Theoretical Limology:
Postmodern Analytical Approaches

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In the field of geographical limology, the new science of international borders, it is possible to distinguish several consecutive theoretical approaches that can be seen as either traditional or postmodern. At each consecutive stage new approaches have been applied together with, not in place of, the traditional, in order to continue to perfect the discipline (see, for instance, Minghi, 1963; Rumley and Minghi, 1991). Traditional approaches, such as historical mapping, the typological, the functional and the political, have been described in previous theoretical works (e.g. Kolossov and O'Loughlin, 1998; Kolossov and Turovsky, 1998; Kolossov and Mironenko, 2001). Here we are concerned with the postmodern approaches, which have been emerging mostly during the 1990s and the present decade.

Geopolitical approaches

The impact of globalization and integration on political borders

Postmodern concepts have allowed us to bridge the gap in the study of international and domestic policy and the borders between states and other borders. Indeed, a state boundary and a municipal boundary are destined to separate the space controlled by members of a social group or a territorial community and to limit the rights to this territory of those who do not belong to this group (Newman, 2002). In rephrasing an expression of Benedict Anderson's, it is possible to say that any boundary looks outwards to reunite a social group, and inwards to separate both it and its territory from its neighbors. The problem is in the re-distribution of functions between boundaries of different types and levels under the impact of globalization and integration, which is often called de-territorialization and re-territorialization.

Under new conditions and because of the growing mix of different ethnic and

other groups, identity is being deeply modified. More people have complex identities, associating themselves with two or more ethnocultural groups. Cultural, linguistic, religious and socio-professional identities, which are not always clearly related with a territory, are being strengthened. Again, it leads to a relative weakening of national (political) identity, because people often associate themselves with a concrete place where they live – a settlement, a municipality or a region – and want to erect an administrative fence separating them from 'others' (migrants, poor, people of another faith, etc.).

Perception of external threat gives rise in the mass consciousness to an aspiration to minimize or to cease all contact with an undesirable or dangerous neighbor. If it is impossible to get rid of him, to subordinate, to control, or to resettle him, the next-best solution is to build a protective fence. This was the strategy of the states that built 'Great Walls' – the Chinese, the East/West boundary in Berlin and, nowadays, in the Middle East, the barrier between Israel and Palestine. The survey we conducted in 2001 in Stavropol territory (Russia) showed that the population of its eastern districts, with Chechnya as their next-door neighbor, saw the solution of the Chechnyan problem in the same way: separate 'us' from 'them' (Kolossov, Galkina and Krindatch, 2001). But 'great walls' only aggravate conflicts: isolation gives rise to ignorance; ignorance to fear and mistrust; and such a perception of the neighbor becomes the strongest obstacle to reconciliation and a lasting resolution of conflict.

Therefore, political, administrative and cultural boundaries make up a single, integral and hierachically organized social system.

These days it is important to study the place of each boundary in this system at every territorial level. For example, to understand the evolution of the functions of Moldova's boundaries, it is essential to view them not only as boundaries between three neighboring states, but as: (1) a part of European boundaries (in light of Romania's attachment to the EU) and, in addition, a part of post-Soviet boundaries; (2) as cultural boundaries at the regional level (Bessarabia has been distinct from Romania for almost two centuries, and this separation left a deep impact on the popular consciousness); and (3) as an element in the system of cultural and political boundaries inside Moldavia (account having been taken of the problem of Transnistria and the autonomy of Gagauzia as affected by the legitimate boundaries of the whole country).

Elements of this system are very stable, despite frequent changes of boundaries. French philosopher O. Marcard has called political boundaries 'scars of history'. Even boundaries from the remote past can be easily located within both the cultural and political landscape, and are sometimes still visible in the physical landscape.

Naturally, the boundaries that delimit areas of similar cultural identity do not always match the formal (*de jure*) boundaries. Cultural (*de facto*) boundaries serve first of all the external functions of contact between cultural areas, while *de jure* boundaries assume mainly internal functions, contributing to the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the state, and to the social and ethnocultural integration of its population. Former state boundaries sometimes become administrative and/or cultural boundaries, and vice versa. New political boundaries at all hierarchical levels almost never emerge 'from nowhere', and only seldom do they cross old

boundaries. Most often it is the cultural boundaries that are transformed into formal (*de jure*) boundaries. However, the formal boundaries of the past can also, under certain historical circumstances, fully or partly retrieve their official status, becoming state or provincial boundaries once again (Kolossov and Mironenko, 2001).

The true status of several political and administrative boundaries does not correspond to their formal status. The boundary between Chechnya and its neighboring Russian regions is certainly not a simple administrative boundary. In the same region of the Caucasus, the real functions of the boundaries with Abkhazia and South Ossetia are not representative of their formal status either. The inhabitants of these states do not need visas to cross the Russian border, in direct contrast with those who live in the rest of Georgia who must, since 2000, apply for a visa. Not only do they not need visas, but a significant proportion of the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been granted Russian nationality.

Some state boundaries match contrasting ethnic, cultural and linguistic limits and have strong barrier functions. They can be called frontal. Postmodern geopolitical approaches show the inconsistency of their interpretation as cleavages between the largest geocultural areas – civilizations (Galtung, 1994). This leads to absolutization and perpetuation of historically transient cultural and political limits, and a return to the old-style geopolitics of force, as practised in the 1920s and 1930s.

The approach to borders from the perspective of security

People who self-identify with a determined territory endow its different parts with a highly symbolic meaning. They become part of a national and ethnic identity: Sebastopol in Russia, Kosovo in Serbia, and capitals of many countries are such symbolic territories. Borders are closely related with the notion of national security and the use of the state apparatus of compulsion to ensure the thoroughness of that security. Border areas were considered to be the natural location for border guards and customs services, for a high concentration of military units, especially in those directions from which public opinion perceived their security to be under threat. Security is a complicated notion, distinguishing military, economic, political, environmental security, and so on. In its most general sense security is understood as the safety of life-supporting systems and the absence of threats to people's everyday lives and activities. From the perspective of limology, what matters is who is responsible for security and what is it safeguarding – a macro-region, the state, or its parts?

The perception of how secure a concrete boundary is depends on its symbolic role, historical traditions, image and on contemporary discourse. For instance, in Finland, despite past conflicts, social representations of the border with Sweden are rather positive, while the border with Russia is viewed as a source of illegal migrants, criminality, pollutants and other threats (Paasi, 1996; Aalto, 2002).

Traditional understandings of the function of state borders for national security are based, first, on prevention of military threat. Border areas become militarized zones, with their own special regime, where the highest priority is the fighting efficiency of military units ready to repulse the aggression of a potential enemy.

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Second, the traditional securitization of a border zone means taking the widest possible control over any transboundary flows. The boundary is understood as a front line intended to stop the penetration-in-depth into state territory of undesirable individuals, goods, information, etc. The control of transboundary flows is easier where fewer inhabitants live in the border zone and when economic activity there is relatively weak. As a result, these zones eventually degenerate into areas of economic stagnation.

Third, as this approach aims to securitize the state, it is generally supposed that this is a task the state is meant to fulfil. It is also supposed that the security interests of border regions are similar to those of the state as a whole. Geo-economy is subordinated to geopoltics.

In postmodern studies, border functions are seen in a different way. It is stressed that the whole state territory is involved in intensive economic exchanges with abroad, and border regions become the drivers of economic growth and centers of innovation. Transboundary systems are being shaped: urban agglomerations, industrial plants, etc. Demographic and social situations there lead to an increase in the number of inter-ethnic marriages and changes to the ethnic structure and identity of the population. Next, mutual trust deepens, secular negative stereotypes disappear, and, under these circumstances, it can be seen as worthwhile to simplify or abolish traditional border controls and use the more modern methods of remote control.

The perception of what threatens national and regional security is also changing.

First, it is based on the assumption that it is impossible to cope with new challenges by use of military force. Even the most powerful armies of the world cannot control or counteract illegal migration, international terrorism, the traffic of drugs and weapons, the risk of epidemics, transboundary pollution or global environmental disasters.

Second, the majority of experts are now convinced that attempts to keep growing transboundary flows under control by the same methods as in the past, i.e. by strengthening the barrier functions of boundaries, are not only ineffective but objectively harmful for both economy and society. On the contrary, only close cooperation between neighboring states can bring positive results, and in order for it to develop there must be mutual trust, demilitarization of border areas and open borders (*desecuritization*).

Third, the postmodern approach to border security recommends that governments should contribute to the development of border cooperation at the local-authority level. Power at the center can no longer ignore the specific interests of border areas nor create obstacles to their cooperation. The notion of security thereby acquires a considerable *regional dimension*.

Fourth, a systemic approach to the defense of borders is being developed by means of which national security would be defended across its entire territory, not just at the boundaries. The struggle against illegal migration and the trafficking of drugs cannot be reduced to defensive measures at the boundary. International experience shows that at best only 5–10 percent of drugs traffic can be captured at the boundary, and almost all of it passes through official crossing-points. Therefore, the fight has to be taken to the sources of this traffic – international criminal organizations; it also requires openness, transparency of information on transboundary flows,

the possibility of their being monitored internationally and remotely controlled with the use of modern technologies (Lattinen, 2001; Moisio, 2002).

Therefore, border space[1] embraces now not only the area along the boundary, but internal regions too. The development of transport, international trade and communications creates boundaries deep inside the state territory – for instance, around international airports, special customs areas and free economic zones. The state boundary is now not the only line marking the limits of state territory and territorial waters.

Contemporary boundaries become more differentiated: their transparency is not the same for various flows, types and subjects of activity. The state establishes different boundaries for them, often following different lines. As a result, various social groups and kinds of activity have been allocated their 'own' boundaries and border zones. For large companies, customs formalities and taxes do not play a significant role, while for small and medium-sized enterprises they become a serious obstacle, stimulating them to re-orient their activity to the domestic or local market.

Political boundaries in the world's oceans now make up a complicated system that includes the boundaries of territorial waters and economic zones. In sum, the world system of boundaries is evolving from that of a single line to a plurality of limits, from physical, strictly demarcated lines to cultural borders, and from high walls to lines of interaction.

Fifth, border security is now a matter not just for the state. It must take into account the interests of local and international organizations and actors.

Naturally, it is difficult to follow postmodern recommendations in the real world. The inertia induced by traditional viewpoints, the particular geopolitical culture[2] and the imperatives of nation- and state-building, which need the strengthening of the symbolic role of boundaries, the character of border space and other factors all combine to prevent it happening.

A strengthening of the boundaries regime is often imposed by geopolitical factors at the supra-national level. For example, the integration processes in the new independent states of the CIS often proceed in two opposing directions. They try to combine the aspiration towards integration with greater Europe with that of stable relationships with Russia. But circumstances regularly confront them with a false choice: either greater Europe or Russia; either relatively transparent boundaries with the new or candidate-members of the EU, or with Russia. Boundaries in Europe and the political and administrative boundaries in the post-Soviet territory are in fact an integrated system.

In effect, the transparency of the vast boundary between Russia and Kazakhstan meshes poorly with the opening up of western boundaries: 70 percent of illegal migrants get through to the Ukraine from Russian territory, 94 percent of them bypassing the official crossing-points.

Borders as social representations

As has already been noted, the function of boundaries, sometimes their very lines, can be determined by the formation of discourse and mass representations. This has recently become an independent area of research within limological studies.

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Discourse about boundaries has several different layers which never entirely corre-spond. The theory of critical geopolitics worked out by G. Toal (Toal, 1996) and other authors distinguishes 'high' and 'low' geopolitics.

The former is the field of politicians and experts creating the concepts which have to ground and to justify the actions of the government at the international level. 'High' geopolitics is further subdivided on theoretical and practical grounds, and deals first of all with studies of strategic, general questions (the world order, the structure of international relations, etc.). Its discourse concerns the place of the country in the world, the system of international boundaries and, especially, frontal boundaries.

'Low' geopolitics is a set of geopolitical representations, symbols and images in media, advertising, cinema, cartoons, etc. It is the basis of a world geopolitical vision – a necessary element of ethnic and political identity, and a tool of state-building.

The world geopolitical vision consists of representations on the relationship between different elements of political space, national security and threats to it, advantages and shortcomings of a certain strategy in foreign relations. The world geopolitical vision also includes representations concerning the territory of an ethnic group or political nation, its boundaries, preferred state models, the state's historical mission and the forces preventing its realization (Dijkink, 1996; Taylor and Flint, 2000). The geopolitical vision is a product of national history and culture, a synthe-sis of views held by various strata of the political elite, academic experts, the creative intelligentsia and public opinion as a whole (Kolossov, 1996). To legitimate its activity, the government needs 'high' geopolitics to match 'low' geopolitics to the greatest possible extent.

Geopolitical discourse is coined by both politicians and the media, and by the systems of education and mass culture. The functions and the importance of bound-aries in the life of the state and society is a subject for discussion and compromise. The role of boundaries is differently interpreted by various social groups. Social representations about boundaries are to a large extent mythical. As they constitute an element of ethnic and political identity, for political leaders of Central and Eastern Europe, for example, it was important to represent their boundaries as limits between the West and the East on a global scale; as boundaries of Europe – on the macro-regional scale; and – on the local scale – as the 'historical', 'native' borders of their ethnic group or, on the contrary, the result of wise though painful compromises in the name of international stability (Berg and Oras, 2000; Moisio, 2002).

An analysis of geopolitical discourse helps to identify the limits of the so-called informal regions as they exist in the representations of political leaders and in public opinion (for instance, North Europe, Central Europe, the Muslim world, etc.) (Medvedev, 2001).

The 'policy–practice–perception' (PPP) approach

The PPP approach represents an attempt to synthesize recent theoretical achieve-ments with traditional approaches, so as not to lose their practical value – in partic-ular, the value of the functional approach. From this perspective, the boundary is not

simply a legal institution destined to ensure the integrity of the state's territory, but the product of a social practice (in the term used by H. Lefebvre), the result of a long historical and geopolitical development, an important symbolic marker of ethnic and political identity.

This approach consists of a combined analysis at different spatial levels. The first is of the practice related to transboundary flows and developed in the shadow of the boundary. It focuses on informal transboundary networks in business, local authorities, NGOs, etc. The scale, the form and the objectives of this activity depend on a level of understanding by and with the state, the supra-national and regional actors of national security, and of the role in it of the given border. Border activity is determined by the regime of the boundary, which, in turn, has its own influence on activity.

Second, border policy is considered on different levels – as the state and international, institutional and legal infrastructures ensuring transboundary flows and determining the relationship between the barrier and contact functions of the boundary – in other words, the degree of its transparency. This infrastructure is usually a mirror of the state's, border regions' and local authorities' strategies and includes the tools destined to stimulate and to limit border activities, and to regulate processes of external (transboundary) and internal territorial integration.

Third, the PPP approach studies the perception of the border, i.e. the character, the evolution and the channels of influence that social representations exert on the boundary itself, border regions, relations between neighboring states and regions, border cooperation and geopolitical discourse at the levels of 'high' and 'low' geopolitics (Scott, 2000; Van Houtum, 1999).

Border activities, the perception of the boundary and the boundary's institutional and legal infrastructure are interdependent: the primacy of any of these three elements is a chicken-and-egg question.

The theory of human behavior in border areas is close to the 'PPP-approach' (Lunden, 2001; Lunden and Zalamans, 2000). It is also related to the functional theory of John House (1982) and with postmodern approaches. According to this theory, the boundary limits the freedom of people's movements by changing their rationale and life conditions. As a result, the area of the human life-cycle also changes. Ideally, the life-cycle has the shape of concentric circles reflecting how an individual's contacts weaken with increasing distance from home. The shape of this area of influence also depends on gender, age, education, socio-professional status, the development of transport, political and legal factors, and so on. In border areas, under the influence of the boundary's barrier functions, this area looks quite different from how it does in the depths of the state's territory. The boundary's impact depends strongly too on level of education. 'Intellectuals', or 'white collars' (teachers, journalists, functionaries . . .) have a closer relationship with their state than do less educated people. A boundary's proximity also modifies the internal and external factors that determine the scope of individual life-cycles and behavior.

Socio-economic conditions (economic development, labor-market costs, the price of goods and capital, the state of transport systems, the diffusion of media, etc.), as well as administrative and legal restrictions, are all relevant external factors.

Territorial restrictions, mental maps and communal values shared by an indi-

vidual and by his social-territorial group as a whole can be classified as internal factors. Important among these are ethnic and national identity, i.e. a person's self-association with the interests of their ethnic group, with fellow-citizens of their state and cohabitants of their region or neighborhood.

The ecopolitical approach

It is well known that natural processes do not recognize socially constructed boundaries. Mountains, river basins, areas of birds or fish, monuments of nature, inland seas and other natural regions are very often divided by political and administrative boundaries. Likewise, mineral deposits are often shared by two or more political units. At the same time, integrated natural regions can help diffuse concentrations of pollutants in air and water. An awareness of global and regional environmental problems can strongly stimulate international cooperation, including border cooperation (see, among many others, Young, 1997). This powerful branch of the social sciences that studies transboundary environmental-political problems is being developed mainly by political scientists, specialists in international relations, and physical geographers.

Discussion of these problems far exceeds the limits of this paper, so let us name just the one line of enquiry in this instance – the river-basins approach. It integrates a social- and a physical-geographical analysis in pursuit of a solution to many international conflicts by working out new principles of environmental management. River basins represent closely integrated natural regions, provide a basis for settlement and transportation systems, and often determine boundaries between historically created territorial and cultural communities. But problems that arise from sharing the use of their water, their energy and biological resources are a classic source of international and boundary conflicts.

'A borderless world'?

Those who share neoliberal views believe that due to globalization and liberalization of the economy, the development of new technologies and communication techniques, and a growing prosperity, political boundaries are gradually changing their aspect – from alienating to open and integrational. Such an evolution is also explained by increasing international awareness of global, environmental, energy and other problems, and the importance of international cooperation. Under these conditions, it can be easier to find a solution for boundary conflicts on the basis of international law. A number of contradictions could be overcome by separating the economic functions of the boundary from its ideological ones. Neoliberals argue that excesses of nationalism and the unlimited right of peoples to self-determination are now a thing of the past because of both widespread and in-depth democratization, particularly in the 'new' countries (Ohmae, 1995; Prescott, 1999). The rapid development, along similar lines, of border cooperation in most regions of the world also inspires optimism (Wu Chung-Tong, 1998).

But many authors do not agree with the concept of a borderless world. Its opponents stress that boundaries remain a considerable barrier, even in regions where processes of integration are especially advanced. Despite, for example, the high dependence of the Canadian economy on that of the USA, the trade turnout of an 'average' Canadian province with other regions of the country, as weighted by population and per capita income, is 12 times that of its trade with neighboring American states, and the exchange of services is 40 times as large. Migrations between Canadian provinces weighted in the same way are 100 times more intensive than those with American states across the boundary (Helliwell, 1998), and the same pattern can be observed in the EU.

The discourse about a borderless world concerns only peaceful, 'integrational', open and internationally recognized boundaries, which can be found mostly in Europe and North America. However, they make up no more than about 5 percent of the total length of land-state boundaries. The following facts characterize the potential for border conflicts in the rest of the world, especially in Africa and Asia. About 42 percent of the total length of land boundaries in Africa has been drawn up along parallels, meridians and equidistant lines, with no consideration of social realities; 37 percent of land boundaries were imposed on African countries by British and French colonial powers, who cared only about the dividing lines between them (Foucher, 1991).

Nationalist movements remain a powerful force in many regions of the world. The unlimited right of peoples to self-determination is in obvious conflict with another key principle of international law – the territorial integrity of sovereign states and the unviolability of their borders. These important factors provoke strong doubts about the reality of the neoliberal scenario of the evolution of the world boundary system. Hence, it is necessary to define those borders and border areas where there is a high risk of destabilization and of territorial conflicts.

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In sum, despite rich historical traditions, old approaches have been unable to explain why in some cases even a small change to a state's territory and to its boundaries can provoke a deep emotional reaction from its society and can lead to a territorial conflict, while in other cases new boundaries have been perceived by public opinion as definitive and have not been disputed. 'Traditional' political geography has not been able to explain why some border areas, which have for a long time seemed peaceful, have suddenly become the foci of conflicts and bloodshed, and why governments and public opinion have often been so painfully sensitive towards all questions concerning their political boundaries.

The arrival of postmodern concepts was a natural reaction to the methodological and analytical problems of recent decades. Postmodernists, of course, have not been able to suggest comprehensive answers to all of them, but their work has stimulated research in the field of limology, has contributed to its renewal and allowed border studies to define a new agenda for the future.

Currently, it's most often the traditional approaches to border security that win

out over the postmodern ones. But the very nature of contemporary boundaries, the scale of the problems they pose for societies, their ever 'tighter' links with the perspectives of integration and globalization and the panoply of international relations, these all push the experts, the regional authorities and the governmental circles to come up with innovative solutions and to strengthen the mechanisms of borderline cooperation.

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Notes

1. Border space is a socio-geographical area in which the most active interactions and conflicts between the economic, cultural, legal and political systems of neighboring countries take place.
2. Geopolitical culture represents traditions of interpretation of international events according to national identity and the strategy of interaction with other states. Russian geopolitical culture includes, for example, geopolitical traditions of 'Westernism' and 'Eurasianism' in their many different versions.

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