of itself, provide security. Coastlines only create a secure military border where they are backed by sufficient naval power. By way of example we can refer to the defencelessness of the Spanish coast following the disaster of the Spanish Armada. In World War II, the existence of sturdy coastal fortifications along the Atlantic couldn't prevent the landing of naval forces that controlled the sea, as well as the air. This vulnerability is even greater for island nations, which are not safe from invasion, as shown by the Norman invasion of England. Furthermore, being an island does not guarantee in any way an ability to dominate the surrounding seas, as seen in the case of Ireland. Isolation is something that is either developed or otherwise by man, not a pre-established reality. In fact, because the seas are zones of contact rather than separation, island powers do not tend to think of their coasts as their borders. As Selden, the renowned author of *Mare Clausum*, contends, "It is true, beyond doubt […] that the shores and ports of the most important neighbours on the other side of the sea are the southern and eastern bounds of the maritime territory of the British Empire; however, to the north and the west, across vast oceans, the bounds of the British Empire are located in the furthest reaches of the these vast seas belonging to the English, Scottish and Irish."[19] As two distinguished French treatise writers highlighted, maritime borders, just like land borders, are *une oeuvre d'Etat*, that is, a creation of the state. And the development and complexity of these maritime borders follow the development and complexity of the state itself.[20]

Whilst sea powers tend to project their borders to foreign coastlines, riparian powers project their domain as far as the immediate coastline, which becomes their territorial

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[18]　See, for exemple, G. Zeiler, *La France et l'Allemagne depuis dix siècles*. Paris, 1932.
[19]　Cf. E. Wolgast, *Grundriss des Völkerrechts, I: Allgemeine Grundlagen*, Hannover, 1950, p. 36.
[20]　Brunhes and Vallanx, op. cit., p. 340.

sea. The delimitation of territorial seas has given rise to, and continues to provoke, countless interpretations and controversies, especially where the claims of one state clash with those of another, as in the case of bays and straits. This is illustrated by the case of the Gulf of Aqaba, in the north of the Red Sea, where three borders come together. Where should the 'natural' border lie here? In these cases and others, such as that of the contiguous sea or the continental shelf, only a human decision, which takes into account the conflicting interests put forward and is conscious of the common good, can resolve the issue.

Although rivers serve as or symbolise borders in many cases (as noted by Pascal), they are in fact the opposite of a 'natural' border. Whilst river borders have the advantage of setting out a clear line (whether as a shore or a *talweg*), this concept of a border fails to consider the natural tendency for settlements along river basins to connect with each other. All the human activities which rivers facilitate and support highlight the interdependence between peoples, not only on opposite shorelines but also between the upper and lower courses of a river. What's more, this interdependence, which was a factor in the political integration of the great river states of the Ancient Near East, has become particularly relevant over the last century and a half with the growing possibilities for river use that come with technological advances. We thus see more attention being paid to the unity of river basins, with the resulting need for standard regulations that go beyond political delimitations. The classic example of this is the way in which developments along the Tennessee River led to the creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority. Obviously, the borders that had to be overcome here were between states which belonged to a federal state, and it might seem premature to transpose this type of arrangement when we talk about the international sphere. But international legal regulation of river transport, as has been developed since the Congress of Vienna,[21] is evidence of the community of interests which are necessarily established around rivers, with the principle of good neighbourliness being an especially relevant field in this respect. It is also relevant that rivers have little strategic value, as is illustrated by the numerous historical cases in which armies have crossed them.

Sometimes the course of a river is interrupted by a lake. Van Houtte argues that lakes are ideal as a border, as crossing them requires the ability to use nautical resources inland, and they are more difficult to cross than a river.[22] We see numerous examples in this respect, such as Lake Ladoga, between Russia and Finland, the Great Lakes which were adopted as a border between Canada and the United States in 1793, the African Great Lakes around Congo, along with well-known lakes in Europe.

More important than lakes and rivers, mountains would seem to be an ideal natural border. Indeed, mountain ranges have always played a role in delimiting human societies. And the higher the mountains, the more difficult it becomes to communicate across them. Without going into the political fragmentation Greece would face if its numerous mountain ranges became borders, we can look at the Romans, who did not include Alta Italia (High Italy) within Italy; this region was named Cisalpine Gaul, as distinct

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[21]   Cf. See the insightful observations of C. De Visscher, *Théories et réalités en droit International públic*, Paris, 1953, p. 352 ff.
[22]   Op. cit. P. 112.

from Transalpine Gaul. But this example merely represents the relative importance of mountains as an isolating element. Furthermore, where mountain ranges have passes which can be transited, they need not acts as dividing lines and states can in fact incorporate mountain ranges within their borders; indeed, the Helvetic Confederation of Switzerland, which was created through the union of three formerly separated cantons, is a paradigmatic example of this. It is only where the extreme altitude of mountains, together with other factors, such as vegetation, makes transiting them too difficult that we see mountains functioning as a geopolitical barrier, as in the case of the colossal peaks of Central Asia. But even in such cases, human activity can overcome geographical features. The Swiss canton of Tesino is located on the southern flank of the Alps, as an inexplicable addition to the Helvetic Confederation. Indeed, the logic would also seem to dictate the union of Portugal and Castille, which are not divided by significant mountain ranges such as the military crests of Aragon, of which Antonio Machado wrote, and which speak similar languages and have rivers which run across them rather than between them. Yet, as an English historian noted, union surprisingly came between Castille and the mountainous terrain of Aragon, where languages closer to Provençal, Occitan and Italian are spoken, rather than with Portugal.[23] And whilst the Pyrenees may seem to be a solid border for Spain, both Catalonia and the Basque Country exist across them due to political vicissitudes; similarly, the height of the Pyrenees did not stop Navarre establishing itself atop their peaks. Indeed, Jean Gottman has reflected on the Pyrenees as a natural border, arguing "The Pyrenees are, beyond any doubt, high, above all because the people living on either side of them have wished them to be so: the French during the era of Spanish dominance; the Spanish during the period of French dominance. We only have to look at the gauge of each country's railways to understand that geographical features are not the biggest obstacle to communication between France and Spain."[24]

There are two competing theories regarding the exact way in which mountains are established as borders. The *hydrographic theory* posits that borders are set along watersheds, whereas the *ridge theory* argues that borders are set along a line linking the highest peaks. Ridge theory was applied to set the border between Spain and France. Whilst hydrographic theory may seem preferable, it does bring problems with it on frequent occasions, with the resolution of these issues depending much more on good neighbourliness than 'natural' facts.

Whilst rivers and mountains are given plenty of attention in the interpretation of borders, the same cannot be said for *vegetation*, whose role as a factor which disperses, and thus separates peoples is often overlooked. Forests are in fact an excellent example of vegetation as a form of geohistorical defence,[25] as they wipe out the possibilities of deploying and supplying an invading army. This can be seen in the routing of Varo's Roman legions by Arminio in the Teutoburg Forest in the year 7 A.D. In temperate zones

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[23] C. E. Nowell, *Histoire de Portugal* (French translation by H. E. Del Médico), Paris, 1953, p. 8. Nowell notes that it is appropriate to consider events that seem to have been largely accidental . He concludes that history and popular feeling are more powerful forces in the creation of a nation than geography and language.

[24] *La politique des Etats et leur géographie*, Paris, 1952, p. 129.

[25] Vicens Vives, op. cit., p. 170.

the densest forests tend to be found on mountainsides, thereby coupling the effect of vegetation with that of relief. A similar effect occurs where dense vegetation is found in swamp zones. This can be seen in the case of Poland between 1919 and 1939, where the border was predominantly based on vegetation, especially around the Pripet Marshes.

The sparse vegetation of steppes, or even desert, is less effective as a border, especially in modern times. Although, like forests, they lack resources, these zones do not present as many obstacles to movement. Borders produced by zones of sparse vegetation are, as Van Houtte notes, more permeable than others, and they are often inhabited by nomadic tribes who exercise constant pressure on surrounding populations, who occupy more favourable terrains.[26] Interestingly, steppes, whose dry inland seas are traversed by nomadic caravans, have always had an important geo-historical role as a link between great cultures. This has been seen in the circumnavigation of Africa and America by Europeans, and has been remarked on by Toynbee.[27] Not only has man always managed to cross deserts, but advances in technology have increasingly reduced their importance as a form of defence, as was seen in the ease with which both sides in the Second World War managed to move around the Libyan Desert.

The conclusion to be drawn from this analysis of the so-called natural borders is that their importance is relative and is generally highly dependent on human factors.

CONVENTIONAL OR MATHEMATICAL BORDERS

In contrast to borders which, with varying degrees of justification, follow geographical features of the earth's surface, we also have *conventional* borders (also known as *artificial* or *mathematical* borders) that cut across natural landscapes and regions in straight lines. The first, large-scale development of this type of border was the marine line established between Spanish and Portuguese possessions under Pope Alexander VI. And a classic example of this can be seen in the border between the United States and Canada, which runs along the 49th parallel for 1,250 miles, cutting through the Red River Valley, the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains. Similarly, in Europe we see the straight border between Russia and Finland as it runs through Lapland. There are problems associated with this type of border, as they are difficult to control and police, and they contain sections which don't fit with local conditions. This type of border is often seen in new states, and they are prevalent as borders of former (and existing) colonies and mandated territories in Africa and the Middle East. In the cases of Korea and Vietnam, borders of this type have been established in an improvised fashion within the country for military reasons.

CULTURAL BORDERS

There is a third type of border to be considered, which fully considers the human factor, namely *cultural borders*. Karl Haushofer[28] was particularly interested in this form

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[26]   Op. cit., p. 110.
[27]   Cf. *Civilization on Trial*, Oxford, 1946, 4th edition, 1953, p. 69 and ff.
[28]   *Grenzen in ihrer geographischen und politischen Bedeutung*, Berlin-Grunewald, 1927; 2nd Edition, 1938

of border, as was van Houtte, who coined the term *natural human borders.*[29] These borders also present problems, as they can be difficult to fix and culture is fluid. Nevertheless, they may be the best form of border in certain cases. The key factors that make them up are language, religion, ethnicity, history and the local economy. The will of local people, who will be affected by this type of border, is highly important and is often expressed through a plebiscite, as in the case of Upper Silesia following World War I and Saarland following both world wars. The principle of nationality is significant in this respect, which puts forward the idea that state borders should group together peoples who share a cultural identity. But there are difficulties in achieving this.

Some recent examples of political borders being drawn in line with cultural borders include the following: the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, based on the distribution of religious groups (93% of the population are Catholic in the Republic, whereas 33% are in Northern Ireland); the border between India and Pakistan, also for reasons of religious faith (Hinduism and Islam); similarly, Ceylon, a Buddhist island state at India's southern tip is a separate state from India. But there remain minority religious and cultural groups within these states, especially where states have been formed from the fragmentation of larger state or imperial entities (such as in the Balkans), as these often involved population movements and contacts between diverse groups. In this line, we should also remember the case of the Kashmir, between India and Pakistan.

The broad typologies of border that we have analysed are not mutually exclusive. Given the way in which states and borders have grown through history, borders are usually of a mixed nature in terms of their type.

THE POLITICAL-HISTORICAL CONDITIONING OF BORDER STABILITY

From the foregoing analysis, it can be seen that the *stability* of borders does not depend on geographical features but rather on the historical relations between peoples. Borders "respond to the vitality of geo-historical settlements, which generates tension in the periphery."[30] In this line we can compare the zones of tension in Alsace-Lorraine between 1871 and 1939, and those in contemporary Eastern Europe, with the stable border zones in Western Europe. In Europe today these border tensions have tended to lose their former importance in the light of more pressing global problems, as we can see in the recent peaceful solution of border disputes in Trieste and Saarland.

However, borders should not only be understood as zones of tension, as they are also zones of transit. As Gottmann observes, "the border problem in terms of foreign affairs is not about a line which must be maintained, or stopping the spread of sovereignty over one line or another. The problem relates to what goes on beyond these lines, to the relations between phenomena which occur beyond the border and those within a territory […]. In this regard the aspect of neighbourliness is highly relevant. Borders, whether on land or sea, are increasingly a space of contact with foreign actors."[31]

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[29]   Op. cit., p. 113.
[30]   Vicens Vives, op. cit,. P. 172.
[31]   Op. cit., pp. 132-3.

THE LOCATION OF CAPITAL CITIES

Another aspect to consider with relation to borders, and which is often overlooked in terms of international relations and geopolitics, is the proximity or distance of the border from the main political and economic centres of a state, especially the capital city. Aside from the importance a capital city may have in terms of economics and communications, it also plays a psychological role in unifying a population, as van Houtte observes. For this reason we see many capital cities   such as Madrid, Paris, Rome and Brussels   in a central location within their respective states. This is not only necessary for geographical reasons, or in order to effectively mediate between diverse groups which are spread around within a state, but also to ensure the capital is well protected during potential conflicts. In this vein, van Houtte notes that "the fall of a capital city during a conflict brings with it the loss of a source of national unity, which may have fatal psychological consequences over the regions which have not yet been occupied."[32]

A country's hubs of economic activity are often located near borders, such as in the case of the steelmaking industry in Lorraine in France and the coalfields of Saarland and Silesia for Germany and Poland respectively. The same may occur with the capital, in which case the state will tend to obtain a more favourable border through a protective glacis (the annexation of Lorraine by Prussia in 1871; the creation of Saarland by France in 1919 and its reconstitution, with a customs union, following World War II; the incorporation of Silesia into Poland, also following World War II; Yugoslavia's northerly shift of its northern border through World War I in order to decongest Belgrade). As proximity has a special effect on the capital city, we also witness cases in which the capital itself is changed. When Turkey lost its Balkan territories, Constantinople lost its central location, and was replaced by Ankara as the capital. Russia did the same after losing its western provinces in World War I, though here we need to consider other factors, as it wished to distance itself spiritually from the West. The French policy of protecting Paris is also a result of this, as seen in *poussée vers l'est*, as developed by Richelieu. Indeed, one of the most serious consequences of World War II for Germany, in addition to the loss of territory in the east (comparable in magnitude to Spain hypothetically losing Al-Andalus and it being occupied by a Muslim power, with the expulsion of its current inhabitants), is the proximity of Berlin to a traditionally hostile border.

The fact that numerous states in Europe and beyond (especially in the Americas) have their capitals in coastal regions (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Portugal, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina etc.) is due to the importance of these cities as ports and entry points, where the first settlements were established, with the strategic geographical considerations mattering less (which is also true more generally in the age of nuclear weapons).

MARCHES

Through looking at the role of borders as zones of transition and contact, as well as of differentiation, we are able to appreciate the importance of marches, which sometimes

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[32]   Op. cit., p. 116.

give rise to regionalisms and often constitute the nucleus of a new state. Austria, for example (Ostmark, Oesterreich), was the old march of the German Empire; Prussia was the former march of Brandenburg; we also see Serbia and Romania, amongst others. However, only states of a certain size can have marches, and there is a fine line between marches and buffer states. In modern times, where great empires, or superpowers, face each other off over vast zones, groups of states can sometimes act as buffer states: for example, Germany and Austria (as well as Switzerland), and Russia's satellite countries, if they became neutral. Of particular relevance here are the series of buffer states that were created between the Russian and British empires in Asia in response to the rivalry between the two empires.

An interesting psychological and political aspect of marches and borderlands is the way they affect the state of mind of their inhabitants. In times of peace, the inhabitants of marches have a heightened perception of their connections with neighbouring states than inhabitants away from the border; in times of conflict, their unique location either generates an increased level of patriotism or hopeless resignation. Regardless of the sentiment, there is a heightened sensitivity to everything related to international politics, which sometimes creates a certain lack of understanding or mistrust towards their compatriots living away from the border. We see these relations in Germany, which is in the centre of Europe and surrounded by foreign states, with the use of special words to designate those living in border areas: *grenzleute* and *grenzvolk*.

Gottmann has drawn attention to the historical role of marches in the borderlands of Central Europe in terms of the pressures emanating from Asia. "Over the centuries, the large zone of marches in Central Europe seems to have developed the role of 'barrier zone' for many important movements through history. Professor David Mitrany has observed that all the great waves that affected Europe's past ground to a halt along a line that runs from the depths of the Adriatic to the southern shores of the Baltic. Whilst this line may have shifted from its eastern incarnation of Leningrad to Fiume to its western manifestation of Lubeck to Venice, the great movements pushing towards Europe have always stopped within the vast triangle that lies between these lines. The advancing Slavs, the Ottoman Empire and the Orthodox Church all failed to move through this zone in their westward expansions; similarly, the Carolingian Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Reformation, the Napoleonic conquests and the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century all floundered in this zone as they spread towards to the east. Today the Iron Curtain runs down through this zone."[33] Zones of this type are also found between other civilisations, though the reasons for them are not always clear.

Gottmann goes on to comment that "these vast barriers do not stop circulation. For reasons which we do not yet understand, they sometimes create marches between great civilisations. These zones are seen between the East and West in Europe, between Asian and Caucasian in Asia, between black and white Africa, and there may well be others in other parts of the world."[34] In line with the idea of Pirenne on the Mediterranean as a Christian-Muslim sea, we can view the Mediterranean as a liquid march between the

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[33] Op. cit., p. 142.
[34] Ibid., p. 143.

Western or European world and the Islamic world. After centuries of tensions   marked by the Reconquest of Spain, the Crusades, the Turkish counteroffensive and the era of protectorates   the Mediterranean, or *Mare Nostrum*, has become a zone of transition between political and cultural spheres which have finally accepted the need to coexist.

All this may just be a sign of the inability of civilisations to expand beyond certain limits, meaning that the phenomenon has more to do with culture and history than with geography. Gigantism is thus just as antinatural in international politics as it is in biology. Indeed, expansionism has often been the prelude to collapse or regression, which man tragically seems unable to learn from.

A DIGRESSION ON THE IDEA OF THE 'SHIFTING FRONTIER' IN NORTH AMERICAN CULTURE

In this brief digression we will look at the historical and cultural phenomenon of the border and its role in stimulating the development of a nascent society. Specifically, we will look at the North American frontier through the interpretation provided by Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932), professor at the University of Wisconsin, in his classic work *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1893).

As a child of the frontier, Turner felt its vital force and perceived its intrinsic movement as a key element in the development of US culture. The conditions under which the English migrated to North America, followed by a diverse range of other nationalities, gave rise, according to this interpretation, to an aggressive form of individualism which was further hardened by the tough conditions of the frontier. We thus see a situation in which individuals with their own, fully developed culture suddenly find themselves in an area of abundant, free land which anyone could claim as much of as they wanted. Importantly, free individuals could build a society upon this land and shape it as they wished, without the constraints of a pre-existing tradition. From this we see the rise of a certain type of farmer as the forerunner to a unique culture which was at the same time rooted in, and free from, European culture.

It is not within the remit of this article to carry out an extensive analysis of the concept of the North American frontier, which has been gloriously illustrated in many a good Western, as this falls into the realm of general sociology.[35] Nevertheless, it is worth referencing Karl Dietrich Bracher,[36] who sees within the frontier the roots of North American notions of progress, which, from the base of the concept of imperial succession, culminates in the pioneers' extolment of democracy as lauded by Walt Whitman. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is the equivalent of Homer's *Iliad* for this fledgeling nation, and Whitman wished to "define America, her athletic Democracy" (to foreign lands), and "project the history of the future" (to a historian), and encouraged the States

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[35]   For an overview of this theme, see the article by F. L. Paxton, "Frontier: American History," in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, op. cit. pp. 500-503, and the corresponding bibliography.

[36]   "*Der Frontier-Gedanke*: Motiv des amerikanischen Fortschrittsbewusstseins", in *Zeitschrift für Politik*, Neue Folge, II (1955), pp. 228-36

and cities of America, for their love of freedom, to "resist much, obey little."[37] Indeed, Whitman knew how to capture the way that men of the frontier created realities from their virgin land in his verses, which sprung like cosmic flows:

> We take up the task eternal, and the burden and the lesson,
> Pioneers! O pioneers!
> All the past we leave behind,
> We debouch upon a newer mightier world, varied world,
> Fresh and strong the world we seize, world of labour and the march,
> Pioneers! O pioneers!
> All the pulses of the world,
> Falling in they beat for us, with the Western movement beat,
> Pioneers! O pioneers!
> (*Pioneers! O pioneers!* verses 4, 5 and 15)

This poem, along with others, is worthy of a full reading.

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[37] "To the States or any one of them, or any city of the States,
Resist much, obey little,
Once unquestioning obedience, once fully enslaved,
Once fully enslaved, no nation, State, city of this earth,
ever afterward resumes its liberty."