Locating the territoriality of territory in border studies

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1. Introduction: Locating territory and borders

1.1. Anssi Paasi and Md Azmeary Ferdoush

Despite the forecast of a forthcoming "borderless world" and transformations in the nature of state sovereignty (Agnew, 2018; Paasi, 2019), the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, perhaps more dramatically than any political event since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, that territory and territorial strategies are still in effective use across the globe. Numerous states around the world rapidly closed their borders in the spring of 2020, prohibiting or at least strictly controlling human mobilities or forcing mobility by deporting people from national space. States often were inwardly oriented when exercising vaccine nationalism. As of autumn 2021, COVID-19-related territorial controls over borders and border-crossings are still being used in various forms while many resource-poor states have hardly been able to start their vaccination programs.

In the modern state system, territories and borders give meaning to each other in the sense that borders delimit territorialized sovereign power. Conventional political-geographic perspectives hold that territoriality — the management and control of space — is a state strategy that can be turned on and off (Sack, 1986). There is no denying that territorial principles underlying the modern state system continue to dominate our understanding of borders, sovereignty, and territory itself (Agnew, 1994; Elden, 2010, 2013; Johnson et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2017; Murphy, 2013; Paasi, 1996, 2009; Parker & Vaughan-Williams, 2009; Rumford, 2006; Stilz, 2019). At the same time, seminal works in political geography have demonstrated that territory is not exclusively a state phenomenon; that borders and bordering are not solely territorial phenomena; that borders may be porous, and that sovereignty

may be practiced outside the purview of the state. We situate the current intervention precisely at this intersection and, from varied perspectives, aim to answer: *How do we locate and conceptualize territory and borders in a world characterized by conflicting, yet coexisting, phenomena of globalization, populist-nationalist movements, and de/re-territorialization?*

Many have challenged the tendency to take territorial concepts and practices as given or self-evident. In the mid-1990s, John Agnew influentially questioned the territorial assumptions behind the interlocking relationship among state, sovereignty, and society, arguing that such taken-for-granted assumptions had led to an intellectual impasse that he named the "territorial trap" (Agnew, 1994). Since then, political geographers, as well as scholars in International Relations, Political Science, Sociology, and Anthropology, have moved towards a non-bounded rearticulation of state, sovereignty, and borders. For instance, Anssi Paasi (1996, 2009) has argued that territory as a "bounded space" is only one of many forms of the spatiality of power, and he has drawn our attention to "spatial socialization" in identifying the role of space, region, and memory in the socialization of people to certain places. Territory brings together the material and the symbolic. Hence, territory is also closely related to identity and can be used to inculcate and reproduce a sense of loyalty and affiliation, which is central to ideas of the nation (Storey, 2020). Yet, we have to be perpetually critical of non-reflexive, "psychologizing" ideas of boundaries as reflections of "*a basic human need to live in a bounded space*" (Leimgruber, 1991, p. 41, our emphasis). In this regard, reorienting the gaze from state spaces to daily encounters has proven to be particularly productive in identifying different scales, sites, and methods for studying the border-territory nexus (Mountz, 2018; Fall, 2020). Specifically, post-structuralist and feminist geographers have played a significant role in complicating social-spatial binaries like "public" and "private" by shedding light on

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bodies as sites of political practice and identity, and even as territories themselves. This scholarship has critically questioned and rethought the connection between bordering and territory by privileging methods (for instance, auto-ethnography) that allow for deeper and more nuanced ontological and epistemological reflection (see Jackson, 2016; Smith et al., 2016). Such a body of literature further enables us to expand what we understand to count as "politics" and to reflect on the sites in which politics takes place.

Moreover, recent scholarship has offered new conceptions of territory that highlight multiple sources and configurations of spatial power and authority. Saskia Sassen, for instance, has identified assemblages of territory, authority, and rights in analyzing the conditions of power, identity, nation, borders, and economy in a globalizing world (Sassen, 2006). Sassen (2009) states that while the exclusive territorial authority of the state still appears dominant, the constitutive foundations of such authority are now less absolute than they once tended to be. She further states that the critical site for making and registering that change is not necessarily the traditional territorial border. Likewise, linking it with the state, Stuart Elden reads territory as a bundle of political technologies for controlling land and terrain (Elden, 2010, 2013). Others have interpreted territory from the vantage point of different scales ("micro" and "macro") and axes ("vertical" and "horizontal") (Delaney, 2005). No less intriguing is Paulina Ochoa Espejo's (2020) perspective on territory as interconnected systems, where land, biota, people, and institutions together generate overlapping relations and civic duties. In the long run, the acceleration of climate change will very likely challenge both existing territories and their borders (Dalby, 2020).

Similarly, a revolution has taken place in the study of borders since the 1990s with Étienne Balibar's well-known but somewhat cryptic assertion that borders are everywhere (Balibar, 2004). Since Noel Parker and Nick Vaughan-Williams (2009) set forth their "lines in the sand" agenda, many scholars have been "locating" borders in numerous forms at myriad locations, including state territories, extraterritorial spaces, and human bodies (Amoore, 2006; Johnson et al., 2011; Jones and Johnson, 2016; Rumford, 2006). Such bodies of scholarship also suggest that state borders often assume different characteristics depending on political, social, and economic dynamics operating within and across those borders. For instance, the border between the USA and Mexico is significantly different from that between the USA and Canada by every possible measure. Similarly, the Finnish state's border with Russia carries different meanings and symbols from its borders with Sweden or Norway, not only for Finland itself but also for the European Union. A similar range of circumstances can be found in India, which practices distinctive bordering techniques vis-à-vis Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, and Nepal. In other words, borders have been (re)conceptualized without one-sidedly prioritizing state territoriality.

Yet, Alexander Murphy (2013) has been right to suggest that territory's "allure" continues in the modern political system. Further, Anna Stilz (2019, p.1) reminds us that "A deep fact about our political world is that it is a world of sovereign territorial states," and that states claim rights both against their own members and against outsiders, as well as rights to independent control of a particular territory. This appears in four key rights-claims that emanate from states: first, to territorial jurisdiction; second, to non-intervention, third to control their borders; and fourth, to regulate the use and extraction of resources in their territories. At the same time, Stilz reminds us that all such formal rights are not absolute. State's territorial claims must be understood against the backdrop of the modern state system which grants a crucial structuring role to boundaries (p. 2). While its meanings and applications have thus expanded, territoriality remains highly relevant to any discussion of state and borders (Storey, 2017, 2020).

Thus, we return to the question posed earlier: How to conceptualize and locate territory and border amidst tensions between populist-nationalist movements and globalization? In answering the question, our point of departure is that both territory and borders are ideas in the making. That is, they only *become* what we make of them in practice,

praxis, norms, discourses, and philosophy. Since there is no single exhaustive narrative to be told about borders and territoriality, and no single assemblages of territoriality, power, identity, and politics, the biggest challenge to scholarly enquiry is in identifying the appropriate set of conceptual and methodological tools related to the contextual choices of scale, spatiality, and principles through which to "read" territory and borders. Our intention is not to indicate a judgment of right or wrong choices but to search for the most productive choice(s) in a given context. This is evident in the contributions that follow, which bring different scales, contexts, and principles into friction in analyzing the practices of bordering and territorial configurations.

In their respective contributions to this intervention, Reece Jones and Alec Murphy focus on the recent hardening of borders and the fetishizing of territory as belonging to a certain people and "nation." It is undeniable, from their perspectives, that borders have become "everything" in a territorially bounded world divided among sovereign states. In contrast, based on a principle of disassociating territory from borders and identity, John Agnew calls for a distinction between reading borders as "dwelling spaces" and as "geopolitical spaces" (Agnew, 2020). Drawing on similar tenets, Paulina Ochoa Espejo contends that in a Watershed Model of territory, borders are productively understood as relations and connectors of jurisdiction instead of distinct frames on the edge of dry land. Further, territory in this model, is conceptualized in dynamic terms as flowing, moving, leaking, and melting (Ochoa Espejo, 2020). Juliet Fall and Giada Peterle call for embracing methods that would shift the scale of investigation of the (inter)national through the lens of the personal. Drawing on auto-ethnographic narratives, Fall and Peterle empirically demonstrate the body's power in narrating embodied experience of borders and territory and conceptually resituate the body at the center of our imaginaries (cf. Smith et al., 2016). To reiterate, the point is to look for the most productive (theoretical and methodological) tools in a given analysis of borders and territory. This is precisely what our intervention aims to achieve as we explore tensions between nationalist imaginaries, complex empirical realities, and normative political framings.

Some of the contributors to this Intervention highlight the right-wing populist arguments currently animating present-day political debates about borders. Such arguments repeat the clichéd tenet that every "nation" must have a territory distinguished from other territories by borders that must be kept "safe" from the "outside". In reproducing such discourses and practices, it is inevitable that state actors (including highly powerful ones like that of the former US President Donald Trump) and media figures will be in a constant state of "performativity" (Butler, 2011). Such performativity consistently justifies the logic of aligning territory and borders–that is, ensuring that a nation's territory starts and stops at its borders (Cons, 2016; Ferdoush, 2019, 2021). However, the tension arising from the constant justification of such a logic (and a failure to do so) often gives rise to what Sankaran Krishna calls as "cartographic anxiety" — anxiety that arises both from the tension of justifying and the fear of failing to justify the logic of national boundaries (Krishna, 1994). Shedding light on such issues, Jones and Murphy demonstrate that nationalist imaginaries, while consequential, do not signal a purely, uniformly nationalist territoriality or national political space. Drawing on Ochoa Espejo's works, Agnew takes us into a philosophical realm. While he recognizes the power and salience of borders, he urges that we reflect on the realities of social and political changes that challenge particular territorial visions and assumptions of nationalist groups (especially around the idea of "homeland"). Inspired from the modes of political action that defy the territorial and imagined limitations of the sovereign, Ochoa Espejo identifies forms of territoriality that emerge from real, ecological connections between people, law, and territory. In so doing, she delves into a discussion of post-nationalist politics based on ecological relationships. Fall and Peterle further shift our attention explicitly to the methodological aspect of reading territory and borders, showing how our research methods provide a lens through which to visualize different kinds of borders and territorial formations.

Put together, the interventions suggest that imaginaries and discourses are of utmost significance, as they guide practices on the ground and therefore have material consequences. However, at the same time, these interventions suggest that imaginaries and discourses obscure a great deal—that realities on the ground are substantially more complicated than what ideas and discourses of national sovereignty and territoriality suggest. As such, the Intervention unsettles the notion of territory and borders and points to numerous ways forward in understanding and conceptualizing ever-changing relationships between power and space.

2. The border is everything

2.1. Reece Jones

Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 US presidential campaign appeared to be a repudiation of the previous administration's policies that demonized immigrants and fetishized a wall on the border with Mexico as the solution to all of the country's problems. However, within weeks of Biden taking office, even as the COVID-19 pandemic raged on and millions of citizens were out of work, the Republican Party focused all of its attention on the border (Diaz & Mountz, 2020). The US media dutifully reported a new "crisis" at the border, and Republican politicians rushed to the border zone for press conferences on the existential threat the border posed to the future of the country.

Kevin McCarthy, the House Minority Leader and Republican of California, spoke in March 2021 in El Paso with the border wall visible behind him. He said that Border Patrol agents had just told him that terrorists had made it across the border. He said, "You saw it in their eyes. They talked about, 'They're on the list.' … The terrorist watch list" (Elfrink, 2021). Senator Ted Cruz of Texas led another delegation to the border a week later and said, "This is a humanitarian crisis, this is a public health crisis. The illegal immigrants who are being released, they are testing positive for COVID-19 at a seven times higher rate than the American population, and it is a national security crisis" (Shah & Ehling, 2021).

None of the claims McCarthy or Cruz made about an existential crisis at the border were backed by data, but that is not the point. As Alec Murphy describes below, nationalist politics relies on the division of insiders and outsiders, and the performance of difference is manifested at the border (Jones, 2021). Even as scholars have demonstrated that border work happens both inside the state and well beyond its borders, the line itself remains a critical point for the performance and reproduction of the territory and national imagination of the state. As Donald Trump was fond of saying, "If you don't have borders, you don't have a country" (Guild, 2018).

Despite the veneration of borders and territories, the reality is that social, cultural, and economic practices are not contained by the imagined borders of states on the map. They never have been, and they never will be. This is the paradox that John Agnew (1994) called the "territorial trap" almost thirty years ago. The world is a messy place where ideas, capital, and people are constantly in motion, not bounded and tied to a particular territory. Nevertheless, the power of the state is predicated on the fiction that those lines are very real and very significant. Consequently, a critical part of performing the authority of the state and its claim to legitimate authority in a territory has become the performance of the border.

This has not always been the case. When many borders were established in previous centuries, they were not given much thought. They were remote locations, distant from the center of power for the states (Winichakul, 1994). Most countries did not mark their new borders, much less guard or fortify them, for many years after they were originally drawn on maps. Borders were necessary for the creation of a state, but were, by definition, peripheral to it—something technically required but not particularly important to the consolidation of state sovereignty. For example, the United States did not have a Border Patrol until 1924 and it remained a small force well into the 1990s (Lytle Hernández,

2010).

Today, however, that formulation has been reversed. As more people, goods, and ideas cross borders, that movement has led to pointed questions about the legitimacy of the state and the territory itself (Brown, 2011). If the climate, economy, and internet are global, why are old-fashioned territorial states still necessary? To rephrase Trump's line, if a country cannot demonstrate its sovereignty at the border, how can it claim to continue to have a reason to exist?

Consequently, controlling the movement of ideas, people, and capital at borders has become the key location for the reconfiguration and reimposition of sovereign control (Jones & Johnson, 2016). Since states the world over are threatened by the dawning of a global consciousness—a global awareness of economic, political, and environmental connections—states everywhere are responding with increasingly violent efforts to signify their control over their borders. Indeed, the border has become the location for the performance of the territorial sovereignty of the state, par excellence.

In that sense, Wendy Brown (2011) was correct when she identified the turn to border walls as a symptom of waning sovereignty. However, while she saw it as a last gasp of a dying system in 2011, a decade later it is perhaps more evident of a retrenchment and fortification of that authority. Rather than fading away as states are replaced by a new global configuration of power, it appears that the years to come will be characterized by a nationalist resurgence in countries around the world as states and their privileged populations cling to the authority of a bounded territory tied to the past. The state remains a key container of sovereignty even as local and global nodes of power grow, which points to further conflict as these divergent views of territoriality overlap and intersect.

This is evident already in countries around the world. The logic of Britain leaving the European Union was that it would regain control over its borders. In Hungary, Prime Minister Victor Orbán consolidated power through demonizing immigrants, calling them "poison" and using the white supremacist theory of the great replacement to justify harsh border policies (Walker, 2019). In Greece, migrants attempting to enter from Turkey are pushed back out to sea and held in poor conditions in remote camps (Vradis et al., 2019). It is not just the US and Europe that are engaged in the nationalist politics of border performances. Two thirds of the seventy border walls that exist today were built in the past twenty years by countries as diverse as Bangladesh, China, South Africa, and Norway (Bissonnette and Vallet, 2021). Even as the number of people displaced by conflict is at the highest level ever, the global consensus around the refugee resettlement system has broken, what Alison Mountz (2021) calls "the death of asylum." These are all symptoms of the performance of hardened borders.

Rather than "the border is everywhere," as Balibar (2004) suggested, it is increasingly clear that the border is everything, at least in the eyes of nationalist politicians.

3. The territory-border underpinnings of populist right-wing nationalism

3.1. Alexander B. Murphy

Political borders and related bordering initiatives are foundational to the modernist concept of territory (Elden, 2010). As such, territory and political borders are intertwined; neither can be fully understood without reference to the other (Kallis, 2018). A stark, revealing example of the relationship between the two can be found in the bordering agendas of the populist right-wing nationalist movements that have gained traction in many countries over the past decade. Many such movements are grounded in a discourse that conveys alarm over the erosion of traditional territorial arrangements and prerogatives due to porous borders and inadequate "homeland security" (understood as defense of national territory from outside intruders). The bordering agendas promoted by this discourse (e.g., construction of walls, visa

restrictions, expanded state biopolitical control within and beyond borders) are a *product* of territory—a combination of its physical manifestation and conceptual foundations. These bordering agendas remind us that—at least when dealing with political borders in a world shaped by the political-spatial norms that developed along with the modern state system—the conceptualization of borders is deeply rooted in territorial arrangements and understandings.

This general point has been widely accepted, at least since work began appearing on the impacts of specific border arrangements on conceptions of territory, identity, and place (e.g., Murphy, 1988; Paasi, 1996; Sahlins, 1989). Many more recent studies have extended and deepened our understanding of the territory-border relationship, but bringing populist right-wing nationalism into the mix can yield further insights (accord Casaglia et al., 2020). That is because the bordering agendas of these populist movements are grounded in explicit territorial sovereignty claims that reflect and influence bordering discourse and practice in distinctive ways.

The central role territorial sovereignty claims play in right-wing populist discourse is well established (see e.g., Basile & Mazzoleni, 2020). In Agnew and Shin's (2020, p. 260) words, "to make sovereignty and territory match has always been the goal of such nationalist movements." Sovereignty is a contested concept, of course, but it is invoked by populist right-wing nationalists in ways that reflect the notion of a state's right and ability to control affairs within its territorial domain (fictive though that ability may be). That invocation inevitably makes borders relevant—even central—to the right-wing populist agenda (Kallis, 2018).

Donald J. Trump's successful 2016 campaign for the presidency of the United States of America is illustrative in this regard. His "Make America Great Again" campaign was rooted in an emphasis on promoting national over global interests. It championed a variety of initiatives with border-related implications: immigration restrictions, border walls, restructured trade arrangements with foreign countries, expanded "defense" spending, and rhetorical threats against companies moving production abroad. To paraphrase Jones in this intervention, the border came to be almost everything in the Trump campaign.

The growing appeal of populist-nationalist agendas in other settings has given rise to a variety of studies offering insights into how border-infused "spatial imaginaries of sovereignty" have contributed to the hardening and proliferation of borders (Richardson, 2020, p. 43); why the performance of a rigid, bordered notion of sovereignty has had strong communicative power (Kallis, 2018); why territorial sovereignty was so influential in the Brexit debate (Agnew, 2020); and the influence of a narrow (problematic) conception of sovereignty on contemporary Italian populism (Agnew, 2019). In and around this line of work are other questions that could enhance understanding of important nuances of the territory-border relationship. How have past bordering practices produced a set of territorial arrangements and understandings that give populist claims about sovereignty and borders such traction? Why do such claims resonate in some places more than others, and what are the implications of that geographical unevenness for populist bordering agendas? Finally, what do the answers to the preceding questions suggest about strategies that could challenge populism's framing of the territory-border dynamic?

Turning to the first of these questions, there is general recognition that support for right-wing populism in economically depressed areas has been fueled by shifting (often declining) employment opportunities and feelings of social-cum-cultural marginalization that have left many people feeling "besieged economically and culturally" (Jacobson, 2017, p. 21). What is often overlooked is that these circumstances/feelings are at least partially a product of bordering agendas that go back decades. Driven by the interests of what Michael Lind (2020) terms an overclass elite, those agendas include trade liberalization, the encouragement (or at least tolerance) of high levels of immigration, global labor and corporate tax arbitrage, and deregulation. In some parts of the United States and other countries, these globalization-driven strategies helped to depress wages in the manufacturing sector, weaken unions, exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities, and reduce local autonomy. They thus served as catalysts for the sovereigntist and bordering arguments advanced by right-wing populists (Judis, 2018).

For those who view the roots of populist nationalism in largely partisan terms (for example, as a product of Republican policies and priorities in the U.S.), the uncomfortable reality is that these bordering initiatives were driven by politicians, lobbyists, and institutional actors across a wide swath of the political spectrum. Their primary relevance to the issues under consideration here, however, lies in what they signify about the sovereignty-infused underpinnings of the populist border discourse. That discourse comes from territorial circumstances *produced* by approaches to bordering (or debordering) that gave rise to a material-cum-perceptual environment conducive to the sovereignty claims of right-wing nationalists. It follows that the task of locating territory in the conceptualization of borders does not necessarily start with territory and work toward borders or vice-versa. Instead, these two are circularly (i.e., relationally) constructed.

The Trump phenomenon in the U.S. is suggestive of another aspect of the territory-border relationship: the role underlying geographic variability plays in that relationship (the second question posed above). The results of the 2016 U.S. presidential election showed that the Trump emphasis on sovereignty and hard borders resonated much more in some places than in others—particularly in places that Lind (2020, pp. 14–15) terms heartlands (middle-class suburbs, exurbs, and rural areas), as opposed to hubs (urban areas and inner suburbs) (see Agnew & Shin, 2020). The explanation for this pattern lies in part in the spatially differentiated impacts of the bordering agendas of the overclass elite during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Nuance is important here. Many Trump supporters did not live in left-behind areas, and border anxiety is not always correlated with support for hard borders (consider the appeal of the Trump agenda in parts of Iowa and Nebraska that have been little affected by border issues). But the geographically variable pattern of support for Trump's sovereignty-infused campaign shows that place can play an important role in the territory-border relationship.

Joseph Sternberg (2019) editorial on populist nationalism in Europe reaches a similar conclusion. Arguing that such movements are more locationally specific than national (meaning state), he wrote that "Marine Le Pen's National Rally party could be more correctly labeled the Northeast and a Sliver of the South Rally. The Alternative for Germany party is really the Alternative for a Slice of the Former East Germany." His point is that populist movements are not simply the product of overarching social or demographic divisions; they are rooted in places characterized by a complex mix of social, economic, and attitudinal circumstances (accord Gordon, 2018). Recognition of this point is important for two reasons. First it shows the limitations of focusing too narrowly on a single variable—economy, culture, demography—in efforts to understand the territory-border dynamic. Second it draws attention to the types of geographical circumstances and understandings that fuel the populist territory/bordering agenda—an agenda that purports to be national in scope, but that is often regional in inspiration and effect.

These observations carry with them more general implications for how we think about the future of the territory-border relationship, as well as contemporary populism's version thereof. They suggest that material circumstances and representations reinforce one another in ways that buttress that dynamic. In practical terms that means that efforts to loosen the ties between borders and modernist territorial understandings cannot be accomplished by focusing solely on socioeconomic circumstances or on discourse at the state scale; these two need to be addressed synergistically in geographically sensitive ways. It follows that success in challenging populist bordering agendas will require a combination of targeted place-based policies and representations that speak to the territorial imaginaries of affected communities (e.g., providing economic development grants to communities

that have faced outsourcing-related job losses, while launching buy-local campaigns that support local businesses and benefit the environment).

Work that bridges the material and the representational is important in the scholarly realm as well. Insightful studies in this vein ranges from broad-scale investigations of the ways in which large-scale socio-political developments fostered discourses that paved the way for the spatial and functional expansion of bordering practices (e.g., Jones & Johnson, 2016) to case-specific explorations of, for example, the impacts of the flow of asylum seekers into Australia on that country's bordering discourse (van Kooy et al., 2021). A constructive way of building on such work (echoing Fall and Peterle in this intervention) would be to focus more attention on how intertwined, place-specific socio-economic circumstances and imaginaries give rise to geographically differentiated territory-border dynamics at scales below that of the state.

4. What sort of territory for what kind of border?

4.1. John Agnew

In the popular imagination borders are territorial in the sense that they mark the edges of blocs of space that constitute the "homelands" of nation-states. So, even if the management of border crossings moves away from the territorial borders themselves to policing at a distance or visa offices in embassies, it is those borders that anchor the meaning of the term. "No Borders, No Nation" was a graffiti I once saw scrawled on a wall in Thessaloniki in northern Greece. It reflected the sensibilities of locals about the Greece-Macedonia dispute over the name and symbols of the latter in the early 1990s following the breakup of Yugoslavia. The line on the map and the policing of that on the ground are central to the perennial questioning of the permanence of borders that keeps both nationalism and national identities in business (Agnew, 2007). Donald Trump's wall with Mexico and myriad others, as Jones notes in this Intervention, are the focal points for the key claim that a nation-state unable to control its borders is not much of a state (Wapner, 2020). Of course, barriers are themselves problematic psychologically for those who live adjacent to them.

The fetishization of physical land borders is based in an idealized silo conception of territorial spaces completely cut off from one another, when for most of world history, and increasingly so today, all sorts of transactions involving people, goods, services, and capital flow backward and forward over, through, under, and around territorial borders (Agnew, 2018). Of course, the world currently seems to be on a course in which absolute territorial sovereignty is making a major comeback, not least in the resurgence of nationalist-populist ideologies in which foreigners (as immigrants or as "bad actors" more generally) are seen as to blame for the political-economic malaise of so many contemporary post-industrial societies (e.g. Agnew, 2019; Agnew, 2020a). Indeed, nostalgia for a world of imperial rivalries in which "Great Powers" engage in the right to dominate has also revived, without much if any attention to the disasters this previously visited on the world in the first fifty years of the twentieth century (Paasi, 2020).

In this contribution, while highlighting the growing political salience of borders, I wish to relativize the typical meaning we give to borders by questioning the territory-homeland connection and by considering, in empirical and normative terms, territories as places for dwelling. My aim is to disassociate territory from the nationalist connotation of borders as defining homogeneous socio-political blocs that are totally immune to population shifts and local-global linkages. To make the argument, I draw from and compare two interesting books that have just been published (Shelef 2020; Ochoa Espejo, 2020). If Shelef (2020) uses a fairly conventional notion of a well bounded territorial "homeland" as its key concept in addressing the onset and history of interstate territorial disputes, Ochoa Espejo (2020) is keen to disassociate the bordered territory from a putative national homeland in order to argue for a more pluralist and organic view in which historic migration fields and legal

jurisdiction are more important than the abstract claims of a specific national/ethnic group in matching borders to territory. Following on from this latter approach, at the close I briefly articulate my conception of thinking about borders more in terms of delimiting what I call "dwelling" rather than geopolitical spaces (Agnew, 2020b).

Shelef's *Homelands* integrates research in two methodological registers: case studies of three historical examples of disputes over certain territorial borders held to define national borders (Germany after World War II, Italy after World War I, and Palestine in relation to Israel today) and a quantitative analysis of the factors that give rise to territorial disputes across a large international sample (e.g. co-ethnics on the border, electoral democracy, distance to the capital, alliances, prior conflict, etc.). The book begins with its essential premise: "Few things are as instinctively durable as a nation's desire for its homeland" (p. 1). The "persisting image" of the lost homeland, as with Zionist desire for the historic Israel, the Palestinian claim to the same territory, the Hungarian dream of a Greater Hungary in its pre-World War I borders, and the claims for a Greater Serbia, seem to justify this position. The main strength of the book, however, lies in the attention it gives to the political contingency of such claims. Over time what is understood as the homeland can shift as a result of competition between domestic political groups responding to external as well as internal incentives to literally redraw the territorial claims.

The three case studies, though, raise some doubts not just about the labile character of certain territorial claims, but also about what exactly a "homeland" actually is. Shelef leaves the outlines of homeland fuzzier than it should be if "it" is the main source of all territorial conflicts. A now largely forgotten article from 1964 identifies a key aspect of the problem when trying to make the distinction between territorial "core-areas" and their "peripheries" with respect to the "homelands" at stake in state development and national-identity formation (Pounds & Ball, 1964). In Germany an argument can be made to the effect that after World War II both of the successor states lost what had been much of the historic Brandenburg-Prussia core to the modern German state. Yet, as Shelef shows, after some internal conflict between domestic political parties in West Germany, as it then was, the claim was given up. As a pastiche of mini-states plus Prussia before unification in 1870, the German concept of *heimat* (national belonging through local belonging) seems to offer as much currency as the German idea of *vaterland* (direct national affiliation) in defining the German "homeland." In Italy the claims of irredentists to the South Tyrol and, more particularly, to the hinterland of Trieste in the northeast after World War I did generate much emotional energy before and into the Fascist era. But there is evidence that this had more to do with both the recent local sacrifices of Italian soldiery against the Austrian Army and Italian claims to colonial borders in Africa than with defining some natural Italian homeland. Even more than Prussia for Germany, apart from Rome and its environs, added at the close of Italian national unification in 1871, perhaps the Piedmont region of the northwest could be seen as the core of the country because it was the army of Piedmont and its king that provided the basis for what was largely a rather unenthusiastic reception to integrated statehood across the peninsula. Finally, the Palestine case study inevitably draws attention to the fact that prior to World War II, while Palestine was a British-mandate territory, the Palestinian homeland was much of what is now Israel. The Palestinians have been pushed off to the margins in the hills of the West Bank and the lowlands of Gaza with no territorial connection between them. Some (potential) homeland this is. There is no Palestine as such on the world political map. Frankly, how its "homeland" can even loosely equate to the other ones is beyond belief. This is normative projection of an ill-defined concept onto a marginalized population without much if any capacity to control its own territory.

Ochoa Espejo's *On Borders* questions this entire modeling of territories and their borders. Ochoa Espejo (who contributes to this Intervention below) suggests that homelands need to be put in question rather than simply assumed to conform to the territorial limits set by

current borders or the ones claimed by certain domestic nationalist factions. The strongest part of this book is its critique of what the author calls the "Desert Island Model of territorial politics." Casting doubt on the premise of a world divided up into well-defined "peoples," she also questions the fantasy present in the "utopian ideal of a borderless world with no states and no jurisdictions" (p.25). Rather, she proposes that "just borders" rely on "place-specific duties" built on what is called a "Watershed Model of Borders" (p. 25). The emphasis shifts from "identity" to "place" as the defining element of belonging in a territory defined as a jurisdiction. In this construction, "we draw borders (or jurisdictional limits) that sustain institutions which help people cooperate in sharing vital resources sustainably, equitably, and nonexploitatively" (p 186). As such, borders serve to delimit "the farthest claims in relation to a practice of sharing places, rather than a line that circumscribes a people" (p. 186).

This approach obviously fits better, empirically and normatively, a world in which borders are not best thought of as containers but as jurisdictional markers in which duties and rights can differ depending on which side of a border you are located. Just as globalization has attenuated "territoriality as sovereignty's primary mode of geographical organization' (Agnew, 2018, p. 13), so, from this perspective, the previously hegemonic Desert Island Model based on property and identity no longer matches the world as it is with new challenges from climate change, uneven economic development, shifting demographic patterns, and so on. The homelands model that we presuppose describes the world "as it is" in fact is an imposition onto a much more complex global reality in which all sorts of identities and interests are in play and not all territories occupied or claimed by different states are homelands at all. In this regard I make the distinction between borders for "dwelling spaces" and for "geopolitical spaces." As I have argued elsewhere, the former "presupposes that pursuit of basic life purposes and the possibility of living a 'satisfactory' life trump the inheritance of a given territorial address. This is not to say that there should not be criteria for deciding on territorial membership, such as asylum courts, legal immigration processes, and so on. But it does call into question the very idea that the act of movement across current national borders and settlement beyond them are somehow violations of a natural order" (Agnew, 2020b, p. 57).

5. Territory in times of shifting borders: the Watershed Model

5.1. Paulina Ochoa Espejo

In March 2020, using the spread of COVID-19 as an excuse, the U.S. government extended the practice of expelling to Mexican territory all asylum seekers arriving at the southern border. Unearthing a forgotten article of U.S. health law, and in the name of "national security," it reneged on its treaty obligation to non-refoulement. This contentious legal move advanced Trump's ideological strategy of blaming the disease on foreigners. By waving a xenophobic red herring in front of the public, it further distracted them from the administration's mishandling of the pandemic. Key to this strategy was the fantasy of the *cordon sanitaire,* which pretends to prevent the spread of disease by keeping people within an infected area. In reality, such practices never work at the border. But the appeal to them made by the US and many other governments in 2020 relied on the widespread notion that state laws, the nation or people, and the territory are coextensive. While the virus and the refugees demonstrated that these elements are not static, the desire to align them turned into violence directed against those outside the legal order, the national community, or the border wall.

Today borders are vectors of xenophobia and lawlessness. Many believe that they are always violent, and to end that violence we must dismantle them. But what if we changed how we understand territories? Here I argue that a Watershed Model of territory could help us have better borders, but the possibility of change depends on how we envision territory, and its relation to the people, and the law in the state.

Law, people, and territory are the three elements that traditionally define a sovereign state (Stilz, 2019). From a state perspective these three elements create a static "line in the sand" (Parker & Vaughan-Williams, 2009). Yet consider how things look from the border. When we see the spread of the virus, or the new practices of migration policing in the high seas, it is clear that borders are better described as "shifting" (Shachar, 2020). Indeed, when seen from the border, law, people, and territory themselves often shift their shapes or blend with the outside. Immigration officers carry their laws beyond the official line in the map, and populations extend beyond their official national homelands. Borders, then, are constantly shifting, and are therefore "everywhere" (Balibar, 2004). But the shifts reveal more than borders' ubiquity. They also spotlight a tension at the very heart of the modern state.

This flux in law, people, and territory is what makes borders so violent. Because they are defined by these three elements, sovereign states seek to stabilize and align them. But the flux means that, in doing so, states face a trilemma: they can hold any two of them fixed, but not all three. What then to do? On one approach, "the people" are not simply the population, rather, they are the state's nation; and the nation *owns* the territory. Here, what matters most is the tight connection of nation and territory (Paasi, 2020). But international law usually plays havoc with that desire: it allows immigrants many entry points into the territory. So those taking this approach often jettison the law to keep foreigners out (think of the anti-migrant actions of the US government) (Cohen, 2020). A second approach stresses the connection between the people and the law. For them, the people grounds the law, and the law the people. So they try to keep both of these fixed. Hence territory is the element in which they are willing to accept shifts. Thus they tolerate moving borders or overlapping jurisdictions, so long as state citizens and officers carry the law in their boats and their uniforms when they reach beyond official borders. On this approach, as in maritime law, the "law follows the flag": it is expected to move in lockstep with the shifting border (Shachar, 2020). Many think these two are the only approaches available. Yet the trilemma has a third option to hold fixed territory and legal rights. It is peoples that should be allowed to flow freely across borders. This approach seeks to keep the border at the border. But rather than imagining territory as the property of a given group, those who hold this view value the relations to the land for those who happen to be there. This approach sees citizenship in terms of residence, rather than identity. And it values territory because it cherishes interconnections of land, plants, things, and animals, both human and not.

Recently, this third approach has been taken up by indigenous rights activists and anti-colonial thinkers. When faced with environmental destruction, indigenous activists in Latin America began transforming the traditional meaning of the word "territory" as "an area of land claimed by a state" (Storey, 2020, p. 1). Instead of envisioning territory as the geospatial limits of a state depicted on a map, these activists considered the relations that their communities had established with *la tierra*—the land—as a source as sustenance and a way of life. Hence they severed the old association between "defense of territory" and military or nationalist purposes, instead tying it to political struggles against environmental degradation (Riofrancos, 2020). These new defenders of territory sought to stop multinational corporations (who were often in cahoots with national governments) from gouging natural resources out of areas that sustained traditional ways of life. To prevent that exploitative extraction of minerals or agricultural products (often justified in the name of national sovereignty), they embraced a conception of territory where ethical relations to the land have moral priority over popular sovereignty or the national will. On this conception, political obligations do not fall like manna from heaven onto individuals through the medium of state institutions. Instead, rights and obligations grow out of local norms. Thus communities and individuals relate to each other through mutual obligations mediated by the land, and they take responsibility for reproducing life in the places they inhabit. These obligations are justified when they support sustainable patterns of resource

use—particularly, water use. So for these "defenders of the water and the territory," rivers and watersheds stand in for valuable relations among people, animals and things. Hence it is not national sovereignty or territorial independence that justifies and defines territory, but rather environmental sustainability. As a result, this conception holds that borders connect as much as they divide.

This conception shares structure with the Watershed Model of territory and borders, a philosophical account that I developed in my book *On Borders* (Ochoa Espejo, 2020). Here, watersheds areas are a geographical feature that serves as a metaphor for territory and borders. In a watershed, water—rainfall, snowmelt, filtered water—flows from ridges toward creeks, streams, and rivers; eventually, it drains into lakes, reservoirs, and then the World Ocean. Like watersheds, territories are also composed of landforms, vegetation, animals, and their habitats (including people, their infrastructure, and their settlements). The Watershed Model rejects the established view of territories, which sees them as distinct, independent, and closed to the outside. For the Model, territories, like watersheds, are connected and interdependent. Since water flows and circulates, it is hard to determine exclusive ownership of it—and the same is true of territories. Thus the Watershed Model offers a place-based approach to territorial politics that does not rely on identity to demarcate jurisdictions. Instead, it makes local institutions of resource use and cooperation the ground of territorial rights. The watershed functions as model for a set of values and an orientation to border management that takes seriously our relations to ecosystems and special obligations tied to places.

In contrast to those views that imagine territory as either a container of cultures or as a protective bunker, this approach highlights the importance of geological features and natural relations within territories. Specifically, like the Latin American activists, this model focuses on place-based political obligations. Like watersheds, territories create unique obligations among those within them, and these in turn establish unique collectives. Just like each member of a nation has special obligations to other nationals, here instead, those who are present in a place owe obligations to those who are physically near them. A good example of place-based obligations is the responsibility we have not to soil the water for those downstream. Place-based obligations are tightly connected to government because they guide administrative and political decisions about how we circulate, how we plan cities, and how we think of private, public, and sacred spaces.

More broadly, the watershed metaphor allows us to think of place-based normative standards to govern territories and borders. The Watershed Model does not assume that nature creates distinct countries, that a people or a nation *owns* a territory, or that land *belongs* to a people; rather, it sees territory emerging from located socio-natural relations, obligations, and institutions. These relations become the center of governance in localities, which may come together and scaffold up to constitute territories, and even social collectives based on presence. These collectives are neither grounded on identity, nor on abstract universal norms that descend from above; rather, they depend on participation in networks of coordinated action that respect place-specific duties and are associated with institutional urban design, rural management, and local habits.

Borders are shifting. If current predictions hold, migration will be only one among the many challenges involved in mitigating and adapting to climate change. The enormous changes required in economic institutions and infrastructure cannot be limited to one society or contained within one territory. We can bring to this challenge a bunker mentality, like the xenophobic knee-jerk reaction to COVID-19 and immigration at the southern US border in 2020. Or we can bring a solidarity approach that crosses borders, as the one we can see in many cross-border initiatives and water-sharing institutions that already exist. The Watershed Model helps us to re-imagine territory by grounding transnational solidarity in embedded communities, while responding to the dual challenges of migration and climate change.

6. Fleshing out insecure territories and borders

6.1. Juliet J. Fall and Giada Peterle

Anyone who has ever sat on a beach knows how much effort it takes to stake out and maintain a corner of sand. You spread out your towel and spend the day making sure that the neighbors, with their alleged encroachments, recognize your temporary authority over a patch of land. But when you leave, you notice that the trace of your towel on the sand is rapidly cancelled by a subtle breeze. There was in fact no permanent connection between your body, your personal effects, and the beach. Slightly sunburned, you realize that territory, as a political concept, is fundamentally insecure and fragile. It is not the result of an inevitable, natural way of dividing social space (Elden, 2010). This essential insecurity means that territories need to be constantly re-grounded and re-naturalized within a variety of never-ending processes of de/re-territorialization (Jackman et al., 2020). Yet it is a well-established nationalistic trope that territories are grounded in something fundamentally true and real, as reflected, for instance, in concepts like "natural borders" or "artificial states" (Fall, 2010). While territories are taken to reflect an original essence, their "naturalness" is a costly illusion to maintain.

But how, in these moments of intense and insecure de/re-territorialization and globalization, can we locate where territory is made in relation to these bordering processes? How can we narrate the embodied dimension of these continual processes of territorial becoming? Geographers can make sense of this by remaining attentive to how the global and the intimate construct one another (Mountz & Hyndman, 2006). In other words, rather than thinking about national and international politics taking place at one scale, and daily life taking place at another, we should consider how the human body mediates processes that operate across spaces and scales. This implies diversifying our approach to territory, first, by drawing upon feminist perspectives that explore how bodies are themselves sites of continual border-making; and second, by embracing methods that allow for the narration of these embodied experiences.

In seeking to understand processes of making and remaking insecure territories, we have experimented with ways of grasping and reflecting on these bodily dimensions, integrating autoethnographic vignettes with visual methods – i.e., mobilizing methods that go beyond words and that address affect in multiple verbal and more-than-verbal ways. Our short autoethnographic documentary-film *Envisioning borders: thinking across border spaces with and through comics* (February 2021, Vimeo) moves in this direction. The various pandemic lockdowns that we have experienced, and their grounding in state-sanctioned processes of de/re-bordering, have become fascinating laboratories on our doorsteps. Connected, though at a distance, we have used photography, filmmaking, comics, and graphic storytelling to produce counter-narratives and to reflect on our individual and collective experiences. Here, to explore the on-going production of boundaries, and the bodily experiences of those boundaries, we present a series of autoethnographic vignettes on the creation of COVID-19-related borders in Italy and Switzerland (*see also* Butz & Besio, 2009; Peterle, 2021; Shaw, 2013; Rabbiosi & Vanolo, 2017).

In February 2020, the small town of Vo' Euganeo, 20 km away from Padova in northeastern Italy, was the epicenter of COVID-19 infection in the region. Soon after, the whole region was bounded as a "red zone," and many other restrictions impacted everyday mobilities and rhythms. By March, the whole country was a protected zone and, aside from China, Italy became the main focus of international attention. In this way, Italy offered a premonition of what other countries in Europe would soon experience: a dystopian version of our common future. The Italian lockdown had strict rules compared to those in most other European countries. Mobility was discouraged, except for trips considered strictly necessary to go to work, the pharmacy, or the grocery store. In Veneto, physical activity was allowed only in a small area no more than

200 m from a person's home address. Giada, who lives in Padova, described the experience of her mobility within her new COVID bubble. Even if visible only on her smartphone, the borders were nonetheless powerful in shaping her movements, separating her from her friends and loved ones, and limiting her accessibility to public urban space. She wrote,

> With a very simple app on a smartphone, I was able to draw on the map of Padova a yellow bubble, a circular area with a radius of 200m from home where I was allowed to walk. Within that bubble, the sounds were mitigated by the almost complete absence of cars on the streets, and the smells coming from the small canal were penetrating my nostrils. I used to walk for hours. In each outing, I did more than 15,000 steps, drawing a network of invisible pathways, trying to fool myself, to pretend that I wasn't locked up in the yellow bubble. Other friends were doing the same, walking in their own bubbles. Yet our yellow areas never crossed, and we were kept separated, isolated, distanced.

In Padova, like in other cities, and countries, new, invisible borders started regulating everyone's mobility. Decisions made at the broader scale of the state, or of the Veneto region, were rescaling the perception of the city, the home and the body by affecting daily gestures and movements. In Italy, you had to complete a self-certification form attesting the reason for leaving the home. Giada's notes reflect on the existence of intangible borders as a way for "sensing scalarity" (Linder, 2021) as follows:

> I remember staring at the invisible border traced by the app at the precise beginning of a pedestrian crossing. Its absurdity was hard to accept. My instinct was to move my feet, to step on the white line on the asphalt, and jump on the 'other side'. But soon the traffic light turned red, and, with shortness of breath, I turned to the right, and I left the border behind.

As Benjamin Linder asserts, "scalar interrelations were in a moment of radical flux" during COVID-19 (Linder, 2021, pp. 1–2), and the pandemic altered our intimate, relational and even political perception of scale: while the domestic scale was revalorized, other "higher" or "larger" scales felt even more distant, sometimes unreachable. The changing im/mobilities that accompanied fortified borders call for a more experiential understanding of scale that places sensorial and emotional matters at the center (Linder, 2021, pp. 2–3). This understanding is usefully applied to COVID lockdowns, which were used from Wapner, 2020) to secure territories and to preserve the bodily integrity of their inhabitants, or at least to delay or deflect the collapse of health systems, through multiple performative and visual processes of bordering. Juliet describes the closure of borders in Switzerland as follows:

> In March 2020, as COVID-19 cases soared, the Swiss Federal Council imposed a lockdown across Switzerland, closing international borders to all but essential travel, with restricted entry both into and out of the country. Overnight, concrete blocks and improvised fences appeared at most of the large and small roads leading to the border. In consequence, the open landscape around my home in Geneva suddenly shrunk. Seeing these walls appear suddenly so close to home, at a time of heightened global anxiety, made them personal in a way that affected and surprised me deeply. As I became obsessed with witnessing these border fences, I became aware of how bodies were the scale at which power operating at larger scales could begin to be understood, as sites upon which the new ideas, ideologies, and the territorial politics of the pandemic were being performed and made meaningful, from handwashing to border closures. These new fences only made sense as curiously temporary, haphazard and fundamentally visual performances of security, illustrating how sovereignty is endlessly re-enacted and made visual in order to be claimed.

This is a useful example to understand how political crises redefine security through and across interwoven scales. In this case, domesticating our thinking helped to make sense of the ways in which the division between public and private was being inscribed on the political landscape, but also the way public and private were becoming entangled. By erecting new and sometimes absurd borders, the patriarchal state was trying to make visible the ways in which the protection it offered reached from the intimate spaces of contagion to the international sphere.

Narrating and theorizing such personal experiences visually helps keep interpretation open and gives readers an active role in making sense of a new global reality, experienced differently in different places (Fall, 2020). Visualizations help us to document and picture insecure territories, and to remember and actualize past experiences. Moving beyond the fixed frame, visual representations are processes that craft new narratives each time we engage with them: they are interventions that create new spatial meanings (Peterle, 2021). Put into circulation, these autoethnographic methods allow for reciprocal exchange beyond self-reflexivity. They also contribute to resituating bodies at the center of our imaginaries, showing how borders and territories are performed, embodied, and experienced differently according to various subjects, scales, and contexts.

Looking at our respective pictures from the lockdowns now, alone and together, new meanings and values emerge, stimulating storytelling that creates new opportunities for encounter, and that helps us make sense of our experiences and share them with others. This intensely personal, bodily, and situated experience of borders at different scales needs to be taken seriously. It connects in important ways to efforts by feminist scholars to bring non-state political actors, including activist groups, local communities and associations, women, global and international social forums, and non-governmental entities, into discussions about politics, security and vulnerability, broadening the understanding of each (Enloe, 1989; Dalby, 1994). Shifting the analytical focus beyond states, in turn, has introduced a more nuanced and multi-scaled understanding of what constitutes "the international", and has helped us to connect the global and the intimate. In these approaches, the body is taken "as a scale and site upon which ideas, ideologies, and politics are performed and made meaningful" (Mountz, 2018, p. 762) and where sovereignty is performed and claimed. We share this interest in understanding how global forces haunt and shape the intimate spaces of bodies. Our aim is not to fix a single narrative of de/re-territorialization, but rather, by stimulating collective, critical storytelling practices, to offer multiple interpretations of what has happened and what is yet to come.

Declaration of competing interest

No conflict of interest.

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