Political borders have moved from the margins to the center of politics. The evolution of borders and the shifting of border controls, both in space and temporally, simultaneously reflects and produces changes in the modern system of sovereign states and how states are approaching security. From this perspective, it is not surprising that research on borders has become of great interest to social science scholars across various disciplines.

Matthew Longo’s *The Politics of Borders: Sovereignty, Security, and the Citizen after 9/11* provides an interesting and important contribution to discussions of the evolution of state borders since 9/11 and the problematics of new security thinking. The book starts with the notion of a “thin” jurisdictional border and a “thick” institutional border that forms the starting point for Longo’s analysis. He writes: “borders are not just legal limits; they have material embodiment, history and context. They are not merely sites of authority, but also control” in the Foucauldian sense (p.24). The book then moves to the question of the political unit, that is, the historical analysis of borders and frontiers in the context of ancient Greek cities, the Roman Empire, and the modern state system (p.26-40). In this regard, Longo presents the persistence and dynamics of borders in politics. In the following discussion, he continues problematizing the “politics of unit” (p.110). He argues that due to its globalized security cooperation, the US has started to resemble an empire where smaller and weaker states are forced to cooperate and support US security strategies to secure their trade relationship, among other things.

The rest of the book is divided into two parts. Part I focuses on conceptualizing the US land and coastal border as a “perimeter” and is structured around three themes: security in the borderlands; border zones as sites of two sovereignties; and co-bordering. Part II focuses on “ports of entry” from the perspective of data and the politics of identification, sovereignty and trust, and the future of security. The main focus is the Unites States’ borders and bi-national cooperation with its northern neighbor Canada and southern neighbor Mexico, but several chapters scrutinize the
global dimensions of the new security approach and provide examples from the EU, South Africa, and the Caribbean. The book introduces rich empirical material that derives from interviews with border and security authorities mainly in the US but also elsewhere.

Many scholars have argued that state borders cause serious harm for people and groups of people, making the case for an open border policy and even “no borders” (e.g. King 2016). Longo takes a different approach, however. His key interest is not “whether to have boundaries, but what they should look like and where they should lie” (p.41), so that the harm they cause would be minimized (p.9). While in media and public debate the term border usually refers to the exact borderline and walls, etc., Longo emphasizes that borders should be rather seen as “thick, multi-faceted, and bi-national institutions” (p.2). Similarly, scholars studying borders and migration have long contested the idea of a border as a line, arguing that borders, and bordering practices, are enforced in many different sites and contexts within the state territory and offshore, in distant and distinct locations (Mountz 2011). Though Longo approaches borders from a political science perspective, the book certainly serves all academics and scholars who are interested in borders and new security thinking.

The key arguments of Part I are that the border is not a line but a perimeter, comprising, first, the proximate regions of two neighboring states and, secondly, the state’s internal heterogeneity. Longo uses the term heterogeneous inside to argue that some parts of a given territory are less controlled than others and that state space can be analytically divided into a center and a periphery. While the border zone represents the periphery, according to Longo, the border itself can be understood as the center implanted in the periphery. Whereas many academics who study border regions argue that border areas should no longer be seen as state peripheral areas but as nodes of interaction and cooperation, Longo returns to the older idea of peripheral borderlands. Perhaps more important than the geographical location, however, is the conception of periphery as less powerful and, at least partially, under the control of the center. According to the book, borderland people are protected by the state and its security methods, and simultaneously their “loyalty” to the center is considered important (p.66).
In the US, around two-thirds of the population live within 100 miles of land and coastal borders. The so-called 100-mile border zone contains the largest metropoles (e.g. New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco) that hold a central position in the country’s political map and economy (see ACLU 2018).

Longo then widens this idea of periphery to the people. This people approach, I would argue, provides an even more accurate picture of the dimensions of control than the geographical perspective. The state targets its “watchful eye” towards peripheral people in a similar manner as it targets minorities (p.68). Longo also suggests a new kind of citizenship for people living in the border zone. This perimeter zone citizenship would offer a distinct citizenship status for borderland people that would co-exist with their “own” national citizenship (p.98). Perimeter zone citizenship would afford special rights and responsibilities that pertain in the perimeter zone only—for example, the right to cross freely between the states and vote for issues that are of concern in the border zone. This citizenship would be geographically defined, not based on ethnicity (p.102), something that could ideally decrease ethnic discrimination, but, in the worst scenario, the mechanisms of subjugation could multiply. Longo puts forward an idea of border zones as places where migrants could have certain rights, and only later could they possibly move freely to other parts of the country:

In a thin rendering, the border zone could be a place afforded for the re-settlement of refugees and asylum seekers–migrants for whom states have special obligations in international law … A thick rendering might also afford spaces where economic migrants can work. The point is that if border zones can become housing areas for immigrants, you in principle can ameliorate the harms against them (by giving them a space to live and work) without requiring that states have a fully open borders policy. (p.131)

While some ideas like the proposed practical solution to migration and migrants’ rights need to be evaluated from a more critical perspective, Longo, in general, does excellent work in theorizing. I
found the concept of co-bordering, something that describes bi-national security cooperation, especially fruitful for understanding and analyzing the rationales of border control and securitization. Moreover, the concept of co-bordering enables us to make an analytical distinction between different types of cross-border cooperation. In scholarly literature, cooperation across borders is often understood to lower and soften the borders between two or more states. Yet, as Longo shows, security cooperation across borders often resembles more an effort of co-bordering that actually renders borders as thick and pervasive.

Longo’s nuanced analysis points out that co-bordering has considerable implications for our conception of sovereignty. The book starts, firstly, with an understanding that sovereignty is not just about legality but also control. Secondly, it is underlined that state sovereignty is not merely territorial but spatial. The multiple spatialities of sovereignty are well grasped by examining what and how border security practices take place in different locations within, above, and beyond state territory. Longo, like many other scholars (e.g. Jones et al. 2017), indicates that while borders were previously seen as the exact sites where sovereign power is played out—thus a solution to security problems—today borders have become the sites of sovereign anxiety.

In Part II of the book, Longo shows that changes at ports of entry challenge the sovereign decision, or “the state’s right to decide on ‘emigration, naturalization, nationality, and expulsion’” (p.191) in a significant way. Border officers are increasingly reliant on databases stemming from non-national and non-sovereign sources, therefore decisions of entry (i.e. of goods and people) rely on data and algorithms that are not fully controlled by the state. Longo explains how, “[i]n relying on heterogeneous sources, the decision is stripped of sovereign exclusivity” and how “the sovereign state increasingly relies on non-sovereign means”—collaboration, sharing and trust (p.191).

Longo also explains the implications of “data filtering” for citizens. He argues that it changes the relationship between subjects and the state and turns people into non-citizens because, by segmenting people at ports of entry on the basis of “risk scores” rather than citizenship, it enables the state to distinguish between welcome and unwelcome subjects, regardless of citizenship. This “severs the political meaning of citizenship from its legal basis”, rendering subjects “de facto
non-citizens, even if they are *de jure* citizens” (p.18). Longo asks whether “a subject composed of data points” (p.19) foretells the end of the individual. What if the state knows too little, and one is simply seen as a risk to be excluded? And what if it knows too much? How was data collected and why? Who will it be shared with and is it secure? The new politics of data filtering and sharing threatens the freedom of people and their right to privacy—too often securitization doesn’t create more security but, rather, vulnerability (p.163). Post-9/11 security thinking and the algorithms of border control technologies, Longo’s book argues, are not recognizing the unique identity of a subject. Data filtering and sharing has created a problem of a “pixelated” subject—a “subject composed of so many data points that the individual is no longer a meaningful category” (p.224), which raises the question of rights, and perhaps also responsibilities, in the data universe.

The merits of Longo’s book are numerous. The book contains some repetition but this enables the reader to follow the key arguments and theorization. The new security thinking and methods of surveillance emphasized by the author should be of serious concern to all scholars, responsible politicians, and international organizations. Border security practices and techniques are often hidden from the view until they suddenly gain publicity because there has been a serious violation of human and individual rights, data protection or other. Hence, Longo’s work offers an important contribution for highlighting and debating the moral concerns that often follow the process of border securitization. In particular, he accentuates the impact of data gathering and border surveillance on citizens and third country nationals. He concludes by exploring “whether states come to control data, or data comes to control states” (p.224), and emphasizes the importance of taking efforts in order to achieve more socially responsible politics (of borders). Without such efforts, the future of states and citizenship looks rather pessimistic. In Longo’s words, “what was good about states—whatever else was bad about them—was that they *at least* protected their citizens. This appears to no longer be true” (p.197).
References


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