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Review Article

Changing Paradigms of Territory and Boundary Studies in Political Geography

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Abstract

Boundary studies as a sub-discipline of political geography has undergone several momentous transformations during its evolution. The classical period was predominantly concerned with demarcating the ideal boundary for achieving a stable geopolitical order. This changed during the latter part of the 20th century when scholars began contemplating the role of boundary as a social force. Postmodern understanding of boundaries concerned itself with questions of identity and the narratives of boundary. The focus on territory and territoriality marks another departure from contractual boundary between states to a more cultural notion. In stark contrast to the spatial perception of boundary and territory stands the stream of literature exploring social boundaries investigating the symbolic boundaries that facilitate the social differentiation between various groups of people. The present study comprehensively reviews the three intertwined branches and indicates the need to fuse these traditions and offer suggestions on how to do so. The article also contemplates necessary adaptations to the field going forward.

Keywords

Boundary, boundary studies, cognitive boundary, social boundary, territory

Boundaries are the gatekeepers of global political order, and as such, they are intricately intertwined with the nature of state. Pre-modern states were characterized by a core–periphery structure; other than military installations, bureaucratic influence gradually waned into a frontier (Smith, 2005; 2007).

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Imperialist states often co-opted local elites at the periphery than maintaining strict boundaries (Agnew, 2005). On the contrary, classical modern states meticulously delineated and maintained boundaries. Limits to spatial sovereignty formed a fundamental building block of nation states (Biggs, 1999). Boundaries were transformed from a negotiated zone to a jurisdictional entity (Held, 2002, p. 3). More recently, neoliberal states experienced an apparent relaxation of their territorial control once distinct boundaries between states became increasingly fuzzy and developed into a zone of transition (Kearney, 1991; Varsnayi & Nevins, 2007). Academic enquiry into states also started looking into social categories and identities at the level of individuals and groups (Sibley, 1995). Into the third decade of the 21st century, global political orders appear to move away from liberal and neoliberal regimes to what Crane and Grove (2018) termed as 'illiberalism'. Boundary studies would also undoubtedly adapt itself to the changing nature of state, but the direction political geography will traverse in the coming years is anybody's guess.

However, despite burgeoning literature looking beyond the macro-picture, boundary studies remain disproportionately focused on international boundaries (Ramutsindela, 2019). In a way, future direction and theorization of the discipline continue to be envisioned around nation states and geopolitics (Jones, 2012; Rumford, 2006). Even when the discussion devolves into identity and 'ethnicization', it is usually analysed at the level of states and fails to escape the hegemony of formally defined bounded spaces: '…borders can be theorized reasonably only as part of wider production and reproduction of territoriality/territory, state power, and agency' (Johnson et al., 2011, p. 62; Yuval-Davis, 2004).

Scholarship within the domain of political geography, quite unsurprisingly, focused on boundaries as delimiters of space, sometimes spilling over into its cultural consequences. Semantic understanding of boundaries is not restricted to physical spaces, and academic enquiries are often carried over into the cognitive realm of categorizing the real world, conceptualizing, conserving and contesting social differences. The boundaries of cognitive realm are as dynamic as their physical counterpart; constantly in a flux being constructed, eroded and reinvented both organically from within and imposed from outside (Hall, 1996; Jenkins, 2014). Social isolation and a clearly demarcated boundary between in-group and out-group regarding customs, norms and moral values are key criteria in delineating a social group and understanding social identities. As such, they are among the most widely studied themes in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and psychology. Despite the interwoven nature of the cognitive and physical boundaries at all levels, political geography rarely focuses on this dialectic beyond national identity and international boundaries.

At this juncture, this article is a look back at different theoretical traditions in boundary studies to assess their evolving trajectory and ascertain key areas where a synthesis between different strands would be possible. We try to conceptualize boundary studies in the mould of Lefebvre's (1991) conceived, perceived and lived spaces. The article starts with the contractual boundaries, the most apparent physical manifestation of the concept. The section is organized in a temporal

presentation, from the quest to find the ideal boundary in classical sovereignty regime to the purported postmodern turn at the end of the 20th century. Then, we focus on cultural boundary—from the invisible barriers of personal and community spaces to territorial assertion of imagined communities. Finally, we deal with cognitive boundary—non-spatial extension to social categories that have carved out its own niche within the discipline. In the end, we attempt to extend the spatiality paradigm (Hillier, 2008) to the realms of boundary studies and propose a synthesis between the three theoretical traditions and suggest possible avenues for political geography to incorporate cognitive boundaries within its epistemology.

Contractual Boundary

The first half of the 20th century can be considered as the zenith of boundary studies. As nation states pursued the perfect boundary for an ideal geopolitical order, boundary studies assumed centre stage in flourishing political geography scholarship—a trend that was only intensified with European reorganization and decolonization (Jones, 1959; Minghi, 1963). As a part of the modernist ontological paradigm, the discipline devoted its resources in identifying the perfect boundaries and, by extension, the perfect political units. The dichotomy of 'good' or 'natural' boundary and 'bad' or 'artificial' boundary was widely accepted, and debate raged on the best way to arrive at it.

One of the most prevalent concepts, at least academically, was natural boundaries. Fascination with it can be said to have been originated from the age of Enlightenment philosophies as the inspiration was inevitably elicited from nature to determine the ideal means of governing human affairs. During the age of Enlightenment, particularly in France, this idea became an academic and political justification behind territorial expansions (Pounds, 1954). Imperial expansions in the 18th and the 19th centuries were wrought with the prospect of arriving at a perfect boundary set by natural limits (Morrison, 2014). Dominance of the idea persisted throughout the two world wars; the significant reshuffling of European political order was rooted in the idea of natural boundaries (Paasi, 2009).

From a legal point of view, boundaries mark the limits of sovereignty and, by extension, become the first line of defence in the case of foreign aggression. Thus, pragmatically, political boundaries were conceptualized as a predominantly military affair to protect the cultural homeland (Prescott & Triggs, 2008). The role of physical features in both tactical and strategic defence was paramount in boundary delimitation. During antiquity, the Roman Empire limited its territorial expansion by arriving at strategically defensible boundary of Rhine and Danube (Sicker, 2010). Till the 19th century, European political thought was dominated to a large extent by the notion of defensible frontiers and strove towards achieving the geopolitical order of sustained peace (Mitzen 2013). At the end, however, boundaries are mapped by the victors, and after all the 'scientific' considerations, boundaries are eventually 'fixed by a process of bargaining' (Srebro, 2013). They are ultimately an expression of power—power of the conqueror over the conquered.

This discrepancy was never clearer than during colonization, where European powers drew boundaries to demarcate their domain with little regard to local culture or history. The term geometric boundary was coined for delimitation of spatial units with the help of mathematically precise straight or carved lines. If boundary making was being exercised in an unsettled land or one with little economic value, straight lines were perceived as the simplest and most efficient form of boundaries (Prescott, 2014; Hubbard, 2008). Arguably, the most well-known early instance of this kind of a boundary is the Treaty of Tordesillas, where the Papal Authority used the 135 west meridian to settle a dispute between Spain and Portugal over the new worlds, which had a major impact on internal boundaries of Australia originating from the first divide between the Dutch and the Spanish colonies (Carney, 2013; Steinberg, 1999).

However, as vital as land or defensible barriers were, people were always more important in delineating boundaries and establishing political units, especially in a densely populated region with aspirations of cultural expression and political autonomy. It is thus no wonder that in the 20th century, the most persuasive and perhaps the most practised theoretical underpinning behind state reorganization has been the idea of nationalism and pursuit for creating nation states. Linkages between the idea of nation and political boundaries had always been extensively debated, expressed as the 'chicken and egg argument' by Newman (2001). This connection is lucidly explained in Biger (2011, pp. 71–73) in his differentiation between 'nation before boundary' and 'boundary before nation' model. The key idea is expressed in the words, 'Nationalism has been defined, in effect, as the striving to make culture and polity congruent, to endow a culture with its own political roof, and not more than one roof at that', or to put it briefly, 'the political and national unit should be congruent' (Gellner, 1983, pp. 43, 1).

Multiple plebiscites were conducted, and many former empires were stripped of their territories to validate the national aspirations (Prott, 2016). Soon after its introduction in the political arena, the concept was appropriated by the nationalist anticolonial movements as their theoretical justification for wanting to be free of imperial powers (Manela, 2007). Since then, struggles to conform the political units to national identity have led to several redrawings of international boundaries, with the most (in)famous instance being the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991 (Koskenniemi, 1994).

Throughout this period, boundary study was conceived predominantly as affairs of state. It was almost exclusively focused on international boundaries, and the emphasis was on arriving at the best boundary to suit the global geopolitical order. It was thus inevitable that following a general disenchantment with the supremacy of nation states, boundary studies also underwent a profound shift around the 1980s. Paasi (1999) observed this dramatic shift and attributed it to three major reasons:

- disappearance of the east–west dichotomy at the tail ends of the Cold War,
- a renewed interest in the minority social and ethnic identities and
- A rapid increase in 'boundary crossings and transgressions'.

Paasi (1999) postulated that boundary studies should be, and is being examined, beyond the manifestation of boundary as a political–physical line delving into the

spaces of symbolic representations. A more refined and elaborate version of what they proclaimed as a post-modern trend can be found in Newman and Paasi (1998, pp. 190–198), where they identified four main themes within the discipline, '1) the suggested "disappearance" of boundaries; 2) the role of boundaries in the construction of socio-spatial identities; 3) boundary narratives and discourse; and 4) the different spatial scales of boundary construction'.

Disappearance of Boundary

Boundary between states persisted as one of the most fundamental considerations in political geography. This primacy, however, came to be challenged in the 1980s with something that would eventually take over the academic circles in the form of a buzzword—'globalization'. The dominant school of thought has been to assume that the organization of social life transcended the nation state and delves into a growing sense of awareness about the existence of a global social order, thus rendering national boundaries obsolete (Holton, 2011). The most famous culmination of such arguments was Agnew's (1994, p. 77) 'territorial trap' where he argued that 'Social, economic and political life cannot be ontologically contained within the territorial boundaries of states through the methodological assumption of timeless space'.

The idea that globalization is a unique phase in the history of political geography has been discredited by several authors. By studying the history of capitalism, Singh (2008) postulated that modern globalization is nowhere qualitatively different than the laissez-faire economic order a century earlier. Murphy (1996) also looked into the past developments of political boundaries and concluded that it is not the first time the legitimacy of the dominant political order is being called into question. Political boundaries, and by extension the discipline of boundary studies, are very much a part and parcel of our modern globalized society. Questions being raised against their dominance are not as much a paradigm shift as the eternal confrontation between the established and the emerging: 'The construction and demolition of boundaries is as old as human society itself, as exemplified in the we-they distinction and in the construction of the other' (Oommen, 1995, p. 255).

Boundary and Socio-spatial Identities

Following the larger paradigm shift of the last quarter of the 20th century, boundary studies had its own cultural turn. Focus here has been to cull the larger-than -life grandiosity of boundaries and to bring it down from concerns of geopolitical order to everyday social interaction. This sentiment is perfectly captured in the words of Sibley (1988, p. 409), '…a more general problem of boundary erection and maintenance in the shaping of social relations and the creation of social space'.

The amalgamation of spatial and social identity culminated in the concept of social space. Traditionally, academic discussion around social space was primarily concerned with a structuralist reading of social morphology (Bourdieu, 1985). Since the last decades of the 20th century, however, behaviourists and existentialists have applied it to a subjective reading of socio-spatial identities. Subjective social space, space as perceived by communities, is at the heart of this discussion. This infusion of social and spatial in the real and perceived boundaries of everyday life is present everywhere, from nation state to the most local and familiar spaces. Ozaki and Lewis (2006) perfectly captured this milieu in their study of Japanese house plans and the role of cultural practices in boundary making within it. This postmodern school of thought tried viewing boundaries not as a monolithic delimiter of political units, but in the microcosm of everyday life. The focus on individuals necessitated a cognitive understanding of territory and the cultural practices shaping the boundary between the habitual and alien.

Boundary Narratives of Inclusion and Exclusion

Postmodern tendencies, in contrast to the classical period, did not consider boundaries to be an end in itself rather exploring the inclusionary or exclusionary roles they play to people inhabiting either side of it. The storytelling narratives that 'describe the world in relation to a subject' are integral to the spatial tradition and yet were largely ignored by the academia (Entrikin, 1991).

Spatial and boundary analysis, however, despite being one of the foremost elements of inclusivity–exclusivity, was much delayed in adopting the narrative approach. 'The boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequence, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially' (quoted by Paasi, 2012). By invoking the term 'territorial socialization', Newman (2001) argued that the relation between boundary and identity is a constructed process; by socializing the constituent national and ethnic groups, state agencies ensure their belongingness, and by extension, loyalty is rooted to the territorial unit. The discursive address of cultural identification (and often homogenization) is strategized by the state through the use of literary devices, projecting the present social cleavages into an antiqued past (Bhabha, 2013). In the creation of boundary narratives, inclusion and exclusion are perennially intertwined; it is by excluding the 'other', an inclusive national integrity is achieved. Identity of an individual as part of a national community is almost always reflected in juxtaposition to the 'other'. National identity narrative, thus, reverberates around singling out and often eliminating the 'other' in favour of consolidating self (Benhabib, 1996).

Boundaries of Spatial Scale

For most of the academic history, boundary studies almost exclusively concerned itself with international boundaries. It is only during the postmodern turn that lines of separation between smaller spatial units were given any recognition.

Although for most part they are not considered qualitatively different from international boundaries, scholarship in this field often laid emphasis on the dynamic fragility of state boundaries, drawing attention to nationalist movements within existing states. Taylor (1994) commented that as cultural containers, states tend to gravitate towards ever smaller units; further, he argued that drawing political boundaries along cultural lines may improve interstate relations. It is evident that the number of states is not static, and today's internal boundaries can become tomorrow's international boundaries. As Prescott and Triggs (2008) elaborated with the example of French West Africa—during the decolonization process, it is the internal boundaries of the former colonial nations that were elevated to the status of international boundaries. Internal boundaries also gain prominence in the case of highly federalized countries with several semi-autonomous regions where internal boundaries can be experienced as 'hard boundaries'; an example of this can be found in Klemencic (2001) in his analysis of internal divisions of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Cultural Boundary

The past 50 years also witnessed a shift in academic attention from boundaries to more abstract concepts of territory and behavioural aspects of territoriality (Johnston, 2001). Whereas contractual boundaries demarcate limits of sovereignty and exercise of authority, questions of territory and territoriality are more concerned with cultural association to land and intersubjective perception about its limits (Elden, 2010). Territory is not merely bounded space but should be understood as political technology. As representation of an abstract space, they are intricately linked to the nature of state, its political practices and institutional arrangements (Brenner & Elden, 2009; Elden, 2013). However, this overemphasis on statecraft is often a residue of the discipline's fascination with nation states and may present a fairly narrow outlook to the concept. Although questions of political economy can never be ignored, one must expound on the more holistic evolutionary role territory has played.

An organic desire to achieve spatial exclusivity is often touted as an evolutionary survival strategy, the 'intraspecific aggression' ensuring dispersal of population, so as not to exhaust all sources of nutrition (Lorenz, 2005). Even as biologists tout territoriality as a fundamental organic behaviour, a distinction is often made between the evolutionary principles of monopolizing space in order to foster competition, to that of human territoriality; usually, it is cognized as an organizational strategy for social, economic or cultural activities (Gregory et al., 2009). The present endeavour, being centred on boundary studies, is situated more within the realm of human territoriality.

Human Territoriality

The question that has always plagued scholars is whether or not humans are fundamentally territorial beings; whether achieving territorial control is a

genetically fixed behaviour, or are the human not territorial by nature, or perhaps it is all circumstantial, an evolutionary imperative to suit any given context (Dyson-Hudson & Smith, 1978). Sack (1983, p. 55) defines human territoriality as, '…the attempt to affect, influence, or control actions and interactions (of people, things and relationships) by asserting and attempting to enforce control over a geographic area'. Meaning and characteristics of territory within human behaviour remained a hotly contested topic; through Sacks to Raffestin, Soja, Gottmann and Malmberg, the idea has undergone several iterations and modifications (Murphy, 2012). As an alternate example, it is worthwhile to look into the works of Wickham and Zinn (2001) as the authors approached the issue from an attitudinal and emotional angle. Contemporary transformation has witnessed the idea being manifested in varied social settings, like Usher and Kerstetter's (2015) work on 'localism' and territorialization of surfing space among tourists.

Arguments around territoriality in the context of modern society and nation state depart considerably from notions of territorial behaviour in biology and anthropology. It is only in the late 1960s that the discussion of territory was brought forward in social sciences by psychology and another decade or so for it to become mainstream among scholars arising from dissatisfaction with the overuse of the term 'space' (Raffestin, 2012). Private property is undoubtedly the cornerstone of territorial behaviour. It is, however, at a societal scale that the concept realizes its potential in understanding the political organization of space (Soja, 1971).

The idea of an exclusive and defended space within the realm of human society is nowhere manifested as vividly as in the case of personal space. In his seminal work, Hall (1969) talked about the 'small protective sphere or bubble'; an invisibly bounded space of non-contact that every individual maintains around themselves. Study of personal space stood the test of time and remains relevant even in the 2000s as researchers tried to ascertain the cultural variation in the cognizance of personal space (Beaulieu, 2004). Manifestation of territorial forms beyond personal space, but smaller than administrative or political units can often be experienced within the dense populace of urban centres. Distinction between public and private may often be fluid in a small urban neighbourhood; surrounded by known faces, parochial spaces of a familiar locale would make one feel 'at home' and assume expressions of social territory (Lofland, 2017). Contrary to the biological territorial behaviour of combative competition for space, urban territories are negotiated as a symbolic language of space (Hirschon & Gold, 1982). This convergence of the material and immaterial, physical and social is exemplified in the writings of Brighenti (2010a) as she investigated the 'territorial formations' within the public domain with her analysis of how social relations of wall graffiti can be elevated from territorial markers to territories themselves.

State and Territory

The concept of territory can be applied beyond its apparent spatial connotations, and its superimposition as relational criteria is at the heart of its use as a

'boundary-drawing' mechanism (Brighenti, 2006). After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, hierarchical control of medieval period was replaced with equal sovereignty based on a territorial principle and paving way for the modern state system. Furthermore, the anti-hegemonic tenets (that of Catholic Church) and exclusive authority within their territorial limit meant that lines of separation between states became more important than ever (Flint & Taylor, 2007). Despite being heavily critiqued on multiple fronts (Krasner, 1995), Westphalian order of territorial sovereignty and internal autonomy remained the building block of international geopolitical order throughout its existence.

The despotic power of state and the monopoly of violence are largely due to its territorial domination, as state monopolizes any form of territorial autonomy and subsumes other social forces within its fold (Agnew, 2002). Even though internal sovereignty is the most talked about aspect of territoriality, it is hardly the only expression of territory in the spatial organization of political activity. Cox (2008) drew attention to the territorial subdivisions within states and the role it plays in representation; he further discussed that the division of labour and distribution of spaces within the state is at least partly territorial with exclusive administrative zones. Despite it being the building block of several major academic paradigms of modern era, theory of territory remained considerably polysemic and ambiguous. Brighenti (2010b, pp. 52–53) lamented the lack of attention paid to 'territorology' and stated '…the term itself sounds uncanny and slightly arcane among social scientists'.

However, the all-encompassing and universal use of territoriality in political geography has not gone unchallenged. Agnew and Corbridge (2002) argued that the exclusivity of territorial state came at the cost of annihilating plurality. Replacement of the hierarchical arrangement of feudal structure with centralized territorial identity has usually been accompanied with a hegemonic homogenization of the population. Territorial sovereignty accepts a bounded polity where state boundaries supersede democratic principle, that is, the democratic decision-making is subordinate to the territorial unit. Abizadeh (2008) hypothesized that democratic theory is inconsistent with closed boundaries of territorial sovereignty. Foucault (2007) questioned the supremacy of territory and claimed it to be subsidiary to population, which he contended to be the subject of assertion of state power, be it through constructing disciplinary spaces or by governmentalization of people.

In spite of all the criticisms, importance of territory cannot be overstated. At the wake of the globalization debate and a strong negation from international relations, scholars had once again focused attention towards theorizing territory in the early 2000s, and several notable efforts have been made thus far (Banai et al., 2014). Going beyond the debates of biological versus social and instinctive versus contextual, territory and territoriality have flourished as one of the cornerstones of political geography and international studies, having immense contribution and influence in the discipline of boundary studies.

Cognitive Boundary

Boundaries are not only physical or culturally perceived dividers of space, but they also inhibit the cognitive realm, separating one category from another. As the role of boundary shifts from delimiting space to classifying society, several prefixes are used to denote this fundamental change in character, 'symbolic' and 'social' boundary being the most popular. Symbolic boundaries create distinctions in the consciousness of reality; they are '…the lines that include and define some people, groups and things while excluding others' (Epstein, 1992, p. 232). As symbolic boundaries become entrenched in society and manifest themselves in social interaction, these in turn are transformed into social boundaries. In a sense, symbolic boundaries can be viewed as a necessary yet insufficient condition for social boundaries (Lamont, 1992). Symbolic boundaries are essentially a principle of classification; a way to categorize things and concepts for people to arrive at an 'agreed upon definition of reality'; social boundary, on the other hand, are objectification of such cognitive differences, and the questions of power and unequal access to resources and opportunities are inherently embedded in the concept (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Perceived spatial boundaries in the social space are systematically drawn by the community and are often analogous to symbolic boundaries of the local social space (Jarness, 2018).

Lamont et al. (2001) recognized the continued influence of Weber and Durkheim in the academic pursuit of boundary studies, which they proclaimed to have branched in three different paths focusing on cultural inequality, identity and moral order. Similarly, Tilly (2004) investigated how social boundaries are constructed within a neighbourhood. He recognized that the social actors would usually borrow the existing symbolic boundaries and reinforce these in their social interactions, more often than not forming a discriminatory social boundary in the process. Neighbourhood spatial proximity is more likely to generate and strengthen symbolic boundaries than blurring them. Van Eijk (2011) found that neighbours are often close enough to observe the categorical markers to ascribe symbolic boundaries; yet, they lack the personal interaction necessary to eradicate preconceived prejudices. Symbolic boundaries are transformed into social boundaries when institutionalized. Bail (2008) studied how citizenship or secularism is institutional norms that generate social boundaries, and when these are challenged with symbolic boundaries of religion, race and language in the form of migration waves from the Middle East to Europe, new dimensions of symbolic and social boundaries are created. 'The negotiation of cultural compromise' for a community manifests in marking its symbolic boundaries, as Wimmer (2002) explained that this 'process of social closure' leads to forming distinct social categories.

Foucault's illuminating interpretation of Borges's 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' runs into disorder of the incongruous, a disturbing heterotopia that remains a testament to the postmodern fascination with categories (Foucault, 2005). The concept of symbolic boundaries has thus pervaded in the pedagogy of science itself, where taken-for-granted categories are being challenged from several quarters. Jones (2009) pointed out two chief sources of

interest—post-structural thoughts disputing that social construction of categories being ‘imbued with uneven power relationship’ and the cognitive role that category plays in human mind. He further argued that the ‘paradox of categories’ arise from the symbolic boundary of categories being considered as open and fluid, one the one hand, while rigid and tightly bound containers, on the other hand. Contesting Jones’ arguments, Schaffter et al. (2010) tried to bring symbolic boundaries within the spatial realm by linking the semantic and topological boundaries through the process of ‘reification–naturalization–fetishization’. This debate is further expounded by Gieryn (2008) as he contradicted the essentialist and constructivist arguments of making boundary among science, technology and society.

Linking Spatial and Non-spatial

The last quarter of the 20th century was a period of turmoil for boundary studies. Widespread commentaries regarding the end of nation state inevitably affected the discipline hitherto ensconced within a statist paradigm (Storey, 2009). In the new millennia, it is almost unequivocally accepted that geopolitical order remains territorially entrenched. However, with the waning influence of deconstruction and structural analysis, a rigorous theoretical framework continues to elude political geography in general and boundary studies in particular (Flint, 2002). Attempts to provide an analytic structure have been few and far between and are yet to take root (Agnew, 2000).

This is, however, not to say that contractual, cultural and cognitive boundaries have failed to coalesce at all. Social spaces have been a thriving field of social geography that ties society and cultural norms with its spatial manifestation. Spatial segmentation of communities is based on social categories like race (Dwyer & Jones, 2000) and gender (Bird & Sokolofski, 2005) that has witnessed significant scholarship. More specific understanding of cognitive boundaries and their spatial manifestation has been explored by anthropologists in a study of social processes and intercommunity relationships and their interplay with rural palisades, burrows and hill forts (Løvschal, 2014). However, two distinct areas of geography that attempt to merge spatial and non-spatial boundaries are emotional geography and urban geography.

Emotional geography has emerged as a significant contributor in understanding how social categories and identities can manifest spatially into cultural boundaries of familial and hostile. One of the most recent developments in the discipline, emotional geography ‘attempts to understand emotions, experientially and conceptually, in terms of socio-spatial mediation and articulation rather than as entirely interiorized mental state’ (Davidson et al., 2016). In its fundamental tenet of how ‘emotional relations shape society and space’ (Anderson & Smith, 2001), the body of literature produced in this tradition inherently gravitate towards understanding how the cognitive domain mould the perception of space by establishing boundaries categorizing personal and familial from the unknown.

Crewe et al. (2014) did a study on prison and demonstrate the interplay between spatial demarcations within prison and the emotional state of inmates. It draws on public–private dichotomy of space from both cognitive domain and on its spatial manifestations. The idea of a familial space of acceptance for gay and lesbian communities by Cattan and Vanolo (2014) also delves into the role contractual boundaries play in maintaining cognitive divide. They used metaphors of island of archipelagos in exploring the spatial negotiation of marginalized identities. In another study of single mothers in San Francisco, McQuoid and Dijst (2012) use time geography to trace the spatial paths of everyday lives. The study explored the boundary-setting activities to differentiate between the self and the outside with varying degrees of personal spaces. Overall, emotional geography maintains cognitive boundary as a central theme, while trying to analyse its interplay with the cultural and contractual boundaries in everyday lives.

Urban geography is another area where spatial forms and social processes interact regularly (Vis, 2018). Urban areas, by their design, facilitate greater interaction between diverse social and cultural groups and a close interaction of cognitively divergent communities. Alongside its more well-known function of being a cultural melting pot, urban areas also simultaneously act as areas of deepening cognitive boundaries and exhibit its spatial forms. 'Urban' inherently refers to this amalgamation of a specific physical setting with a set of activities, practices and norms that define a distinct social milieu. 'Urbanism denotes the prevalence of urban places in a society' (Cowgill, 2004). Enabling closer contact between groups also leads to formation of territorial association and cultural boundaries, which further materializes into contractual boundaries. This dynamic of cognitive to spatial boundaries ensured that urban geography will emerge as a hotbed of scholarly pursuits of linking spatial and non-spatial boundaries.

One of the most illuminating studies in reifying cognitive boundaries into spatial forms comes from Valins (2003) in the study of ultra-orthodox Jews. The article traces how the cognitive boundary of religious identity develops an us–them feeling that gradually manifests into cultural dominance of space with the display of mezuzah in houses to a proliferation of synagogue, yeshiva and other Jewish institutions. This develops a sense of territorial association with the location, Broughton Park, having streets working as a clear cultural boundary separating them from 'terra incognita' (Valins, 2003). Taking this argument further, cities indeed become a 'patchwork of enclaves' as different socio-economic communities occupy different pockets of space. Cognitive boundary between them differentiates their cultural spaces and often manifests into walls and fences separating rich and poor neighbourhoods (Lossifova, 2015). Cities are anything but homogeneous and uniform; there exists numerous boundaries, which may be as perilous to traverse as international boundaries. These visible or invisible borders are well understood by the inhabitants existing in a dynamic equilibrium with the cultural spaces of the city (Paasche et al., 2014).

Ultimately, the interaction between contractual, cultural and cognitive boundaries in urban areas presents a microcosm of global order. The geopolitics of urban neighbourhood can be as significant in everyday lives as international relations. The cognitive boundary between different community hinges upon

negotiation of lived spaces, erection and transgression of spatial boundaries (Shtern & Yacobi, 2019). Due to its heterogeneity and complexity, urban social spaces have, in recent years, emerged as a thriving field in understanding the interlace between cognitive and spatial boundaries. Boundary-making process is rooted in everyday negotiations between identities and communities, making cities as an ideal setting to understand bounding and unbounding. Furthermore, with increasing urbanization, the divide between urban and rural is gradually dissipating, extending the interest on boundary making into rural neighbourhoods as well (Lichter & Brown, 2011). Experience of linking spatial and non-spatial boundaries in urban areas can act as a pivot in reconceptualizing different strands of boundary studies.

Despite the advances in the literature in other areas, three traditions of boundary studies have failed to synergize with one. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of cognitive boundaries. This burgeoning field of literature, despite having extensive exchanges with sociology, social psychology and anthropology, failed to integrate with boundary studies (Albeda et al., 2018). Some sporadic and underappreciated efforts like 'spatiality paradigm' (Hillier, 2008) or 'boundary theory' (Ashforth et al., 2000) came from disciplines like architecture or management, but it failed to have any significant impact in broader literature. Beyond such attempts, the psychological and the physical have rarely been assimilated (Pachucki et al., 2007).

It should be noted that most of the aforementioned research studies had little to do with political geography. One of the most interesting attempts in this regard is the debate between Jones and Schaffer et al. On his 2009 paper titled 'Categories, borders and boundaries', Jones (2009) argued for the necessity to rethink categories as a central motif of boundary studies. Drawing upon the history of the discipline and its major paradigm shifts, he theorized in favour of assimilating social categories within the broader tradition of boundary studies. Despite the illustrious history of the discipline and the crucial roles boundaries and categories play, their inchoateness is exemplified in the lack of organization in this regard. He propounded a move away from political categories to incorporate all forms of categories and their spatial manifestations. In Jones' (2009) words, 'This analysis should recognize the paradoxical role boundaries play cognitively as containers with fixed boundaries while emphasizing the inchoateness of bounding process'.

A year after the publication of Jones' Schaffter et al. (2010) published their response bringing spatialized and unspatialized categories at the centre of social sciences. They contested Jones' (2009) use of the term 'category', highlighting the difference between category, class and concept. Categories can be perceived as inherently spatial, spatialized or non-spatial that are fundamentally synthesized via the process of reification–naturalization–fetishization. They explain how an abstract idea gradually reify into something more real before being naturalized within the discourse and eventually fetishized again into something absolute and mythical to cement its material manifestation. Ultimately, Schaffter et al. (2010) suggested against collapsing categories in favour of exploring social and institutional processes that associate or disassociate category and space.

In his rebuttal, Jones (2010) commented that Schaffter et al. 'missed the mark' and fail to 'grasp the argument' in their zeal to relegate only spatial and spatialized categories to the domain of the geographers. He contested their affirmation of intrinsically spatial categories and considered that categorization of the world inherently matters to geography and social science as a whole. However, Jones (2010) assented with the reification–naturalization–fetishization dynamic boundary-making processes and conceived it to have a common ground with his central argument. Ultimately, he suggested boundary studies to look beyond acts of 'on-the-ground' bordering and adopt a more holistic system of understanding the manifestation of categories.

The debate between Jones and Schaffter et.al. rethinking categories and systematically incorporating them within the domain of boundary studies undoubtedly signifies one of the key attempts to fuse cognitive categories with the spatial manifestation of boundaries. However, despite Jones' (2009) initial article attracting some attention, their core argument failed to have a meaningful impact in the field (Jones, 2009; 2010; Schaffter et al., 2010).

Boundaries between academic disciplines have blurred significantly in recent times, and contemporary academic pursuit is perhaps best exemplified by this interdisciplinarity. It is definitely appreciated that other disciplines are incorporating boundary and territory not just as a buzzword, but within their core epistemological framework. That said, it also needs to be realized that the emergence of boundary studies was grounded in political processes and institutions. Although it has adapted itself as per the evolving scenarios, its historical experience facilitates it to traverse the nuances of politics and power better than other disciplines. Extensive use of boundary concepts in all areas of research is definitely a welcome addition, but political geography is definitely better equipped to address the questions of power and institutions in boundary making, maintenance and its consequences.

Future Trajectories

Nature of state and its associated polity are always at a flux, and this is perhaps nowhere more apparent than the meteoric rise of right-wing populism in the past 10 years (Moffitt, 2020; Rooduijn, 2019). Populism appears to appropriate national, ethnic or religious identities in the most exclusionary fashion, forming a binary divide to polarize the populace (Noury & Roland, 2020). Its hegemonic nativism to consolidate a rigidly defined silent majority not only entrenches cognitive boundaries but consequently spills over into conceived and perceived spatial manifestations. Although the impact of anti-immigration and refugee rhetoric on national boundaries and citizenship is the most well-known impression, it is by no means the only impression of populism and their state machineries on boundary matters (Goodman, 2019).

Further aggravation of this cognitive divide and erection of unforeseen cultural and contractual boundaries, especially at local levels, is witnessed with

the raging Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The way we perceive boundaries is being fundamentally altered. In addition to hastening the anti-globalization trend, the pandemic may entrench previously inconsequential cultural boundaries like street addresses or neighbourhoods (Glover, 2020; Salama, 2020). Expansion of the invisible bubble of personal space and the proxemics of sociable spaces are already being explored (Mehta, 2020), and their transformation into more contractual boundaries at a micro level is only a matter of time.

At this juncture, boundary studies need to pay extra attention to link spatial to social and find a cohesive structure to assimilate the contractual, cultural and cognitive boundaries within its paradigm. Boundary needs to be understood not only within the domain of state and international relations but as everyday negotiations in the minutest levels. In this quest, it can, and probably must, borrow insights from other disciplines that are already investigating the role of boundaries in local geography to bridge the cognitive–physical divide. Going forward, it is perhaps paramount that boundary studies strive to become more interdisciplinary and expand its epistemologies into hitherto unexplored territories.

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