



Points and Lines: A Topography of Borders in the Global Space

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Introduction: Borders of Sovereignty

The terms ‘border’ and ‘frontier’ immediately evoke images of guards and barbed wire, of rigid territorial boundaries, of globes on which each country has a different colour and black lines separate each state from the others. As a matter of fact, political maps represent current sovereignties on our planet exactly like this: as areas delimited by tangible and continuous, still and uninterrupted lines.

This idea of the border corresponds to the conception of the modern state as it emerges after the Westphalia peace treaty of 1648: a sovereign state exercising the exclusive political, military and jurisdictional control over a specified territory – outlined by clearly defined borders – and over the population there residing. Next to this conception we then find the idea of nation-state, which implies the existence of a national people with a unitary identity, consisting in common history, language and religion, and with deep roots in a specific territory. So identity and territory come to be considered as natural and immutable attributes of each other, and at the same time as basic and constitutive elements of the nation.

The model of political organisation fit to this conception of nation-state spreads from Europe (where it had been born) outwards, and was exported all over the world by the European powers during the centuries of geographical discoveries and colonial expansion. However, while the idea of identity univocity is adopted with more flexibility, permitting the creation of multinational states (with different languages, ethnic groups or religions living next to each other), the principle of territoriality remains untouched, with its necessary attribution to each state of a territory of its own exclusive pertinence, surrounded by rigid and linear borders.

After the two world wars, in the attempt to make order in the international set-up, first the League of Nations then the UN took state sovereignty as the basic criterion for the attribution of international subjectivity. Together with the state sovereignty it is also the concept of delimited territory – with rigid linear borders – that becomes a basic

parameter for the categorisation of the world, since the control over a specific territory is now considered to be a necessary condition for the existence of a state. The rigid border lines do resist even in the extra-European continents, where they have been introduced for the first time by the western colonisers: de-colonisation actually implies the acceptance by the colonised peoples of those models – completely unknown in their pre-colonial traditions – which have been imposed on them by colonisation.

The twentieth century seems thus to witness the universal triumph of territoriality, when the sovereign state – which recognises it as an essential and necessary condition for its own existence – affirms itself as the first and only model of political organisation in history which succeeds in covering the whole surface of the planet. In the post-colonial world order there is no strip of land above sea level that is not subject to the exclusive sovereignty of a state, nor is there any sovereign state whose borders are not clearly defined on the ground. At the same time, however, the great economic and technological developments give more solid bases for the multiplication of international subjectivities and of their interdependencies, as well as for the de-territorialization of power relations and for the end of the international nation-state-based order. The crisis of such an order, based on nation-states and on territoriality, becomes evident only in the last part of the century, in the years after the end of the Cold War, but it actually started long before, and its end is not visible yet.¹

The astonishing development of industrial production, telecommunications and transports radically reduces the distances separating different countries, peoples, cultures and markets. The international mobility of goods, persons, services and especially of capitals and information has grown to levels unthinkable in the past. Now the world can no longer be contained within the opposition of land and sea proposed by Schmitt. It was Schmitt himself, on the other hand, who signalled the obsolescence of the dichotomy when he noted that new and immaterial dimensions had to be added to the traditional and material ones, thanks to the technological development, among other things, of air connections and radio broadcasting.² If in the past it was possible to indicate territorial conquest and sea control as the two opposite keys that permitted control over the planet, now this order seems to become unstable, pressed by the urgency of new events. Following Schmitt once again, it is possible to affirm that space now only represents the field of forces where human activities and energies act, meet, collide and produce their effects. This crisis of territoriality, this de-territorialization of power relations (both economical and political) and of any other kind of human relation (cultural, religious, emotional) raises problems with regard to the traditional role of the nation-state, which is necessarily connected to the direct and exclusive control over a territory. With the crisis of the state, also state borders have to face new problems. The very idea of a fixed and linear border, typical of the modern sovereign state, is now put into question.

1 Carl Schmitt even suggests that the decline of the Westphalia system begins in the Eighties of the 19th century. Carlo Galli points out that the Cold War allowed “a new space development of politics, which has at least postponed the historical and institutional collapse of its geometries”

2 In 1944, when the first edition of the book was published, Schmitt suggested the aerial dimension as a possible third one, while today we might add the electronic-information dimension.

However, what is a border – a state border, especially – but a way to express, affirm, materialize and contain the idea of sovereignty? And what then are the other instruments that power utilizes in order to express itself, besides those which are incarnated in the state and find the limits of their effectiveness in the still and material border lines? Which other borders, which other limits and barriers are establishing or re-establishing themselves today, infiltrating into the fissures of the nation-state, replacing or overlapping the traditional state borders? And what other powers – if any, beyond the state – do these new borders favour? Is it possible to consider different (and maybe new) borders as points of view from which to watch and interpret the dynamics of power – of the different powers – in the era of post-colonial and post-bipolar globalisation? Can we suggest a new cartography showing us in a clearer way the signs of the sovereign power, helping us to distinguish the visible signs from the invisible ones, the material borders from the immaterial ones, the borders marked on the territories from those impressed on persons, on lives, on the choices and destinies of all human beings? Perhaps such a map would help us to understand how the very features of the different kinds of border are now becoming more and more difficult to distinguish, and how materiality and immateriality, flexibility and rigidity, territoriality and a-territoriality tend to trespass their limits and turn into one another, and how each one uses each other to its own advantage.³

First of all, we should ask ourselves what borders human beings have so far created as expressions of sovereignty, of power relations; which forms – which features and properties – have assumed the different types of borders that history has seen coming and going through time and space, starting from the assumption that all anthropic borders are but the result of human relations, and therefore the result – and the visible expression – of power relations between different subjects, different authorities, different individual and collective sovereignties.

Territorial and Non-Territorial Borders

State borders – separating territories on the basis of political jurisdictions – represent, together with the borders of private real estate properties (the walls of a house, the fence around a plot of land, a garden or an industrial area), the totality of the territorial borders. Such borders are linear and material ones, and this means that they can be marked and physically reproduced on the earth surface.

There are other borders that don't have this property, since they signal differences between immaterial entities. This category includes the borders between social classes, between ethnic groups, between cultures, between linguistic groups, between modes of production or economic interests, between groups of individuals which are different from a juridical point of view. In the partition proposed by David Miller and Sohail H.

3 I will not try here to answer these questions, but I will just try to propose a few conceptual instruments that I hope will be useful to face the questions at hand. I presented a few tentative answers in Cuttitta (2003).

Hashmi, such borders are defined as ‘social borders’, in opposition to territorial ones.⁴ But such a distinction may be misleading if it is interpreted as suggesting that territorial borders aren’t socially produced, while it’s clear that the borders of a state or those of a private ground are the results of social relations just as the others are: actually, they are created, they die and they are transformed only on the base of decisions taken (consensually or not) by human beings. Therefore, it may be better to abandon Miller and Hashmi’s partition, and to simply distinguish between territorial and non-territorial borders, considering these two categories as the exhaustive basic repartition of the more general category of social or anthropic borders.⁵

The diverse – cultural, economic or of any other kind – connections developing on the two sides of a non-territorial border are what actually creates such a border. Such connections are independent from a territory, since they don’t necessarily imply the spatial contiguity of the subjects involved. It’s the actions, choices, sentiments of the individuals that determine the links, and not the fact that the social actors live and act within a specified geographical area, defined by visible, tangible, and concrete borders – as visible, tangible, and concrete as the territory they concern. After all it’s the choices taken by the subjects that prevail over the territorial constraints; it’s the dynamic, direct and immediate relations which prevail over the static, indirect, mediate ones, by creating borders which are spatially flexible and mobile rather than rigid and immobile. “Cultural borders are by nature very fuzzy”, as Friedrich Ratzel says, “because no people can prevent all elements of its culture to trespass the national borders”.⁶ Of course, this doesn’t mean that a non-territorial border cannot be in itself – as a mean of separation – rigid, impermeable and static; it simply means that the existence of such a border and the degree of its rigidity and impermeability, as well as its static nature, are not necessarily based on a direct relation with a specific territory surrounded by defined borders. In some cases, non-territorial borders may be extremely rigid and though they may not have any territorial character. The borders between the castes in the Indian society, or the borders between Jews and non-Jews, are classical examples of super-spatial, though traditionally rigid communitarian borders.

The entities (social groups, cultures, etc.) inscribed within non-territorial borders do not have the feature that is typical of territorial space, which Simmel defines in terms of ‘exclusivity’ (*Ausschliesslichkeit des Raumes*), the state being its perfect example: “The

4 Miller and Hasmi (2001).

5 Besides this general category there is only the one of ‘natural’ borders. Here are a few examples of natural borders: the borders between the earth regions where the sun reaches the zenith and the ones where it does not (Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn); the borders between geologically different areas; the borders between land and sea or between lands and rivers or lakes, etc. In such cases, it’s a question of borders that men have not created, but just recognised as matters of fact given by nature. This is true as long as we just consider them in their essence and in their meanings as not transformable by the material or cultural intervention of human beings. The same lines, the same areas and the same dots constituting natural borders may on the other hand turn into anthropic or social borders, as soon as they are given a social function (for example, a river or a mountain chain may be chosen as the border of a state). Even in this case, the difference between the natural border and the social one still remains, since the latter is only superimposed on the former without cancelling it.

6 Ratzel (1899: 271).

type of relation between the individuals that the state creates, or of which the state is the result, is so strictly linked to territory that it is impossible to think of the co-existence of another state on the same territory”.⁷ The entities characterised by non-territorial borders are called by Simmel ‘super-spatial entities’ (*überraumliche Gebilde*). Unlike the state, they have not the property of spatial exclusivity, and their presence on any territorial space does not imply the exclusion of another entity of the same type. A perfect example of super-spatial entity is the church, interpreted as the community of the persons and institutions connected to a religious faith.

So there are two categories of anthropic borders: the first one includes those which may be marked, that is physically reproduced, on the earth’s surface (we will call them territorial borders); the second category includes the borders which do not have this property (we will call them non-territorial borders). But we have already seen that the first of these two categories – the one of territorial borders – also includes two sub-categories: the one of private estate property borders, and the one of sovereign state borders. Since we know that the borders we are dealing with (social or anthropic borders) are the product of social relations between human beings, we shall now investigate the nature of the relations producing each one of these two sub-categories. We will find out that in both cases the type of relation at hand doesn’t necessarily require the mediation of any territorial element.

The relations producing the borders of private real estate property represent a sub-category of the relations which produce the borders of private property *at large* or which result from such borders. Such relations develop between several persons (owners and non-owners) and the objects, which can be movable or not. In the case of movable property, the borders are represented by the physical contour of the object, and they have no relation with the territory. In the case of real estate property, the borders are instead those of the territory which is itself the object of the property right (a plot of land) or those of the territory on which the object of the property right (a building) is located. Therefore, it’s only in this last case – the one of real estate property – that the typical relations of private property require a territorial mediation.

In the same way, the relations producing the borders of sovereign states must be interpreted as a sub-category of the relations producing, expressing and characterising sovereignty *at large*. It’s a matter of relations developing between the sovereign power and the individuals – relations which basically involve human beings (those who are in power and those who are not) – where the presence of the territorial element hasn’t any character of necessity. Also in the case of the sovereign power *at large*, as well as in the case of the private property *at large*, the territorial element is only a possible appendix. It may intervene and establish itself as a further pole in the relation but it is not a necessary feature. Only in the event that the territorial element intervenes, private property becomes *real estate*, and sovereign power becomes *territorial*.

7 Simmel (1983: 223).

Aterritorial Sovereignities

The modern sovereign state represents a historical form of sovereignty, which has replaced all other forms of sovereignty and has thus universally imposed the mediation of territoriality. In other contexts, places and times, before the establishment of the modern sovereign state, such mediation has not been necessary. In feudal Europe – in the very context where the phenomenon of the nation-state would soon develop – the political-hierarchical system permitted the co-existence of different levels of obedience and personal loyalty on the very same territory. Multiple loyalty relations crisscrossed each other and were interconnected in a regime characterised by a softened, fragmentary and residual sovereignty. A state was nothing more than the sum of a variable number of minor sovereignties, which had the form of juridical entities rather than of territories.⁸ Again, it was in medieval Europe where towns developed as typical forms of fragmented territoriality, which were destined to slow down and hamper the process of national unification of territorial base in the regions (like Italy and Germany) where their role became more and more important.⁹

Outside of Europe, just a few centuries ago – in the pre-colonial era – many civilisations still ignored not only the state as a juridical institution, but even the very idea of territorial sovereignty. Hierarchical and authoritative relations, based on loyalty and obedience between individuals, families and clans, did not necessarily require a transcendental superior authority, nor a stable and definite territorial foundation, since they took place and strengthened through an autonomous praxis of exchange of goods, cattle, marriages and, generally speaking, of solidarities. In a word, there was no territorial mediation between the power and the individuals. In Africa, the function of social and political control – which in the western world was territorially-bound – was mostly exercised by exchange networks. In the Arabic peninsula, the power balance was based on group solidarities, and it was put into question every time the group in power tried to create an authority transcending the relations of inter-tribal integration.¹⁰ In northern America, whole Sioux tribes used to migrate following the movement of buffalos, the borders of their political community were consequently mobile, just as the borders of many nomadic peoples on this side of the Ocean.¹¹

In the course of history there have thus been borders which were more human than territorial, more subjective than objective. All the same, they also reflected relations of power, subordination and sovereignty. Even today, in the areas of the world where forms of nomadic life survive, the relations between individuals or clans still tend to develop in a more direct and elastic way (more horizontally than vertically, more dynamically than statically, in a more immediate than mediate way), on the basis of a mobility that the principle of territoriality imposed by colonial borders curbs every time – a ground's surface becomes the foundation for a superior authority, thus turning into a territory. In the steppe of the nomadic populations and in the Bedouins' desert, the

8 Febvre (1962).

9 Badie (1995).

10 *Ibid.*

11 Ratzel (1899: 166).

borders of the community move together with the individuals, coming and going, moving back and forth with them. The borders are mobile, they are 'portable borders', and they can be taken down like the tents of the camps and are insubstantial like the desert's sand.¹² Though, even in steppes and deserts there are now static, visible and often insurmountable state borders, which contradict traditional mobile borders and stress their radical otherness.

We can then state that territoriality is simply the peculiar and specific configuration of modernity, and therefore that such an organisational form of power, rooted in the space defined by its borders, is not unique, inevitable and necessary.¹³ In history, the role played by the territory in decision-making processes – and thus in the mechanisms of definition and manifestation of sovereignty – appears variable. In the disperse and fragmented sovereignty of the European Middle Age and of a large part of extra-European history, autonomy, elasticity and dynamism of the decisional sphere seem to prevail, whereas in the unitary state sovereignty of modern western world it's the static conditionings of territoriality and of its borders which prevail.¹⁴ Little wonder the most important systems of values in the pre-modern world mainly ignored the questions related to territorial borders.¹⁵ Such systems of values had to give ethical foundations to political and social regimes which didn't necessarily have linear and rigid borders. This is the reason why there are so many problems in trying to interpret present complex dynamics of border transformations on the basis of different ethical traditions.¹⁶

This results in a relativization of the concept of territoriality, which thus loses importance: territorial mediation is not necessary; it is just possible. Together with the concept of territoriality, also the concept of territorial border necessarily is becoming less crucial. The two concepts in fact are inevitably tied to each other. However, this necessary correspondence between territoriality and territorial border does not imply the existence of a single and unique type of territorial border. A state-centred point of view would lead us to interpret territorial borders as only static lines, as uninterrupted series of dots marked once and for all on the ground, as signs characterised not only by tangibility and immobility, but also by linearity and by the absence of any spatial development in depth. As a matter of fact, such are the properties of the borders state territoriality is based on. Though, even if a territorial mediation establishes itself in the relations between the sovereign power and the individuals, such a sovereignty may appear under different forms, not necessarily identical to the modern nation-state, and may have borders different from linear ones.

12 Zanini (1997).

13 Bonanate (1996: 76-77).

14 Pangalangan (2001: 164).

15 Chan (2001: 90).

16 On this subject, see the essays in Miller and Hashmi (2001).

Zonal Borders

As Lucien Febvre writes, “ancient limits were never, so to speak, linear: mostly they were zones”. The French historian explains that “according to an ancient custom that we find among all peoples at a certain stage of their development, the forests extended in between them as fringe areas, as neutral territories”, which in some cases even constituted “proper territorial units with their own specific names”.¹⁷ As a matter of fact, before linear borders covered the whole world surface during the twentieth century, there were still several examples of frontier zones, that is of what Prescott simply calls *frontiers* – which are fuzzy and do vary in widths – as opposed to *boundaries* which are simple and clear-cut lines.¹⁸

Between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, Ratzel points out that the linear border is a feature which is characteristic only of most advanced civilisations, and that we can see its nearly perfect expression only in Europe, where during the nineteenth century, thanks to the developments of geodesy and cartography, political borders have turned everywhere into geometrical abstractions, while in other regions of the world we can find diametrically opposed conceptions of frontiers.¹⁹ Outside of Europe, the ‘scienceless peoples’ (*wissenschaftslose Völker*) do not draw lines in order to delimit their territories: they rather surround themselves with uninhabited or scarcely inhabited areas, which are not subject to any exclusive and direct form of sovereignty, since in the end they belong to neither of the two neighbouring political-territorial entities, or else they belong to both of them. Such strips of land stand as buffer zones, as neutral areas between the two territories. Sometimes they are left abandoned and unused, sometimes they become a den of bandits and outlaws, sometimes they are used on a more or less regular basis – for example as hunting grounds – by both neighbouring peoples. The function of such liminal areas, of such frontiers with bi-dimensional extension (developing not only in length but also in depth), is to prevent conflicts without making exchange and commercial activities impossible (such activities become less simple and immediate, and therefore easier to control).²⁰ Ratzel calls this form of frontier *Grenzsäum* (border-edge) in opposition to the *Grenzlinie* (border-line).

Starting from the presumption that frontiers and political communities evolve concomitantly, influencing and determining one another, we might say that the zonal frontier has also the function to protect the community and to permit the development of its identity. Thanks to the protective action of the frontier – and only after having established its own identity, and therefore after having become conscious of it and having re-enforced it – the political community may venture out into the open and show itself openly to its neighbours, to its potential opponents, to those who are ‘others’ exactly because they find themselves beyond a border. And only at this moment may the border be reduced to a line, to a signal, to an abstraction which has the function of

17 Febvre (1949).

18 Prescott (1987: 1).

19 Ratzel (1899: 267).

20 Ratzel (1923: 392-397).

showing the differences, since now identities do not need a protective filter anymore, as they feel strong enough to resist to any immediate, direct, close-range confrontation.

In Ratzel's opinion, it is the scientific and economic progress of civilisations which causes the evolution of the frontier from the zonal to the linear form. The determining factors of such evolution are, more precisely, the following: the increased ability to exploit the soil, the higher interest in the direct control over the possibly largest portion of land, the augmented skills in measuring and representing – and, therefore, in controlling and ruling – the territory itself.²¹ In a word, frontiers are created, dismantled and transformed by human beings on the basis of their interests and as a consequence of their power relations. This is Febvre's opinion as well. It's no more a matter of finding at any cost a set of lines, a frame which is able to define in one way or the other a territory: It is not the frame which has primordial features; on the contrary, it is what is inscribed within it and, so to speak, constitutes its expressive and vital focus. "In other words, the question of frontiers should never be dealt with from the exterior, but always from the interior".²² Indeed, Febvre goes one step beyond Ratzel when he points out that "it's not from the frontier that we have to start, in order to study the frontier, but from the state", explicitly stressing the importance of the political form that characterises the community which is creating the frontiers, and thus – in the case of the evolution from the zonal frontier to the linear border – stressing the importance of the modern sovereign state. Only from the specific point of view of a given political form is it then possible to appreciate a specific frontier-form. In our particular case, the route that leads to the establishment of the nation state is the same that leads to the linear border.²³

Punctual Borders

The concept of zonal frontier or border zone (*Grenzsaum*) is crucial in Ratzel's discourse. Although progress has imposed the passage from the zonal to the linear border in the most advanced societies, the border zone is still reality, while the border line only represents its abstraction.²⁴ In the end, the zonal frontier is important not only and not so much as a stage in an evolutionary process, but also and mainly as the real dimension of the phenomenon, regardless of the apparent form that the phenomenon itself takes each time. Ratzel seems to have no doubts: irrespective of its ways of representation and codification according to different politico-juridical conventions, every border is a zone. But what are these zones made of? As we have seen, in the case of 'scienceless peoples', they may consist of spaces which are not necessarily empty. Such spaces can be shared spaces; they can be mixed areas, not so much isolation zones as buffer zones, created in order to damp conflicts; they can be areas that allow the coexistence of interests and identities; they can be *terrains vagues* where individuals who belong to different politico-territorial entities may go hunting. In such a case it is possible to say that the border of the sovereignty is the very point where the hunter *is* in

21 Ratzel (1899: 267-270).

22 Febvre (1949).

23 Febvre (1962: 11-24).

24 Ratzel (1923: 385).

any particular moment. Thus, the hunter displaces the border of his political community inside the *Grenzsaum*. On the other hand, we can say that the border of sovereignty takes the shape of a dot, since it assumes the same physical extension of the individual embodying it. Such a dot is also a mobile one, as mobile as the ‘portable’ borders of nomadic communities. The difference is that nomads do not know fixed and stable borders, they do not know closed territorialities – statically continuous and homogeneous territories. By contrast, they are sedentary communities creating a *Grenzsaum* that have both a closed and an open territoriality; they know both the univocity and separation of the former, and the ambiguity and mixture of the latter.

The closed territoriality represents an area of homogeneity, where there is just one fixed, immobile and continuous border, and no other borders within it. The open territoriality, on the contrary, is a space which enables the coexistence of a plurality of borders: ephemeral borders (which do not persist in time), mobile borders (which are able to move), omni-present borders (which may appear anywhere). This means, in the end, that in the open territoriality, in the ambiguous mix-up of the *Grenzsaum*, space and territory may be marked by as many border-dots as the emergences of sovereignty of the different subjects close the frontier zone. Such emergences of sovereignty are but the movements and actions of the individuals. This means that in the *Grenzsaum*, the borders of sovereignty take the shape of mobile and potentially ubiquitous dots.

Ratzel himself points out that we often don’t immediately realize having passed the border of a country, since nothing in what we see gives us the impression of having passed a border, and it is difficult to notice clear-cut differences at once. After a little while, though, we start to distinguish those signals or evidence of the border which Ratzel calls ‘scattered emergences’ of the border (*vereinzelte Erscheinungen*): we see more and more foreign faces, we hear people speaking and we see signs written in a foreign language, and we notice that dresses have a different cut... It’s like this that the clear-cut and univocal line of the political border becomes a fuzzy and ambiguous space, especially if – as in the example of the Austro-Italian border used by Ratzel – many cultural elements, like language and folkways, are the same, or do present very strong similarities, or are widely intermixed on both sides of the political border.²⁵

Although Ratzel never uses this definition, such occasional manifestations of the border might well be called ‘punctual borders’, insofar as they are scattered and isolated, and as they do not have the continuity and uniformity which are peculiar features of linear borders. It is in this sense that Ratzel considers the linear border as a mere abstraction, and the frontier zone – the *Grenzsaum* – as the reality. And a frontier zone consists exactly of the sum of such isolated manifestations of the border, of such scattered signals affirming their diversity from other signals, of *enclaves*, outposts and offshoots (*Ausläufer*) of a given territory A inside a given neighbouring territory B, and vice versa. While Ratzel refers to the cultural, linguistic and religious borders between peoples, we may apply the same interpretative key to the borders of sovereignty. Just as habits, folkways, languages and other cultural features distinguishing peoples and communities, also political power may act in a point-like way, outside of its own territory. Sovereignty may show itself, in a more or less isolated way, beyond the

25 Ratzel (1923: 384).

usually or officially recognised border line, and there it may affirm its presence, its influence and its role.

Let's think about the *Grenzsaum* itself, about the neutral frontier zone between pre-state communities, where the hunters of one or the other community constitute single mobile border dots, affirming their right to carry out that very activity, in that very place and in that very moment. Let's also think about the *Grenzsaum* as the only genuine dimension of the border, or even – taking Ratzel's thought to its extreme consequences – as the only possible territorial reality. Even inside the full and exclusive space of sovereign states, in the very centre of their closed territoriality, there are – and there have always been – external presences. The most classical example of such presences are embassies, which for centuries have been actually representing, according to the international law, strips of the territory of a given state, and they have been subject to the sovereignty of such state, even if they have been located inside the territory of another state.

The World as *Grenzsaum*

The idea of a punctual border, which is able to show itself other than in the compact and uniform entity of the closed territoriality of a political community, and the idea of the *Grenzsaum* as the only and true territorial dimension, consisting of a plurality of punctual borders. These are the two Ratzelian ideas which may help us to imagine a new global cartography. For today sovereignty does not consist anymore – or at least not only – in the mere control of territorial areas. But it more and more depends on the control over the different flows running inside and through territories. If we consider that states are no longer the only – and often not even the main – actors which can take decisions regarding such flows, we can say that sovereignty reveals itself in the very modalities through which such decisions are taken and implemented. Therefore, the old system of space representation – a system based on fixed, rigid and linear borders, useful to a kind of power management which is typical of modern nation-state sovereignty – does not seem able anymore to understand the reality of the present world. In fact, such a representation avoids the problem of the actual ownership, identity and nature of a sovereignty which can no longer be recognized only in the light of state borders. Because it hides its multiple and fuzzy identities behind the entangled network of relations and flows which run across the planet, showing itself in the most different ways, times and places, while it multiplies and diversifies its 'supply' of borders in order to face a 'demand' of control which is growing more and more complex, subtle and variegated.

On the one hand, the tangle of interdependences – of reciprocal influences and mutual conditionings resulting from the multiplication of international actors and from the crisis of the closed territoriality – makes the linear, rigid and univocal concept of border lose much of its clear-cut nature and makes it mingle with the more plural than univocal)concept of frontier. A frontier has a wider and unclear nature, and therefore can be more easily trespassed. It is more similar to a neutral and free zone, where any mixing is possible, than to a clear-cut separation; it is also similar to the concept of threshold as an impartial and discreet 'signal of an elsewhere', more symbolic than

selective.²⁶ This process may seem to go towards a de-materialisation, flexibilization and permeabilization of borders, following the general trend towards openness, exchange and promiscuity, in line with the need to guarantee the free circulation of international flows. On the other hand, this apparent flexibilization (or even disappearance) of borders and barriers hides a more complex reality, which is indeed much more selective insofar as it is no longer easy to understand at a glance. What is really happening is that borders have increased their versatility, becoming able to modulate their interventions with regard to different situations, needs and urges. What at first sight looked like a process of transformation of the borders into frontier zones or thresholds, under the banner of a general opening and mixing up, now turns out to be the beginning of a process of creating new and different borders, a way to offer to all kinds of borders wider spaces, more freedom to act and more chances to show themselves in different forms.

So if the world can no longer be cartographed only on the basis of the principle of territoriality – or at least not only on the basis of the principle of *closed* territoriality – then where do the new frontiers place emerge? Maybe they are now located as barriers at the access points of the network.²⁷ So the new borders would no longer be lines which have been marked on the ground; they would rather be the elements (even immaterial ones) that permit, hinder or prevent the access to the network flows. As a consequence, the fuzzy frontier zone in which the idea of border seems to blur can be seen as the equivalent on a global scale of the Ratzelian *Grenzsraum*. Again we can see the scattered emergences of the border – that is the point-like or punctual borders, which are fundamentally mobile and virtually ubiquitous.

The whole world, in the end, would now be but a single large *Grenzsraum*, a single large frontier zone, a unitary space characterised by the coexistence of different realities, furrowed by several lines, and dotted with a multiplicity of points. In such a space, the co-existent realities are different from each other; the rigid and continuous lines represent routes and flows rather than barriers and borders, and the points constitute strategically fragmented forms of the border. If this is the case, the crisis of territoriality certainly did not cause the disappearance of the borders. On the contrary, it caused their disengagement from the rules of state territoriality. This means that the borders are no longer forced to immobility, since they can move, and that their form is no longer necessarily linear, since it can also be punctual. Their presence (and their influence) is no longer limited in space, since it has virtually become ubiquitous. Rather than the crisis of territoriality as such, what we see is a process through which the closed territoriality of the states is being replaced by the new open territoriality of the global *Grenzsraum*.

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