

## THINKING GLOBALLY ABOUT SPACE AND SPANISH BORDERS

NATALIA RIBAS-MATEOS

### A "PERMANENT CONSTRUCTION SITE"

The complex Mediterranean regional context, characterised mainly by its sea border, and the US-Mexico region with its extended land border (and some rivers), may well represent the two regions of the world where the processes of integration-interaction between asymmetric countries are currently most in evidence. When considering the Mediterranean as a borderland, Spain has played a decisive role as an emblematic border-country in the construction of the external frontier of the European Union.

Within the context of the new settings for the world's borders, the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Iron Curtain, a simplistic North-South division has often replaced the clash between East and West. This clearly plays an important role currently for the reshaping of borders in the time of globalisation. However, in contrast to classic geopolitical studies in which borders are portrayed as inert frameworks, our ethnographic attempt to visualise these borders (research conducted in 2005 and 2009 in Mediterranean borders, and for previous research see Ribas-Mateos 2005) reveals these borders as a form of expression for intricate socio-economic global processes. Therefore, borders, in this case, act as frameworks rather than objects from which we can observe current socio-economic processes. Indeed, they are privileged spaces in which this interaction takes place (Foucher 1991:10), where the space represents a means (rather than a historic actor), a framework, an *enjeu*, which contains resources of use and interest to many. This highlights the idea that borders are constructed socially, as stressed by Barth (1969) when discussing ethnic groups between borders. Borders are not limited to a mere 'social product' or social process, but are instead alive and dynamic. Borders are always there, but they are continuously being invented and re-invented, configured and re-interpreted.

This concept of borders must be contextualised with the visions of other authors who focus their efforts on the spatial and scale reflections related to globalisation. One such author is Brenner (1999), who, rather than analysing globalisation within a space, refers instead to the production of space in the age of globalisation by means of a number of processes. It should be stressed that the problem with these types of contemporary approaches is how to achieve an empirical vision of globalisation. Authors such as Sassen have attempted to establish strategic research units in order to interpret global changes. This particular author focused her attention initially on London and New York, capturing the essence of these cities as the hubs of a world economy that extended beyond the Atlantic region, indicating a new phase in capitalist accumulation and urban structuring. Whilst Sassen (2000) centred her attention on global cities, we have opted to focus on marginal spaces, situated on the borders of this global capitalism. Yet we are not referring to just any type of border; instead we have targeted common global processes in a range of areas and their borders, and it is here that we have also centred our analysis of the complex reconfiguration of space and borders.

This focus on borders, and on border cities in particular, further highlights the interest in recovering those physical places that form part of economic globalisation, albeit from a spatial heterogeneousness in which multiple trajectories and processes under ongoing construction are to be found. This vision of these processes back up the idea of a “permanent construction site”, which has been attributed to Nevins: “(...) not only walls and fences, but national identities and exclusivities are frenetic works in progress. Here also politicians and bureaucrats manufacture the self-serving myths that advance the interest of the “border control industry” (Davis 2002, in his introduction to Nevins’ work on Operation Gatekeeper). This dynamic view can also be seen in Staud and Spener (1998) when say that “borders are continually made and remade, rebordered and debordered, in concert with larger circulations of migration, the projects of states, the implementation of trade agreements, and the political responses of those experiencing these processes at first hand”.

## DISCUSSING THE CURRENT GLOBAL BORDER FRAMEWORK

The border-type analysis in the context of globalisation takes into account the various fragmentation, deterritorialisation, and externalisation processes which affect the definition of border, which in turn impacts on the types of scales, in which the periphery takes over the centre and where the control of margins defines state sovereignty.

Nevertheless, the various types of enclosure materials (fences, wire etc.) act as a testimony to the materialisation of border closures around the world. These conventional fences can be overcome, can be climbed over, and indeed this happens in various ways. They are being replaced by more technically sophisticated versions, such as the concrete bollard fences, digital SIS Schengen system and visa data bases. In the United States televised video surveillance systems operate 24 hours a day along these heavily fortified segments, which are linked to border patrol dispatching centres and which can dispatch border patrol vehicles to the exact spots where illegal entries are detected. There are also infrared night scopes, both fixed and mobile units, which detect the presence of “illegal entrants” by their body heat.

When discussing the current global border framework, researchers tend to limit their discourse to the relation between open and closed gateways, movement and barriers, crossings and barriers, failing to venture into the complex task of analysing the differentiated effects of mobility/enclosure as the unequal terrain of the global capitalist system itself. This has been indicated by Heyman (2004), for example, when writing about his own research findings focused on the so-called ports of entry at the United States border with Mexico, as key nodes in the world system. Heyman (2004) claims that the “globalized” world consists not of an open terrain, but a jigsaw puzzle of socially unequal spaces. The complex pattern of manoeuvres by border crossers and attempted state controls provides us with vital clues about the making and remaking of “globalization” (303, 304”).

Border case studies have shown us that such processes do exist in border cities, thanks particularly to their specific characteristics. In cities such as Tijuana, Tangiers, Ceuta, and Melilla, a series of contradictions clearly arise, such as the differences between *border crossing* (e.g. women who work in domestic service and who cross the border into Ceuta and Melilla on a daily basis, networks of transborder families between Tijuana and San Diego, smugglers of basic items that embark on long routes from Ceuta and Melilla) and *border reinforcing* (Schengen 1991 and the construction of Fortress Europe, the abuse of the human rights of people of Sub-Saharan regions, the reinforcing of the US-Mexican border following September 11<sup>th</sup>, etc).

## A SPATIAL REDEFINITION

Through my own research as well as through numerous debates<sup>1</sup> one key idea that seems to be reflected repeatedly is that we are witnessing a complex form of deterritorialisation that can guide us in future debates on the issues of borders and migration, where the new role of the nation-state reproduces old roles and combines them with new roles of administrative forms and categories and sub-categories of classifying type of mobilities and populations. Such ideas makes us overcome the notion of 'border' in the classic topographic and geo-political sense, leading us to a conceptualization of the externalisation of borders (distinguishing different notions of transit and alteration of migrants routes) and internalisation of borders (inside the territory of the nation-state through the fight against "the irregular" by, for example building up of detention centers for migrants).

Indeed there are European borders which share many elements related to the restriction of mobilities and which are a not located in Spain: these include Malta, Lampedusa, and other Italian southern borders, Calais-Dover – as a Schengen border - the Eastern European borders etc. However in many ways, Spain, as a border-country in the so-called "Fortress Europe", construction has been one of the emblematic examples for nearly now 20 years. Specifically, the classic problematic border places were initially the Strait of Gibraltar, then the African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, and more recently, the Canary Islands. On the one hand there was a re-routing process for migrants, on the other hand a tendency to move border controls to the South: control policies having effects as far south as The Gambia, for example, and making other countries as transit (the Maghreb countries). Nevertheless such spatial re-definition of borders in the context of migration control does not end here as borders also include other Spanish harbours, and Spanish airports (having Madrid-Barajas as the main entrance for Latino-American migration).

Therefore, we can see though the Spanish case that many future questions of borders are related to delocation, dislocation and the blurring of contemporary borders. Thus, meaning changing the conception of the border as a strict space of restriction to a space of relocation, involving a movement towards the South, first to transit zones, then to the further south and connected with forms of re-routing constructed by the migrants). And thirdly, blurring occurs between the logic of the relaxation of fading of control in intra-European borders, but which establishes new forms of tension, such as the border of Calais or the hidden borders between France and Spain and Portugal and Spain.

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<sup>1</sup> I refer here to four seminars: "El Río Bravo Mediterráneo. Las regiones fronterizas en la época de la globalización", which took place in 2006 in Aix-en-Provence, in 2007 in Tijuana, in 2008 in Coruña and in 2009 in Tangiers. Organised by different academic institutions in both sides of the Atlantic and in both sides of the Mediterranean.

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Natalia Ribas-Mateos, ESOMI, Universidad de A Coruña, 2009