In Part 1 the issue of the changing nature of borders is discussed from a global perspective. The authors challenge the status quo, questioning the stability of borders in an increasingly international context. In Chapter 1, Gerald Blake claims that, overall, we fail to appreciate how dynamic borders can be and that they are indicators of broader geopolitical, economic, and cultural processes. Blake discusses border interaction and the inadequacy of simplistic definitions of border functions from a cartographic perspective, suggesting that state boundaries are not permanently fixed by geopolitical and military objectives. Similarly, in Chapter 2 Thomas Edwards focuses on cross-border flows of information and capital. He suggests that new geopolitical discourses will develop to accommodate the changing basis of borders – a basis focused upon informational flows and the accommodation of transnational economic forces. As such, the real challenge, as dictated by information geopolitics, is to proactively discern the proper “interfaces” between the global and local information contexts long before the “products” are released. Unlike Edwards, however, Blake questions the assumption that borders are by necessity “firm,” and he looks to underlying perceptual and cartographic conventions that define the world simply as a stage divided among discrete nation-states. The problem is not so much with the map itself, but with the viewer.

This raises the question, of course, of how the viewer develops his or her viewpoint and of the role of geopolitics in influencing conventional viewpoints. To Edwards, a geopolitical revolution is under way, and it involves informational flows and transnational corporate politics challenging the geographical basis of the nation-state. It will result in the creation of informational geopolitics and redefine national-international power structures and conventional borders.

In Chapter 3 Robert Adamson focuses on a related but somewhat different theme – the role of law and its influence on globalization – or, more accurately, on internationalism. Adamson argues that domestic law...
policy were once seen as operating inside the watertight compartment of national territory, more or less immune from foreign influence. Now law and policy makers must reinvent the concepts of sovereignty and jurisdiction in a way that best delivers social goods. Taking a fresh look at the concept of the internationalization of domestic legal processes, Adamson argues that the latter remain important and have increasing significance in a rapidly globalizing world. The prospect of unilateral responses to international events is growing proportionately, particularly in the United States, where internationalism and international law was having a diminishing influence even prior to the American invasion of Iraq in the spring of 2003.

Part 1 is concerned with redirecting our discussions towards an interrogation of the nature of “new” borders and the nature of border “retrenchment.” The three chapters in this section of *Holding the Line* begin this project by recasting the question “what is the role of geopolitics within a global context?” to “has it changed in discursive substance or critical importance?” Two of the authors in this section would argue that geopolitical perceptions have indeed shifted, leading to new insights and new viewpoints. The third argues that strategic or international geopolitics is no longer a viable consideration as states and policy makers must reinvent the concepts of sovereignty and jurisdiction to reflect the growing importance of the local over the global.
1
Boundary Permeability in Perspective

Gerald Blake

World Political Maps Can Be Dangerous

The world political map has a powerful hold over most of us. World maps tend to be printed in bright colours, and the deep blue of the oceans provides an attractive setting for the mosaic of states that occupies the land. They also appeal to us because they are familiar, from our recollections of the map on the schoolroom wall to the tiny version of the same we can look at in our diaries when we are bored on the train or the bus. World maps are commonly part of the decor in offices and railway and airport waiting rooms all over the globe. Some of the finest world maps are triumphs of cartography and printing, and within the limits of scale and cost they convey an impression of reality that has genuine value.

Such maps are also misleading sources of information, quite apart from the distortions of various projections. They give an impression of stability, of somehow being the finished product, a tidier version of older maps that were evolving towards the ideal. Every part of the land is occupied by states usually outlined with thick red, green, or black lines, each state named and with its capital city shown. Few world maps show boundary disputes. Even fewer show maritime boundaries, although there are now some 160 maritime boundaries (or about one-third of the potential) formally agreed between states. No distinction is made between boundaries marked out on the ground and those that are delimited but not demarcated. Many maps carry dated or inaccurate information that should have been known at the time of printing. Part of the problem, of course, is not with the map itself, but with the viewer. Most maps are clearly dated, and it is our fault if we forget that the map is merely a snapshot of political arrangements at a point in time. In reality the pattern evolves constantly, sometimes dramatically (as in the past decade) and sometimes imperceptibly (as during the period of the Cold War). The world map of 100 years ago was very different to our map of today, and ours may be equally unrecognizable 100 years from now.
Another problem (for which we can hardly blame cartographers) is that international boundaries are three-dimensional, and our one-dimensional maps have conditioned us to overlook this vital fact. States control the airspace above their land territories and above their territorial seas to twelve nautical miles offshore horizontally but vertically to an undefined height. Coastal states have rights to resources in their exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and continental shelves. In the case of the EEZ, this means exclusive rights to the resources of the water column and the seafloor to a distance of 200 nautical miles offshore. In the case of the continental shelf, it means exclusive rights to seabed resources to more than 200 nautical metres offshore. States jealously guard their rights to airspace over their offshore waters and over their land territories. To evaluate the permeability of the boundary system of a particular state, one must consider all these dimensions. There is much evidence to suggest that state control of offshore areas is being avidly asserted and reinforced all over the world, as witnessed by the growing volume of national legislation, the proliferation of island and maritime disputes, and state spending on patrol vessels and surveillance systems. Similarly, airspace intrusions are taken very seriously, as is shown by the aftermath of 11 September 2001. But even less dramatically, and outside of the continental United States, events such as the shooting down of a Pakistani aircraft in Indian airspace (which occurred in August 1999) had already raised a red flag. In an item on BBC TV news on 13 August 1999 concerning air traffic control chaos over central Europe, a BBC reporter speaking from an aircraft said that, while we may not see boundaries on the ground nowadays, “they are very much in evidence up here.”

Perhaps the feature of our world political maps that is most misleading is their depiction of international boundaries as though they all have the same status, age, and function. Of course there is a limit to what can be shown at world scale, but it is surprising that, in this respect, cartography has hardly moved on since the beginning of the twentieth century. In the days when state boundaries were containers and barriers, and were fixed with military and geopolitical objectives in mind, thick lines indistinguishable from each other may have been appropriate. Now that the functions of state boundaries are changing, it is time for cartographers to take up the challenge. Indeed, the late Bradford Thomas called for us to consider new ways of showing international boundaries and, indeed, many of the contributors to this volume (see Bort, Nicol, Jackson, Scott) undertake analyses that reject a “linear” approach to borders. A good starting point may be to indicate, broadly, the permeability of international boundaries, all of which lie somewhere on a spectrum from totally closed to totally open. At least some distinction could be made between “hard” and “soft” boundaries, with an indication of those that remain in dispute. Greater
cartographic sophistication may prove possible, and of course the opportunity to produce CD-ROM versions with impressive detail is now available.

**Mapping Permeability: Desirable but Daunting**

“Permeability” is a term borrowed from the physical sciences, where it has a precise meaning and the process is measurable. The permeability of a geological stratum is the result of the physical characteristics of the rock as a barrier and the frequency and volume of rainfall. Boundary permeability is the product of the barrier characteristics of the boundary (the outcome of legal, geographical, historical, and social factors) and the pressures on the boundary from people, goods, capital, ideas, and so on. Permeability is, however, most often used as convenient shorthand for transboundary collaboration, borderland initiatives, and openness.

The task of mapping boundary permeability at global scale is probably beyond the capacity of any research team or publishing group anywhere in the world. A proper analysis would involve data collection across 308 or more land boundaries separating approximately 190 independent states and some 70 dependencies, not to mention maritime and airspace boundaries. National statistics about the circulation of people and goods are often either unavailable or cannot be related to particular points of entry. The communications revolution and the growing volume of information and ideas crossing international boundaries are the inspiration for much of the debate about the fading of the state and the collapse of boundaries.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, in spite of breathtaking growth, access to the Internet remains uneven and is still massively concentrated among relatively few of the world’s approximately 6,000 million people and in relatively few well-off states (dominated by the anglophone world). Even if detailed statistics about the Internet were available as an indicator of permeability, much thought would need to be given to weighting this phenomenon in relation to flows of people and goods.

Nevertheless, mapping permeability at world scale should be attempted. Membership of the world’s most active political and economic blocks could be highlighted, distinguishing between internal boundaries (with a growing level of permeability) and the external boundaries (which tend to become less permeable). The greatest concentration of open borders in the world is in the European Union (EU), where, even by 1999, the EU member states shared twenty internal EU boundaries (see Bort, this volume). Although representing only 6.5 percent of the world’s land boundaries, they ought to show up on a world map. When the new members of the EU are added (those that joined in May 2004), the proportion of internal EU boundaries becomes almost 10 percent of the world total. The outer margins of the EU, where borders are “hardening,” also need to be depicted differently. The outer perimeter of the EU clearly has to be properly
controlled if internal borders are to remain open. NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations), and other major associations of states could be similarly distinguished. The majority of states today belong to an economic or political grouping of some kind.

At the other end of the spectrum it is not too difficult to identify a number of closed (or effectively closed) boundaries, most of which are heavily militarized and in dispute. Turkey-Syria, North-South Korea, India-Pakistan, Iraq-Kuwait are examples. Such boundaries are clearly quite unlike those, for example, in the EU, which are peaceful and highly permeable. A large proportion of the world’s land boundaries no doubt fall somewhere between these two extremes of open and closed. It would be highly instructive to break these down into levels of permeability. In the meantime, there are arguments for doing what we can to create a more realistic political map of the world, even if our categories are rather crude and incomplete. More detailed maps would have the great advantage of providing visual evidence to supplement the discourse about vanishing borders and the borderless world. Vanishing borders may (or may not) be a desirable outcome, but their advent may be more remote than is sometimes assumed.

The good news is that for a few individual boundaries, some illuminating data are being collected by a new generation of geography researchers. Much of this research throws light on boundary permeability, although that is not always the prime objective. Newman and Paasi have noted the need for such empirical studies. If boundaries are becoming increasingly permeable, as is clearly the case in many parts of the world, then boundary and borderland management are becoming increasingly important. Terrorist activities leading to the tragedy of 11 September 2001, indicate that boundaries need to be open for legitimate crossings while acting as an effective filter to unwanted people (terrorists, bandits, criminals, smugglers, illegal migrants) and goods (drugs, weapons, biological threats, pornography). It is a difficult balancing act. Detailed knowledge of the rhythms, procedures, and processes at border crossings; profiles of the people who cross, their origins and destinations, purposes of travel or other similar reasons provide the basis for controlled and humane management. Recent events have created a new and pressing imperative for countries to get it right.

Certainly the need for enhanced border security vis-à-vis global terrorists is important; however, as Abdullatif Al Shaikh – who analyzed survey questionnaires in 1998-99 at a number of Saudi Arabia’s border crossings with Kuwait, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates – demonstrates, borders also need to be fluid to be efficient. Abdullatif Al Shaikh observed that about one-third of all arrivals and departures in this area were for the purpose of...
visiting relatives. A large proportion of arriving travellers passed through the checkpoints in less than twenty minutes, whereas truck drivers with local destinations typically spent two or more hours getting through. All these states are members of the Gulf Co-operation Council, whose eventual aim has been open borders. This raises the question of how to interpret Al Shaikh’s findings. On this evidence, are these borders open or not? What does permeability mean, and for whom? What more could be reasonably expected? Maybe open and closed borders are not as easily recognizable or as clear-cut as we would like to think.

**Permeability Is Not Always Good**

In general, the events of 9/11 notwithstanding, the most accessible borders are also the most stress-free borders. They are characterized by a fair measure of political goodwill on either side. The boundary itself is likely to have been formally agreed upon and demarcated, and will be routinely maintained and managed by both parties. In all probability there will be collaborative arrangements in place for transboundary resource exploitation and control of pollution. There may be a standing boundary commission to oversee boundary and borderland affairs. The classic models for boundary commission activities are the Canada-US and the Mexico-US international boundary commissions. Stress-free borders are usually easy to reach, have good road or rail links, and lack stringent military controls. Tourists as well as local people engaged in commuting, shopping, or visiting friends and relations account for much of the usage of open and stress-free borders. The dilemma is that, in today’s world, borders are not necessarily limited to transnational flows; rather, they are more international than ever, often for economic purposes. In the Middle East the most common reasons given for border crossings are social rather than economic; within this kind of environment, permeability is clearly desirable and beneficial to the borderland communities.

There are, regrettably, many parts of the world where permeable borders bring negative results. In these areas governments may be well advised to impose strict border controls or to effectively close their borders. In the aftermath of September 11, the point hardly needs to be laboured. All the indications seem to point to more and more international boundaries coming under stress from a variety of potentially costly and threatening phenomena. Equally, citizens of the states affected expect their governments to prevent such threats, which most of them perceive to be a function of the state boundary (although in practice this may not be the case). Five examples are:

1. Illegal migrants and refuge-seekers. Caused by political upheavals and economic deprivation, the international movement of illegal migrants
is on a colossal scale and growing. For obvious reasons nobody knows the precise figure; however, worldwide, illegal migrants already number millions. Most rich states are vulnerable. Indeed, by the end of the twentieth century, the United Kingdom seemed to be particularly popular with asylum seekers.

Refugees. Civil wars and famine are major causes of large-scale refugee movements. Some large refugee groups are semi-permanent while others (like those in Central Africa) disperse after a short time. Refugees create enormous political, economic, and environmental strains and stresses on the host country. One of the most abnormal international boundaries is Burma-Thailand, where large numbers of Karen refugees settled in Thailand retain cross-border contacts. There are some 20 million refugees in the world today, a significant proportion of whom remain permanently close to the borders of their homelands.

Smuggling. The greatest concern is with drug smuggling, with North America and Europe being the most favoured target areas. Much of the drug trade is overland, and a considerable number of states are involved in attempting to intercept supplies. In practice many drug seizures are made away from international boundaries.

War lords and bandits. Several borderlands in Africa and elsewhere are beyond the effective control of central governments. They have become the power domains of rebels whose objectives may be either political or criminal or both. The state boundaries bordering these regions may be extremely permeable, although hardly to the advantage of the local population or to the state.

Terrorism. In the aftermath of the September 11 crisis, stricter enforcement of the security function has been directed towards preventing terrorism not just in the United States but also in much of the “developed” and “developing world.”

Permeable Boundaries Do Not Negate Sovereignty

The modern state system can be said to have had its formal beginning with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which ended thirty years of war in Europe. The treaty established the right of the state to exercise its functions within its own territory to the exclusion of all other states, thus confirming the link between sovereignty and territory. Only states (and not the church) were able to exercise political control, and no state could interfere in the domestic affairs of another state. Within state territory sovereignty was absolute, extending to limits defined by boundary lines of no thickness. The drawing of state boundaries had the effect of creating national consciousness through exclusion. With European imperial expansion, the Westphalian nation-state concept was exported to all the corners of the globe and became the cornerstone of international order.
context of thousands of years of political history the state is a relatively new idea, and international boundaries are almost a novelty. Few expect the state system as we know it today to survive forever, and the character and purpose of international boundaries will evolve with new forms of political organization. It is, however, difficult to envisage a world without boundaries.

The processes, which we all agree are creating more permeable boundaries, are undoubtedly powerful. Similarly, it is undeniable that the modern state has a considerably reduced capacity to control its own economic affairs, deliver security to all its citizens, and ensure a clean and healthy environment. These facts have led to the assumption by some observers that borders are losing their meaning and, in time, will wither away. While it is true that boundaries have lost a number of their former functions as military and economic barriers, they retain the fundamentally important role of defining the limits of the territorial sovereignty of the state. Dittgen\(^5\) regards this legal function as the most important of all, and this view seems to be held by many international lawyers, including Marcel Kohen:

> The exercise of power, whether “national” or “supranational,” remains essentially a territorial one. Laws continue to be adopted in order to be applied over a given territory, the Executive continues to take decisions applicable within the limits of its territorial jurisdiction, judges are competent to deal with cases only if they have territorial jurisdiction. Even “supranational” decisions taken by organs of the European Union are applicable only to the extent of the territorial limits designated by its member States. Hence, territory continues to mark the sphere of jurisdiction of States and international institutions.\(^6\)

Although states increasingly transfer power to international institutions for certain purposes, they have usually not abandoned these powers and, therefore, remain sovereign.\(^7\) In the majority of cases they have transferred, but not relinquished, these powers (see, for example, Chapter 4, this volume). There are also a number of other kinds of territorial status, including neutral zones, condominiums, joint development zones, dependencies, and so on in which the state is not sovereign. These should not detain us here. The essential point is that high levels of permeability along state boundaries do not diminish the constitutional necessity for boundaries, nor do they remove the important function of defining different legal systems.

There is not much evidence to suggest that governments anywhere in the world recognize the phenomenon of withering boundaries and loss of territorial sovereignty. On the contrary, states are as eager as ever to define
and protect their territories and offshore areas. Land boundary agreements continue to be made, while existing land boundaries are being more accurately mapped through the use of modern techniques such as global positioning system (GPS). Considerable sums are being spent on the demarcation and redemarcation of land boundaries. Offshore, there is great interest in delimiting the remaining 270 or so maritime boundaries that have not yet been agreed upon. The process is lengthy and often costly. Far from being a borderless world, about one-third of ocean space is currently being partitioned between coastal states. The territorial instinct is still very strong among states, and few matters can ignite nationalist fervour more readily than threats to territory.

Estimates as late as 1999 provide further evidence of the vitality of state sovereignty in the plethora of land and maritime boundary disputes, probably more than at any time since the Second World War. Recent estimates identified sixty unresolved land boundary disputes, twenty-six unresolved maritime boundary disputes, and thirty-two ongoing disputes over island sovereignty. In pursuit of their claims states are increasingly resorting to arbitration or the International Court of Justice. Substantial costs are involved, and senior government officials may be preoccupied with cases for months (or even years). Although in recent decades maritime disputes have resulted in the temporary creation of some sixteen joint development zones, the preferred option is invariably the negotiation of a line delimiting sovereignty.

More States More Boundaries?
David Newman and Anssi Paasi undertook a comprehensive and timely review of the literature on boundary narratives in political geography. Their work revealed a wide range of opinions among top scholars across a range of disciplines concerning the future of the state and state boundaries. Yet, in all this uncertainty, one feature of the future world political map seems highly probable: there will be more states and thus more borders. They will emerge in response to several processes, including:

- Secession. As a growing number of the “suppressed” nationalities of the Fourth World assert themselves, some will undoubtedly achieve statehood. E.W. Borntrager has argued that the time has come to unequivocally open up the right of self-determination as the only possible way to relieve rising tensions in the world political map. He detects an increasing tendency for international law to consider the claims of territorial self-determination. While there may be some 4,000 “Fourth World” peoples in the world, not all would wish for statehood or be able to make a credible case for it. A more realistic indicator may be the fifty-plus members of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation,
comprising over 100 million people. In mid-August 1999, all during the same week, there were press reports of bids for secession in Russia’s Daghestan and Namibia’s Caprivi Strip, in addition to the long-running struggles in Chechnya and elsewhere.

- Independence. Some of the seventy dependencies are likely to opt for independence from their possessors, which include (notably) the United Kingdom and France.
- Break-up of federal states. There are eighteen federal states in the world, with a total of something like 280 federal units. A number are undergoing serious strains and stresses, and seem destined to lose constituent members if not to disintegrate altogether, as did Yugoslavia.

Saul Cohen predicted the emergence, through a variety of processes, of forty new states in the twenty-first century. Most of these would be “gateway states” at favourable geopolitical and economic locations, thriving on manufacturing, trade, tourism, and financial services. A number of his cases seem improbable today, but forty is a useful figure for speculation. Still, there is by no means universal agreement that greater economic cooperation will lead to more super states and fewer small states. A 1997 study, quoted in the Financial Times, showed that economic openness is likely to create more rather than fewer states. Politics will become more local as markets become more global because political separatism is less costly within a global economy.

Conclusions: Back to the Future?

“If people are familiar with any map of the world at all, it is likely to be the map of so-called sovereign states.” That map, as we have seen, massively influences our conceptualization of global political space and has fostered the perception that all states share the same essential characteristics. This is just as absurd as is the assumption that all the world’s 308 or so land boundaries have the same origins, the same physical characteristics, fulfil the same roles, and will evolve in the same way. In reality, the sovereign states, which comprise today’s political map, were carved out of a rich diversity of geopolitical, cultural, and historic environments. Pre-state political space was organized in a considerable variety of ways, many of which did not recognize absolute sovereignty or conceive of precise boundary lines. The state system widely superimposed on these traditions, largely by Europeans, was alien and unpopular, and rarely coincided with the underlying human geographies.

Against this background, it seems inevitable that as a new world order emerges there will be marked regional contrasts in the types of political entity and the boundaries that enclose them. Instead of looking for global trends, political geographers in the coming decade should take up the
challenge of tracking regional differences. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that boundary and state futures in Europe are likely to be, and indeed are, divergent from those of the former Soviet Union. Similarly, sub-Saharan Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and the Middle East may develop quite differently.

Of heightened interest, in view of recent terrorist activities and resulting political and military coalitions, is the relationship between border permeability and Islamic fundamentalist traditions. Pre-state territorial traditions in Islam provide a classic example, where, “In short, sovereignty in Islamic constitutional theory is concerned only with community and not with territory. It was only with the explicit introduction of the nation state that concepts of territorial sovereignty began to emerge.”\(^{15}\) Precise boundaries and territorial sovereignty were therefore unimportant in Islam, and there have been calls for a return to this tradition. Besides the major groupings of states based on common cultures, history, and political experience, the world's thirty island states must not be forgotten. They are invariably overlooked in the debate about the future of the state, but they are a fundamental part of the picture.

There is fear that, in the midst of rapid change, several competing cultural and ideological blocks might emerge, in which the “past,” or nationally charged versions of the past, could reassert themselves. In devising such a global breakdown of geopolitical/territorial traditions as a tool to examine the boundary futures, there might be some hints of Huntington’s “clash of civilizations.” In his view the separating fault lines between civilizations will mark the most important future conflicts.\(^ {16}\) This may be far-fetched, but, as the contemporary world order disintegrates, there could be a rush to retrieve old political styles and identities, many of which lie dormant under today's political map.

Much data needs to be assembled, and regional experts need to be consulted before we can make any worthwhile predictions about where such “hot spots” might occur.

Notes
4 Two recent examples in the media are:
(1) 140 Ugandans were killed in Turutuko and Wolinyang villages near the borders with Sudan and Kenya. The attackers were alleged to be Turkana cattle thieves from Kenya (*London Times*, 13 August 1999).
(2) Four Western aid workers were seized in Liberia by armed bandits operating from inside Guinea. The bandits had occupied part of northwest Liberia (*London Times*, 9 August 1999).


7. Ibid.


