

State Frontiers

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Borders and Boundaries
in the Middle East

EDITED BY

INGA BRANDELL

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Among them the French historian Daniel Nordman, author of the huge *Frontières de France*, the Swedish geographers Gunnar Olsson and Thomas Lundén, both engaged for a long time on the issues of boundaries, territories and mapping. Erik Borg put forward a comprehensive approach to conflicts over borders in the Arab world. Also present at the conference was Nelida Fuccaro, whose work on the Yazidi Kurds in Iraq provided much inspiration, as did the research on the Kurdish conception of the nation by Maria O'Shea. Abbas Vali developed further the question of the impact of nation-state borders on the Kurdish national movement. The door to classic Arabic literature and its vision of territories and boundaries was opened by Richard van Leeuwen, while Burgi Ross delved into the work of a particular author, Salim Barakat, and its treatment of the Turkish-Syrian boundary. Christian Velud presented parts of his extensive research on the creation of a territorial administration during the French Mandate in Northern and Eastern Syria, and Bo Utas, head of the West and Central Asia programme at the Swedish Research Council, developed an analysis of the relationship between language and institutions. Khaled Salih and Khairia Kasmiee analysed boundaries in different contexts, the contemporary Iraqi-Kurdish one and that obtaining during the Mandate in Syria respectively. Etienne Copeaux and Claire Mauss-Copeaux also

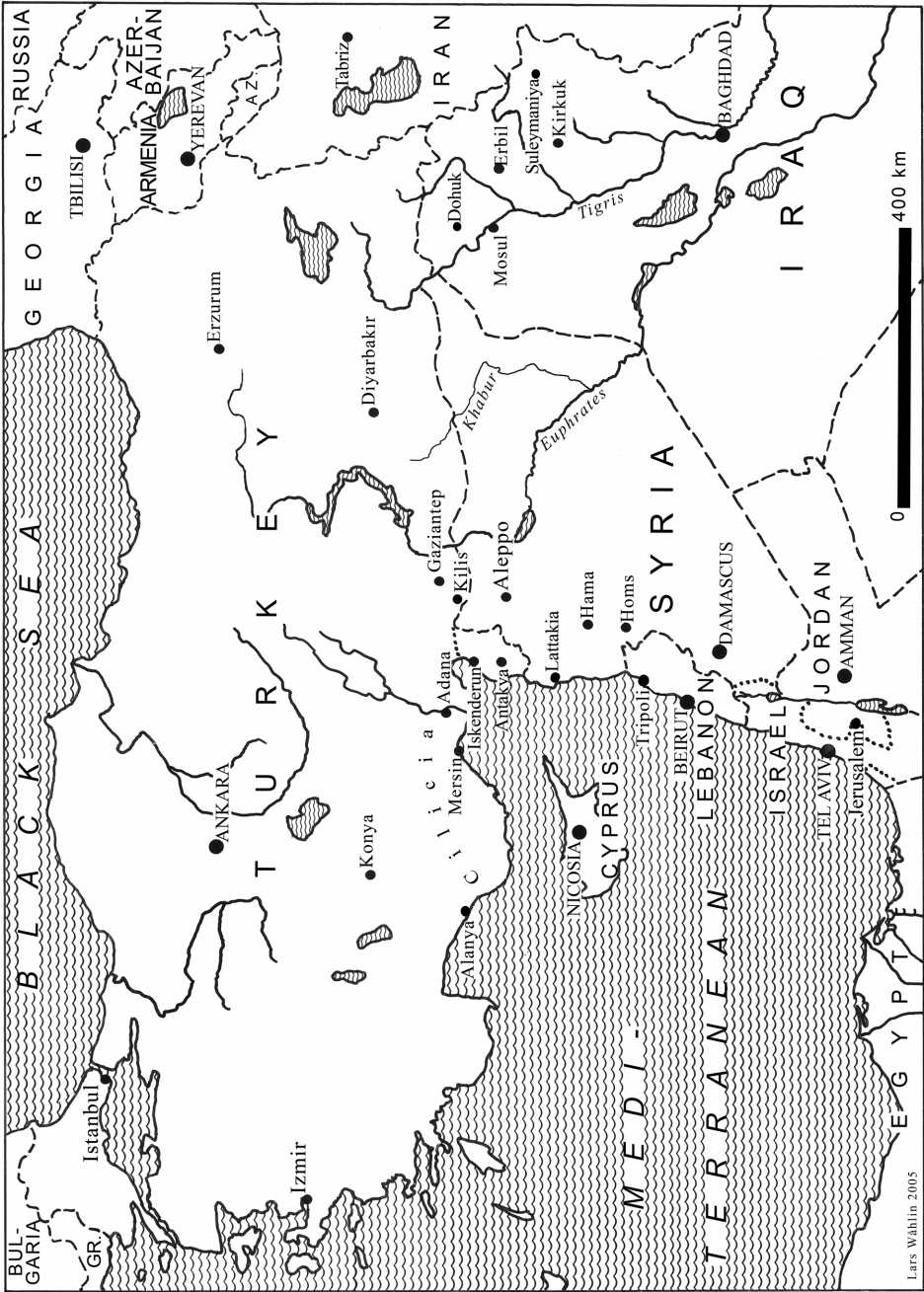
presented a first draft of their work on Cyprus, and Lars Kleberg gave an initial version of what we can now read in this volume.

This inspiration, including that provided by the yearly meetings of the West and Central Asia programme, has had a significant impact on the individual contributions and the work as a whole. Hashem Ahmadzadeh and Salam Zandi, then doctoral and master students, participated actively in the seminars of the project group, while Katarina Carlberg consistently did a great work assisting the project with documentation as well as administration. In the process of bringing all the contributions together for the publication the support given by professor Bo Utas was invaluable. The thorough reading and comments given by the anonymous readers at I.B. Tauris was of great benefit to the authors and the editor, while the efficient help with the English language given by Margaret Cornell, the meticulous editorial work done by Mirja Juntunen and last, but not least, the maps contributed by Lars Wählin, will hopefully have made this volume more readable.

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Finally, a note on transliteration is needed. In order to smoothen the reading of the volume this is strongly simplified in the text, except for Arabic concepts and names. Arabic as well as Turkish names are, when possible, given in their English language international form. *Hamza*, *alif* and *ayn* are generally not indicated. Fuller transliteration is to be found in the endnotes and the bibliography. Therefore, references to newspaper articles in Arabic and Turkish are given in the endnotes after each chapter, while all other references are within brackets in the text.

Map 1 Map of the area



INTRODUCTION

Inga Brandell

This book starts on the *marches*¹ of Europe, in the divided island of Cyprus; it then travels through parts of the Middle East, in particular Syria and Turkey, visits Lebanon and northern Iraq, and finally returns to Europe. Unlike its point of departure, the return is not to the borders of Mediterranean Europe, but to Europe's eastern *marches*, in the lands of Count Dracula. The common topic of the different chapters is state frontiers, borders and boundaries of the nation-state, more precisely the use made of them by individuals and groups of people, and by institutions and governments. Some people use them accidentally when they are simply busy with their own lives; others use them consciously, or on the contrary are constrained by them or outright hindered in their lives. Some uphold them in practice and in imagination. Some construct a discourse about them, perhaps with the purpose of justifying their existence and their actual location, or with the purpose of contesting them and demanding their relocation or even disappearance.

The authors thus have in common a concern with both the concept and the reality of the nation-state boundary, and their relevance to the respective empirical cases. In this introductory chapter the history of the state boundaries in the Middle East is briefly outlined, as well as the general debate on nation-state borders and its relevance for the area. These issues are discussed again in a final chapter, which draws on the findings and analytical approaches in the preceding chapters. Furthermore, underlying the analyses in the different chapters is the questioning of the boundary between cultures, both at a concrete empirical level and at an abstract conceptual level. At the empirical level this concerns the extent to which historical experiences and contemporary conditions diverge such that people and institutions relate to the nation-state border in significantly different ways in different parts of the world. At the conceptual level it raises the question as to the

possibility of addressing a social, political and cultural phenomenon – here the nation-state border – with the conceptions and theories produced from other experiences: is there a common meaning of the state frontier and the nation-state boundary? The latter issue, and the consequences of a proper understanding of it, are explicitly addressed in the penultimate chapter. Hence, although finding its material in the fringes of Europe and in the Middle East, this book is also about nation-state borders and boundaries in Western Europe, and in the Western world generally.

The rest of this chapter will first introduce some selected aspects of the history of Middle Eastern nation-state boundaries, drawing on earlier research. This is meant to constitute an empirical background for the subsequent chapters, and at the same time to introduce some possible different perspectives on the topic. Following this, there is an overview of the conceptual and theoretical issues with reference to the empirical field. The chapter ends with a discussion of methodological questions, and a brief introduction to the various chapters.

State Frontiers in the Middle East

Hatay as an Example

The case of Hatay, since 1939 a Turkish province in the south of that country, but still included under another name in maps of Syria, will serve as an entry point both to the topic, and to the scholarly approaches to it. A long series of publications can be found on this Turkish region situated on the Mediterranean, with its harbour Iskenderun (Alexandretta), historical cities like Antakya, and a border not far from Syria's second largest city, Aleppo. Many of the books on the region were published in the 1930s and 1940s when the conflict regarding its future was at its height. The subsequent cooling of the conflict was never completed, the research interest has persisted and new theses and articles bring the issue up again. To find all the relevant publications, however, it is necessary to search under three different entries: Hatay, which is the name of the Turkish province, Iskanderuna which is the Syrian name and the Sanjak of Alexandretta, the name used during the French Mandate, and still in use among European authors.

Iskenderun, the port on the Mediterranean, was heard of during the winter of 2003, when American soldiers with their equipment were awaiting for the green light from the Turkish parliament to go ashore and move westwards towards the Iraqi border. After a couple of weeks they left Iskenderun. Otherwise, this city has lost some of its importance as the main regional trading harbour to other ports in southern Anatolia. Iskenderun once gave its name to the whole region,² and was an

important part of the negotiations in the early 1920s when this region was first given a special administrative status within the French Mandate, and later ceded by France to Turkey just before the Second World War. Initially the fate of the Iskanderuna/Hatay region lay within the larger context of the conflicts over the upcoming independence of Syria. Turkey regarded most of this territory as Turkish lands, since it lay on its side of the truce lines of 1918 (see map 6, p. 140) had been occupied by the Turkish army for a couple of months; in spite of that Turkey declared in 1923 that it had no territorial claims on Syria. It came to the fore, however, when in 1936 the French Popular Front government signed the document planning for a future independent Syria, and in 1939, after an agreement between France and Turkey, an elected assembly in the Sanjak voted for its integration into Turkey.

At the time a series of articles and books published in Syria or in France took sides, on the whole against the French 'abandon', advancing, in particular, legal arguments. It was questioned how France was able to cede a territory which was not under its sovereignty, since it was only ruling Syria under a mandate from the League of Nations. Simultaneously authors and activists from Kemalist circles, in Istanbul, Ankara and locally, argued that the region was part of the Turkish 'motherland', and even more that the Turkish speakers in Hatay were the majority and were being oppressed. All these historical, social, political and legal issues remained to be brought up again in later works – political pamphlets as well as academic research. Although a slow normalisation has taken place, the conflict is not officially settled, and its intensity is still felt in some of the scholarly works by authors from the region.

Jacques Thobie, French historian and specialist on relations between France and the Ottoman Empire in the late period and more generally on Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean, wrote two versions of a detailed article on 'l'affaire du Sandjak d'Alexandrette' (Thobie 1979, 1985). Consultation of the relevant archives and personal papers in Paris (Foreign Ministry) and Geneva (League of Nations) makes possible a detailed description of how France in the early 1920s was keen to settle the issues with the new Turkish power. The anti-Bolshevik intervention had failed and France could not afford to continue the war. Turkey thus became important as a buffer and an ally in the strategy to contain the Bolsheviks. Turkey, on the other hand, seized the opportunity to break the front it was facing – only in 1923 was it able to oust the Greek army from its future territory – therefore it accepted a treaty in which it was clearly stated that it had no further claims on the territory of the French Mandate, i.e. including the future Hatay.

Thobie's close following of events, involving the work of the Mandate Commission, finally leading to the election of an autonomous assembly in 1938 which in turn immediately decided to integrate with Turkey, a

decision accepted by France, is guided by one main question: namely, *why* France acted against international law, and against the interests and political will of most of the people whose territory it was set to protect through the institution of the Mandate. The answers are to be found among the regular perspectives of political history and international relations, and result from the balance of forces and actions taken by a number of actors, Turkey, France, the Mandate Commission of the League of Nations, and, to a certain extent, the Syrian government. At the most general level the answer will be that only Turkey had a long-term strategy and a clear purpose, which was never the case for France. Or, more precisely, Kemalist Turkey had a clear strategy for *this* territory, while France in both the early 1920s and the late 1930s had other purposes beyond the Sanjak and for which it could be sacrificed. In the 1930s, as is well known, the purpose was to anchor Turkey within an anti-Soviet alliance if there were to be a confrontation with USSR, in which case Turkey had a great geostrategical importance. The question put by Thobie could be answered within a regular analysis of national interests against the background of strategic preconditions in the regional and international context.

Elizabeth Picard revisited the Sanjak in the late 1970s and published her article some years after Thobie (Picard 1983). Her concern, however, is with Turkish Hatay, its economy and its politics. Although she discusses the Sanjak/Hatay as an international issue, its place in Syro-Turkish relations and its impact on them – in fact not very great – her focus is on the effects of the annexation on the region and its population, in particular the Arab minorities, and the handling of the ‘national questions’ in the Sanjak. When she addresses the same historical events of the 1930s as Thobie, she describes them in terms of ‘a conflict between the Syrian and Turkish nationalisms’.³ The outcome then resulted from the much more attractive offer of the Turkish nationalism – a clear identity, reforms in the domains of religion, administration and language, social transformation, even to a certain extent democratisation, and a prestigious political leader, Atatürk – which together unified the potential local constituency. For the Arabs in the Sanjak, in contrast, the Syrian claim to keep the region within its boundaries meant at the time remaining at least for a period under French rule, as the government in Paris had refused to ratify the treaty of independence. Furthermore, the Arab population in the region, which was schematically made up of Alawites, Christians and Sunni Muslims, adopted different approaches. The Alawites preferred to have as few relations with any central power as possible, the Christians feared a Muslim government, while some Sunni Muslims in particular in the higher classes, were in favour of the law and order they could expect from Ankara. The diverging interests of the Arab populations, and the lack of a clear perspective on the Syrian side,

explains why no effective opposition to the annexation by Turkey was raised.

As Picard is able to show, the result was that not only did the Armenians leave following the annexation,⁴ which is well known, but also half the Arab Sunni Muslims, mostly rural labourers. The turkification of names and places that, according to the Turkish law of 1938 was applied in Hatay after the annexation, and an inflow of population from Turkey replacing the rural labour and others who had left took place. 'The Turkish citizens speak Turkish', and Picard observes, when she visits the region in the late 1970s, that the Sanjak citizens of Arab origin, at least the men, speak both Turkish and Arabic. The geographical and economic isolation of the region when it was cut off from the Syrian area of Aleppo, did not mean a lack of integration with Turkey. On the contrary, the presence of the Turkish state was strongly felt through its military, its administration, institutions and monuments. In spite of the turkification, Picard is also able to illustrate the new opportunities for maintaining links with the Arab world, through family connections and affinities, and possible support for local Alawite opposition from Syria in the early 1970s, as well as through emigration for work in the oil-producing countries. Her conclusion, however, returns to the issue of the 'bad treatment' of the national questions in the Sanjak, and she asks if the idea of a federation between Syria, Lebanon and the Sanjak that was discussed in the 1930s could have been a better solution. 'Would such a system, with levels of inclusive sovereignty and flexible relations, have resisted the nation-state model and its destructive surgery?' (Picard 1983: 61).

Picard raises questions of political economy and sociology, and of politics *tout court*, concerning the effects of a transfer of territory, with an underlying problematisation of nation-building and identity issues in the Middle Eastern context. The border and the many possibilities of crossing it, for smuggling or for political reasons, and at the state level the conflicts and cooperation it engenders are also part of her border study. More than a decade later Hatay is again studied, but from a different angle. Martin Stokes approaches the borderland of Hatay from a dual perspective: first, that of the 'identity' of young men in Hatay constantly aware of the border and of otherness – *heterotopia* as he calls it following Michel Foucault⁵ – and, secondly, the place of Hatay as an (Arab) borderland in Turkey, or as a borderland for the Arabs (Stokes 1998). And he does this through a popular musical genre, the *Arabesque*, heavily criticised both in Hatay and in the rest of Turkey, and considered by many to be a 'hybrid Turkish version of Arab popular songs' (Stokes 1998: 265). Here the history of the transfer of territory does not bring to the fore the diplomats and politicians as in Thobie's analysis, or the social and ethnic groups in Hatay as in Picard's study. The transfer takes

its place in an analysis of the symbols of patriarchal national identity, with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as the father. As Hatay has not been conquered militarily as the rest of the country, it remains a 'gendered border' and there is, as it were, writes Stokes, 'a crucial flaw in the masculinity of the border[...]responsible for the steady flow of an Arabness corrupting the Turkish political body, and a femininity which corrupts the vigorous masculinity of the Turkist political principle' (Stokes 1998: 270). The young Turkish men Stokes meets tell him about their fights with 'the Arabs – all *fellahs*', all peasants.⁶ Their use of *Arabesk* music, with its longing and complaints, concludes Stokes, bridges for them the 'gap between nationalism and its all too visible limits', in other words, the power which they as Turks close to the border are entitled to and the real powerlessness of their lives (Stokes 1998: 284).

Read as a kind of progress of nation-building and territorial integration, the combined results of the three studies are quite interesting. Thobie, and to a certain extent Picard, focus on the initial figures, the different censuses and population estimates of the 1930s, both of them coming to the conclusion that no objective evidence made this region Turkish. Picard then, when describing Turkish Hatay, lays stress on the ongoing turkification, even discussing whether the Alawites are hiding their Arabness, and she has difficulties in knowing whether the people have 'become' Turks, if they know and speak Arabic or not. In Stokes' later field-work there is no longer any doubt that the region is part of Turkey, one proof of this being that Arabic does not seem to be forbidden in public places any more. But, on the other hand, when this 'Arabness' of the region is definitely out of the question and largely depoliticised, then it comes back in the form of *Arabesk* music, referring to Arabness both in its name and in its content.

Are these studies about the border? Thobie's is the history of how an international boundary was moved from one side of a region to the other – the political history behind the bounding of territories into sovereign nation-states. Picard's field study has its main focus on the difficulties of nation-building resulting from such a story as Thobie relates, in particular as regards the minority population, but also on the remaining conflict between Syria and Turkey over the territory, in other words the illegitimacy, as viewed by Syria, of the actual boundary. Stokes' approach finally is based on the argument that borders create problems for those whose lives they frame, because the modern state with its symbolic apparatus does not fade out on the border. On the contrary, it intensifies in order to coerce or persuade local populations to accept its presence and jurisdiction. Furthermore, the contemporary 'contradiction between nationalism and globalisation' (Stokes 1998: 263), is intensified in border regions where the boundaries cut through formerly undifferentiated territories. Implicitly, then, his analysis of 'Turkishness' stands out more

strongly because of the Arab otherness on the other side of the border – and on the Turkish side as well. The three studies are different examples of what border studies can be about. No doubt they also constitute a good introduction to the empirical question of the borders and boundaries in the Middle East. Hatay is, in the words of another author who has written about the case – a geographer this time, Stéphane Yerasimos – an ‘aberration’, and he further claims that ‘like all extreme situations it does well in disclosing the process of territorial formation of the states of the Middle East’ (Yerasimos 1988: 198).

Political Boundaries and Territories

The political boundaries or state frontiers in this volume consist first of a line running east-west between two very ‘different territorial formations’ as Yerasimos calls them. In the north of it lies the territory resulting from the Turkish national and military mobilisation to reconquer Anatolia and as much as possible of the territory lost following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. And to the south of the line lie the territories formed by the British occupation for limited political purposes, and ruled, on the one hand, by former Great Power agreements and, on the other, by strategic interests regarding the oil resources. The borders further south as well as north south through the Levant are thus essentially a result of power brokering and movements on the ground by European troops. The power brokering had as its background the division made before the war, in view of its imminence and the expected downfall of the Empire, of the Ottoman territory into regions controlled or ‘influenced’ by various European powers. In contrast to the creation of nation-states within the Balkan part of the former Ottoman Empire, where national movements prepared the ground and more or less obtained their desired territory, the national movements in the areas south (and east) of Turkey either received a different territory from the one they wanted, or were unclear about the territory to which they aspired.

These boundaries were all drawn in the aftermath of the First World War, when the principles of the Westphalian sovereign nation-state were dominant, with the concept of sovereignty now understood in the double sense of an inviolable right to a territory *and* the right of every people to self-determination if it so desired. Never before or after have so many commissions investigated and so many ‘peoples’ expressed their will concerning their ‘sovereignty’.⁷ Only to a limited extent were these principles applied in the Middle East, however. There was indeed a report following a visit to the Sanjak of Alexandretta by the Mandate Commission of the League of Nations. Surprisingly, it came to the conclusion that a majority of the seats in the region’s assembly should go

to the Turks of the region. The population census was contested by both sides, as people themselves could choose in which category they wanted to be counted, with the possible overlapping of the categories.⁸ In the Middle East, as in Europe, the effort to define 'peoples' meant searching for ethnographic, often linguistic, and historical evidence in order to produce statistical categories and overviews. Independently of the immediate impact of the work of the commissions, they introduced a whole battery of concepts linked to sovereignty and its content. As related by Nelida Fuccaro, in the case of the Iraqi-Syrian and Iraqi-Turkish borders the Permanent Mandate Commission thereby fostered among the people they encountered new ways of self-definition whether in terms of 'majority' or of 'minority' (Fuccaro 1999: 132ff).

On the whole, however, two conclusions drawn by Yerasimos in his article on the current political boundaries in the Middle East are worth repeating. First, that until the early nineteenth century only one political frontier existed, that between the Ottoman and the Iranian Empires, forged by centuries of struggle between them. This frontier corresponds, with minor differences, to the current international boundaries between Iran and Iraq, and between Iran and Turkey. The other boundaries were established in the absence of consultation with the local populations as regards their location, and even the creation of new states.⁹ The major exception to this is Turkey, where those who inherited the vanquished Ottoman Empire, constituted a national movement able to exploit the divisions amongst the European powers and also to impose facts on the ground. The motives for the European powers were, in the first place and without doubt, the oil resources in the region (Yerasimos 1986: 123, 157). In this context the important consequences were that a boundary was drawn between Lebanon and Syria in order to strengthen the French foothold in the Middle East through its long-standing relations with the Lebanese Christians.

Furthermore, the boundary between Syria and Turkey became located further south than initially planned by the French, as a concession to Turkey, because France wanted to keep the Sanjak, with its economic linkages to Aleppo and to the regions that became Iraq (Thobie 1985: 99). The boundary between Syria and Iraq came to include territories in Syria, which had never been thought about as Syria, since the mandate was carved out when the issue of the Mosul region, now northern Iraq, was still unsettled.¹⁰ Finally, with regard to this last region, Turkey was in the end unable to uphold its stand of treating the facts on the ground at the time of the truce in 1918 as the basis for the future boundaries. The British military advance following the truce, and the extensive commission efforts, led to the end-result that Mosul was included in Iraq, under the British Mandate. So, though Turkey was able after two decades to impose the truce lines as its boundaries in the Sanjak this was

not the case with Mosul. In this volume Lundgren discusses the tensions and paradoxes in Turkish policy towards this region since the first Gulf War.

Borders and Orders¹¹

Borders: Terms and Concepts

This volume has as its main focus the nation-state border. Since the early 1990s there has been an extensive use in social and human sciences of the concepts of borders and boundaries, even frontiers, with different metaphorical meanings and referring to different social phenomena. Even when explicitly referring to a state boundary structuralist and semiotic approaches understand it as a limit,¹² while post-structuralists or post-modernists, regard it as both a limit and a periphery.¹³

Interestingly enough, the different European languages do not have the same capacity to distinguish between terms and concepts. While the Germanic languages have at their disposal only one word – *Grenz* – English and French have a number of different words, which are not even common for the two languages in question. The metaphorical invasion of the words ‘border’ and ‘boundaries’, and sometimes ‘borderlands’, into the social sciences often refer to the seminal work by Fredrik Barth in 1969, in which he elaborates how ethnic groups act to constitute themselves by establishing a border with others (Barth 1982 [1969]). In other cases, the metaphorical use is an answer to post-modern concerns about peripheral conditions, ‘hybrid’ identity and other issues when individuals and groups are facing contradictory demands and diverging cultural norms.

The word ‘frontier’, on the other hand, seems to return in history and political science. This initially French word, originating of course in the military ‘front’, is used for example by the political scientist Malcolm Anderson (1996), and also by the historian Eugene L. Rogan in his book on Transjordan in the late Ottoman period (1999). However, their denotations are quite different. Rogan is studying Transjordan as a case of those outer regions where, although part of the Empire, only local non-Ottoman rule-making and powers prevailed. This was the case, for example, with Libya, the Arabian Peninsula, Eastern Anatolia and the Syrian steppe. These regions became *frontiers* when efforts began to establish direct rule and introduce the institutions of the Ottoman Empire. This is not far from the imperial Roman concept of the *march*, or for that matter the use made by Turner of the term in his influential work on the frontier in American history (1920). Anderson, in turn, quotes the authoritative geographer J.R.V. Prescott who remarks that ‘there is no excuse for geographers using the terms “frontier” and

“boundary” as synonymous⁷; in the former’s opinion, however, this does not correspond to ordinary language and Anderson then uses the word ‘frontier’ to refer to the international boundary, and ‘boundary’ to refer to the limits of political and administrative authorities below the state level.¹⁴ The result is that two contemporary scholars, Anderson and Rogan, use the word ‘frontier’ but with quite different meanings. It can be assumed that Anderson’s choice reflects his understanding and approach to international boundaries, in particular in the European context, where they stand as remnants of centuries of military confrontation, and as such constitute hindrances in different ways in the contemporary drive towards integration.

There is no need here to impose a unified use of terms. The relative, but persistent, plurality of the connotations and denotations of the different terms and their concrete and metaphorical use should be kept in mind, however, as they bear witness to the richness of the historical and intellectual references in play. Rooke reminds us about this in his discussion of the terms in Arabic in this volume.¹⁵ It has been shown that classical Arabic geographers, although describing a politically divided world, lacked a concept for the political boundary or border (Brauer 1995). This has been confirmed by studies of the classical Arabic vocabulary (Miquel 1988) and travelogue narration (van Leeuwen 2000). The conclusion drawn by some authors that general cultural attitudes, based on religion, hindered a conceptualisation of the political borderline is, as Rooke states, an anachronism. First, there was a term for the concrete border marks in classical Arabic times which contradicts the idea of the incapacity to envision the territorial boundary. Secondly, only systematic comparison with non-Arabic material from before the establishment of the modern nation-state would show whether the case is not – which seems the most probable¹⁶ – that nowhere were sharp political boundary lines between countries or peoples conceived of in pre-modern times (Rooke 1997). Of course, modern Middle Eastern languages have later on, like the European languages, transformed the meaning of old terms in order to be able to name contemporary political boundaries and borders.

In the contributions to this volume the international boundaries studied, are sometimes looked upon as *borders*, i.e. the periphery of a nation defined by its centre. They can in this case then be looked upon from the centre, or from the periphery. In other contributions the boundaries are conceived of as *frontiers*, defined by their exclusion of and opposition to what is on the other side of the line. The ‘technical’ term, *boundary*, refers to the line on maps and in treaties, and sometimes marked on the ground.

Borders and Belonging

The first decades of the twentieth century saw intense polemics concerning the nature of political boundaries. Against an earlier judicial understanding of boundaries as the result of treaties between states, some scholars began to assert that there were 'natural boundaries' as well as 'just boundaries'.¹⁷ From this could – and did – follow arguments in favour of the 'correction' of boundaries. These works are important to remember not only for their political consequences but also for their reference to the entity the boundaries surround, a people or a people-state each with its particular characteristics. An organic understanding of the state was here combined with a socio-Darwinist vision of states in eternal competition and struggle. Critics consequently warned about the topic, like the French geographer Jacques Ancel who himself wrote about the geography of boundaries, but considered it 'dangerous for the scholar as it is filled with passions' (1938: preface); or, like the historian Lucien Fèbvre who warned against the justification for all kinds of violent politics offered by what pretended to be a science. 'In reality', wrote Fèbvre in opposition to the German geographers, and particularly Ratzel, 'it is not by beginning with the frontier itself that it can be studied and analysed, it is by starting with the State. *That* type of State, *that* limit to it, and as a consequence *that* frontier in the military and political sense.' (Fèbvre 1962 [1928]: 17-18).

But this line of reasoning was not the one followed in the early twentieth century. Instead there came as the alternative to the organic state with its borders imposed by its very nature, political bounding in application of the principle of the right to self-determination. This was formulated in the American President Woodrow Wilson's 14 points and institutionalised through the League of Nations. In Europe, in cases like the Balkans, Badie comments, the territorialisation on the basis of the principles of sovereignty and every people's right to self-determination led to an extremely severe imposition of identity issues, or what we might call 'ethnification' of politics and territories, imposing only *one* possible belonging (Badie 1995: 46). Contrary to the assumption behind this policy, several contributions to this volume, as well as the above-mentioned case of Hatay/Iskanderuna, clearly show that people often have more than one option when urged to answer the question who they are, in terms of 'people' or ethnicity. Recent historical research, for example on the Syrian Arab national movement in the 1920s and 1930s, has illustrated that the fact that people spoke Arabic, or 'were Arabs', did not necessarily entail that they opted to become citizens in an Arab state instead of the former Ottoman, at the time Turkish, state, were they given the opportunity to chose.¹⁸ Examples are also given by Fuccaro, and others, of sometimes surprising positioning, like, for example, the

alliance between certain Kurdish and Armenian circles in a common nationalist mobilisation and project. Fuccaro takes the analysis further. In her work on the Yazidi Kurds, she states that 'the emergence of Iraqi minorities was a historical necessity of state building [...] It was a process of re-definition of boundaries between state and communities which resulted from the consolidation of modern institutions and which was clearly affected by the fixation of national frontiers in the region.'¹⁹

The inclusion that the boundaries produce – the belonging and the citizenship, or as Joel Migdal puts it, identity and status (2004: 15) – does not precede but results from *that* State – as Fèbvre wrote – which defines not only its boundaries but also, through its institutions, the categories and conditions of possible inclusion: *millets*, citizenship, majority, minority. Although it may seem so, this is not contradicted by recent research on the pre-modern establishment of international boundaries, as for example the often quoted works by Peter Sahlins on the establishment of different portions of the French-Spanish border (Sahlins 1989, 1998). Sahlins develops an argument against the state-centric perspective, characterising classics like Karl Deutsch and Reinhard Bendix. In contrast to them, he describes the border populations as both autonomous and active parts in the enforcement of the international boundary and the ensuing national institutional integration and cultural assimilation. One of his cases concerns one 'people', all Catalans in the Cerdanya region, who interestingly enough participated in the division of themselves and their double transformation into French and Spanish citizens respectively. Contrary to expectations these Catalans had *more* difficulties than the central national commissioners from Paris and Madrid in coming to terms and reaching a compromise in the process of delimiting the boundary. The bounding of France and Spain, in this case, took place within a context of local competition and conflicts. Sahlins, like Fuccaro, looks into the local society to discover the articulation between the conflicts and lines of division within it and the context and conjuncture linked to the establishing of the boundary – and the nation. The boundary and the nation were not imposed on these people; they pushed for its enforcement. Nevertheless, it was only through the creation of central state institutions, and concomitantly a national ideology, that this new possibility for them to handle their local conflicts and alliances occurred.

As mentioned, the seminal article by Fredrik Barth in 1969 has had a great influence on how the new boundary and border studies are conducted. If, in the early twentieth century the focus was on the nation-state and the polemics concerning its 'nature', scholars in the latter part of the century focused on the 'ethnic group', sometimes inducing reasoning at the level of state and nation as if there were congruence. When Sahlins, for example, wants to explain how the Catalans, both

immigrant Spanish and French living together in the more developed French part, still kept their identity as different nationals, he refers to Barth with the following quotation: 'Categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained *despite* changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories' (Sahlins 1998: 52; Barth 1982: 10). The question should, however, be raised as to whether the primordial or instrumental need or desire to be part of a group and the reproduction of the group, despite changing membership, which is Barth's argument can be relevant in Sahlins's case. Do people – here the French and Spanish Catalans – stick to their nationality as if it was an 'ethnic group'? Do not the state institutions, the linkage to a political centre, turn nationality into something different, which cannot be reduced to group belonging and identity? Does it not, in particular, join the two dimensions of 'belonging' and of inclusion in politics, and thereby create an access to what is beyond the group itself, even beyond the nation? In the Middle Eastern context Fuccaro relates, for example, how the Yazidi Kurds and other groups in the Iraqi mandate, through their inclusion into the modern state institutions, also began to directly address the international arena, at that time the League of Nations (Fuccaro 2000: 4).

In his introduction to an interesting collection of research on boundaries and belonging in the contemporary world, Migdal claims that the polemics between those who consider that the state boundaries are no longer relevant and their opponents who still see them as fundamental, might be creating a 'false dichotomy'. 'It may be more accurate, he states, to think of a world of multiple boundaries overlapping one another', producing numerous mental maps and many different forms of belonging, sometimes comfortable to combine, sometimes not (Migdal 2004: 22-3). In this contribution Migdal continues his important 'deconstruction' of the state and complexification of the understanding of the relation between state and society already developed in previous works (Migdal 2001). Although stressing that the state – or its fragments – remains 'at the center of the vortex', it is not clear, however, if there remains any reason to distinguish between the nation-state boundary and all the other boundaries dividing groups and surrounding individuals. While it is certainly true that what can briefly be called globalisation works in the direction of the proliferation of borderlines and concomitant belongings, it is still the case though that the nation-state remains, with Etienne Balibar's words, 'the principle reducer of complexities in the world' (Balibar 1988: 243). As such, it constitutes – with its boundaries – not only a fallback but also a powerful competitor to the cosmologies otherwise mainly offered by