The Mesmerizing Journey from Gyeongju¹ to Lisbon: The BRI as a Mechanism of De-bordering, Re-bordering, and Co-bordering

Francisco José Leandro

Institute for Research on Portuguese Speaking Countries,
City University of Macau
Avenida Xian Xing Hai 105,
Centro Golden Dragon, Room G512A,
Macau SAR, People's Republic of China
E-mail: franciscoleandro@cityu.mo

Abstract: *This paper argues that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a de-bordering mechanism makes a positive contribution to border security. Three central concepts—de-bordering, re-bordering and co-bordering—are used to examine the future of borders, and further develop the notion of the “cycle” of borders. This research adopts a political science perspective and combines the theory of borders with the Copenhagen School and Paris School of security, bearing in mind the BRI as an access strategy. Furthermore, the BRI elements of connectivity are central to de-bordering. Finally, this paper maintains that the BRI makes different contributions to border security, that borders are “alive”, and that they are the result of cooperative or antagonistic human interactions in which asymmetry in perception is the leading cause of conflict.*

Keywords: *border theory, BRI, co-bordering, de-bordering, re-bordering, security*

¹ South Korea.

1. Introduction

*As we Chinese say, “A close neighbour is better than a distant relative.”
Vice-foreign Minister Zhang Zhijun (2012)*

Borders are the unnatural outcomes of historical hurdles, political struggles and social constructions, which create collective narratives of self-perception. Feudal societies were based on hierarchical social dependency structures and not on territorial delimitation. Borders, if they existed then, were virtually invisible. It was the Westphalian concept of sovereignty and the transformation of the nation-state into the sovereign state that brought significance to border studies, because borders function as limits of direct action in the exercise of sovereignty. Borders represent the maximum reach of state sovereign limits, measured from a centre of political gravity. Borders embody lines of opportunity for cooperation or lines of tension, which may disrupt the balance between two contiguous political units. The latter lines of tension depend upon the way neighbours perceive one another. That is why borders perform different functions and possess dissimilar value, depending on how balanced or unhinged the relationship is between sovereign neighbouring political units. Nevertheless, post-modern state borders are a sort of “mix” combining the hard, closed and bi-dimensional borders of the classic Westphalian state with permeable, immaterially framed, and multidimensional borders of the post-modern state. In light of this reasoning, Castells (2000) distinguishes between the “space of places”, in which people’s experiences and activities literally take place, and the “space of flows” of the increasingly rapid mobility of capital investment, communication and data, and people from one place to another. This notion of the “space of flows” is currently transforming the classic understanding of borders as the most securitized state physical limit, no longer under the exclusive and direct sphere of action of a single sovereign state.

The Great Wall of China, the Berlin Wall and the Brandenburg Gate were President Ronald Reagan’s points of reference when he famously urged, “Mr. Gorbachev—tear down this wall!” Other notorious borders that come to mind are the barbed wire fence on the border between Serbia and Hungary to divert migrants during the migration crisis in 2017, and President Trump’s resolute declarations in 2017 to build a wall along the US-Mexican border. When this paper was drafted, instances of hard bordering (fenced or walled) were taking place, and hard bordering continues to exist in more than 67 states and territories around the world.

This paper argues that the Belt and Road Initiative makes a positive contribution to border security, because this initiative promotes de-bordering, re-bordering and co-bordering. The paper further aims to understand how the BRI-associated elements of connectivity contribute to these three types of border effects. We begin by clarifying three important concepts. The first is *de-bordering*, which refers to concurrent, voluntary, involuntary, multilevel, material and immaterial processes of fading, weakening, trespassing or removing the physical, cultural, legal and economic barriers which are preventing or impeding direct interactions between agents of two contiguous sovereign states, without compromising the exercise of sovereignty. A simple free trade agreement (FTA) is a good example of a de-bordering process because it allows for a more intensive flow of trade in goods between sovereign units. The main idea of these processes is to eliminate restrictions to the cross-border free interplay of national agents, with the intention to promote “harmonious development by reducing the differences existing between the various regions and the backwardness of the less favoured regions” (EU Commission, 2018, PR IP-85-38). These processes should occur at all levels and involve a structured and intentional cross-border collaboration that aims at regionalization. The regionalization concept used here refers to a process of creating local development opportunities, not a political devolution of power. According to Blatter (2001, p. 76), “In Europe, cross-border collaboration is producing another soft, but formalized, comprehensive and territorially defined layer in the European “multilevel system”. In North America, by contrast, only informal, specific and non-territorial institutions are evolving across the national borders”. Delissen (2015) calls our attention to the fact that de-bordering creates opportunities and changes the attitude towards others, introducing a form of elasticity which accommodates different interests. McCall (2012, p. 214) emphasizes that within EU “de-bordering is underpinned by the process of Europeanization eliciting nascent notions of supranational citizenship and identity as well as more substantial form of supranational governance and territoriality”.

De-bordering does not necessarily suggest the removal of physical borders nor does it entail terminating the demarcation of sovereign limits. Indeed, de-bordering refers to simultaneous processes of boosting cross-border interactions, through the implementation of facilitating mechanisms compatible with the exercise of sovereign power. De-bordering however does not eliminate the special divide as Genova (2017, p. 21) points out: “Europe’s borders, like all borders, are the materializations of socio-political relations that mediate the continuous production of the distinction between the putative inside and outside, and likewise mediate the diverse mobilities that are orchestrated and regimented

through the production of that spatial divide”. Examples of de-bordering include the constitution of the Schengen space, free trade agreements, status of forces agreements, bilateral investments agreements, cross-border water management agreements, programmes of academic exchange and recognition of joint degrees, visa exemption regimes as well as the BRI economic corridors and special economic zones. De-bordering also creates opportunities for intensifying immaterial flows such as capital, social media, culture, networks and digital content.

The second concept is *re-bordering*, which advances the idea of reshaping and relocating the “power” of sovereignty and the “space” in which sovereignty is exercised. “Re-bordering refers to challenging, expanding or altering the idea of Europe in order at once to accommodate Eastern Europeans, and potentially other neighbours, as new citizens of the EU, and to define its new spatial, cultural and conceptual boundaries” (Paasi, 2009; Wallace, 2002). Re-bordering calls for the relocation of a sovereign perimeter and transformation of a substantial portion of the perceptions of insecurity. Marcu (2015) puts forward the following notion: “As action, re-bordering includes the bureaucratic legal and police practices aimed at establishing a tight perimeter around the EU, while opening up the internal EU borders (de-bordering). Thus, re-bordering, as I conceive it, is at once about inclusion and exclusion and its limits”.

To a certain extent, re-bordering implies facilitating the ease of crossing internal borders, while simultaneously exerting a higher level of control on a common external border. In the context of the so-called Brexit, some scholars used the idea of swinging borders (Colin, 2015, pp. 67 & 82) as an exercise of variable inclusion and exclusion limits, emphasizing the ideas of reinforcing the external common requirements to be allowed in and joint effort to harden the external common controls. Re-bordering also seems to produce an interesting phenomenon of transferring perceived insecurity from the centre to the periphery, and applying Genova’s argument (Genova, 2017, p. 4), re-bordering entails the “unprecedented securitization of the external borders of the EU’s Schengen zone of free mobility”. Arguably, both concepts of de-bordering and re-bordering are intertwined, and they correspond largely to the material processes of domestic economic and political integration. Likewise, in de-bordering processes, the external border is more exposed to illegal and unreported immigration, to new immaterial processes of digitalization disruption, and the formation of new transnational networks. Re-bordering applies to both soft and hard borders, and re-bordering calls for new considerations such as multi-layered borders combining perspectives on hard, soft and immaterial borders. The most evident example of re-bordering is the integration of states into federations, establishing

a political re-bordering. However, there are other types of re-bordering, as illustrated by the African Economic Communities such as the ECOWAS or the SADC. In addition, the EU-bound Monetary Union and Schengen can also be seen as co-bordering mechanisms. Finally, in terms of the BRI, the constitution of the economic corridors and the memorandum of understanding to use seaport facilities in the context of the maritime Silk Road are also sound examples of re-bordering.

The third concept is *co-bordering*, which appears to be the most demanding level of de-bordering, requiring a certain “joint” dimension exercised voluntarily by contiguous states. Longo (2017) describes essential elements that define the co-bordering concept:

Co-bordering appears to [...] creat[e] overlapping jurisdictions in which two sovereigns can exercise authority over the same stretch of territory (p. 92). [...] States form tandem political institutions, and even create terms for overlapping legal zones, while at the same time preserving basic aspects of sovereignty [...] re-pooling of state sovereignty (p. 111) [...] Co-bordering would provide the glue, adhering member states, which would be compatible with supranational constitutional structure. (Longo, 2017, p. 123)

Creating joint institutional mechanisms for common action such as joint border controls, joint management of separation zones, facilitation and recognition of local transit visas, joint management of hydrographic basins, cross-border exchange of information, and joint security units patrolling external maritime borders, entail deliberate political efforts to use a common physical border as a positive point of contact between two sovereign entities. Such co-bordering policies intensify border dynamics between two contiguous sovereign units, accepting that borders are not lines of mono-sovereignty but active domains for an international interplay of agents and institutions at multilevels to serve common interests. Co-bordering concerns both sides of voluntary active processes, avoiding the uneven exercise of power. Co-bordering is a sort of joint extension of sovereign power, seeking the maximization of mutual interests. Some real examples of co-bordering are the Rovuma Joint Water Commission between South Africa and Mozambique; the Framework Agreement on the joint development of hydroelectric resource (Mekong River) between China and Myanmar; the Khorgos River arrangements between China and Kazakhstan.

This paper is organised as follows. Firstly, for the purpose of conceptualizing borders we will address two questions—what is a border in the Westphalian

sense, and which are the leading effects of borders? Secondly, we will inquire about the future of borders to understand the current trends in border theory; thirdly, we will address the leading causes of interstate border disputes to identify the best options for curbing border conflicts; fourthly, we will argue that the BRI holds a significant potential to contribute to border security; and finally we draw a few conclusions. In terms of methodology, we use comparative qualitative research to combine political science, security theories, and empirical first-hand observations.

2. What is a border? Which are the leading effects of borders?

We live in an odd world. On the one hand, the public narrative says that the world has become increasingly interdependent and globalized; that states are keen to join economic zones to overcome trade barriers, to be recipients of foreign direct investments (FDI) and to engage in bilateral trade agreements (BTA), preferential trade areas (PTA) or FTA; and the political discourse acknowledges that common challenges cannot be tackled by single states in isolation. The emergence of multilevel multilateralism is another manifestation of interdependence and globalization. The main function of organizations such as the World Trade Organization, the Internet Governance Forum, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration, the International Labour Organization, or even informal groups like such as G-20, is to ensure that trade, information, labour and people flow as smoothly, predictably, securely and freely as possible and at all levels. We talk about movements across regions all the time: capital, people, goods, labour, services, culture, electronic waves, transportation means, submarine cables, and innovative ideas. In this context, it appears that hard borders are doomed to fade away and will eventually disappear. We all want to be connected to the global cloud, which probably represents the virtual anti-idea against any sort of divide. Moreover, global natural occurrences, such as climate warming, pollution, fauna migration movements, the proliferation of flora species, spread of diseases, river flows, typhoons, high and low tides, winds and rain, digital connectivity, have rendered the idea of borders almost useless.

On the other hand, the concept of political borders appears to swing between sovereign fault lines, which constitute tense points of contact and lines of opportunity facilitating the management of common problems. Likewise, political borders may reflect fundamental imbalances that induce antagonism, or

they may provide opportunities for joint efforts to meet common needs. Anghie (2004, pp. 89–95) suggests that borders were created by the push provided by the Berlin Conference (1844–1845), as part of the European access to raw materials and markets, which excluded African nations. Most of the time, borders do not depict a fair transition from nations to states, but they represent the compromise to end colonialism or circumstantial nation-building processes, bearing in mind what Fukuyama (2005, p. 10) christened as “minimal state functions”. As Kristof (1959, p. 220) argues, the primary function of boundaries is their use as a legal instrument in order to have some stability in the political structure, both on the national and international level, because of which a clear distinction between the spheres of foreign and domestic politics is necessary. Boundaries help to maintain this distinction and they establish a difference in identity between “us” and “others”—enforcing the recognition of the parties as equals. Therefore, borders are a human creation that materializes the concept of the Westphalian state, and as a consequence, states build lines of separation (sometimes in the form of physical walls), reinforce the external protection of common borders, enter into exclusive bilateral agreements, criminalize in the strongest ways any allegiance to foreign states, do their utmost to prevent illegal border trespassing, and safeguard their borders in the most assertive ways, often with a high degree of militarization. The degree of militarization in the context of the securitization narrative becomes part of their natural reality as Gelézeau (2015, p. 28) puts it, “The thorough militarization of the border regions contributes in evident ways to their “cultural” identity and is an integral part of the daily lives of the inhabitants.” Physical border security and foreign affairs are central concerns of sovereign states, whose aim is to protect their nationals from the “outside world”. In this vein of thought, “sovereign” borders, as a Westphalian creation, represent lines of separation, dividing equal power and differentiating national identities. Political borders are conventional lines that distinguish national interests, and they sometimes function as catalysts promoting mutual interests. They are the result of historical processes and were established by the dynamics of political power. According to Ulc (1996),

European borders are unnatural, political constructions [...] border drawing has been a consequence of the struggles about formation and re-formation of nation states. [...] Borders are the “scars of history” [...] as they divide geopolitical spaces, states, nations, ethnic groups and families. They divide people due to political decisions; they are often the outcome of violent conflicts between nation-states, but they may be determined peacefully, such as it was the case [...] after a referendum that divided into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in a so-called Velvet Divorce. (Ulc, 1996)

Border stability, and the type of physical barrier standing as a border, depends on a correlation of forces, the circumstances determining the exercise of political power, the ability of the existing institutions from both sides of the border to entail stable communication, the perceived asymmetry of power, the regularity of social and economic interactions within an arch of historical time, kept alive in the memory and identity of people separated by a border.

After World War II, the number of fenced or walled borders was less than ten. In 1989, soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world had 15 hard borders, with walls or fences. In 2018, the number of this sort of physical barriers was between 67 and 77, according to different sources. Our research has already identified 67 states with hard borders and is not yet complete. Hard borders all over the world have steadily increased after the year 2000, in response to terrorism and immigration (Table 1).

Table 1. *Percentage of the world's hard borders in 2018*

	Africa	Asia	Europe	Latin America & Caribbean	Middle East	World
States with fenced borders	9	33	17	7	12	78
Percentage of the number of states or territories	17% (54)	65% (51)	35% (48)	21% (33)	66% (18)	34% (204/193)
				Exclude dependencies or other non-sovereign territories		UNGA representation 193 sovereign states

Middle East and Asia are the regions with a highest percentage of hard borders, but the number is growing fast in Europe, especially after 2010. Likewise, hard borders are being built as a protective measure against illegal immigration and as a security measure against transnational crime.

In this paper we consider an interactive typology of borders classified into three intertwined types: (A) the exercise of power associated with the existence of a border; (B) the processes of border transformation; and consequently (C) a border's material existence (Figure 1). Therefore, the physical appearance of borders is the result of a certain way of exercising sovereign power and linked to on-going processes of transformation.

Figure 1. Typology of borders

A - Exercise of Sovereign Powers		B - Transformation		C - Existence	
1	Full Sovereign Borders	5	Processes of de-bordering	11	Hard Border (physical barrier)
2	Mitigated Borders	6	Processes of co-bordering	12	Soft Border (w/ symbolic existence)
3	Non-sovereign Borders	7	Processes of re-bordering	13	Delimited Border (maritime)
4	Disputed Borders	8	Processes of hard-bordering	14	Multi-dimension Immaterial Border
		9	National unrecognized bordering processes		
		10	State minimally recognized bordering processes		

The exercise of sovereign power according to perceptions of cross-border security is at the centre of the border's existence as a living structure. There are four categories:

(A1) refers to the exercise of full sovereign rights between contiguous states, in which asymmetry is a condition for the existence of hard-border solutions—e.g., Ceuta (SP), Melilla (SP), Gibraltar (UK), Cyprus, North–South Korea, Israel–Palestine, Uzbekistan, Brunei–Malaysia, Norway–Russia and Lithuania–Russia (Kaliningrad);

(A2) denotes the exercise of mitigated sovereign rights when one of the contiguous states responds to the other, as in the case of some European states, federated states, or the classical case of quasi-states, with limited external exercise of sovereignty—e.g., federated states, Schengen states, San Marino, Andorra, Lichtenstein, Portugal, Spain, and Luxembourg;

(A3) refers to the so-called borders within borders, which applies to non-sovereign borders within a sovereign state, as in the case of the special economic zones (SEZ) or the Chinese Special Administrative Regions (SAR)—e.g., China's SARs, international zones in international airports and seaports, and the three-mile-long wall in Calais (FR);

(A4) refers to the borders of states that are not capable of or willing to exercise full control over their borders due to international disputes or their own material incapacity—e.g., Somalia, Colombia, Myanmar, China, India, Pakistan, Israel, Syria, Nepal, Russia, Japan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Kosovo, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

Depending on regular cross-border interaction, this second group of borders undergo processes of border transformation from de-bordering to hard bordering. B5 to B7 can be considered processes of softening borders. Thus, there are:

(B5) Processes of de-bordering, combining economic and political dimensions—e.g., BRI, the European Union, ECOWAS, ASEAN, MERCOSUL, ASEAN, EEU, international pipelines, submarine cables, cloud centres, international academic programmes, meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE), air and shipping lines;

(B6) Processes of co-bordering—e.g., BRI, federated states, European Union, joint management of international institutions, joint border-checkpoints, and joint border patrols;

(B7) Processes of re-bordering—e.g., federated states, and European Union;

(B8) Processes of hard bordering—e.g., Uzbekistan–Afghanistan barrier, Estonia–Russia border fence, Turkey–Iran border barrier, and Belize–Guatemala;

(B9) Unrecognized attempts to materialize non-existent political borders—e.g., Kurds, Igbos, Bavarians, Catalans, Puerto Ricans, Rohingya, and Užupis (Lithuania);

(B10) Bordering developments recognized by a small group of states. These developments are based on current circumstances and driven by past political-legal historical events—e.g., South Ossetia (Georgia), Abkhazia (Georgia), Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria (Moldova), Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, and Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (Morocco).

The exercise of sovereignty and transformation processes result in four types of borders:

(C11) A hard border refers to the existence of a fenced, walled, militarized or non-militarized physical barrier, imposing a high level of control on cross-border interactions, according to criteria defined by the sovereign power. Trans-border physical movements are seen as threats to the state, and therefore often criminalized;

(C12) A soft border symbolizes only the maximum extent of sovereign power, but there is no physical border to obstruct cross-border interactions. Trans-border physical movements are encouraged and considered cultural and economic assets;

(C13) An immaterial border differs from a political border (hard, soft or maritime) as it refers to interaction flows, such as culture, beliefs, traditions, ideas, capital, digital waves, radio waves, pollution, wild fauna crossing, and the effects of natural elements, which transcend physical barriers. Each of the previous forms of borders have a certain degree of complex consequences of the common immaterial nature of all borders. Nail (2016, pp. 2–3) pointed out the problematic nature of border theory when he argued that “it is not strictly a territorial, political, juridical, or economic phenomenon but equally an aterritorial, apolitical, non-legal and noneconomic phenomenon at the same time”; and

(C14) A delimited maritime border refers to non-physical conventional limits, with different degrees of sovereign rights, governed by the UNCLOS.

According to the classical theory of borders, borders are recognized, conventional demarcation lines, delimiting contiguous spaces of sovereignty exercised over a territory and a population. Borders result from the transformation of nations into states, and they craft states across nations or transform a nation into multi-states. Borders mark the maximum range of the direct effects of state institutional actions within a system of public values enforceable by domestic law. In the case of the DMZ between South (SK) and North Korea (NK), the border represents first and foremost a deep division between the public values of both countries, and incompatible political ideals. However, the identity divide seems to be the most significant dimension. The programme to reunite families is an affirmation of their common Korean identity and is part of the very few measures to de-border the “hardest” border in the world. Borders depict a certain conception of space and, as Chauprade (2003, p. 18) clearly puts it “borders are part of our geopolitical referential [...] they are the visible result of interaction between different forces composed of ethnic, religious, language, relief and the rush for resources”. In this sense, borders represent the territorial and physical limits of political systems, binding all individuals whose presence within that territory is legally relevant. But borders go further, because they are also conditioning elements of a state’s perception over its own physical geography and therefore a very important element when considering foreign affairs options. Chauprade (2003, p. 201) concluded that “physical geography is a constant factor, which stands as the foundation of the continuity of states’ foreign affairs”. Again, in the case of the DMZ between SK and NK, this border not only represents a separation between two completely different models of establishing relations with the international system of the world’s nations, but also depicts a great ideological, political and economic asymmetry on many levels. The DMZ appears to be a

border of two tragedies—the tragedy of living with a persistent fear (SK) and the perceived tragedy of being forgotten by the world (NK).

In the traditional categorization of borders, alongside the current political narrative, it seems that there is an acceptance of the narrative of “interdependence”, insofar as it concerns soft borders. Inversely, the idea of a hard border is met with a completely different reception. The classic concept of hard borders portrays a world of exclusion, confrontation, fear, separation of cultures, incompatibility of interests, deploying the unknown and a rooted perception of antagonism. Hard borders frequently represent lines of “protection” to prevent access and reinforce the national sense of belonging where the uncertain is to be feared. As Mostov clearly explains,

Hard borders and hard border thinking undermine people's access to resources, opportunities, and protections; limit possibilities for democratic processes of social choice; and encourage relationships of domination and violence [...] promotes and exacerbates political conflicts, blocks sustainable peaceful conflict resolution, and maintains skewed relationships of power in international markets and development programs (Mostov, 2008, pp. 3–4).

He further asserts that

hard border concepts fuel politics of fear and exclusion, fixing notions of membership and belonging and exacerbating vulnerabilities of those over whose bodies symbolic borders are constructed and for whom physical borders are lethal (Mostov 2008, p. 123).

Unquestionably, even when we refer to hard borders determined by natural features of geography, there are different types of hard borders, each with its own challenges, for example, mountains (difficult to oversee and control and they represent the natural separation of waterways), rivers (seen as natural barriers and as natural communication routes), lakes (require common management), deserts (their unstable and changing landscape is difficult to manage), and forests (difficult to exercise control). Borders are used to separate what is different but not necessarily incompatible. Sometimes borders represent long-standing separators, and they function as “dividers” in the historic, religious or economic context. Laroche (2017, p. 32) explains why borders have become sites of conflict and contestation “international politics is now characterized by several cleavages (North/South, South/South, legal/authoritarian states, etc.). They are determined by major social economic disparities and large dissimilarities between actors on the international stage (undeveloped/developed countries).”

To separate what is thought to be incompatible creates a dilemma, and this dilemma is based on the fact that states are ready to invest more and more to improve the strength and the resilience of their hard borders. However, it appears that the greater the asymmetry between contiguous states, the harder a border becomes. Consequently, the harder a border becomes, the higher its potential as a source of fear, discomfort, cleavages and violent conflict.

The Copenhagen School of security has put forward a two-stage process of securitization, using the central concept of “speech act”, which is defined as the discursive representation of a certain issue that poses an existential threat to security. In fact, the Copenhagen School claims that any specific matter can be non-politicized (it is not a matter for state action, and it is not included in the public debate); politicized (a matter managed within the standards of the political system, is part of public policy, therefore requires government decision and resource allocations); or securitized (the end of the spectrum, requiring emergency actions beyond the state’s standard political procedures) (Emmers, 2010, pp. 138–139). An act of securitization refers to the accepted classification of a certain and no other phenomena, persons or entities as existential threats requiring emergency measures. This is precisely the problem of conceptualizing hard borders, because they immediately trigger existential threats requiring emergency measures. Military border protection is a classic example of securitization based on a speech of act, using fear as a central justification for action.

The material representation of a border is connected to risk perceptions associated with or arising from border governance techniques based on three levels of the public narrative. In fact, the Copenhagen School of security (Leandro, 2018, pp. 141–142) claims that any specific matter depicting the relationship between the sides of the border can be non-politicized and not treated as a matter for state action and therefore will not be put under the spotlight of public scrutiny. Or it can be politicized as a state matter to be managed within the institutions composing the political system as part of public policy and the object of governmental decision-making and with a fair amount of public resources allocated in the pursuit of public objectives. On the third level, a matter can be securitized, which places it at one end of the spectrum of political action, requiring extraordinary and urgent measures, far beyond the state’s standards of political procedures and if necessary, allocating a considerable part of the present and future resources of the state. Securitization in this sense represents an exceptionality of the state action as “opposition to normal politics”, which in the case of borders leads to extreme hard borders with an unsustainable militarization solution. Fear fuels asymmetric perceptions and paves the way to antagonism, sometimes

violent antagonism. Confidence induces cooperation and de-escalation, and as a consequence, joint solutions in de-bordering actions.

Hard borders extend far beyond the simple divide between political systems. Most of the time, they represent firewalls against a perceived evil, and are capable of undermining the existence of a state. Thus, when we discuss the perception and function of hard borders, very much depends on the relationship with neighbouring regions and countries, the balance of power, the levels of non-military securitization, the communication tools, and state regional integration as a determinant of the domestic securitization narrative. In any case, hard borders either represent the symbolism of a historical context and a pursuit of singular individuality, or they are physical barriers built on fear, unbearable differences and the uncertainty of “odd neighbours”. According to Asad (2017, p. 220), “The representation of Europe’s borders is, of course, symbolic. But the signs and symbols have a history.” This historical representation also impacts on the perceived “need” for strong and resilient hard borders which are often merely instruments of a narrative of political reassurance.

The DMZ on the SK side appears to be the most militarized border in the world, while the Israeli-Palestine border is the most “hostile” (Marshall, 2018, p. 1). From these two examples of hard physical borders, four substantial physical effects and three intertwined psychological repercussions can be identified.

Substantial physical effects

- Borders are capable of inhibiting the “evil” from invading or occupying our space. Borders represent a protective barrier and shield our psychological “comfort” from an array of harm and threats. Borders protect and isolate political units and they function as “filters” setting the conditions for inter-border interaction. Borders prevent us from stepping freely into “uncertain lands”. According to Mostov (2008, p. 2), “While boundaries are regularly and easily traversed today by capital, electronic information, a wide class of goods, environmental hazards, and certain categories of people (privileged passport holders and traffickers), other categories of people are held hostage within the hard borders of their ‘home’ states or blocked at the hard-borders of potential ‘hosts’.” Borders protect us from others by setting criteria, operating as a filter that regulates entry into alien space and that determines how we share our space with aliens;
- Borders are there to reorganize our space and differentiate it from “enemy domains” according to a certain security rationale. Borders are conventional, historical and political constructions, resulting from the necessity to impose

limits on us or to enforce barriers on others perceived as different from us. Borders offer protection from fear, because they are intended as an instrument to consolidate a union of identities and to promote the sense of belonging. In addition, borders are “arrangements” made with others, acknowledging the space which others occupy and at the same time forcing others to recognize us and the space where we exist and exercise our values;

- Borders rationalize the space in their vicinity according to security needs. Borders are not defined simply by the physical separation between two sovereign entities. Borders command a set of collocated infrastructures whose number, type and organization depend on the perceived security needs. Borders influence the organization of the space within their vicinity and the rationale of domestic interactions. Gelézeau (2015, p. 30) argues that “despite the dream of a Peace Belt on the 38th parallel, the Korean border is still a militarized “hot border” and profoundly structures the spatial organization of the region and its way of life. Yet, despite its apparently static nature, the border continues to shift.” Therefore, depending on the level of securitization, borders make different impacts on spatial architecture, structures, assets, occupation, and land use. Land borders are a haven for wild life because they function as a protected sanctuary, allowing for fauna and flora to be out of human reach. The land borders between Croatia and Serbia, between Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, between Syria and Jordan and between South and North Korea are examples among many. Gelézeau (2015, p. 27) asserts that “the inter-Korean border is a space where two types of gaze meet: that of defensive military surveillance and that of the inquisitive tourist for whom the border is a monument to the past and an ecological marvel”. Nevertheless, it appears that the same idea does not apply to disputed maritime borders which are mostly the loci of illegal and unreported fishing, human trafficking and polluting activities, precisely because of the lack of exercise of sovereign power;
- The excessive securitization of borders as a mechanism of exception is a governance technique, resulting from a perception of threat and the formulation of a narrative of “preventive” fear. As Paasi argues (2012, p. 2307), understanding borders is inherently an issue of understanding how states function, and understanding their perceptions in relation to others and to their own vulnerabilities because “borders can be exploited to both mobilize and fix territory, security, identities, emotions and memories, and various forms of national socialization”. A policy of borders based on abnormal politicization as an attention-grabbing model opens the door to the politics of pure realism (and extremism) and is a kind of mobilization of conflictual or threatening relations (Leandro, 2018, p. 146).

Intertwined psychological repercussions

- In most of the cases, borders represent the limits of fear or the beginning of hope. Borders create an intentional gap, capable of generating psychological relief (protection from threats) or anxiety (as a result of a widening wealth gap). Borders are a safety protection from the unknown or a window on what is desired;
- Borders exercise a sort of secret hold or power of attraction. Borders as physical locations exercise the magnetism of the unknown, because they represent the closest point of “safe” contact with “evil” or offer the virtual opportunity to experience hope and dreams. Kolossov and Scott (2013) mentioned that borders “often become ‘memory landscapes’ with abundant monuments, museums and historical sites; they become sacred spaces of national or ethnic memory. In some cases, border regions can take on a dramatic theatrical character in which specific national interpretations of past conflict and the culpability of the other side are carefully staged. This is particularly the case of the South Korean side of the demilitarized zone, of Cyprus [and Turkey], the border between Turkey and Armenia, and of borders between Bosnia and other former Yugoslavian republics.” (Kolossov & Scott, 2013, p. 5)
- Borders are artificial dividers of culture, identity, families and social groups. Borders categorize individuals according to their “native hood” or their “foreign” nature. Borders imply emotional divisions among the populations on either side of the border. Risse (2004) asserts that “borders are multidimensional”, that they exist in the minds of people, and reinforce the perception of differences. Delanty (2006) stresses that “borders are spatial representations of power relations, and they become reflected in the minds of the people who live with and along the borders” and according to Genova (2017, p. 23), “The struggles of migration and borders reanimate race and post-coloniality as central to adequately addressing the most fundamental problems of what ‘Europe’ is supposed to be, and who may be counted as ‘European’.”

Border theory, especially in the study of border conflicts, should combine the two perspectives of physical effects and psychological repercussions of borders on both sides. Yndigeñ (2011, p. 48) provides an apt description of borders and stresses, “Borders produce meaning and significance beyond their mere existence. Borders are social constructions, but they construct social relations as well. Borders signify the relationships between actors and institutions in the borderland.”

3. What is the future of borders?

Will soft borders eventually replace hard borders? No. Hard borders are unlikely to change significantly, except in the face of complex and significant political processes. Regardless of different approaches to global interdependency, immaterial borders will expand and intensify at different levels, due to the advancement in digital technology, communication facilitation processes, and transnational trade networks. Physical borders will remain but some of them will be transformed into hard borders, and others will undergo de-bordering processes, but all will acquire complex multi-dimensions. The number of fenced or walled borders appears to be growing and the number is likely to grow even more. Alongside this proliferation of hard borders stand immaterial flows that will intensify and, consequently, new immaterial borders will appear. The intensification of asymmetric perceptions will influence the design of the physical configuration of borders. While interdependency does not necessarily imply physical de-bordering, it does entail a softening of borders in the classical sense. According to Mostov (2008, p. 123), “Softening of borders does not mean creating a world without political borders—it means recognizing the fluidity and malleability of such borders [...]. Softening means facilitating legal movement and exchange across political units and also opportunities for political and economic participation in multiple polities.” As a result, softening borders reduces asymmetry, encourages sustainable solutions, economic prosperity and social stability.

The major challenge that the post-modern state faces is precisely the compatibility between the processes of softening borders, intensification of immaterial flows, and the exercise of sovereign power. Softening the border leads to an increase in cross-border flows, since the process creates “windows of mutual penetration” based on common interests. It contributes to de-bordering but raises new issues in relation to other levels of re-bordering—for example, in the cyber domain. However, the process of softening borders does not necessarily create mechanisms of co-bordering which requires concrete public policies and negotiated international solutions, for example, international water management in riparian and upstream states. The future of borders lies in the mobility of goods, capital and people. In relation to human mobility, Genova explains that

borders are not simply spatial technologies but also operate in ways that are fundamentally dedicated to the temporal processing of distinct mobilities, ultimately consigning various categories of mobile people... The ongoing crisis of European borders, therefore,

corresponds above all to a permanent epistemic instability within the governance of transnational human mobility, which itself relies on the exercise of a power over classifying, naming, and partitioning migrants/refugees, and the more general multiplication of subtle nuances and contradictions among the categories that regiment mobility. (Genova, 2017, p. 9)

Indeed, we will see more and more de-bordering actions in the digital, capital and science domains. Inversely, transnational human mobility will be the subject of processes of hard bordering, despite the need for the mobility of human resources. The future will bring dilemmas. On the one hand, as the process of border softening gains momentum, so will digital globalization and economic interdependency. On the other hand, and despite the fact that ageing societies will require higher levels of transnational human mobility, the fear of losing national identity will harden cross-border access criteria, especially inter-continental cross-border movement.

4. Which are the leading causes of interstate border disputes?

We must return to the concept of hard bordering. Mostov argues about

the negative consequences of hard-border policies and the potentially positive consequences of soft border practices [...]. Hard borders and hard border thinking undermine people's access to resources, opportunities, and protections; limit possibilities for democratic processes of social choice; and encourage relationships of domination and violence. Hard border thinking promotes and exacerbates political conflicts, blocks sustainable peaceful conflict resolution, and maintains skewed relationships of power in international markets and development programs. (Mostov, 2008, pp. 2–3)

In international cross-border conflicts, the leading cause seems to be the level of “multi-sector asymmetry along the border”, due to human insecurity—exacerbated by military, ethnic and economic complexities. Hardening hard-border policies contributes to an escalation of crisis. Premature hard-border militarization is a tangible policy measure, which is, even for self-defence purposes, capable of triggering violence. Therefore, it is possible to put the leading causes of interstate border disputes into three categories, all of them related to processes of hard bordering.

(1) *Geo-identity factors* are the leading causes of border conflicts, ignited by the exploitation of religious narratives, cultural clashes, ethnic unity, nationalistic narratives, and ideological alignments; the failure to recognize and empower national identities and protect national groups; confused, inconsistent, and conflicting communication discourses; and extremist narratives that induce fear and uncertainty. The perception of being in a position in which an external factor is harming the sense of “who are you?” and the identity of “who are we?” threatens the very basic human security needs. These feelings are often exploited by populist and extremist narratives of intolerance, which are capable of galvanizing factors of violence;

(2) *Geo-economic factors*. These correspond basically to the failure of fulfilling the essential elements of the social contract—namely, not addressing the development gap, the wealth imbalance, social and environmental inequalities, endemic corruption, uncurbed pollution, lack of sustainability, failure to provide an acceptable level of social capital, low level of foreign investment, economic isolation, rush for natural resources (especially livelihoods), depletion of natural resources, and non-competitive or unfair trade barriers. Indeed, the high competition over scarce natural resources, which is worsened by environmental issues, is among the most pressing causes of current conflicts in Africa (UN-OCHA, 2008). Extreme asymmetric geo-economic realities generate disproportionate development levels, communication barriers, economic insecurity and reckless behaviours;

(3) *Geopolitical factors*. Among an array of leading causes of cross-border violence are water management (and sustainability), migration movements, discriminatory border regimes, treatment of asylum seekers, colonial legacies, military-power disparity, transnational crime, failed states, dispute over sea access (landlocked states), and border demarcation (territorial disputes) especially in connection with problems of resources control. Gibler (2012, pp. 12–14; 25–29) proposed four types of disputes: territorial, catch-all, policy and ethnic. However, territorial disputes affect the state for a long period of time, tend to encourage the building of large standing armies, and hold a great symbolic charge. This symbolic charge, constitutes an opportunity for an empowerment of an elite, capable of securitizing disputes, inducing political concentration, promoting hard-line leadership, deviating from political tolerance, and advancing hard border solutions. Territorial disputes are probably among the most important causes of cross-border armed conflicts and therefore, they should be object of particular attention. According to Mancini (2013), “[t]erritorial disputes are traditionally regarded as the most common sources of conflict and a vast number of scholars have

analysed the connection between disputed territory and the outbreak of war”.² Indeed, John Vasquez (1993, p. 307) concluded that “if you want to avoid war, learn how to settle territorial disputes non-violently”. Yet, it is important to emphasize that not all territorial disputes lead to war. “Since 1953, ninety-seven territorial disputes have been solved through bilateral negotiations, third-party mediation, arbitration, or adjudication at the International Court of Justice. Many other disputes remain dormant.” (Wiegand, 2001, p. 2). Mostov (2008, p. 134) emphasizes that “[c]ontrol of economic resources, however, is a significant motivation for technocracy and the violence of hard border politics.” It is particularly interesting that bays as convergent points of access diminish the perceived need for hard border protection on the part of individual countries. According to the UN-OCHA (2008), although geography may be important it is the lack of resources and ability of local governments to manage and prevent cross-border conflicts that seem to be the leading causes of conflicts.

5. To what extent does BRI contribute to border transformation processes?

Visiting the DMZ on the SK side, it is difficult not to miss the enormous billboard displayed inside the Dorasan Railway Station (Fig. 2), depicting “the mesmerizing dream” of travelling from Gyeongju (South Korea) to Lisbon (Portugal) by train. This long journey symbolizes an ideal intercontinental de-bordering process, which induces significant material and immaterial flows. Unfortunately, the number of hard borders is growing and the level of militarization of national borders is also growing. Uzbekistan is an interesting case of a landlocked state, that between 1999 and 2006 barricaded itself off its four neighbours (Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Kazakhstan), with a tall electrified barbed-wire 380-volt fence, land mines and army patrols. New physical walls are being built and more have been proposed: Costa Rica–Nicaragua, Pakistan–Afghanistan, and Guatemala–Belize. Fortunately, there are no-walled processes taking place such as the Aral Sea border (Kazakhstan–Uzbekistan), the new agreement on the sea border of the Caspian Sea (2018) between Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Lastly, there is the “peculiar” example of a “moving internal border” in China—the West Kowloon Railways Terminus in Hong Kong, which operates in the framework

² Such as Gary Goertz, Paul Diehl, Paul Hensel, Stephen Kocs, John Vasquez, Rongxing Guo, and Krista Wiegand.

Figure 2. The Trans-Eurasian Railway Network

Source: Billboard displayed at Dorasan Railway Station, South Korea
(October 2018)

of three concurrent jurisdictions, under a singular sovereign: trains are under Chinese jurisdiction, tracks are under Hong Kong jurisdiction and the railway station is divided into different zones, which are under Chinese jurisdiction or Hong Kong jurisdiction. Thus, it appears that de-bordering and hard bordering are taking place concurrently.

The BRI is a Chinese concept with a global reach, subjected to national scrutiny by the participating states, which aims to induce multilevel de-bordering processes without modifying the limits of sovereign borders. According to the World Bank (WB),

the Belt and Road Initiative is an ambitious effort to improve regional cooperation and connectivity on a trans-continental scale. The initiative aims to strengthen infrastructure, trade, and investment links between China and some 65 other countries that account collectively for over 30 percent of global GDP, 62 percent of population, and 75 percent of known energy reserves. (The World Bank, 2018)

Furthermore, the WB has emphasized three very important facts about the BRI: “it can transform the economic environment in the regional economies of its operation”; “it can substantially reduce trade costs and improve connectivity” and “the cost reduction will have significant consequences for certain goods impacting the mode choice and total flows of international trade” (The World Bank, 2008). In fact, the BRI is based on a network of elements of connectivity between economic agents: domestic land development axes, international

economic corridors, joint transit routes, sea lines of communications with a myriad of sailing options, and special economic zones (and similar arrangements).

The BRI has been studied and talked about by state institutions and scholars. The National Development and Reform Commission and the State Oceanic Administration Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative to build a peaceful and prosperous 21st Century Maritime Silk Road comes under the umbrella of the Silk Road initiative. This document must be read in the framework of the socialism with Chinese characteristics for the new era, as a model under construction, based on market innovation elements and the idea of social redistribution. Entrepreneurship has taken on another dimension because the concept of the BRI stands for much more than creating sustainable wealth. Indeed, in light of the Chinese vision, responsible entrepreneurship fosters a positive contribution to the common good. As an infrastructural access strategy, the BRI envisages a global contribution, connecting trade agents for the benefit of all. Thus, the combination of the BRI the land belt with the maritime Silk Road is intertwined with exceptional interface gateways (SEZs) between economic agents, using the elements of connectivity to promote and facilitate cross-border flows. The idea of shortening the distance between markets and production centres worldwide, under the principle of free trade, creating harmonized policies and respecting sovereign boundaries, appears to be a powerful de-bordering global initiative.

The BRI has turned global and extended far beyond Eurasia. The three Chinese domestic development axes are extended to six economic corridors and the maritime Silk Road. This '3=6+1' structure is the core network of a global strategy existing in Central and Eastern Europe (the BRI for the Western Balkans, the Arctic Silk Road and the Greenland Arctic Base); in Africa (the Maghreb-Sahel Silk Road, Great Lakes Silk Road, the Trans-Africa Highway, the Western-Africa Railways, the Angola-Tanzania Railways, and the Great Lakes infrastructure plan); in Asia (the ASEAN integrated master plan of connectivity—The Thailand Regional Connectivity Plan, the Southeast Asia Railways Plan—The Pan-Asia Railway Network, the Mekong India Economic Corridor), in the Pacific (Trans-Pacific Maritime Silk Road); and on the American continent (the Latin America Silk Road, the Inter-Oceanic Railway, the Nicaraguan Canal, and the Cartagena-Caribbean Railway), all of which are complemented by other domains such as the Digital Silk Road, the Green Silk Road, Education Silk Road (EU/China), Cultural Silk Road, and the Space Silk Road. But common to all these different domains are five development pillars: (1) promoting the construction of vital infrastructure through elements of connectivity; (2) advancing new financial institutionalism; (3) encouraging multilevel bi- and multilateralism;

(4) fostering domestic functional integration; and (5) nurturing people-to-people exchange. These pillars have been constructed according to the Chinese model of socialism with Chinese characteristics for the new era, which has at its core the de-bordering of the development borders inside China.

- *Promoting the construction of vital infrastructure through elements of connectivity.* In the context of the BRI, the articulation of the different infrastructural connectivity elements, such as domestic development axes, economic corridors, fast transit routes, special economic zones and sea lines of communication, are based on ad hoc cross-border economic and legal arrangements. The main objective is to facilitate exchanges between markets and production centres, having as a common denominator the fact that all the arrangements should be subjected to national scrutiny. The positioning of these sets of key infrastructure corresponds to a geopolitical strategy to connect China, Eurasia, and Indochina and to make direct access to two oceans possible—the Pacific and Indian oceans. Infrastructure also operates to support immaterial connectivity, especially in the context of digitalization of the economy. Partnerships, and financial arrangements as MOU, FDI, BTA, FTA, and special loans operate as instruments of co-bordering and re-bordering;
- *Advancing new financial institutionalism.* In the context of the BRI, the new financial architecture is composed of new international banking institutions, new international funds, new strategy for domestic banks, and new financial centres. Alongside China's active participation in the existing global financial institutions, and the cooperation between the WB and new financial institutions, other positive developments that have taken place include the de-bordering of access to funds, the creation co-bordering mechanisms of financial sustainability, and since 2016, the inclusion of the RMB in the Special Drawing Rights of the IMF;
- *Encouraging multilevel, bilateralism and multilateralism.* China has used the BRI to move from a sort of “historical isolationism” to a wider engagement with the relevant international actors. In the context of the BRI, China is attaching great importance to multilevel relations which encompass all levels of state administration and private entities. Furthermore, bilateral relations with key relevant partners in the form of “partnerships”, tailored to the different interests, levels and possibilities are growing—ASEAN, European Union, and African Union are among the best examples. China has also developed bilateral relations in “third country market cooperation” involving special arrangements with partners for a collaborative approach to Africa, for example, between China and Italy. Along the same lines

is trilateral cooperation which began in 2010 when the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Strengthened Partnership, in the presence of the then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and UNDP Administrator Helen Clark. This marked the beginning of UNDP's support for China's South-South and trilateral cooperation, which its China office established as a main pillar of its engagement with the country in its current Country Programme Document (2016–2020). Likewise, multilateral relations with regional and global institutions have been given a high priority in the form of forums: the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation and the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-Speaking Countries, also known as Forum Macao. China has also pushed for stronger participation in global forums such as the World Economic Forum (Davos), advocating free and fair global trade rules and market access. All of these actions aim at de-bordering global trade and commerce;

- *Fostering domestic functional integration.* In the context of the BRI, Chinese domestic functional integration, combined with the elements of connectivity and a massive investment in innovation, will create an economic dynamism throughout Chinese territory and de-border economic asymmetries and promote the so-called five happiness industries. In China there are 23 provinces; 5 ethnic autonomous regions; 4 municipalities directly under the control of the central government; the Special Economic Zone in Hainan Province—Beibu Gulf Region; the 2 Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macao; the 5 sub-provincial SEZs of Shenzhen, Zhuhai, and Shantou in Guangdong, Xiamen in Fujian, and Kashgar in Xinjiang; the Pearl Delta River experimental free trade zone (EFTZ) (Guangdong), Hengqin district of Zhuhai (financial centre)—Nansha district in the south of Guangzhou (logistical centre), Qinghai district in Shenzhen (HK duty-free); experimental free trade zones in Shanghai (2013) (HK Synergies), Fujian (2014) (to boost economic interactions with Taiwan), and Tianjin (1984) (Bohai Rim Region); the '9+2' integration policy which envisages functional integration of 11 cities in the Pearl River Delta area—Shenzhen (national high-tech R&D and manufacturing centre), Dongguan (manufacturing base), Guangzhou (automobile, electronics, petrochemical, electric power, electrical machinery, general-purpose equipment, large-scale transportation and aerospace equipment, medicine and medical equipment), Foshan (high-tech industries, energy conservation and environmental protection, and new energy vehicles), Huizhou (petrochemical and electronic information

industry base), Hong Kong (international finance, shipping and trade centre), Macao (one centre—world tourism and leisure centre—and one cooperation platform with Portuguese-speaking countries), Zhongshan (clusters for home appliances, clothing, lighting, and furniture), Jiangmen (automobile equipment and motorcycle industry base), Zhuhai (high-tech manufacturing and international leisure tourism island), Zhao Qing (the main grain-producing areas of the province and the gateway city connecting the southwest hub); the 6 Yangtze River ports and the Yangtze River Delta area; the 11 border cities and the 14 coastal development areas of Dalian in Liaoning, Qinhuangdao in Hebei, Tianjin, Yantai and Qingdao in Shandong, Lianyungang and Nantong in Jiangsu, Shanghai, Ningbo and Wenzhou in Zhejiang, Fuzhou in Fujian, Guangzhou and Zhanjiang in Guangdong, and Beihai in Guangxi. These and a number of cluster cities are the most visible domestic de-bordering mechanisms and “entry doors” to international flows of trade;

- *Nurturing people-to-people exchange (P2PE)*. In the context of the BRI, the base of P2PE is the advancement of human social capital, entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility. China is promoting and investing in short- and long-term academic programmes in the country and abroad, joint academic degrees, cultural industries, cultural exchanges such as festivals, dance, arts, sports, tourism, exhibitions and seminars, language courses, language technologies, business training, and joint participation in corporate incubation areas. The number of overseas students in China has been growing and in 2017 there were more than 450,000 foreign students in the country. Likewise, the number of Chinese students overseas is also increasing. China is paying attention to the Chinese diaspora as part of cross-border facilitation, adopting a pragmatic approach to the interests of Chinese diasporic communities, and combining their interests with its national interests. China is paying increasing attention to corporate responsibility, especially in relation to the SOEs operating in less developed countries. Finally, China has put into place a number of visa facilitation measures. One example is worth mentioning—the 2016 Agreement between the European Union and the People’s Republic of China on short-stay visa waivers for holders of diplomatic passports and holders of passports issued by 49 countries. They do not require a visa for a 72-hour or 144-hour stay if they are transiting through a number of ports/airports of entry. This set of measures carries a strong potential to de-border immaterial borders constituted by science, knowledge, and perceptions of fear. P2PE also contributes to re-bordering because it promotes the expansion of areas of scientific exchange to support common interests. Finally, it encourages

joint academic and scientific institutions to promote areas of knowledge.

The Macao Forum, established by the People's Republic of China, is an excellent example of a joint institution working in the area of development, clearly operating as a co-bordering institution, capable of promoting de-bordering through re-bordering and strongly contributing to immaterial de-bordering.

6. Conclusions: Borders are alive

*“Choose a leader who will invest in building bridges, not walls.
Books, not weapons. Morality, not corruption.”
Suzy Kassem (2011)*

Building fenced and walled borders based on a narrative of fear is not a quick fix, and it mobilizes a sort of popular response to perceived threats. Hard borders are part of an array of governance instruments, thought to be capable of delivering fast development results, in the area of asymmetric perceptions, unbalanced power relations or diffused threats. The real investment in security is the one that accommodates asymmetries and at the same time preserves sovereignty. While de-bordering contributes to peace and development, it also calls for balanced solutions to avoid the dilemma of asymmetry in perceptions. The purpose of this paper was to show the positive contribution of the BRI to border security because it promotes de-bordering, re-bordering and co-bordering. It is reasonably fair to conclude that borders are alive, and therefore borders change with transmuting asymmetric perceptions on both sides. Physical border structures are the result of perception and governance. Borders are living structures and their physical shape and the level of their “openness” depend upon the interaction asymmetry between two or more neighbouring states. In other words, physical and immaterial borders are a direct result of how neighbours perceive one another. As the level of perceived asymmetry mounts, the border as a physical obstacle tends to intensify. The more the perceived level of confidence deepens, the easier it is to implement cooperative solutions, making a higher level of de-bordering possible. Furthermore, borders are multi-dimensional, and we have observed a shift from the bi-dimensional Westphalian border concept to a multi-layered and material-immaterial concept of borders, which the classic sovereign powers struggle to curb. Even fenced or walled borders do not represent a sealed physical isolation of sovereign domain or offer full protection from external harm. The BRI aims precisely at creating a

set of economic, non-economic, material and immaterial mechanisms to clarify misperceptions and to balance asymmetries. The future is expected to bring more walled borders and more immaterial flows moving across borders. In this context, the BRI is a bridging initiative. As a multilevel and multi-state initiative, the BRI operates under a Chinese approach, but it will be the result of multi-state scrutiny of national interests and active participation. The BRI offers not only domestic and international physical mechanisms of de-bordering but also a platform for immaterial global governance.

The cycle of physical borders entails not only the dilemma of balancing the asymmetry and correspondent hardness of the sort of divide that borders should represent, but also the dilemma of curbing the threats of deeper de-bordering processes which open the doors to organized crime and virtual piracy. In this regard, the future of borders will remain a struggle between the contending needs of integration, protection, and growing digitalization.

The BR elements of connectivity (domestic development axes, economic corridors, special economic zones, special administrative zones, and fast transit routes) contribute to all these three types of border effects, in different ways and with dissimilar intensity. They promote the fading, weakening, trespassing or removal of obstacles and encourage cross-border interplay, as a multilevel process to create opportunities and change attitudes and perceptions, without compromising sovereignty. They foster the voluntary relocation of a sovereign perimeter, transfer insecurity perceptions and often correspond to a sectorial dimension of sovereignty. They encourage new joint dimensions of exercising sovereign power and the creation of joint institutions. They nurture the exercise of overlapping jurisdictions over a portion of sovereign territory or an immaterial domain, and they generate synergies and intensify cross-border cooperation. All in all, the BRI holds the potential to de-border material and immaterial domains, making the dream of land travel, the mesmerizing journey, from Gyeongju to Lisbon, come true.

Francisco José Leandro received his PhD in political science and international relations from the Catholic University of Portugal in 2010. From 2016 to 2017 he took part in a post-doctoral research programme on state monopolies in China—One Belt, One Road studies. In 2014 and 2017, he was awarded the Institute of European Studies in Macau (IEEM) Academic Research Grant, which is a major component of the Asia-Europe Comparative Studies Research Project. From 2014 to 2018, he was the programme coordinator at the Institute of Social and Legal Studies, Faculty of Humanities at the University of Saint Joseph in Macau, China. He is currently an associate professor and assistant dean of the Institute

for Research on Portuguese-Speaking Countries at the City University of Macau, China. His most recent book is titled *Steps of Greatness: The Geopolitics of OBOR* (University of Macau, 2018).

References

- Alker, H.** (2005), 'Emancipation in the critical security studies project,' in K. Booth (ed.) *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, London: Lynne Rienner.
- Anderson, J. & O'Dowd, L.** (1999), 'Borders, border regions and territoriality: contradictory meanings, changing significance,' *Regional Studies*, vol. 33, no. 7, pp. 593–604. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343409950078648>
- Anghie, A.** (2004), *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511614262>
- Asad, T.** (2017), 'Muslims and European Identity,' in N. De Genova (ed.) *The Borders of "Europe": Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Blatter, J.** (2001), 'Debordering the world of states: towards a multilevel system in Europe and a multi-polity system in North America?' *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 175–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066101007002002>
- Castells, M.** (2000), *The Rise of the Network Society*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Chauprade, A.** (2003), *Géopolitique – Constantes et Changements dans l'histoire*, 2nd ed., Paris: Ellipses.
- Chen, X.** (2005), *As Borders Bend*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Colin, S.** (2015), 'Swinging borders,' in V. Gelézeau, K. De Ceuster & A. Delissen (eds.) *De-bordering Korea: Tangible and Intangible Legacies of the Sunshine Policy*, Oxon & New York: Routledge.
- Delanty, G.** (2006), 'Borders in a changing Europe: dynamics of openness and closure,' *Comparative European Politics*, vol. 4, nos. 2 & 3, pp. 183–202. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cep.6110073>
- Emmers, R.** (2010), 'Securitization,' in A. Collins (ed.) *Contemporary Security Studies*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 136–151.
- Gelézeau, V.** (2015), 'Life on the lines – people and places of the Korean border,' in V. Gelézeau, K. De Ceuster & A. Delissen (eds.) *De-bordering Korea: Tangible and Intangible Legacies of the Sunshine Policy*, Oxon & New York: Routledge.
- Gelézeau, V.; De Ceuster, K. & Delissen, A.** (2015), *De-Bordering Korea: Tangible and Intangible Legacies of the Sunshine Policy*, Oxon & New York: Routledge.

- Genova, N.** (2017), *The Borders of "Europe": Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Gibler, D.** (2012), *The Territorial Peace: Borders, State Development and International Peace*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Han, C.** (2016), *Trilateral Cooperation with China - Sharing China's Development Experience through Innovative Partnerships*, UNDP Discussion Paper, South-South Cooperation, Beijing: UNDP.
- Jal, G.** (2014), 'The roots cause of cross border conflict in Gambella regional state between Jikany-Nuer and Lou-Nuer,' *Public Policy and Administration Research*, vol. 4, no. 8, pp. 44–58.
- Kassem, S.** (2011), *Rise Up and Salute the Sun: The Writings of Suzy Kassem*, 1st ed., Boston: Awakened Press.
- Kolosov, V.** (2017), 'Internationalization of science and regional political studies (the case of the Caucasus),' *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol. 58, no. 5, pp. 582–586. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2017.1422986>
- Kolossov, V. & Scott, J.** (2013), *Selected Conceptual Issues in Border Studies*, *Belgeo*. Retrieved from <http://belgeo.revues.org/10532> [accessed Sep 2019]. <https://doi.org/10.4000/belgeo.10532>
- Kristof, L.** (1959), *The Nature of Frontiers and Boundaries*, Chicago: University of Chicago. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.1959.tb01613.x>
- Laroche, J.** (2017), *The Brutalization of the World, from the Retreat of States to Decivilization*, Paris: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50793-4>
- Leandro, F. J.** (2018), *Steps of Greatness: The Geopolitics of OBOR*, Macau: University of Macau.
- Longo, M.** (2017), *The Politics of Borders: Sovereignty, Security, and the Citizen after 9/11*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316761663>
- Mancini, F.** (2013), *Uncertain Borders: Territorial Disputes in Asia*, ISPI Analysis, no. 180.
- Marcu, S.** (2015), 'Entre la (re)fronterización y la frontera red: prácticas de movilidad transfronteriza de los inmigrantes de la Europa del este en España,' *Boletín de la Asociación de Geógrafos Españoles*, no. 69, pp. 211–232.
- Marshall, T.** (2018), *The Age of Walls – How Barriers Between Nations Are Changing Our World*, London: Scribner.
- McCall, C.** (2012), 'Debordering and Rebordering the United Kindgom,' in T. M. Wilson & H. Donnan (eds.) *A Companion Border Studies*, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118255223.ch12>
- Michaelsen, S. & Johnson, D.** (1997), *Border Theory – The Limits of Cultural Politics*, Minneapolis, MN: University Minnesota Press.
- Mostov, J.** (2008), *Soft Borders: Rethinking Sovereignty and Democracy*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230612440>

- Nail, T.** (2016), *Theory of the Border*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190618643.001.0001>
- Paasi, A.** (1996), *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border*, New York: John Wiley.
- Paasi, A.** (1999), 'Boundaries as social practice and discourse: the Finnish-Russian border,' *Regional Studies*, vol. 33, pp. 669–680.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00343409950078701>
- Paasi, A.** (2009), 'Bounded spaces in a "borderless world": border studies, power and the anatomy of territory,' *Journal of Power*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 213–234.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17540290903064275>
- Paasi, A.** (2012), 'Commentary: border studies reanimated: going beyond the territorial/relational divide,' *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, vol. 44, no. 10, pp. 2305–2309. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a45282>
- Risse, T.** (2004), 'European institutions and identity change: what have we learned?' in R. Herrmann, T. Risse & M. Brewer (eds.) *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, pp. 248–253.
- Ulc, O.** (1996), 'Czechoslovakia's velvet divorce,' *East European Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 331–352.
- Vasquez, J.** (1993), *The War Puzzle*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511583483>
- Wallace, W.** (2002), 'Where does Europe end? Dilemmas of inclusion and exclusion,' in J. Zielonka (ed.) *Europe Unbound: Enlarging and Reshaping the Boundaries of the European Union*, London: Routledge.
- Wiegand, K.** (2011), *Enduring Territorial Disputes: Strategies of Bargaining, Coercive Diplomacy, and Settlement*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Wielkopolan, S.** (2011), *Border Theory*, Detroit: Black Coffee Press.
- Yndigegn, C.** (2011), 'Between debordering and rebordering Europe: cross-border cooperation in the Øresund region or the Danish-Swedish border region,' *Eurasia Border Review*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 47–59.