

REVIEW

A Critical Development of Border Studies

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Diener, Alexander C. & Joshua Hagen (2012). *Borders: A Very Short Introduction*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press.

The end of the Cold War and the advent of the age of globalization led people to anticipate that the world they live in would become borderless. However, recent global headlines are filled with cases of the continued drawing and redrawing of borders; for example, the international community has witnessed the outbreak of the Ebola virus in western Africa, continued violence between Israel and Palestine in the Gaza Strip, and Russia's annexation and invasion of the Crimean Peninsula as well as portions of southern Ukraine. These recent events distinctly demonstrate that borders continue to constitute international affairs, as well as the daily lives of people around the world. Activities that seemed to remove borders were immediately exposed as attempts to redraw borders. Most ostensibly, the new jihadist group "Islamic State (IS)" erased state borders separating Syria and Iraq. Turning to Asia, the rise of China is changing the regional stability which can result in the potential redrawing of borders. Such phenomena raise the necessity to reevaluate established conceptions such as borders.

This book seeks to explore the breadth and depth of the field of border studies co-authored by Alexander C. Diener and J. Hagen. It provides various case studies and border-related issues as well as the basic concepts of border studies. After tracing the historical development of borders from hunter gatherer societies in antiquity, the geographical groundwork of city states and empires, to the emergence of the modern state system in which the absolutist transition of feudal

systems was crucial, the overview of contemporary border studies is mapped out in terms of debated issues such as globalization and trade, security and terrorism, environmental protection, tourism, health and ethics, among others. Moreover, the book also illustrates how the spatial manifestation of sovereign states caused by supra-nationalism and regionalism challenges the existing state system. Concerning the legal practice of sovereign states, the authors show that the national interests of individual states clash with human rights, in which humanitarian crises manifest themselves, leading to the critical issues such as whether various actors in the international community should intervene or not. In this book, the Arab spring, Darfur, and Guantanamo are illustrated as examples of this argument.

In classical border studies, as chapter four emphasizes, human lives have long been spatially and geographically divided and categorized by various territorial borders, whose main objective is to mark the difference between sovereign states in a Westphalian system. Thus, this fundamental view of modern state system is regarded as a given and hardly questioned. However, the authors underline that the world today is experiencing the dynamics that are brought by “world in motion” in this contemporary era. In this context, the multidisciplinary efforts to address the problematic issues of borders have made progress in the way of our thinking in “the practice of bordering.” The introduction of the notion of “bordering” into border studies opens a new dimension which understands borders as something continually “being made.”

The authors make a point that we are also likely to observe contradictory forces and processes pertaining to borders. The removal of barriers in the acceleration of the flow of goods and people and the emergence of new barriers after the attacks of September 11 are taking place simultaneously. It can be said that the dual process of “de-bordering” and “re-bordering” occurs on a global scale. It is worth mentioning the development of a new concept of “border permeability,” which refers to the filtering out of the wanted and the unwanted.

In light of the above, the main aim has been set out to offer a critical understanding of territorial borders which has been one of the central points of the scholarly inquiry in the field of border studies. The authors seek to go beyond the descriptive and static nature of borders and to clarify the inherent complexities and their essentially contested nature. They argue against the idea that our future world may lose borders and we are evolving toward a “borderless world.” In short, borders are constantly changing with respect to different border function at different place and time. The authors explicate that such an understanding is suitable for novices of border studies and general readers. They also display how to examine the multifaceted aspects of borders which are continuously in the making.

The reviewer has had the honor of translating this book into Japanese. My

intention is to offer a concise and informative textbook of border studies because such a textbook is difficult to find not only in Japan but in East Asia. I believe that the knowledge from such books is crucial in order to understand the regional dynamics in East Asia. Japan has territorial issues with neighboring countries such as South Korea, China, and Russia. Conventional wisdom has it that these borders are state borders in the form of fixed and rigid lines, reflecting the geographical tension in this region. Furthermore, nationalism based on territory makes this picture even more conflictive. This book provides vast implications for East Asia, reimagining borders as multifaceted borders and understanding state borders critically.

Lastly, I would like to make three critical assessments to this text in the hopes to develop border studies further as a discipline. First, as in all interdisciplinary fields, terminologies and definitions become crucial. We often use terms as border and boundary, borderland and border region, trans-border and cross-border interchangeably. However, this may pose a problem when translating into different languages. I, therefore, find a need for developing precise definitions and terminologies. Second, as in all textbooks, we tend to focus on state, national, and international borders between sovereign states. The authors mention that, "Truth be told, most people cross hundreds of geographic boundaries on a daily basis. Some are formal borders ... while others are symbolic or informal" (p. 1). Examples of non-state and informal borders can be found in the text, but are treated with less attention. Third, it seems that the authors have expanded the concept of borders. They demonstrate the breadth of borders such as political, economic, socio-cultural, and historical borders. I believe that the next step is the creation of a concrete methodology. Clues for such methodology may be found in the case studies illustrated in their previous book titled "*Borderlines and Borderlands (2009)*." If case studies are the next step, how can we distinguish area studies from border studies? A mere accumulation of case studies will not contribute to the theoretical development of border studies. In short, how do we reach "the status of a unified scientific subfield" (Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly)? Having said this, however, as all great books do, the book leaves you with immediate and imminent questions for further intellectual inquiry.