

Name: Andreas Vasilache, M.A., Assistant and Lecturer  
Period of the Mobility: 1 April 2006 – 31 May 2006  
Home Institution: Institute of Political Science  
Justus-Liebig University Giessen/Germany

Supervisor at  
Home institution: Prof. Dr. Reimund Seidelmann  
Host Institution: Political Philosophy Group, Department of Philosophy,  
University of Florence (GARNET JERP 5.2.1)  
Host: Prof. Dr. Furio Cerutti

### Research outline

Research concerning the theoretical conceptualisation of borders and boundaries is still not very advanced and hence this field can be identified as a desideratum. As Onora O'Neill points out *Boundaries creep into political philosophy without us noticing* (1998). At the same time, there are quite a lot of scientific investigations on concrete international boundaries and national borders. One can find for example case studies about the border between the FRG and the GDR, about the international boundaries in Eastern Europe, about the future and the security of the national borders in Europe and about the rejection of immigrants at the European borders. There are also empirical analyses concerning questions of social and cultural identity and differentiation. Besides, the topic of the boundary can be detected particularly in the humanities and mainly in the studies of literature. What these investigations have in common is *firstly* the absence of a theoretical discussion and conceptualisation what boundaries in a general sense are or could be and *secondly* the fact that these analyses deal with very specific borders and boundaries which mostly are of empirical relevance. Especially the absence of systematic and theoretical conceptualisations of borders and boundaries in political science is to be noticed. Apart from casual introductory remarks, the topic of the border is virtually inexistent in both political philosophy and political science in general, apparently because borders and boundaries are regarded as pre-theoretical empirical facts. And though empirical analyses and case studies are important, they can not replace a systematic discussion about the nature of borders and boundaries which should include the political-philosophical, the practical-political and the methodological dimension of borders, boundaries and frontiers.

In order to discuss the significance and meaning of the notion of the border, the first theoretical step of my research concentrates on the philosophical foundation myths of the modern state, i.e. on the most popular social contract theories (Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau). It seems reasonable to ponder if it is possible to expose a 'topos of the border' which connects the different contractualist theories. The main hypothesis is thereby that social contract theory contains an implicit methodological border-theory which has to be regarded as the epistemological condition for the political conceptualisation of borders and boundaries.

After having discussed the idea of the border in social contract theory, poststructuralist theories (especially Foucault and Agamben) with regard to the border theme will be analyzed. I think that it will be possible to prove that the animadversion on enlightenment's logocentrism articulated in postmodern theories refers particularly to the idea of borders, boundaries and limitations in social contract theory and enlightenment philosophy.

In many postmodern and poststructural theories the idea of the border is of particular importance, even if it is only in an implicit manner. *Firstly*, one has to take into account the epistemological focus in many poststructuralist theories (see for example Foucault, but also Derrida and Butler). The discussion about the scientific production and distinction between subjects and objects as well as the debate about the epistemological basis and preconditions of scientific criteria, classes and categories are necessarily

based upon particular ideas of borders, boundaries and demarcations and thereby emphasise the methodological impact of boundaries and limitations. *Secondly*, the criteria and conditions of individual and collective affiliation and exclusion are especially relevant for many postmodern theorists. Even though this refers again to the methodological impact of boundaries and limitations, the political implications of such a methodological conception are quite obvious. *Thirdly*, the quite new and much discussed approach of Giorgio Agamben and Judith Butler on the nature of modern sovereignty has to be mentioned. There are two reasons why the theoretical considerations of Agamben are relevant for the border topic. a) Agamben discusses the intellectual history of modern sovereignty and focuses thereby on classical philosophy of the state. His philosophic considerations are located in a theoretical field in-between poststructuralism and classical state theory. As I see it, this theoretical combination could provide a basis for important results in view of the border theme. b) Apart from this, Agamben's concept of sovereignty is linked to the state of emergency and thus modern sovereignty can be regarded as a border phenomenon. From the theoretical perspective of Agamben, the primary function of sovereignty is to decide on the local or temporal suspension of law and, thereby, to define and fix the boundaries and limits of law.

Irrespective of the special focus of a particular postmodern theory<sup>1</sup>, it can be pointed out that in the majority of cases poststructural theory deals with conditions and criteria of inclusion and exclusion and consequently with the constitution and modification of borders, boundaries and limits.

In the works of poststructuralist theorists the border theme appears primarily in its methodological dimension and is not fully explained. While in social contract theory the *political* dimension of borders and boundaries is obvious (even if it is not explicated), in poststructuralist theory an implicit, but obvious presence of a *methodological* idea of boundaries can be realised. At the same time the postmodern criticism of the enlightenment turns out to be based in particular upon methodological reasons.

Recapitulating, it has to be emphasised that in every approach mentioned above, questions on borders, boundaries, limits and demarcations play an important role. But because of both the limitation to the methodological meaning of borders and the special scopes of the different theories (gender, aesthetics of living, culture/identity, sovereignty, globalised governmentality), an elaborate and systematic analysis of the notion and the concept of borders and boundaries which includes both the methodological and the political dimension still does not exist.

Thus, after this second theoretical step of my research which focusses on poststructuralist thought, the following five questions are discussed in detail:

- a) Can the postmodern and poststructuralist criticism of the philosophy of the enlightenment be understood as an objection against the concept of boundaries and limitations in social contract theory?
- b) What does the relationship between the political and the methodological dimension of the border idea look like in poststructuralist theory?
- c) What kind of ideas and concepts of borders and boundaries are created and proposed by poststructuralist theory?
- d) What are the results of a comparison between the idea of the border in social contract theory and in poststructuralism?
- e) To what extent do essential theoretical and practical concepts and attributes of the modern state (sovereignty, monopoly on the use of force, territoriality, rule of law, citizenship) depend on an implicit border theory that works as a subtext to state theory?

---

<sup>1</sup> For a cultural focus see the texts of Homi K. Bhabha, for an identitarian focus see Stuart Hall, for a theory of the aesthetics of living see concept of Wilhelm Schmidt and for a feminist, respectively queer focus see Judith Butler and Nancy Fraser. This variety of different topics and fields of interest is the reason why there is no systematic poststructuralist concept of borders and boundaries as a whole.

## Research outcomes of the mobility

### *Contribution of the mobility to GARNET in general and to the JERP 5.2.1*

The question of the drawing and deletion of ethnical, political and epistemological borders is of relevance for different main research fields within the JERP 5.2.1 and it can contribute in different ways.

- a) First of all, a sophisticated discussion of the notion of the border in modern state philosophy is of relevance to interpret and to explain the European Integration Process and its dynamics in a theoretically profound manner. Thus, my project can contribute to the general understanding of the European Integration and therefore is also a contribution to European Studies in general.
- b) But a discussion of the complex notion of the border which includes and unites its political and its epistemological level of meaning can be also an important contribution to more concrete research questions that are pursued in the JERP 5.2.1. I strongly believe that questions of collective and/or individual identity are based on a specific political and epistemological idea of ethnical, racial, religious and gender boundaries, i.e. of identitarian boundaries.
- c) Apart from that, the discussion on the possibilities and problems of a European public space shows of course various overlapping questions with my project as the concept of the border (from its logical infrastructure) is a *spatial* notion.
- d) Because my project can be considered to be basic research on the modern state, I also focus on elementary attributes of stateness (as for instance sovereignty, monopoly on the use of force, territoriality, rule of law, citizenship). Therefore, and because of its basic approach, my research project could contribute to a better understanding of the very foundations of the modern state and, thus, can help to explain the reasons of the possibilities and difficulties of inter-, trans and supranational integration processes.

### *Contribution of the mobility to my research*

- a) My project will highly benefit from the cooperation with the *Political Philosophy Group* as this joint work would provide the possibility to check the theoretical and philosophical validity of my approach from different points of view.
- b) Furthermore the variability of theoretical and philosophical approaches that are pursued in the group will allow a very complex and extensive discussion of my project.
- c) The work within the *Political Philosophy Group* will also provide a global validation of my work. This is especially important for my research project as this project – which is my PhD thesis – will be in its final stage.
- d) The more specific scientific questions that are dealt with in the group will allow to check the potential of operationalization of a general and inclusive notion of the border. As my work can be characterized as a basic approach, I will be able to empirically “test” (of course not in a quantitative sense) my conclusions and theoretical propositions. Thus, not only the work within the group but also the cooperation with different projects within this group will contribute to my own research.