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What is This?
Borders as information flows and transnational networks

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Abstract
The international communication subfield has assumed that cross-border information flows and the national borders they traverse are two different kinds of phenomena: information flows are viewed as fluid and mobile, while national borders are understood to be the rigid and immobile edges of the nation-state ‘container’. This paper unsettles this assumption by showing that state actors in the US and the EU are stretching border controls into neighbouring and distant territories. These borders, which are dependent on transnational ICT networks, are permitting state actors to re-scale border controls in a way that transcends the territorial framework of the nation-state system. These network-like borders are discussed in terms of their contribution to mobility inequality; their implications for those who have turned to concepts such as ‘diaspora’ as a way of escaping ‘the iron grip of the nation-state on the social imagination’; and their implications for state power.

Keywords
borders, nation-state, trans-border flows, information flows, information communication technologies

For much of its history, the international communication subfield has been concerned with the cultural, economic and political implications associated with the large-scale movement of information across border-spanning networks of various kinds. Research on subjects such as the unbalanced flows of news and entertainment between countries, the extent of western dominance in the production and distribution of film and television

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programming, the rise of regional audio-visual industries, and the role played by the internet and more traditional media in enabling various diasporas exemplify this. So too does research on issues that lie beyond these customary topics such as the emergence of global surveillance networks and the role of high speed telecommunication networks in the globalization of financial services. Generally speaking, this research implicitly assumes that cross-border information flows and the national borders they traverse are two entirely different kinds of phenomena: information flows are viewed as fluid, dynamic and mobile, while national borders are understood to be the rigid and immobile edges of the nation-state ‘container’ (Van Schendel, 2005). Information flows are often accorded agency, while borders are assumed to be sedentary and vulnerable structures; flows are said to ‘permeate borders’, ‘obliterate borders’, ‘erode borders’, ‘make a mockery of state frontiers’, ‘penetrate territories’, and ‘transgress national boundaries’. In Manuel Castells’ (2000a, 2000b) terms, then, much of the subfield has focused on the material and symbolic dimensions of processes that inhabit the ‘space of flows’, while assuming national borders are background structures that belong to the ‘space of places’.1

In this paper, I seek to demonstrate that this assumption is increasingly problematic given recent border control practices in the United States (US), the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia. For the past two decades, and especially after the 9/11 attacks, state actors in these parts of the world have assiduously conducted two kinds of border work. First, numerous initiatives have sought to buttress fortifications at the various manifestations of the traditional territorial perimeter in order to prevent a continuum of ‘undesirables’ – irregular immigrants, and known and suspected criminals and terrorists – from entering the ‘internal comfort zone’. More innovatively, and of primary concern here, a second set of initiatives has dispersed and multiplied border controls away from the geographic borderlines. These ‘remote control’ borders (Guiraudon, 2003), which are highly dependent on complex clusters of networked databases and biometric technologies, stretch into neighbouring and distant territories in order to identify, profile, track and facilitate information sharing about in-bound travellers.2 Based on this ‘upstream’ screening, individuals are sorted into ‘low risk’ and ‘high risk’ categories. This risk calculus ostensibly facilitates the smooth and efficient entry of the former while immobilizing the latter, thereby mediating the competing demands for both heightened border security and ongoing cross-border business movements.

In essence, in addition to constructing ‘walls’ that ‘hold the line’ against the clandestine crossing of territorial borders, state actors in the US, the EU, the UK and Australia are constructing proactive techniques of policing at a distance that are critically dependent on distributed transnational networks of information and communication technologies (ICTs), or what Katja Franko Aas refers to as ‘global risk communication networks’ (2005: 208). In these networks, various forms of information circulate across borders and ‘through different departments, looping back and forth in commercial, policing and government networks. Surveillance records, once kept in fixed filing cabinets and dealing in data focused on persons in specific places, are now fluid, flowing and global’ (Lyon, 2003: 208). In Sandra Braman’s words, this border modality ‘map[s] onto technological … and informational systems … [expanding] the boundaries of the informational state beyond its geopolitical borders …’ (2006: 318–319). Borders, then, can no longer be viewed as simply antonyms of transnational information flows; some manifestations of
the border have themselves become part of the ‘space of flows’ as state actors based in particular locales seek to regulate the cross-border flow of people and goods.

There are at least three reasons why this development is worthy of attention by the international communication subfield. First, if the subfield does not adopt a more sophisticated understanding of what and where contemporary borders are, it runs the risk of reproducing an outdated mode of analysis that is unable to keep pace with the emergence of an important new kind of transnational information flow that is differentially impacting various actors and groups in terms of their life opportunities and transnational mobility. Second, a consideration of the new border architectures has implications for the growing number of scholars in the subfield who have been plotting their escape from what Peter Taylor refers to as the ‘iron grip of the nation-state on the social imagination’ (1996: 1923). These critics argue persuasively that media researchers must abandon the nation-state ‘container’ as the unquestioned unit of analysis in order to grasp adequately the dynamics of transnational media processes that are not bound by or related to specific national ‘containers’ (for example, Aksoy and Robins, 2000; Chalaby, 2007; Georgiou and Silverstone, 2007; Hepp and Couldry, 2009; Karim, 2004). Yet, their attempts to ‘unthink’ the nation-state are problematic because they rest in part on claims that globally scaled processes of ‘de-territorialization’ are progressively undercutting the relevance of state borders. While some of this must be taken seriously, it is only part of the story. ‘Re-territorialization’ processes are at work, too, as state actors in particular locales both fortify national territorial boundaries and generate network-like borders that ‘jump scale’ (Brenner, 2004) into transnational space and ‘touch down’ in various territorial nodes across the globe (for example, overseas consulates, ports, travel agencies). State borders, then, are becoming more complex and differentiated, rather than simply declining in importance. Overlooking this dynamic, the critics do not seem well placed to explain the implications of contemporary state border policies for some of the transnational cultural processes they seek to comprehend. Third, understanding the challenges that the global ‘information revolution’ poses for state power is an enduring theme in the subfield. There has certainly been no shortage of discussion concerning the roles played by satellites and the internet in contributing to the porosity of national borders (see Price, 2002: 3–29). Nor has the subfield and related disciplines lacked debate on the question of whether these developments signal a significant decline in the regulatory power of states (for example, Cavelty et al., 2007; Comor, 1994; Goldsmith and Wu, 2006; Hanson, 2008; Howard, 2011; Mirrlees, 2013: 105–146; Morozov, 2011; Morris and Waisbord, 2001; Price, 2002; Waisbord, 2003). Yet, a more comprehensive and balanced assessment of the relationship between the ‘revolution’ and state power must also take into consideration the fact that state actors in various locales are working assiduously to enhance their regulatory power by deploying ICTs to bolster conventional national borders as well as construct border modalities that are planetary in scope.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section outlines the historical processes that led to the emergence and global reach of linear state borders. The second section discusses the ways in which social scientists, including international communication specialists, have typically understood state territorial boundaries, from the Cold War-era treatment of state borders as the ossified and immutable lines that mark off and enclose distinct national societies to the post-Cold War view that ‘globalization’ has fatally
undermined the regulatory significance of these linear borders. I conclude the section by arguing that the latter perspective is flawed on empirical and conceptual grounds. First, the notion that the regulatory significance of linear state borders is in decline overlooks the ample evidence that various states have recently reinforced these borders in order to enhance control over particular transnational flows. Second, like many Cold War-era social scientists, globalization theorists continue to conceptualize state borders in purely conventional terms – as immobile boundaries located at fixed sites on the state’s geographic outer edge. Consequently, I argue, these observers are not well placed to identify and interrogate the significance of new kinds of state border practices that project beyond the linear frontiers of the nation-state. In the third section, I provide examples of how state actors are drawing on ICTs to construct transnational border modalities that clearly challenge the customary understanding of what and where borders are supposed to be. I discuss the implications of my analysis in the final section of the paper.

**Linear state borders: Emergence and global reach**

Rooted in international propaganda research conducted during the two World Wars and emerging as an area of academic inquiry in the aftermath of World War II, ‘[the] international communication [subfield] historically has been oriented almost exclusively around nation-states, looking at differences between what happens in them (comparative studies) and at flows of communication between them (international communication)’ (Braman, 2002: 339–400; see also Mody, 2002: 291; Thussu, 2000: 1). For much of its history, then, the international communication subfield (and many other areas of the social sciences) has presupposed a particular geopolitical template, namely a visualization of global space that is organized in terms of a worldwide grid of mutually exclusive contiguous nation-states or ‘power containers’ (Giddens, 1985). According to this template, state borders are located at the geographical outer edge of the polity and are the territorial markers of the limits of sovereign political authority and jurisdiction (Agnew, 1994). In this imaginary, then, borders are viewed as delimiting and delineating nation-states as independent entities in the interstate system and sharply separating the ‘inside’ of domestic societal interactions from the ‘outside’ of international and interstate relations (Vaughan-Williams, 2009: 1; Walker, 1993). This concept of the border has been central to the international communication subfield in terms of permitting the very notion of international communication; the concept has allowed for the conceptualization and analysis of flows of information between and among territorial nation-states in contradiction to flows that circulate more or less exclusively within the boundaries of these entities (the latter providing the basis for comparative study of national communication systems).

The fact that this geopolitical template became deeply embedded in much social science thinking of the 20th century is certainly understandable. The social sciences, including the international communication subfield, came into being at the same time or shortly after the modern nation-state rose to unprecedented prominence in the world. As Neil Brenner puts it, ‘[in] the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historical-geographical context [when] the first social sciences emerged … the territorial state’s role in “encaging” socioeconomic and political-cultural relations within its boundaries
dramatically intensified’ (1999: 48). It is ‘no wonder’, then, writes Willem van Schendel, that ‘social scientists stood in awe of the state: before their eyes it brought almost all of humanity and all the earth’s surface under its sway’ (2005: 40).

The ‘encaging’ process Brenner refers to is commonly traced to late medieval Europe when the dissolution of overlapping feudal hierarchies began to give way to the practice of organizing political space in terms of exclusive state control over enclosed territorial domains. This development was nominally codified in the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, a series of treaties that sought to address the chronic and bloody sectarian violence that characterized much of the early 1600s. The Peace recognized the existence of an inter-state system composed of abutting, bounded territories ruled by sovereign states that strive to exercise exclusive control over persons and resources within their respective territories (Murphy, 1996; Taylor, 1994). While the Peace sign-posted a radical transformation in the arrangement of political space, it would take several centuries for early European state boundaries to change from a network of diffuse and permeable frontiers to a system of demarcated territorial borders (Giddens, 1985; Paasi, 1999; Popescu, 2011).

The burgeoning nationalism of 19th-century Europe and the closely connected rise of the nation-state were key factors in elevating the importance of the concept of the territorial border as a political line of separation (Agnew, 2007; Gellner, 1983; Giddens, 1985). ‘Nationalism’, Gabriel Popescu argues, ‘required an intimate connection between people and territory. This territorialization of identity materialized in the nation. The institution of the state gave the nation its political expression. Boundaries served to bind it all together. They helped maintain domestic coherence (the coherence of the nation) and regulate interaction with other nations …’ (2011: 36). Similarly, Taylor observes that nationalist projects of the period encouraged people to see themselves as sharing ‘crucial cultural attributes so that their citizenship was not an arbitrary matter of location. The nation … became a collective group with a common identity … In addition [this] community was indissolubly linked to the land in which it developed. This completely changed the nature of territory, especially the integrity of its borders. From being parcels of land transferable between states as the outcomes of wars, all territory, including borderlands, became inviolate … In short, it became the state’s duty to defend the national homeland’ (1994: 155). Capitalism also played a central role in the making of modern borders (for example, Agnew, 2008; Giddens, 1985; Popescu, 2011; Wallerstein, 1999). As Popescu puts it:

[w]hen compared to the territorial fragmentation of feudal markets and taxation systems, the unified territory of the nation-state provided an improved framework for the organization of stable large-scale wealth accumulation strategies. Sharp nation-state borders provided essential protection for national capital from outside competition, while at the same time they offered a readily available national market for consumption. (2011: 37)

By the turn of the twentieth century, sharply demarcated territorial borderlines had become institutionalized elements of the state’s apparatus throughout Europe. Borderland areas were increasingly populated with watchtowers, fences, border guard units and customs systems (Popescu, 2011: 37–38).
Europe’s linear territorial borders attained global reach through processes of colonization and decolonization (Popescu, 2011; Spruyt, 2000). Taking the African continent as an example, the main purpose of colonial borders was not to delineate European-style territorial sovereignty, but to mark off the spheres of influence of the superpowers of the day. Most borderlines on the continent were established between the mid-1890s and early 1900s as Britain, France, Belgium and Germany vied to secure their territorial claims. Representatives of these powers gathered at the Berlin Conference of 1894–95 to mediate conflicting claims and, in the words of German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, ‘bring the natives of Africa within the pale of civilization by opening up the interior of the continent to commerce’ (quoted in Mutua, 2000: 841). With little or no regard for local political, ethnographic, demographic and topographic factors, the European powers reorganized thousands of tribes into 50 states (Herbst, 1989: 674–675; Popescu, 2011: 40–41; Touval, 1966). As a result, these states were composed of a host of different ethnic groups with different historical traditions, cultures and languages.

Taking up the task of nation-state building in the decolonization period of the 1950s and 1960s, African leaders of the newly independent states retained the superimposed colonial borders, thus inheriting many of the problems the borders initially created. Citing the importance of peace, stability and a speedy decolonization process, these leaders adopted a resolution supporting respect for inherited borders at the 1964 meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (Larémont, 2005: 6; Touval, 1967). In doing so, the resolution tacitly legitimated ‘the involuntary membership of people in states into which they were “fenced” by colonial powers’. Moreover, ‘[a] logical corollary of the resolution would be that attempts to change the status quo by groups claiming the right to self-determination are to be rejected …’ (Touval, 1967: 125). The OAU’s approach, which the US and the Soviet Union endorsed (Touval, 1972), was not without its critics. President Nyerere of Tanzania argued: ‘We must be more concerned about peace and justice in Africa than we are about the sanctity of the boundaries we inherit’ (quoted in McCorquodale and Pangalangan, 2001: 876). Whatever the merits of accepting colonial borders, the African states that came into existence in the aftermath of World War II accepted the ‘territorial straightjackets bequeathed by colonial cartographers’ (Mahmud, 2010: 6) and an international order based on a grid of precisely demarcated nation-states.

By the end of the first part of the 20th century, then, much of the planet’s land mass had been divided into a system of bounded individual territorial states. Ernest Gellner (1983: 139–140) summarizes the outcome of the centuries-long shift to this system as follows:

[C]onsider two ethnographic maps, one drawn before the age of nationalism, and the other after the principle of nationalism had done much of its work. The first map resembles a painting by Kokoschka. The riot of diverse points of colour is such that no clear pattern can be discerned in any detail, though the picture as a whole does have one. A great diversity and plurality and complexity characterizes all distinct parts of the whole … Look now instead at the ethnographic and political map of an area of the modern world. It resembles not Kokoschka but, say, Modigliani. There is very little shading; neat flat surfaces are clearly separated from each other, it is generally plain where one begins and another ends, and there is little if any ambiguity or overlap. Shifting from a map to the reality mapped, we see that
an overwhelming part of political authority has been concentrated in the hands of one kind of institution, a reasonably large and well-centralized state. In general, each state presides over, maintains, and is identified with, one kind of culture, one style of communication, which prevails within its borders.

Several caveats are worth adding to this otherwise helpful summary. First, Gellner tends to overstate the success of nationalist projects and the degree of cultural homogeneity within many state borders. Second, his discussion of the ‘reality mapped’ omits the fact that the neat lines of separation on the map are, in fact, very often zones of intense interactions where people from both sides of the border work out everyday accommodations (Baud and Van Schendel, 1997: 216). To varying degrees, peoples in borderland areas have always been able to manipulate or circumvent the barriers that resulted from the territorial demarcation of modern nation-states (for example, Andreas, 2000). As Robert Holton observes, ‘there never has been a time when states possessed some kind of absolute control over their territory and the movement of resources, people, and cultural influences across their borders’ (1998: 83). Third, Gellner’s notion that ‘there is little if any ambiguity’ concerning the territorial borders that separate states overlooks the fact that states often contest the precise location and reach of these borders (disputes over territorial waters, for example) (Wiegand, 2011).

State borders and the social sciences

During the Cold War, and particularly in the post-independence era, relatively little cartographical change took place around the globe (Popescu, 2011). Writing in the midst of this period, one observer commented:

[w]hether we like it or not, boundary disputes, so dominant in international politics [in the colonial period and the territorial realignment initiated by World War I], are fading away from the diplomatic agenda … [t]hey are replaced in both urgency and importance by problems of a new kind of frontiers – frontiers of ideological worlds. (Kristof, 1959: 278)

Against this backdrop, social scientists increasingly took the territories of modern statehood and their linear borders as a fixed and reliable template. Writing at this time, Anthony Smith observed: ‘The study of “society” today, is almost without question, equated with the analysis of nation-states … the world nation-state system has become an enduring and stable component of our cognitive outlook….’ (1979: 191). Brenner notes that ‘by the mid-twentieth century, each of the conceptual building blocks of the modern social sciences – in particular the notion of state, society, economy, culture and community – had come to presuppose … the territorialization of social relations within a parcelized, fixed and essentially timeless geographic space’ (1999: 47). Similarly, Taylor argues that the social sciences of the period ‘faithfully reflected the power containers of the social world [they] were studying’ (1996: 1920). Concomitantly, the linear edges or borders of these ‘containers’ also acquired a doxic, taken-for-granted character as ‘part of the fixtures and fittings’ of the international system (Williams, 2003: 27). As Brenner puts it, ‘[j]ust as a fish is unlikely to discover water, most

These observations can be extended to the two paradigms that dominated the international communication subfield from the aftermath of World War II until the end of the 1980s, namely the modernization theory of the 1950s and 1960s and the cultural imperialism approach of the following two decades. There are certainly profound differences between the two, but, as Jean Chalaby argues, ‘both shared a national outlook that was instilled … by the rivalries between nation-states that shaped international relations during the Cold War’ (2007: 62). Focusing on the newly independent states, modernization theorists such as Daniel Lerner (1958) and Wilbur Schramm (1964) identified various internal factors – behavioural and structural – that ostensibly impeded national development. For them, the mass media could play a key role in helping state leaders overcome these impediments. In essence, their image of development amounted to transforming these nascent entities into mirror images of the western nation-states. Of course, proponents of cultural imperialism had a very different focus. They were concerned with the supposed pernicious effects of particular external factors on the nation-state building efforts of the former colonies. Specifically, for them, the aggressive proliferation of western advertising, news and entertainment that swept across the South was eroding the cultural sovereignty of the newly independent states. This, in turn, was said to be hobbling the capacity of their governments to forge self-reliant nation-states that could avoid absorption in the Western bloc. The implication was that this goal of self-reliance could only be achieved if these governments were able to amass the capacity to strengthen national control over the images and information that circulated within and across their borders (for example, Nordenstreng and Schiller, 1979; Schiller, 1969, 1976). Despite the stark contrasts between the two approaches, each assumed the nation-state to be the primary and natural form of polity – the only thinkable way of organizing socio-political life. This includes taking for granted the inherited territory and borderlines of developing countries; these borderlines and the territories they encased were assumed to be the immutable ground upon which the drama of nation-state building would unfold.

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, a growing number of observers began to seriously challenge the nation-state’s ‘iron grip’ on social science discourses (see Beck, 2000: 22–63). More specifically, much of the research on ‘globalization’ that proliferated in the 1990s argued that a new post-national geography of ‘supra-territorial’ (Scholte, 1996) processes was eclipsing the inherited geography of a worldwide grid of self-enclosed national territories. Some observers emphasized the increasing scale and reach of transnational corporations, the growth of commodity chains across multiple jurisdictions, and the proliferation of global financial networks and transactions (for example, Appadurai, 1996; O’Brien, 1992; Ohmae, 1995; Strange, 1996). Others chronicled the increasing density and velocity of transnational population movements and the global circulation of images and cultural symbols that ostensibly attenuated the connection between culture and locality (for example, Appadurai, 1996; Garcia Canclini, 1995; Tomlinson, 1999). Almost all of these observers emphasized the role of information-communication technologies (ICTs) in facilitating the global circulation of money, information, objects and people. Concepts and metaphors such as ‘networks’, ‘space of flows’, ‘scapes’, ‘flowmations’, ‘transnationalisms’, ‘diasporas’, ‘translocalities’, ‘global fluids’
and ‘horizontal fluidities’ have been elaborated to explain how these various trans-border processes undermine the nation-state as the basic ‘container’ of social life by loosening the bonds that tied economics, politics and culture to fixed national territories (for example, Appadurai, 1996; Beck, 2002; Castells, 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Held et al., 1999; Rosenau, 1997; Tuathail and Luke, 1998; Urry, 2000, 2005; Waters, 1995). And while earlier generations of social scientists understood borders to be the static, frozen-in-amber lines that effectively demarcated one ‘container’ from another, much of the discourse on this new ‘world in motion’ (Urry, 2000) characterizes these borders as increasingly irrelevant dimensions of a fast-fading form of socio-spatial organization. The latter discourse is suffused with claims that the linear territorial borders of the nation-state are ‘receding’, ‘eroding’, ‘blurring’, ‘becoming less relevant’ and ‘declining in significance’ as transnational mobilities of people, images, information and capital traverse them with considerable ease.

These themes – the eclipse of the nation-state system by ‘supra-territorial processes’, the declining importance of state borders, the desire to escape ‘container thinking’ – are echoed strongly in a growing corpus of writing within the international communication subfield (for example, Aksoy and Robins, 2000, 2003; Chalaby, 2007; Georgiou and Silverstone, 2007; Hepp, 2008, 2009; Hepp and Couldry, 2009; Karim, 2004; Robins, 2009; Sinclair and Cunningham, 2000). For instance, John Sinclair and Stuart Cunningham write that during the Cold War, ‘the world saw itself as primarily constituted by sovereign and culturally distinctive nation-states; although they were anxious about the effect on their populations of satellite spillover from one to the other and, especially, of opening up the flood gates to “cultural imperialism”’. However,

In the current era there is not only skepticism toward the very idea that the nation-state has a national culture to protect, but there is recognition that … populations themselves are on the move, often in a process of ‘de-territorialization’ that erases the national boundaries with which nation-states literally define themselves. (Sinclair and Cunningham, 2000: 11)

Sinclair and Cunningham turn to the concept of the ‘diaspora’ to understand how such contemporary flows of people provide a significant context for explaining the changing dynamics of ‘globalizing televisual flows’.

Along the same lines, Myria Georgiou and Richard Silverstone argue that the subfield must shake off ‘the central role of the national in inter-national communications’ (2007: 30). This is necessary, they argue, because of ‘the recalcitrance of the transnational and the instabilities and movements of communication and cultural forms, whose understanding is not reducible to the singularity of the national’. Seeking to escape the ‘national’, they too focus on the diaspora as a locus of the transnational. Specifically, they argue that the mediated communications generated around the diaspora or transnational community ‘provide a key route for understanding the flows of global media’. As they put it:

Just as migration itself disturbs the boundaries of the state and culture of a nation, so too do the communications that migration generate. Statehood remains, but its boundaries are ignored and the dominance of the existing media players, themselves of course equally unconstrained by
such boundaries, is challenged by the presence of alternative threads of global communication that observes different rules and moves in different directions. (Georgiou and Silverstone, 2007: 30–31)

Similarly, for Andreas Hepp and Nick Couldry, the ‘container thinking … implicit in much comparative media research’ may have been appropriate for theorizing modern states at their beginning, but ‘it is not sufficient for social forms in times of globalization which transgress national borders and build up transnational spaces’. They argue for a ‘transcultural approach’ that examines ‘media cultures’ or ‘diaspora cultures’, but only on condition ‘that we give up the assumption that sharing [of meaning] takes place necessarily, or even importantly, within the container of national territories’ (2009: 32–33; see also Aksoy and Robins, 2000, 2003; Hepp, 2008, 2009).

In these contributions to the international communication subfield, the nation-state’s territorial borders are again portrayed as swiftly diminishing in importance, providing no particular impediment to the various transnational flows that routinely cut swaths through them. To borrow from Silverstone, it’s as if ‘borders are there only to be crossed’ (2007: 18).

These contributions to the subfield and the broader ‘world in motion’ literature convincingly show that the entrenched nation-state centred framework of discrete societies is seriously challenged by the messy cross-national interconnections of the global, and they are surely right to claim that the social sciences in general and the international communications subfield in particular must work to ‘break through the thought-barrier of the nation-state’ (Beck, 2000: 25). Moreover, this literature provides insightful ways of thinking about and mapping transnational social spaces. As Brenner puts it, this body of work has ‘construct[ed] new geographical categories for describing emergent socio-spatial forms that do not presuppose their enclosure within territorial bounded spaces’ (2004: 56). Nevertheless, the literature is flawed in at least two ways. First, the notion that the regulatory significance of the state’s territorial linear borders is undergoing a generalized decline is problematic. Even if one accepts that many state territorial borders have lost much of their efficacy as barriers to the movement of information, capital, licit goods and disease (and the extent of this loss is contestable), it cannot be ignored that many states have actually ramped up their capacity to control incoming flows of people and illicit goods by fortifying or ‘hardening’ their conventional borders. In addition to the fortification of territorial borders that has been underway in North America, the EU, the UK and Australia, this kind of border work is evident in a plethora of other sites around the globe, including Saudi Arabia’s border with Yemen, India’s borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh, Uzbekistan’s borders with Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan, Turkmenistan’s border with Kyrgyzstan, Botswana’s border with Zimbabwe, China’s border with North Korea, and Malaysia’s border with Thailand (Brown, 2010; Diener and Hagen, 2009; Jones, 2009). As Peter Andreas puts it, much of the literature on globalization misses or understates ‘the more complex dynamics of state territorial retreat and reassertion, of border erosion and reinforcement at the same time’ (2003a: 84; see also Hirst and Thompson, 1995: 420–431; Newman, 2006: 149–150).

Second, while the literature provides a withering critique of ‘container thinking’, it nevertheless retains a key element of this way of conceptualizing the world in that it
imagines borders only in terms of being the fixed and immobile boundaries that encase the container. That is, the literature continues to embrace this concept of the linear border even as it argues that borders are becoming increasingly obsolete in the face of a variety of juggernaut-like global flows. Consequently, the contributors to the literature do not seem well placed to identify and interrogate new kinds of state border practices that project beyond the linear frontiers of the nation-state. That is, while these observers ably identify and map the incessant social, economic and cultural transnational processes that transcend state territorial boundaries, their analyses are blinkered to the fact that state bordering practices have also acquired spatiality beyond national territory. In the following section, I provide illustrations of the ways in which state actors are drawing on ICTs to construct transnational border modalities that transcend the territorial rigidity of conventional borderlines.

**Examples of transnational bordering practices**

The focus in this section is on recent transnational border initiatives in North America and Europe. The initiatives are more numerous and developed in the North American context and this is reflected in the discussion. An exhaustive mapping of the initiatives is not the objective. Rather, the goal is to outline several examples that illustrate the kinds of ICT-dependent transnational border work that is at the heart of efforts to ‘push out’ the border from the traditional borderline. Specifically, I discuss how the exemplar initiatives stretch border control practices into neighbouring and distant territories with the aim of enhancing the mobility of some inbound flows, while arresting others.

**US initiatives**

In the days and weeks following the 9/11 attacks, the NAFTA-fuelled torrent of commerce that flowed across the south-western and northern borders of the US was abruptly staunched when the US government ordered border inspectors to thoroughly scrutinize all vehicles and persons at every port of entry (for example, Alden, 2008: 42–48; Andreas, 2003b: 9–10; Sparke, 2008: 140). The negative economic impact resulting from the lengthy delays was felt quickly throughout the border regions. The Bush administration’s response to this gridlock was to forge a comprehensive border security policy that was shaped by two powerful competing social forces:

> On the one side there were the economic forces that pressured for liberalized cross-border business movement in the context of … NAFTA. On the other side were the political and cultural forces that pushed for more border surveillance and more militarized border enforcement in the context of the U.S. ‘war on terror’… (Sparke, 2008: 133–134)

The result was a two-pronged strategy. First, the Bush administration sought to fortify the huge swaths of space between ports of entry on the US–Mexico and US–Canada borderlines. Specifically, more ‘state-of-the-art’ surveillance technologies, fences and agents were deployed along the borderlines. This action extended and intensified the US government’s pre-9/11 south-western border strategy, which had sought to deter the
cross-border flow of illicit drugs and irregular immigrants. Second, and of primary interest here, the US administration abandoned its post-9/11 crackdown at all ports of entry and embraced a new ‘smart’ border control plan. As President Bush put it:

America requires a border management system that keeps pace with expanding trade while protecting the United States and its territories from the threats of terrorist attacks, illegal immigration, illegal drugs … The border of the future must integrate actions abroad to screen goods and people prior to their arrival in sovereign U.S. territory, and inspections at the border … Federal border control agencies must have seamless information-sharing systems that allow for coordinated communication among themselves, and also the broader law enforcement and intelligence gathering communities … Agreements with our neighbors, major trading partners, and private industry will allow extensive pre-screening of low-risk traffic, thereby allowing limited assets to focus attention on high-risk traffic. The use of advanced technology to track the movement of cargo and entry … of individuals is essential to the task of managing the movement of hundreds of millions of individuals, conveyances, and vehicles. (Office of the President of the United States, 2002: 16)

The US administration’s plan imagines a ‘border of the future’ that is quite different from the conventional linear border. More specifically, it envisions the border ‘not merely as a physical boundary but rather as a flexible concept that allows for the possibility that the border begins at the point where goods or people commence their U.S.-bound journey’ (US Congressional Research Service, 2005: 3). In this vision, reconciling the tensions between colliding economic and security imperatives requires off-shoring border controls using various multilayered ICT-dependent inspection and sorting programmes designed to ease border congestion and enhance security at the same time.

This new border philosophy formed the basis of the administration’s ‘Smart Border’ Accords with Canada and Mexico, signed in December 2001 and March 2002, respectively (Alden, 2008). These agreements, in turn, provided the impetus for the proliferation of a raft of voluntary ‘trusted traveler’ programmes designed to facilitate the rapid cross-border passage of pre-cleared travellers at ports of entry while permitting border patrol agents to focus more of their resources on travellers who might require greater scrutiny. The first move was to expand NEXUS and the Secure Electronic Network for Travelers’ Rapid Inspection system (SENTRI). NEXUS is located at select land ports of entry on the US–Canada border, while SENTRI operates at various US ports of entry along the border with Mexico. The first layer of these systems is a pre-approval stage that occurs away from the physical border. The applicant (for example, a Canadian or Mexican citizen), who is encouraged to apply online, pays a fee and undergoes a thorough biographical background check, a fingerprint law enforcement check, and a personal interview with a Customs and Border Protection Officer. A plethora of databases located in a variety of sites in the US are queried during the background check. The successful applicant is categorized as ‘low risk’ or ‘trusted’ and assigned an electronic identifier (a proximity card for NEXUS participants or a radio transponder for SENTRI users). Upon arrival at the physical border, the user enters a dedicated ‘fast lane’ and her identifier is read. This automatically pulls up information and a photo for the inspector who can quickly identify the user’s identity and wave her through (US Customs and Border Protection, 2012b). NEXUS, unlike SENTRI, also encompasses air travel. This
version of the programme adds a further layer of inspection by requiring the participant to undergo an iris scan at the time of application. The iris pattern is then stored in a US-based database and used for comparison when the applicant arrives at the airport. When the participant uses a self-serve kiosk at the airport, the system verifies her identity by comparing her iris pattern with the record stored in the database (Canada Border Services Agency, 2012). This kind of ‘trusted’ traveller programme is not confined to the North American context. The recently launched US–Dutch programme, FLUX, and the UK government’s IRIS system also seek to provide preferential cross-border travel to those frequent travellers who are willing and able to undergo the pre-clearance process (Aas, 2011).

Pre-clearance, risk-assessment programmes have also been devised for cargo flows. In the North American context, the Free and Secure Trade Program (FAST), initiated in late 2001, provides dedicated lanes for pre-approved registered truck drivers/shippers on high-volume corridors on the US–Mexico and US–Canada borders. Shippers qualify by enhancing the security of their manufacturing plants, warehouses and shipping systems. As with SENTRI and NEXUS, drivers must undergo a background check involving various law enforcement databases, a personal interview and fingerprint identification. To ensure continued eligibility, successful applicants are continuously vetted. Whether the driver is at or away from the physical border, law enforcement databases are searched every 24 hours to ensure the ongoing low-risk status of enrolled drivers (Office of Inspector General, US Department of Homeland Security, 2012a: 2).

While SENTRI, NEXUS and FAST stretch US border controls into neighbouring countries, elements of the United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT) programme push out border controls to myriad locations across the globe. The programme, which was rolled out in 2004, resurrects and builds on an immigration control measure devised in 1996 (Hobbing, 2007). At the outset, US-VISIT was envisioned as an automated biometric entry–exit system that would keep track of those visitors who overstayed; armed with biographical information and biometric identifiers (fingerprints and photographs) gleaned from non-citizen entries to and exits from the US, the expectations were that authorities would be able to pursue irregular immigrants within the United States (Koslowski, 2011). Currently, the programme does collect biometric information on most non-citizens on arrival in the US, but the exit portion of US-VISIT has never been fully implemented.

Of primary interest here are the elements of the US-VISIT programme that apply to those individuals who require a visa to travel to the United States. For these travellers, the bordering process begins long before they reach US territory; applicants must first visit a US visa-issuing post (for example, a US consulate) in their home country where their biometrics – digitized fingerprints and a photograph – are collected and checked against a ‘biometric watch list of more than 6.4 million known or suspected terrorists, criminals and immigration violators identified by US authorities and Interpol’ (Office of Inspector General, US Department of Homeland Security, 2012b: 3; see also Hobbing and Koslowski, 2009). Those deemed inadmissible are unable to board any US-bound plane or ship. When approved visitors arrive at US ports of entry, officials capture the same biometric information and examine it to ensure the person seeking entry is the same person the visa was initially issued to (US Government Accountability Office, 2008). In
short, the first layer of the ICT-centred US-VISIT programme involves US border controls ‘touching down’ in many locations across the planet. As Louise Amoore puts it, the programme creates ‘an almost ubiquitous frontier’ (2006: 336).

The Advanced Passenger Information System (APIS) also contributes to the US government’s anticipatory regime of border regulation and control. Prior to passengers boarding flights destined for the US, APIS allows carriers to transmit passenger information from various sites around the globe to the US Department of Homeland Security for review and analysis. APIS was initially set up in the late 1980s as part of the US government’s war on drugs. At the time, US-based airlines agreed voluntarily to allow the relevant authorities full access to data on passengers and crew on all incoming flights (Alden, 2008). The data included biographical information such as name, date of birth, citizenship and passport numbers. It also included reservation data setting out where, when, how and by whom the airline ticket had been purchased. As Alden (2008: 30) explains, ‘[i]f Customs agents knew … that a particular credit card had been used by drug cartels in the past to purchase tickets for couriers, another use of that card for an airline ticket was a red flag that the passenger might be a [drug trafficker]’. By 2000, 67 carriers were providing APIS data to the authorities. This covered almost two-thirds of all incoming passengers.

Shortly after 9/11, the US Congress passed legislation that required all airlines flying to the United States, domestic and foreign, to provide APIS data (Alden, 2008). In addition to the personal information alluded to above, this data includes ‘… financial data, information on previous flights of the passenger, his or her place of work, ethnic group, and “philosophical conviction”’ (Coleman, 2007: 43). Airlines are required to send the data to the US Department of Homeland Security up to 72 hours before departure. This data is then cross-referenced with information residing in a variety of other databases in order to develop a risk assessment of each traveller (McAleenan, 2012). From the perspective of the authorities, this advanced information is supposedly key to early identification and interdiction of ‘high risk’ individuals without hampering legitimate cross-border mobility. While many countries instructed their carriers to go along with the mandate, the programme ran afoul of European data protection rules. After protracted negotiations and legal challenges, the EU agreed to give US authorities access to the same passenger records that were being provided by US and other international carriers (Balzacq, 2008; Coleman, 2007). This agreement is currently due to be renegotiated (De Hert and Bellanova, 2011).

**EU initiatives**

Beginning in the early 1990s, a new landscape of border controls began to emerge in Europe. The roots of this transformation can be traced to the Schengen Agreement of 1985 and the Schengen Convention of 1990.16 Responding to calls for greater mobility of commerce and labour within the EU, these treaties linked the functioning of a European internal market to the elimination of internal border controls between member countries (for example, Maas, 2005; Pellerin, 2005). The treaties also set out provisions for securing the EU’s common external border in response to perceptions and anxieties that a border-free Europe would be swamped by an influx of non-state
‘clandestine transnational actors’ such as irregular immigrants, drug smugglers, human traffickers and terrorists (for example, Andreas, 2000; Bigo and Guild, 2005). These perceptions and anxieties, which were amplified in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent terrorist attacks in Madrid and London, have fuelled the emergence and steady growth of information-intensive border control measures that seek to both fortify the various manifestations of the EU’s external perimeter and create new frontiers away from this geographic borderline. The latter development – the focus of attention here – is exemplified by the EU’s Common Visa Policy and its augmentation by the recently deployed Visa Information System (VIS).

The Schengen treaties required member-countries to formulate common rules regarding visas. To this end, in 1998, EU authorities developed visa lists that, on the basis of nationality, categorized or profiled persons as more or less likely to be a risk. On the ‘white’ list are the countries of the world whose citizens are deemed less risky and, therefore, do not need a visa to visit the EU space. By contrast, individuals originating from a country on the ‘black list’ are required to obtain visas from an EU member country consulate before travelling to Europe. Currently, 60 countries are on the ‘white’ list, while 135 countries are on the ‘black’ list (Van Houtum, 2010: 963). Commenting on the ‘black’ list, one group of observers notes: ‘the most striking features are that, with the exception of Brunei, all of the Muslim and most of the poor states are on [the] list. All African states are listed, as well as most of the Caribbean and the less prosperous states in Latin America and Asia’ (Geisen et al., 2008: 82). When visa applicants visit the EU member country consulate, they are assessed on the basis of biographical background checks, supplemental information that consulates may have access to (for example, whether they have criminal records in their homeland) and interviews to establish their ‘trustworthiness’ and their likelihood of returning to their home country (Mau, 2010: 345). As part of this process, officials also run checks on the Schengen Information System (SIS) list of excluded persons. SIS is an EU-based transnational network of pooled databases created by EU member countries, which includes alerts on persons who ‘have received sufficient notoriety in any one member state’ and are to be refused entry to the Union (Guild, 2001: 17). These persons include known and suspected criminals and those who have overstayed their visa in the past (Ceyhan, 2005). As Steffen Mau puts it, applicants must ‘convince the officials that they are the exception to the rule’ in order to obtain a visa (2010: 345). In short, for those who require a visa to travel to the EU, ‘the border of the Union starts within their own territory …’ (Guild, 2001: 32) and ‘the involvement of the consular authorities in the “filtering process”… represents a system of “remote control” in avoiding unwanted migration flows’ (Hobbing, 2006: 11).

In 2004, the EU Council moved to upgrade the Common Visa Policy with the implementation of the Visa Information System (VIS) (Statewatch, 2012). After much delay, the programme was finally rolled out in 2011. As with the US government’s US VISIT programme, visitors requiring a visa to travel to the US provide biometric data – digital fingerprints and a photo – at a member country consulate. This data is stored in a centralized database within the European Union (in Strasbourg, France). The visa holder then provides the same biometric information on arrival at the EU’s external perimeter in order to verify that she is the same individual who was granted a visa by the consulate. VIS is also intended to prevent ‘visa-shopping’; since all other member
country consulates will eventually have online access to VIS, the expectation is that those individuals rejected by one country’s consulate will have little luck if they apply at other countries’ consulates – these consulates will be able to access the centralized database in Europe to obtain information on previous applications and the reasons for rejection. To date, VIS has been rolled out on a regional basis, first to Schengen state consulates in North Africa in 2011 and then, in 2012, to consulates in the Middle East, Afghanistan, Iran and the Arabian Gulf. The plan is to have global coverage by the end of 2013 (Statewatch, 2012).

In 2008, the EU Commission released its Border Package, Preparing the Next Steps in Border Management in the European Union. Among other things, the Package recommended the deployment of various ‘state-of-the-art’ ICTs in order to extend the EU’s ‘remote control’ strategy.21 More specifically, the Commission envisions using ICTs to establish a US-style voluntary Registered Traveler Program under which non-EU citizens (subject to a visa requirement or not) who have been pre-cleared and deemed ‘low risk’ may benefit from faster entry into the Schengen area. To enrol in the programme, individuals would provide biometrics and undergo pre-screening on the basis of various vetting criteria. The Commission suggests individuals would be ‘low risk’ if they travelled to the EU frequently for legitimate reasons (for example, business, tourism), have a reliable travel history (that is, they respect the conditions of their length of stay) and have proof of sufficient means of subsistence. At the pre-clearance stage, applicants would also be checked against a number of watch lists to make sure they are not a threat to the security of the EU or any of the member-states. On reaching the EU’s external border, enrolled travellers would be able to cross quickly without the intervention of border guards: ‘A machine reads the biometric data contained in the travel documents or stored in a system or database and compares them against the biometrics of the traveler, accelerating border checks by creating automated separate lanes replacing the traditional control booths’ (EU, 2008b: 3). As in the US case, the proposed system is based on the assumption that these new kinds of borders can simultaneously improve security – by identifying threats and risks – while increasing the efficiency of legitimate cross-border traffic (Commission of the European Communities, 2008). The Commission’s Border Package gained added impetus in 2011 with the perceived ‘migration’ crisis that accompanied the ‘Arab Spring’, which precipitated the arrival of thousands of Tunisians in France. The Commission is expected to issue formal proposals for the establishment of a Registered Traveler Program in the near future (Hays and Vermullen, 2012).

Discussion

Across the social sciences and in the international communication subfield, the widely accepted view is that borders are the lines of demarcation between countries – the firm borderlines drawn on a world atlas that mark the limit of sovereign power. This paper has been concerned with unsettling this received wisdom. The argument presented here is not that linear territorial borders are irrelevant. These borders continue to play an important role in shaping the movement of people, for instance. Rather, the point is that the examples of transnational border practices discussed above cannot be understood in terms of this conventional understanding of the border concept. Specifically, these examples
demonstrate that state actors are reconfiguring and rescaling the border concept as they draw on ICTs to disperse and multiply border controls beyond the geographical outer edge of the territorial state. Unlike conventional borders that separate polities, distributed transnational border practices bring people and places together by connecting them directly across contiguous and non-contiguous polities. Indeed, some of the programmes outlined in the preceding section – the US government’s SENTRI, NEXUS, FAST, US-VISIT and APIS programmes and the EU’s Common Visa Policy – open up the entire space of the globe to such state bordering processes.

State actors, then, are constructing new kinds of transnational border modalities that clearly challenge the traditional understanding of what and where borders are supposed to be. Borders now inhabit the ‘space of flows’ in addition to the ‘space of places’. For Castells, the ‘most dominant functions in the network society (financial markets, transnational production networks …) are organized around the space of flows’ (2000a: 34). Like financial markets and transnational production networks, transnational border modalities are critically dependent on the three material layers that, Castells (2000a) argues, underpin the space of flows: the circuits of electronic exchange that carry flows of information across conventional borders; the far flung nodes and hubs that link up to these circuits (for example, interview locations, consulates, ports of entry, database locations); and the spatial organization of managerial elites and professionals who access transnational information flows at the various nodes and hubs (for example, law enforcement and national security agencies located within the home territory; customs officers located at and beyond the territorial borderline; consular officials stationed in neighbouring countries and overseas). Unlike their linear and sedentary siblings, then, these transnational border modalities are fluid and network-like, rather than static and immobile. In Popescu’s words, ‘there is little resemblance between the rhizomatic geography of [these] networked borders and the habitual gridlike ones of [state] territorial borders’. Indeed, state borderlines in this ‘rhizomatic’ configuration can be understood as ‘supplemental checking stations … much like nodes … in a wider, global network of border networks’ (2011: 83).

Below, I discuss the implications of these network borders for the three issues raised at the outset of this paper. That is, I briefly discuss their contribution to mobility inequality, their implications for those who have turned to concepts such as ‘diaspora’ as a way of escaping ‘container thinking’, and their relation to state power.

**Border architectures and unequal mobility**

For many globalization theorists, state borders have been made redundant by the accelerated circulation of people, commodities, capital, money and images through global space. Yet, network borders, and the transnational flows of information that support them, are playing a key role in carving out the channels through which people circulate. For example, the proliferation of US ‘trusted traveler’ initiatives (which may soon be adopted by the EU) are contributing to a border management regime that is having a divergent impact on the mobility of different groups of travellers. On the one hand, international mobility is swift and untroubling for those frequent border crossers willing to subject themselves to ‘pre-inspection’ and pay the fee to acquire membership in the fast
lane. In essence, pre-inspection provides these travellers with de facto entitlement to a smooth border-crossing experience. By contrast, cross-border mobility is slower for those who are unwilling or unable to join these ‘kinetic elites’ (Adey, 2006). Focusing on NEXUS, Robert Pallitto and Josiah Heyman suggest the mobility inequalities produced tend to reflect and reproduce class inequalities:

Those not registered (and not biometrically recognized) are designated greater risks and their freedom of movement is therefore restricted. This form of classification self-selects for class status as well, because those who travel by airline on a regular basis are likely to be business travelers or others with greater financial means; thus, freedom of movement and freedom from suspicion will be conferred more often on high-income, rather than low-income persons. (2008: 324)

The EU’s Common Visa Policy produces starker mobility inequalities. Non-visa nationals, who come from predominantly rich, white countries, are regarded as ‘low risk’ and desirable. These travellers encounter the EU border for the first time at checkpoints on the external perimeter. At these locations, border officials have the discretion of choosing which travellers may be inspected more closely. By contrast, the visa obligation denotes suspicion, mistrust and fear towards all nationals from the ‘blacklisted’ countries (countries whose population are primarily poor, black and/or Muslim). A traveller from these countries must negotiate various obstacles to obtain a visa (for example, travel to the consulate; queue, possibly for hours; undergo database checks and face-to-face interviews; demonstrate adequate financial resources to sustain a visit to the EU). The issuing consulate or embassy can deny visa applications without providing an explanation (Neumayer, 2006: 79). Of course, receiving the visa may not prevent the traveller from being subject to further scrutiny when she arrives at port-of-entry checkpoints.

In essence, the EU’s visa regime is heavily weighted against members of particular races, religions, and the economically challenged; their mobility is either blocked or is much slower and more arduous relative to the mobility experience of non-visa nationals. With respect to those whose mobility is blocked, Didier Bigo asks:

So, what about all those people who are prisoners of the local and cannot benefit from the time-space compression of the world because they are too poor to be good tourists? What about the desire of the so-called third country nationals to visit Europe and the world? They are considered a threat, as potential immigrants, even if they do not envisage staying and have their own life in their own country of origin. (2005: 63)

The recently deployed Visa Information System may well reinforce the inequalities associated with the EU’s visa regime. The programme only applies to nationals of ‘blacklist’ countries (Hobbing, 2007), taking for granted the highly suspect ‘paradigm of suspicion’ (Shamir, 2005) that underpins the regime. The programme is simply intended to enhance the sorting and blocking functions of the visa regime; it seeks to ensure that those deemed ‘unwanted’ are not able to work around the system by means of document fraud or ‘visa shopping’, for example.

While this paper has focused on network borders, it is important to keep in mind that this border modality is one element in a two-pronged border management strategy that also includes the ongoing fortification of traditional perimeters. It has been well
documented that this fortification process has exacted very significant human costs. For example, the US government’s ‘hardening’ of its south-western boundary has funnelled undocumented migrants to remote and dangerous parts of the border as they seek to cross into the United States. Each year, hundreds of people die trying to do so. This same funnelling dynamic (with the same outcome) has been evident in the EU context, particularly in and around the Mediterranean (Weber and Pickering, 2011).

In short, US and EU authorities (and their counterparts in the UK and Australia) are constructing border architectures that have both fortress- and network-like features. The fortification process occurs on the traditional borderline and is primarily concerned with sealing the stretches of space between ports of entry. By contrast, network borders push out from ports of entry in order to pre-emptively sort and assess incoming flows. In some ways, this more recent border modality functions like a high-tech ‘firewall’ (Walters, 2006). That is, network borders are not walls designed to arrest movement, but filters geared to the upstream scanning and auditing of incoming flows, blocking or quarantining those deemed malicious, while allowing the unimpeded movement of legitimate flows. The overarching goal is to reconcile high levels of circulation across thresholds or borders with high levels of security. And just as elements of a firewall can be located in different areas or ‘trusted zones’, network borders can operate in different locales (not just on the traditional borderline).

Together, fortress- and network-like borders are producing a highly stratified pattern of mobility, ranging from the relatively small number of highly privileged individuals who speed across borders to those who must visit a foreign consulate hoping they can demonstrate that they deserve to be classified as a trusted traveller, to those who risk (and sometimes lose) their lives in the US–Mexican Sonoran Desert or on a small overcrowded boat attempting to cross a dangerous section of the Mediterranean. State efforts at channelling, striating and arresting mobilities, then, are as much a feature of globalization as the intensification of cross-border flows (for example, Bauman, 2002; Shamir, 2005).

**Border work and diaspora**

Seeking to escape the ‘iron grip of the nation-state’, much contemporary research in the international communication subfield has turned to the ‘diaspora’ concept as an alternative basis for inquiry into the dynamics of global media flows. Georgiou and Silverstone write:

Diasporas are transnational cultural communities. They are communities of people originating in a geographical location (often a nation-state) and settling in another. Their travels (and re-settlement) are usually plural and include multiple mobilities of people and diverse cultural practices. Diasporas are ultimately transnational as they are forced in some way or another to flee an original homeland and to seek (a better) life somewhere else. Diasporic identity is about the roots as much as it is about the routes of the diasporic journey. (2007: 31)

Though not their focus, the authors are clear that the ‘routes of the diasporic journey’ play a significant role in shaping the formation and composition of transnational cultural
This raises a number of important questions. How are these routes structured? What factors explain why some people become members of a diaspora, while others may be blocked from doing so? And, as Ulrich Beck asks, ‘How are transnational life worlds [e.g., diasporas] transcending distance and frontiers possible in the first place? How can they be put together and cultivated at the level of individual action, often in the teeth of resistance from national state bureaucracies?’ (2000: 32). The migration literature suggests that state bordering practices, in conventional and network-like forms (along with state regulations governing immigration and the acceptance of refugees and asylum seekers, for example), are important, though not the only, factors that shape or inhibit the ‘diasporic journey’ (see Van der Velde and Van Naerssen, 2011). Of course, for many migrants, movement across borders is relatively painless, but, for others, it can be fraught with risk and uncertainty. For example, the ongoing fortification of the US or EU perimeter may deter some from becoming mobile at all, while others may be caught while ‘scaling the walls’, detained and repatriated. Consulate officials may deny visas to others. Dennis Broeders and Godfried Engbersen (2007: 1605) suggest that the EU’s Visa Information System will increase the risks for irregular immigrants seeking port-of-entry access to the EU (reducing the possibility of identity fraud or visa shopping, for example). This, they argue, will deter some individuals from travelling, while others will seek to circumvent the ‘identity routes’ by trying to cross the fortress-like borders between ports of entry.

It is difficult to see how those who embrace the diaspora concept are in a position to investigate the relationship between state border practices and transnational cultural communities. Their break from ‘container thinking’ is secured, in part, by asserting that the regulatory significance of conventional state borders has greatly diminished due to processes of ‘de-territorialization’ (see Brenner, 1999). As I discussed earlier, for these observers, conventional borders are there only to be ‘erased’, ‘ignored’ or ‘transgressed’. And since these observers currently view borders through a conventional frame only, they do not seem well placed to examine how recent transnational border modalities – those that project beyond the ‘container’ – are contributing to the conditions of existence of diasporas by enabling, constraining, interrupting and modulating human mobility. To answer the questions posed earlier in this section, we need to grasp the fact that borders are now more complex and differentiated and exist simultaneously on various spatial scales. They are not withering away.

**Borders and state power**

The emergence of transnational border modalities challenges the notion that the relationship between sovereignty and borders resembles a zero-sum game, whereby, as the level and intensity of global flows increase, so sovereignty and the relevance of state borders decrease (Cox, 2004: 11; Vaughan-Williams, 2009: 60). The border control initiatives discussed in the preceding section indicate that state actors, in their quest to reconcile the contradictory spatial logics of mobility and territorial security, are drawing on various ICTs as they reconfigure and re-scale border controls in a way that transcends the territorial framework of the nation-state system and the grid of territorial borders associated with it. More specifically, these actors appear to be twisting the ‘information revolution’
to their advantage as they stretch their sovereign prerogative of denying or permitting access into neighbouring and distant territories. This radical relocation of the border is made possible by the transnational flows of information that connect various state actors at home and abroad; these flows play a key role in decoupling the state’s authority from the geographic boundaries of the nation-state. Aided by various ICTs, states are now capable of reaching out into global space to classify, sort and influence the life chances of different groups of people in different parts of the planet: ‘It is not merely the passport control officer at the actual border who grants or denies access to a state’s territory. A more and more complex arrangement of control has been institutionalized which entails a re-scaling and relocation of control …’ (Mau et al., 2012: 194). These developments do not sit comfortably with predictions concerning the demise of the nation-state and the breakdown of its borders. It is important to be mindful too of the symbolic power associated with border work. The promotion of expensive and high profile ‘state-of-the-art’ technology initiatives serve to demonstrate the state’s strong moral resolve and commitment to those segments of the public who are concerned about various ‘external threats’ (see Andreas, 2000; Bigo, 2002: 2).

Yet, a consideration of the extent to which transnational border modalities enhance state power and control must also take into account their efficacy. Here, the picture is complex. For example, some observers have argued persuasively that conventional borders have done little to exclude the ‘unwanted’, and network-like border controls may fare no better (see Shields, 2011). Having said this, there is evidence that state border controls have a significant effect on how people try to clandestinely cross borders; as state actors deploy ICTs and other resources to identify and block unwanted individuals, some of these individuals develop counter-strategies to work around or undercut border controls. In response, authorities point to these circumvention efforts as justification for more ‘high tech’ border initiatives that promise to tame the border. Action invites reaction and the result has been an escalating ‘dialectic of control’ (Giddens, 1985: 11) between state actors and clandestine border crossers.

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Notes
1. Castells defines the space of flows as ‘the technological and organizational possibility of organizing the simultaneity of social practices without geographical contiguity’ (2000a: 14). The space of places, by contrast, refers to locales where ‘form, functioning and meaning are self-contained within boundaries of physical contiguity’ (2000b: 453). According to Castells, the space of flows dominates the space of places as ‘function and power in our societies are organized in the space of flows’ (2000b: 458).
2. It is important to note that ‘remote control’ border practices are not entirely new. Visa regimes can be traced back to the early 20th century. For instance, the US Immigration Act of 1924, which codified a 1917 wartime decree, required immigrants to obtain visas from US consular officials. The individuals in question had to present certain documents as a prerequisite to entering the United States. In short, for these immigrants, the US border was first encountered at the relevant consulate. The stated goal of the visa programme was to ‘screen aliens’ in order to exclude ‘criminals or other undesirables’ from entering the United States (US Congressional Research Service, 2010: 3). Having said this, these early forms of ‘remote control’ were ‘generally fragmented, irregular and disconnected’. What sets the current ‘off-shoring’ of border practices apart is their ‘generalization, routine, and systematic integration to form a comprehensive border regime of movement control’ (Popescu, 2011: 83).

3. This resolution anticipated the 1960 United Nations Declaration on Granting Independence to Colonial Countries and People, which upheld the normative principle of the territorial integrity of states and pronounced that existing colonies (not ethnic groups) were eligible for self-determination. The Declaration stated that concerning ‘dependent peoples’, ‘the integrity of their national territory shall be respected’. It then proclaimed that ‘any attempt at the partial or total disruption of the national unity or territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations’ (Zacher, 2001: 221).

4. The principle of respecting colonial borders was also evident in a much earlier instance of decolonization, namely the independence of Latin American colonies from Spain and Portugal in the 1820s. While decolonization provided the emerging states with opportunities to implement novel forms of socio-political organization, ‘instead the Latin American westernized elites borrowed the European ideology of nationalism and embarked upon the building of nation-states’ (Popescu, 2011: 41; see also Zacher, 2001).


6. Shopping centres and malls along the southern borderlands of the US recorded a dramatic decrease in their daily business transactions as Mexicans experienced great difficulty crossing the border to do business. Tourism in the Mexican cities along the border collapsed. The movement of trucks into the US from the maquiladoras plants on the Mexican side slowed dramatically. Vicente Fox, then Mexico’s President, referred to the economic slowdown as ‘cataclysmic’ for his country (Alden, 2008: 47). A similar story unfolded in the northern borderlands. In the state of Washington, border area businesses complained that they were facing ‘an economic disaster’ as the number of Canadian shoppers fell by half (Alden, 2008: 47; Sparke, 2008: 140). And on the Ontario–Michigan border between Detroit and Windsor, the delays played havoc with ‘just-in-time’ production, with auto-related plants closing in both locales (Alden, 2008: 44; Andreas, 2003b: 9–10).

7. Programmes such as America’s Shield Initiative and its successor, the Secure Border Initiative, have deployed networks of detection technologies (sensors, cameras, radars, unmanned aerial vehicles) along the south-western border (US Government Accountability Office, 2010). The Northern Border Project deploys similar clusters of technologies along select strips of the US–Canada border (US Customs and Border Protection, 2012a). The number of border patrol agents doubled from 2001 to 2008 (US Government Accountability Office, 2009).

8. High-profile military-style operations such as Operation Hold the Line and Operation Gatekeeper exemplify this strategy. In both cases, border patrol agents erected reinforced fences, dug trenches and deployed helicopter surveillance around key urban areas (Dunn, 2009; Nevins, 2002).

9. SENTRI was piloted for the first time in 1995 in the San Diego area (US Customs and Border Protection, 2006). The goal was to facilitate the travel of business people going back and forth
between the \textit{maquiladoras} plants on the Mexican side and head offices in San Diego and Los Angeles (Van der Ploeg, 2006).

10. In the case of SENTRI, the databases include: the Department of Homeland Security’s Central Index System, which contains information on violators of immigration law; the Bureau of Custom and Immigration Enforcement’s Deportable Alien Control System, which stores data on ‘aliens’ who have been detained or are slated for deportation or exclusion; the Department of State’s National Automated Immigration Lookout System, which stores information on people not eligible to enter the United States. In addition, the applicant’s fingerprints are sent to the FBI’s National Crime Information Center and the Western Identification Network for criminal and terrorist background checks. Other databases queried include the Interagency Border Inspection System, the Treasury Enforcement Communications System, the National Law Enforcement Telecommunication System and the Consular Lookout and Support System (Office of the Inspector General, US Department of Homeland Security, 2004). With respect to NEXUS, the following databases managed by the following agencies are also reportedly queried: Canadian Security Intelligence Service; Royal Canadian Mounted Police; Interpol; the United Kingdom’s Police National Computer.


12. With respect to the FAST North programme, the databases include the US Department of Homeland Security’s Treasury Enforcement Communication System, the US government’s National Crime Information Center and the Canadian Police Information Centre (Office of Inspector General, US Department of Homeland Security, 2012a). The FAST South programme is not shared with Mexico, so applicants must be approved only by the US border patrol.

13. As of June 2011, approximately 80,000 drivers were enrolled in the FAST programme (Office of Inspector General, US Department of Homeland Security, 2012a: 2).

14. Along the same lines, the Container Security Initiative (CSI) seeks to ‘push the Nation’s zone of security outward beyond our physical borders’ by identifying and pre-screening high-risk US-bound containers before they leave foreign seaports. US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) personnel stationed overseas are central participants in this work. They are able to access the CBP’s Automated Tracking System, which provides ‘an efficient, accurate and consistent method for targeting and selecting high-risk inbound cargo for intensive examinations … The approach is to process data pertaining to entries and manifests against a variety of rules to make a rapid automated assessment of the risk of each import’ (US Department of Homeland Security, 2006: 3–4). Containers evaluated as high risk are heavily scrutinized using x-ray or radiation detection devices. Pre-screened sea cargo receives expedited processing upon arrival in the United States. Currently, 58 foreign ports participate in CSI, accounting for 86 per cent of container traffic bound for the US (US Customs and Border Protection, 2013a).

15. The exit layer was not completed due to the financial, legal and technical difficulties associated with the programme (Alden, 2008). By the end of 2005, US-VISIT screening procedures were in place at all 284 air, land and sea ports of entry in the United States. By February 2008, the programme had collected biometric data and other information on more than 113 million travellers entering the country, making it one of the largest biometric databases in the world (Hobbing and Koslowski, 2009).

16. There are 25 Schengen states (Ireland and the UK are not part of ‘Schengenland’).

17. Efforts at fortifying the external perimeter include the Italian government’s use in the 1990s of naval ships and aircraft equipped with various surveillance and detection technologies.
to deter clandestine crossers from crossing the Adriatic Sea and the Spanish government’s Integrated System of External Surveillance (composed of a network of fixed and mobile radars and infrared cameras), which was first deployed in the late 1990s and early 2000s to interdict irregular migrants crossing the Strait of Gibraltar (see Shields, 2011).

18. For a more comprehensive discussion of initiatives, see Aas (2011) and Shields (2011).

19. The lists were recently relabelled as the less racial ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ lists (Van Houtum, 2010: 957).

20. Henk Van Houtum writes: ‘Yet strikingly, no information can be found in the otherwise rather transparent communication channels of the EU on why and how this [black] list was made, despite its obvious far-reaching consequences’ (2010: 964).

21. Other measures would seek to further fortify the external perimeter – specifically those areas between ports of entry. For example, the Package calls for the creation of a European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR). If realized, the system will make use of satellites and unmanned aerial vehicles and radar – all integrated into a comprehensive network – to provide ‘surveillance information on [the] external borders and the pre-frontier area on a more frequent and reliable basis’ (EU, 2008b). To begin with, EUROSUR would be limited to the Mediterranean Sea, the Southern Atlantic Ocean (the Canary Islands) and the Black Sea (EU, 2008a).

22. More generally, bell hooks (1992) discusses the difficult experiences of border crossings of many people of colour that are often left out of narratives on the formation of transnational cultures.

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