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The role and nature of borders

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Abstract

Over the past decades the core of the bibliography has examined the aspect of the border phenomenon as a social outcome which requires an interdisciplinary approach in order to be understood and interpreted. In the classical geopolitical analysis framework, borders are considered as strategic locations or defense lines which venture their dominance or sovereignty within a global state-centered system. The recent scientific discussion on borders, which has been largely influenced by economic standpoints (where distance forms a significant parameter), considers obvious the fact that similar interpretations can be applied in the social, cultural and political field. In terms of practice however, one does detect that there are other forms of borders (social, national, linguistic, political, etc) all operating from a different perspective or in line with that of a border state affecting the economic interaction in a rather unique way. The present article attempts to review the theoretical discussion throughout the bibliography in order to provide an insight to border related aspects which deal with their role and nature.

1.1 Introduction

The need in the post World War I for defining new border lines in the area of Southeastern Europe in particular, was associated with a boom in border studies and empirical approaches focused on the new reality. (Anderson, 1996). Following the post World War II period borders become political and ideological objects and turned into “iron curtains” reflecting two competitive worlds. major efforts were made in studying the political borders in relation to their natural characteristics and the actual cultural sphere they encompass (Jones, 1959). Within the framework of this analysis, borders illustrated cases of conflict among countries (Minghi, 1991) or “curtains” among competitive ideological systems.

Newman and Paasi, (1998), note that the recent scientific discussion on borders, which is largely influenced by economic practices (where distance is a significant parameter), apparently considers similar interpretations to be applicable to both the cultural and political field. Nonetheless, one observe in practice other existing borders (social, national, linguistic, political, etc) which seem to be operating along a different outline or parallel to that of a country's borderline (Schack, 2000).

Over the last decades, the basic core of the bibliography tackles the border phenomenon as a social outcome and one which requires a scientific type of interpretation in order to be understood (Wilson and Donnan, 1998). Within this context, the role of the border as a natural boundary is an issue far but neglected, while on the other hand, issues such as the correlation of borders with collective identities or the dialectic relationship between space and social reality are examined (Paasi, 1992, 1996, Kaplan, 1994; Pettman, 1996, Rabinowitz, 1998). Taking all this into consideration the geopolitical analysis of borders is associated with culture, language, nationality and other socioeconomic characteristics of border regions (Reitel, et al. , 2002, Arbaret-Schulz et al., 2004).

In another important set of studies within the bibliography, borders are considered strategic locations or defense lines which designate their dominance or sovereignty within a global state-centered system (Beschoner et. al., 1991, Pratt and Brown, 2000). Studies however, related to the European integration, consider borders mainly as obstacles in the freedom of cross border trade flows (Cappelin and Betty, 1993, Ratti and Reichman, 1993).

Despite the resurgence of the research study in a range of scientific fields on borders, there are not yet any satisfactory theoretical models to bridge the interpretation gaps among different scientific approaches (van Houton, 2003, Newman 2003). What is attempted in some of the segments of this report is an overview of the theoretical discussion through the bibliography in order to provide an insight to border related aspects which deal with their role and nature. More specifically, borders are being examined as the outcome of social dynamics in contrast to what the actual borders simply depict on a map. The second part of the report analyses the perception and space diptych in relation to the role which proximity plays in the shaping of the overall picture. In the third part of this report the interaction of cultural parameters are examined along with the perceptions existing at the borders. The report closes in by pointing out the basic conclusions and findings.

1.2. Borders as the outcome of social dynamics

Starting off the discussion on issues related to nature and the role of borders, one comes up against with the question of whether borders are natural or in other words possess clear geographic characteristics or whether they actually express “odd” interventions in the geographic space. The attempt to provide an adequate answer to what may seem as a straightforward question shows that this is a rather composite and complex issue. Basically, borders had been mapped out at a given time by people who applied an institutional legislation veil over them against third parties. Therefore, borders are the result of artificial procedures rather than the outcome of natural laws (Boerman, 1923, Harthorne, 1993, Pounds, 1954; Leimgruber, 1980, 1991, Rykiel, 1995). From this point of view, the term “natural borders” is one which more or less leads to arbitrary interpretations since it has been historically associated with the politics of expansion (Broek 1941, Jones 1943, Racek 1983, Van Houtum, 1998).

Nevertheless, the geographic outline of a country in many cases has been associated with the aspect of “natural borders”. According to this perspective, the national state needs to maintain its territorial boundary line, which is a section of land from which the State would draw its energy, just as a tree would do (Ratzel, 1897). The actual meaning of the term “sovereignty” is associated with the territorial definition of a specific geographic area. As indicated in Theodoropoulos (1999) however, the use of the term “natural borders” in international politics represents a *contradictio in adjecto*, meaning that the term itself serves for political expediencies whatever the person who uses the term wishes it to mean. Within this context, France is an example of a country in which the ideology of “natural and fixed borders” in respect to those in the Rhine, the Alps, the Pyrenees and in the Sea comprised a firm political aspiration, in the form of an extension to Louis IV politics (Hassner, 2002, Theodoropoulos, 1999)

The fact that the mapping out of borders in the course of history formed in most cases a state of constant change, controversy or protection, lent to the study of borders a rather unique interest. The European history of borders in particular, is a history of constant change encircled by trends of looseness and strengthening, closing, opening, defining boundaries and reassessing them, integration and preservation. From this standpoint, the only way for borders to “freeze” would be for someone to depict them on a map bearing in mind however that a map is actually not territorial ground but simply a piece of paper. In real terms, borders may open for specific functions but close for certain others through a filter which actually reflects human nature (Van Houtum, 1998, Kamann, 1993, Ratti, 1993).

Are borders however simply some lines depicted on a map or are they the outcome of social dynamics? The most vivid representation of borders is shown on contemporary political maps

where each nation is represented in different colours and only a fine black line comes to indicate the points these nations meet and separate from one another (Biggs, 1999). Of course the actual border lines on a map hold the same characteristics and do not provide any information on the extent of communication among these countries. For instance, the Dutch-German borders as much as the Israeli – Syrian borders are depicted with a fine black line without providing any information on their penetrability. Borders are not therefore fixed lines on the ground but something rather more powerful and dynamic representing a series of practices and perceptions which are diffused into the society as whole.

Carl Marx, considers national borders as clearly ideological inventions since capitalism is spread across the modern world and imposes a form of productive and social relationships as well as a structure which breeds social structuring based on a class system logic instead of national origin.

According to Hassner (2002), the issue of borders could be studied through three different approaches: The first approach is one being both positive and conservative. Here, borders constitute a central and most important tool in getting any form of a political system to operate. Borders are considered from this point of view as lines, walls, obstacles or barriers which define the boundary lines of a given property of supremacy. Concepts of a common identity and that of a military superiority over others are pretty much strengthened within this context. The second approach is a negative and a rather revolutionary one, as it considers borders as physical obstacles on issues regarding peace and the unity of mankind. In scope of this logic, borders are studied as prison walls which hinder economic cooperation and understanding among people. The third approach is seen as dialectic and progressive. According to this approach the abolition of certain borders leads to the emergence of new

ones which are not necessarily the same with the previous ones. Under this perspective, the general trend is one where borders are persistently becoming less territorial and evidently more complex and a lot less visible. The key words in this outline are differentiation and heterogeneity, communication and interdependence. In this case, even though borders are vague they do in fact exist while they connect those from the inside and at the same time, separate those from the outside.

Scott (2006), argues that borders are not just institutions but elements of an everyday procedure which lies deeply embedded within society. These procedures are identified through ideologies, behaviors and perceptions, with borders seemingly being the lines which separate space and time into zones. Additionally, the procedures taking place at the borders are by nature multi-leveled, both at the level of society as they are at the level of space. For example, the situation at the borders may reflect in a different way at the level of national politics, mass media, migration or local cooperation politics.

Paasi (1998), highlights that borders are not simply some lines on the ground or lines drawn on a map but institutions which possess their own internal rules and functions and their own mechanisms. Within this context, “*border-institutions*” define “*who is us*” and “*who are the others*”, they impose entry and exit regulations and act as “*filters*” in determining the extent of the penetrability of goods, services, individuals, ideas and principles according to the dominant model. This is an interpretation where borders could either be viewed as static or dynamic. In other words, borders can be examined not only at a territorial level but at the level of the mind (Paasi, 1996). Van Houtum et.al. (2005), support that the static approach considers borders as a “*noun*” which stretches the emphasis on the “*where*”, while the dynamic approach views borders as an “*adverb*” by focusing on the “*how*”.

Another approach that has made its way in the bibliography greatly stresses the functional dimension of borders. It examines the borders as an outcome of barriers, inconsistency, and polarization (Ratti, 1993). Along this line of thought borders may as well play the role of the “guard”, or that of the “wall” in view of the dangers from the other side (Williams and Van de Velde, 2005). In the cases where cross border interaction is not shed into the border space, but directed towards metropolitan concentrations of two neighboring countries, borders can operate as a “tunnel” by strengthening polarity (Petraokos and Topaloglou, 2008). Furthermore, borders could actually separate something rather different beforehand or vice versa. In other words, borders could create differences that had not existed before either in the area of reality or in the sphere of perceptions (Van de Velde, 1999). These differences can in turn operate as threats (e.g. mass influx of migrants) or as opportunities (e.g. differences in labor cost).

Another current perspective studies borders through a dialectic relationship between a totally “*fixed border line*”, from the one side and that of the “*vague border*” on the other. Zielonka (2001) for example, in an attempt to examine the future of the EU’s borders suggests two potential models. The “*Neo-Westphalia Super State*” and the “*Neo-Medieval Empire*”. In the first case, the borders are strictly defined and they outline a homogenous socioeconomic and cultural reality by exhibiting also a hierarchical and unitary authoritarian system. In the second case however, borders are unstable and engulf various cultural models as well as coexisting socioeconomic models in which the regions and the various networks play a major role at a local level. According to this perspective the strict definition of a border line in space loses much of its traditional symbolism.

Are borders nonetheless a representation of discontinuity or that of balance? For the purpose of simplifying the discussion that follows it is necessary to distinguish the meanings of “border” and “obstacle”. A border is a dividing line, a distinctive characteristic which perceives “things” going on in our world. It is essential however, to exhibit its own characteristics and features and its own identity. On the other hand, an obstacle is a closed border; a wall which interrupts human communication, products, trade and ideas. In our contemporary world nevertheless, an idea is something easily spread around thus showing that the actual role of the borders has become less important nowadays. Tocqueville for instance, claims that important monotheistic religions as well as the large artistic and ideological movements swarm the world without taking borders among different countries into consideration. Is it however possible a world to exist without borders from a philosophical or moral point of view? According to Fuga (2003), a world without any borders indicts to a world without any sort of interior structure or organization; “*an absolute zero*”. Under this logic, organization means instant restructuring at every border line. Whatever the case may be however, borders constitute a point of discontinuity and irregularity either at a geopolitical, territorial or even at a symbolic level (Leondidou, 2003).

Do borders orders of different countries look very much alike, and therefore allow us to refer to an “ordinary” type of border? Or is every border “unique”? In answering these questions we ought to consider the fact that borders are often associated with the dividing line between different geophysical sections, nations, political and economic systems, institutions, histories, cultures, identities, and perceptions. Of course as borders are cultural inventions they are subject to a multitude of interpretations (Evans and Pezdek, 1980). For all the above reasons, every border and every border region is unique. How is it possible however to examine or analyze the border phenomenon when every border is different? In order to avoid the “unitary

case syndrome” on the one hand, and simplistic generalizations on the other, a typology of borders and that of border regions is considered vital (Topaloglou et.al. , 2005).

Traditionally, borders formed the national boundaries of countries and designated their sovereignty against others. It is often the case where borders outline different ideologies, religions, cultures, and nationalities (Anderson and O’Dowd, 1999). Frequently enough, the border line had become the field of intense conflicts and frictions many of which are still in progress (Kratke, 1999, Paasi, 1998). Borders also define a geographic region in which a range of different legislative and organizational rules apply vertically (Heyman, 1999). There is no doubt however, that every border line is the constituent of its own specific historic, social, geographic and economic facts.

The science of sociology has shown that humans have an innate notion in living among social groups possessing similar characteristics in order to live and socialize among them. Along this point of view, borders reflect at a macro-scale level the differentiation of social groups in space (Johnston, 1989, Lefebvre, 1991, Leimgruber, 1991). The attempt of these social groups to secure their survival, their independence and their sovereignty is often manifested in the designation of a border line.

Do borders serve a purpose in today’s digital age at a time where globalization has become the most popular approach in interpreting the world’s economic system? The rapid developments in technology have lead many to compare the modern world to that of a global village. What can be the purpose for the existence of borders in this new environment?

Nowadays, almost everyone can have access to numerous amounts of information through the internet despite the geographical origin of the actual information. The person may be a

participant in a conference in Greece while their fellow speakers might be in China, Germany, Argentina and Australia, all at the same time. Furthermore, electronic mail provides people the chance to communicate in real time with the most remote places on earth. Satellite technology also enables them to get tuned to any TV channel or radio station they may wish. What's more, people now can travel by plane, train or car almost anywhere around the world at high speeds and in comfort. This is today's contemporary human and these are the modern advancements that have made many to predict in a sense of great enthusiasm a "*world without borders*", "*a global village*", "*a global market*", (Ohmae,1990) or "*a world that looks like an oyster*" (Levitt, 1983).

Over the last two decades, along with the brisk rise of world trade and exchange, a trend has been noted for reviewing the traditional role of the State as the sole body that could manipulate economic politics (Stokke, 1997, Ohmae, 1985). Some argue that the State is a futile entity without future (Ohmae, 1985) while others seem to be a little more reticent as they believe that the State can still maintain the vital areas of its sovereignty (Hirst and Thompson, 1999). Several others, highlight the bulk and volume in the transfer of capital and investments from one country to the other and the important role of multinational enterprises in the international economic affairs, in order to support the fact that borders are starting to lose their importance (Dicken, 1992, Johnston 1984, Levitt, 1983, Lubbers, 1995).

Why do borders then continue to multiply in a world of economic differentiation as the essence of the State losses its traditional esteem? Undoubtedly, a number of new States has emerged over the last fifty years while new border lines have been outlined in the meantime. This is a clear cut evidence that borders exist because they perform functions which are for some reasons considered by societies to be valuable. These functions may have military,

legal, fiscal, ideological or cultural background. (Guichonnet and Raffestin, 1974, Raffestin, 1974).

1.3 Space and Perceptions at borders

It is widely recognized that the border line of a nation influences in one way or another the perceptions of people who live or are engaged in various activities close to that area. There are those who argue that “borderlanders”, are actually different from the people who live in the “hinterland” in terms of the standard of living, perceptions as well as other forms of interaction with the other side (Rumley and Minghi, 1993).

Recently, a major set of studies attempted to analyze the economic cross border interaction on the basis of a human-centered approach in which the way of thinking and the way people feel and perceive things close to the borders occupy a fundamental position (Van Houtum, 1999, Van der Velde, 1999, Berg, 1999, Barjak, 1999). Along this context, border areas constitute “social inventions” where different images and perceptions meet with one another (Leimgruber, 1991).

Recent studies on borders highlight a dialectic relationship between space and social reality. Individual and collective identities of “*us*” and the “*others*” are the outcomet of this relationship while multilevel images, perceptions and practices are evaluated and are spatially diversified. (Newman, 2000, Van Houtum, 2000, Welchman, 1996, Kolossov and O’Loughlin, 1998, Leontidou et al, 2002, Wilson and Donnan, 1998, Theodoropoulos, 1998, VanHoutum and Naerssen, 2002). On the other hand, the rapid technological developments in the areas of communication and transport along with the widely globalized cultural models

portray a rather complex situation at the borders as far as images and operations at the borders are concerned. The latter, make the world to a certain extent a small place influencing the relationship between space, distance and perceptions (Ohmae, 1990, Amin, 1997, Giddens, 1999, O'Brien, 1992). The above discussion leads to the conclusion that perceptions in respect to the borders are constantly submitted to an ongoing portrayal in space and in time (Kemp, 2000, Forsberg, 2003).

“Recalling my childhood international experiences, what I seem to remember most vividly is the time we crossed the borders to get into Eastern Europe. My father had told me that we would have to cross the “iron curtain” in order to get there. To my great surprise I saw no grey “iron curtain” nor was there any large iron door like the one I had pictured in my mind...”

“Just before reaching the borders my parents were cheerful and in good spirits. Games, music, food, laughter, everything was allowed until we came to the border check point. This is where it all stopped. Everyone in the car went silent. I could see through the car's window soldiers with firearms on their shoulders and stony impressions on their faces. No one spoke inside the car. After a while the checking had ended and my father accelerated the vehicle. Wow!!! We all cried out. We got through!”

The above extracts, comprise some of the personal experiences of a Dutchman (Henk Van Houtoum) and an East-German lady (Anke Struver) from the time of their childhood during the cold war period (Van Houtoum and Struver, 2002). The situation at the same borders nowadays has changed dramatically. Within the European Union, most institutional obstacles

in the movement or transfer of people, goods and capital have been abolished. However, the border in the mind still exists, despite the fact that defining that border on land is becoming more difficult than ever before.

At this point it should be noted that the perceptions that lie in people's minds are in fact linked with the objective reality these people happen to live in. Czech's republic former Prime Minister Vaclav Havel most elegantly stated that "the walls are inside our heads". As a result, perceptions of this type inflict obstacles and constraints in the sphere of reality since they influence human decisions and actions (Mungiou-Pippidi, 2002).

Van Houtum and Struver (2002), underline the fact that borders could symbolically operate at the level of perceptions as "bridges" or as "doors". In the first case, the "bridge" connects both sides while in the second case the "door" offers the potential to close to the outside world but to open to the world in the interior. No matter what the case may be, crossing natural borders means crossing socially invented images and perceptions that have the capability to either join or separate people from either side of the borders (Van Houtum and Struver, 2002).

All countries to some extent or the other, aim in defining or developing their own national identity, which is none other than a collective perception of "us" versus the "others" (Anderson, 1983, Billing, 1995). More than often, the definition of a national identity is based on unique ideologies or notions of superiority over others. At other times, the argument of an external danger which threatens territorial supremacy and cultural identity comes in the fore in order to serve the same purpose. Along this perspective, a border line constitutes a symbolic social outline which defines the boundary lines of "us" in space. The more homogenous a country's population is with ethnologic, religious social or economic terms, the

lesser the variations are in the perceptions of “who we are” (Newman, 1998). Consequently, the images for the “others” in the neighboring country are closely related to the degree to which the images of the “others” are distinct and comprehensible as a collective identity.

The border line so much in its natural sense as it is to its intellectual dimension is one which contributes decisively in the formation of identity of “us” versus the “others”. One could in fact argue that the identification of “us” requires the existence of the “others”. In Europe for instance, for over fifty years the East-West borders were not simply a dividing line between two different political-economic systems but also a way to define the identity of “those” versus the “others”. Within this context, the people from either side of the borders were brought up with stereotypes, and perceptions that were based on the superiority of their own system up against the “others” mainly due to the lack of information they had for those living on the other side. When natural borders however become penetrable, the transfer and mobility of people was on the rise again and so was the mobility of goods, ideas, and models which in turn influenced the map of images and perceptions for the others (Maier and Rosenmayr, 2000).

Do proximity and the opening up of borders form the appropriate conditions in shaping common or similar cross border perceptions? In answering this question the European Union in particular, and all the efforts been put for almost half a century in trying to abolish borders is just an example that could provide us with some useful information. There is no doubt that even today, among the six founding members of the European Union, there are important differences in their social practices, perceptions, language, religion and in their identity in general.

Schack, (2001), after studying the perceptions of the neighboring country with a sample of High School students from Denmark and Germany who resided in border and non border regions, found out that perceptions are only remotely affected from proximity at the borders. In this sense, geographic proximity is a rather unfeasible interpretive variable in analyzing images and perceptions at either side of the borders. Furthermore, several empirical research studies show that intellectual distances are sometimes different from geographic ones (Hirtle and Heidorn, 1993, Freundsuh, 1991, Hoogvelt, 1997). Simel (1908/1950), in his very early work supported that spatial proximity does not ensure on its own social or cultural proximity. On the contrary, it often does the very opposite. People who live very close to countries neighboring one another feel that they belong in different social groups with different models, functions and stereotypes.

A number of studies carried out in evaluating the physical distance between two cross border points (usually cities) and two points of the same country showed a systematic correlation between physical distance and the distance of the mind. More specifically, every time a border needed to be crossed the distance of the mind was greater than the actual distance in reality (Evans and Pezdek, 1980, Golledge and Stimson, 1987, Riedel, 1994, Van Houtum, 1998). The overestimation of this distance behind the borders is associated with the lack of personal experience and knowledge, while the contrary occurs in the country's interior where distance is underestimated for the very opposite reasons (Van Houtum 1999). Similarly, Riedel (1994), after studying the French-German border zone noticed a negative relationship between the estimated distance that of the mind and the frequency of visits in the neighboring country.

“Mapping of perceptions”, at the borders that would interpret situations and images is a rather complex process, and one which requires the analysis of a range of parameters in relation to space and socioeconomic factors (Maier, 1995, Hirtle and Heidor, 1993, Longuet-Higgins, 1987). The issue becomes even more complex when borders divide large spatial sections such as the European Union and its neighboring countries. In this case, the combination of characteristics which form common images such as religion, language, historical or cultural ties, all lead to intellectual hierarchies in space (Freundschuh, 1991). It is apparent that this “intellectual” spatial hierarchy is not always associated with the “natural” spatial hierarchy.

Hoogvelt (1997), divides the world into the “real” world, the way it is realized in space and into the “phenomenal” world, in which people interact with one another, regardless of their geographic location. In particular, Hoogvelt supports that international economic interactions are concerned primarily with the transfer of capital which is not directly associated with trade or production and it is not subject to spatial restrictions in movement. In addition, globalised consumer models and activities undertaken by multinational stakeholders “dissociate” to a certain extent space and perceptions at the borders (Ohmae, 1990, Amin, 1997, Giddens, 1999, O’Brien, 1992).

At the same time, there is a trend noted by many scholars for an overall review of the traditional role of the State and its association with the Nation-State underlying the template of national supremacy from current international organizations such as the EU, NATO or the UN (Stokke, 1997, Ohmae, 1995). This overlapping consequently affects the role and the importance of the natural borders *per se*, but also the way in which these particular borders become understood.

Living close to the boundary lines is defined in relation to those who live in the centre, and those who live on the other side. In this sense, the bipolar aspect of “core- periphery”, on the one hand and the cross border interaction on the other, come to the fore not only as political, spatial or economic realities but also as images symbols, stereotypes and perceptions.

Afouksenidis and Leondidou (2004), underline the fact that often local societies at the borders sensing the spatial and economic isolation from the centre feel threatened and unsafe.

Moreover, the perceptions at a local level at the border region are not independent from the overall perceptions of that of the country for those at the other side. The images for example between two neighboring cities that are located in two different countries are associated with the perceptions that have been developed between them (Tversky, 1993, Galasinska et al., 2002). This mere fact proves the interaction between the macro politics and the identity of the local society.

1.4 Culture and perceptions at the borders

Reports referring to the important role of cultural parameters in any form of cross border interaction make their appearance more and more frequently in the bibliography of borders. Huntington (1997), in his well known work of “clash of civilizations”, supports that civilization is defined by the objective elements of language, religion, history, customs institutions as well as the subjective self definition of human beings.

A resident in a Greek village for example at the Albanian borders has different characteristics with the resident of an island in the north Aegean. Nevertheless, both people are connected under a common Greek civilization which separates them from the respective Albanian

civilization. The identity is certainly detected at different levels. A resident of Rome for example, is at the same time a catholic, an Italian, a Christian, a European and a Westerner. To a broader and greater extent (e.g. a Westerner) Huntington, detects seven to eight great civilizations which (according to his prediction) would set the grounds for future conflicts in the world. Along the same line of thought, Meinhof et al, (2003), have empirically noted that perceptions in the former borders between Eastern and Western Germany had major differences. When the discussion however moved to a European level, then both sides felt as Germans.

In Huntington's map, borders are not outlined by political or economic criteria but according to cultural elements such as religion, nationality, language, etc. In this sense, a communist in the former Soviet Union could adopt the rules of a free market, a rich person could become poor or vice versa. Never however, would a Russian become an Estonian, or an Azerian to become an Armenian. Religion also often draws an even deeper dividing line than that of nationality among people. For example a person living in the Hungarian-Romanian borders could be much as half Hungarian and the other half Romanian. Very rarely though could an Orthodox be also a Catholic. Regarding the latter issue in particular, Huntington claims that the "iron curtain" ideology in Europe has been replaced by the "Velvet curtain". The noticeable axis in this distinction is the Christianity of the West (Protestantism-Catholicism) on the one hand and the Christianity of the East (Orthodoxy) on the other.

Recent studies on the interior of the European Union have shown that countries with Catholic or Orthodox roots are ranked as more "European" in relation to Protestants, showing that religious beliefs affect perceptions in respect to the "others" at the borders (OPTEM S.A.R.L., 2001). Recent events such as the war in former Yugoslavia, the 9/11 terrorist attacks,

Turkey's candidacy for the EU and also the war in Iraq have underlined the important and at times controversial role of religion in the formation of images and perceptions for the "others".

A parameter such as the common or different language also has an impact on the attitude towards the "other" behind the borders. Today's European Union's eastern borders also operate as linguistic borders at a much greater extent than the period of the cold war (where the Russian language was spread throughout Eastern Europe). Indeed the motive in learning the language of the neighbouring country was biased (Bort, 2006). For instance the motive behind learning the Greek language for the Albanians is far greater than the motive for a Greek to learn Albanian. In this sense, a different language discourages cross border interaction. Meinhof et al, (2003) support that not only the language *per se* but also the accent of the actual language itself plays an important role in dividing or connecting people together. This image becomes even more complicated when different languages mingle with the existence of minority groups along the border line. In this case, the language itself is often associated in defining the national identity.

Many political geography studies have mentioned that the history of mankind is a history of wars whose fundamental objective was the changing of the borders (Kollosov, 2005). Rupnik (1994), notes that "borders is time depicted on space". These studies reflect a wide agreement in bibliography concerning the decisive role of history in the formation of images at the borders. Historical correlations are often depicted with reference to the past in order to interpret the present. Europe for instance, in relation to the "others" has often been associated with ancient empires such as the Mesopotamian (Waever, 1997), the Austro-Hungarian (Farago, 1995) or the Roman Empire (Brague, 1993, Mourier, 1993).

The impact however of perceptions in relation to history gains a greater importance when different historical phases become personal experiences for the same people. We should not neglect the fact that today's active population of East and West Europe was brought up and raised under cold war conditions that resulted in the formation of controversial perceptions and interpretations that acquire stronger characteristics the more we move toward the former East –West border line. For instance the compulsory withdrawal of the German troops from the Czech- German borders had been interpreted by the Czechs as a “*transfer*”, where as for the East-Germans this was interpreted as “*relocation*”, while the West-Germans defined it as “*deportation*” (Holly, 2002).

Of course, the perceptions on space and distance in the past were very different in comparison to modern conditions mainly due to the technological advancements. As a result, images concerning centrality, involvement or obstruction nowadays are placed under a whole different context (Borocz and Kovacs, 2001, Kramsch, 2002, Hansen, 2002).

Even so, how could qualitative parameters which define “us” and the “others”, be evaluated when these parameters themselves are by nature non measurable? If for instance the level of income of two border areas is to be estimated then the matter is simple. What happens however, when there is a need for a variable measure such as cultural proximity? Recently, there have been some interesting studies in relation to this issue which have made their appearance by initially showing some positive results (mainly in the international economic relations bibliography) in which qualitative variables are analyzed using quantitative methods (Hofstede, 1980, Kogut and Singh, 1988, Topaloglou et al., 2005).

1.5 Conclusions

Throughout the bibliographic review mentioned earlier above, an attempt was made at first to analyze the border phenomenon as an outcome of social dynamics. In turn, the association of

border space with perceptions was examined along with the impact of cultural parameters in the formation of images and collective identity.

What emerges from the study is that borders and the theories of social science that accompany it do not develop into a social, cultural or political vacuum but appear to exist in a dialectic relationship with social practices and developments (Agnew, 1998, Hakli, 2001). In this sense, borders are social and ideological inventions which perform specific functions. On a number of occasions they seem to separate something which is politically, socially, economically or geographically different. On different occasions however, the depiction of a border line sometimes created discrepancies that did not exist before in either in space and time. Respectively, the abolition of border obstacles does not automatically mean the abolition of the initial conditions that had been formed through a series of political, social or historical procedures.

The second issue analyzed in the bibliographic review dealt with the bipolar aspect of space and perceptions. Up to now evidence has shown that spatial proximity does not always correspond with the proximity in perceptions shared by people who live on either side of the borders. Furthermore, the research in perceptions in relation to space cannot neglect the development taking place in the area of communication and transport which up to a certain extent had their basic perceptions reviewed as far as spatial proximity is concerned and the role which borders play through them. Nonetheless, the idea and the outlook for a world without borders is a controversial one since there has been a significant rise in new borders forming throughout the world. What this means is simply that space and borders continue to constitute useful meanings in people's minds.

In the final part of the theoretical review the impact of cultural parameters on the formation of collective identities along the border line was examined. It seems throughout the bibliography that cultural borders seem to emerge in several spatial levels and that they are rather complex

and not always parallel with geographic borders. Cultural elements such as religion, language or history either separate or bring people together in a way which is not often associated with the institutional or legal template of borders.

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