

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial: The African Border Paradox - A Necessary Curse or a Missed Benediction?

Jama Musse Jama 11

Introduction: Contested Sovereignities: Legitimacy, Power, and the Negotiation of Postcolonial Borders.
Clare Bath 15

Understanding Malawi and Tanzania Border Dispute on Lake Malawi (also known as Lake Nyasa).

Raega Omar 35

A Mirage of Protection: Statelessness and Legal Failures in Côte d'Ivoire

Aimee Watkins 57

Review of "Smugglers, Speculators, and the City in the Ethiopia-Somalia Borderlands" By Daniel K Thompson, Cambridge University Press, 2025

Théa Klement 87

U.S.-China Strategic Competition in the Horn of Africa and Implications for Regional Security.

Nasir M. Ali 91

Citizenship as a Contested Global Caste Order: How Political Rhetoric Creates Symbolic Boundaries in World-System.

Farrah Bennet and Ana Velitchkova 123

Contested Sovereignities: Legitimacy, Power, and the Negotiation of Postcolonial Borders

An introduction to the Special Issue

Clare Bathⁱ

University of Notre Dame

Abstract

This special issue brings together scholars who explore the consequences of the postcolonial political-economic world system, illuminating how borders are made, contested, and lived in different contexts. Collectively, these contributions move beyond descriptive accounts of postcolonial borders to investigate their ongoing production through power, economy, and mobility. I argue, and the articles in this issue illustrate, that postcolonial states continue to grapple with the location and (in)permeability of inter-state borders, a process that informs states' position in the global economy and shapes the politics of citizenship. Furthermore, these state dynamics are embedded in broader transnational processes, as borders are transcended by donors, NGOs, social movements, diasporas, and (il)licit economic networks that frequently navigate and contest the formal boundaries of state power. In sum, borders are far less fixed than they are often portrayed; they are continually reshaped and negotiated amid securitization, economic dependencies, and shifting geopolitical alliances. The articles in this issue invite readers to rethink borders not as static boundaries but as dynamic processes that reflect the enduring entanglements of sovereignty, legitimacy, and belonging in the postcolonial world.

Keywords: World Systems Theory, Africa, Postcolonialism, Decolonialism. Postcolonial borders, sovereignty, border politics, legitimacy, world-systems theory, Africa, transnationalism, citizenship, global inequality, border contestation

Cite as: Clare Bath, 2026. Contested Sovereignities: Legitimacy, Power, and the Negotiation of Postcolonial Borders - An introduction to the Special Issue. *Dhaxalreeb*, 22 (1), pp. 15-33.
DOI: 10.13169/Dhaxalreeb.22.1.0015



Scholars contemporarily operationalize borders as dynamic, socially-constructed boundaries used to designate zones of political authority,¹ regulate economic relations,² and organize nations.³ However, the modern system of inter-state borders and state sovereignty is a relatively recent development. The 1648 Peace of Westphalia is widely credited with establishing the legal right of states to secular sovereignty, particularly in the European context.⁴ Yet, Westphalian sovereignty was not universally afforded. As European powers negotiated and consolidated their own nation-states and borders in the imperial core, they simultaneously constructed a global system of colonial domination. The dissolution of much of the formal British Empire, for example, did not begin in earnest until the 1960s; for much of the world, therefore, state sovereignty is less than a century old.

The enduring legacy of this colonial system continues to deny self-determination to much of the world today. Colonizers drew boundaries with perfunctory regard for pre-existing ethnic, political, and religious groups⁵ to facilitate the systematic extraction of resources instrumental for developing and industrializing the European and North American economies.⁶

¹ Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen, "The political sociology and political geography of borders," in *The SAGE Handbook of Political Sociology: Two Volume Set* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018).

² David B Carter and Paul Poast, "Why do states build walls? Political economy, security, and border stability," *Journal of conflict resolution* 61, no. 2 (2017): 239-270.

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, in *The new social theory reader* (Routledge, 2020).

⁴ Derek Croxton, "The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 and the Origins of Sovereignty," *The International history review* 21, no. 3 (1999): 569-591.

⁵ Tayyab Mahmud, "Colonial cartographies, postcolonial borders, and enduring failures of international law: The unending wars along the Afghanistan-Pakistan frontier," *Brooklyn Journal of International Law* 36 (2010): 1-52.

⁶ Navid Hassanzadeh, "Africa in Du Bois's internationalist thinking," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* (2024): 1-20; W. E. B.

When the era of direct colonialism largely ended in the mid-twentieth century, newly independent states inherited and were left to govern, inhabit, and negotiate these externally-imposed and often contested borders and territories. Now, postcolonial economies typically remain dependent on raw material exports and are relegated to peripheral positions in a world system shaped by hegemonic institutions.⁷ So, while the world system privileges recognized states and treats border stability as the core requirement for full participation, colonialism constructed a global hierarchy in which these same borders force many states into subordinate political and economic positions in the world order today. This dual political *and* economic structural subordination is exemplified in the case of Somaliland, where the journal *Dhaxalreeb* is located. Although Somaliland has functioned as a de facto independent democracy with a strong national identity for more than thirty years, it remains unrecognized and legally enclosed within Somalia's *de jure* borders, impacting its economy, politics, and global position.⁸

While this special issue, *Borders Unbound: Power, Identity, and the Making of Boundaries*, was inspired by research from and about Somaliland, this reckoning with borders and global powers is not relegated only to de facto states. As the articles in this issue illustrate, *de jure* states also continue to grapple with the location and (in)permeability of inter-state borders. In this introduction, I conceptualize borders as relational sites where power is continually exercised and contested across local, national, and transnational spheres. I argue, as evidenced by the contributions of this special issue,

Du Bois, "The realities in Africa-European profit or Negro development," *Foreign Affairs* 21 (1942): 721.

⁷ Paul Almeida and Chris Chase-Dunn, "Globalization and social movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (2018): 189-211; John Walton and Charles Ragin, "Global and national sources of political protest: Third world responses to the debt crisis," *American Sociological Review* (1990): 876-890.

⁸ For more on Somaliland, see the work of Jama Musse Jama, Tirsit Yetbarek, and Scott Pegg. Interested readers should also follow the burgeoning diplomatic relations between Somaliland and Israel, a case of sovereignty being negotiated and contested in real time.

that the politics of sovereignty and belonging are fundamentally *unbound*, controlled and defined not only by great state powers and economies, but also shaped by a complex ecosystem of multi-scalar actors navigating, fortifying, and contesting formal boundaries.

Here, territorial boundaries are understood to be contested and sustained by relational networks of economic, military, political, and ideological power.⁹ For example, the placement of borders has direct implications for states' access to resources (e.g. oil, gas, or shipping ports) and, as a result, economic development.¹⁰ Even those postcolonial states with access to such resources remain disadvantaged by global economic dependencies that perpetuate unequal trade with wealthier states.¹¹ Economic inequalities are maintained by military and political power. Core states' geopolitical relations and inter-state alliances serve to maintain global political and economic hierarchies, which at times threaten regional stability and national sovereignty.¹² Then, these relations are justified and bolstered by core-power leaders' leveraging of ideological power, as political rhetoric of the leaders of core powers impacts the perceived value of peripheral states' passports and national citizenship. Still, citizenship in a country of residence is not a given, as postcolonial conflicts and identities shape the politics of belonging, as some are refused citizenship while others enjoy the rights and privileges of legally belonging to a state, from access to healthcare to safety and political representation.¹³ Then, these state dynamics are both enabled and contested by

⁹ Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 3, Global Empires and Revolution, 1890–1945*. Vol. 3. (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Raege Omar, "Understanding the Malawi and Tanzania border dispute on Lake Malawi (Lake Nyasa)," *Dhaxalreeb* 21, no. 2 (2026): 35-56.

¹¹ John Walton and Charles Ragin, "Global and national sources of political protest"; Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Modern World System" *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings* 427 (1993).

¹² Nasir Ali, "U.S.–China Strategic Competition in the Horn of Africa and Implications for Regional Security," *Dhaxalreeb* 21, no. 2 (2026): 91-122.

¹³ Aimee Watkins, "A Mirage of Protection: Statelessness and Legal Failures in Côte d'Ivoire," *Dhaxalreeb* 21, no. 2 (2026): 57-86.

broadier transnational processes and actors. Borders are transcended by donors and inter-governmental organizations;¹⁴ NGOs and social movements;¹⁵ diasporas, refugees, and immigrants;¹⁶ states executing transnational repression;¹⁷ and (il)licit economic networks that frequently navigate and contest the formal boundaries of state power.¹⁸

State-to-state entanglements offer perhaps the most visible examples of border contestation and fortification. Disputes regarding the placement and permeability of borders implicate states at all echelons of the world economy and, at times, escalate into violence. We see this dynamic play out in Africa, from Sudan and South Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia, to Somaliland and Puntland, and beyond, between Pakistan and India (Kashmir) and in the ongoing conflict following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Africa, in particular, has long been a central site of such contestation. The continent has a history of postcolonial border disputes, and critical scholars argue that Africa has served as a testing ground for international law and Western intervention,¹⁹ or, perhaps as an overcorrection to prior

¹⁴ John Walton and Charles Ragin, "Global and national sources of political protest"; Philip McMichael, "Globalization: myths and realities," *Rural sociology* 61, no. 1 (1996): 25-55.

¹⁵ Clare Bath and Philip Gamaghelyan, "Benefits and Challenges of Institutionalizing Peacebuilding and Activism in a Post-Liberal World," *International Negotiation* 29, no. 1 (2024): 164-191; Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn A. Sikkink, *Activists beyond borders: Advocacy networks in international politics* (Cornell University Press, 2014).

¹⁶ Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky, "Transnational migration studies: Past developments and future trends," *Annual Review Sociology* 33, no. 1 (2007): 129-156.

¹⁷ Dana M. Moss, "Transnational repression, diaspora mobilization, and the case of the Arab Spring," *Social Problems* 63, no. 4 (2016): 480-498.

¹⁸ Thèa Klement, "Review of 'Smugglers, Spectators, and the City in the Ethiopia-Somalia Borderlands,'" *Dhaxalreeb* 21, no. 2 (2026): 87-90.

¹⁹ Kerstin Bree Carlson, *The justice laboratory: International law in Africa* (Brookings Institution Press, 2023); Zubairu Wai, The empire's new clothes: Africa, liberal interventionism and contemporary world order, *Review of African Political Economy* 41, no. 142 (2014): 483-

involvement, its subsequent neglect, as was most starkly demonstrated during the Rwandan civil war and genocide.²⁰ While states do assert authority to reposition or fortify borders, states also hesitate or refrain from acting, either out of respect for sovereignty or fear of political backlash, even amid urgent crises, revealing the uneven and uncertain norms for exercising power across borders. In sum, borders delineate ill-defined spheres of power, as states vary in their willingness and capacity to assert authority and the norms of engagement are insufficiently established. Such dynamics determine who is protected, who is governed, and who is excluded.

While direct interstate conflicts establish and contest borders through force, securitization reproduces them through law, bureaucracy, and the managed exclusion of non-national 'others.' States often frame borders as sites and sources of insecurity and violence²¹ in order to bureaucratize and deploy them as tools of political, social, economic, and ideological control.²² We see this, for instance, at the borders between the

499; Elizabeth Schmidt, *Foreign intervention in Africa: From the cold war to the war on terror*, No. 7. (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁰ Kathleen Margaret Vogel et al., "Rwanda and Burundi Genocide: A Case Study of Neglect and Indifference (1977)," in *Milton Leitenberg: Pioneering Work on Weapons of Mass Destruction, Wars and Arms Control* (Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025); A. Walter Dorn and Jonathan Matloff, "Preventing the bloodbath: Could the UN have predicted and prevented the Rwandan Genocide?" *Journal of Conflict Studies* 20, no. 1 (2000): 9-52.

²¹ Daniel Béland, "Right-wing populism and the politics of insecurity: How president Trump frames migrants as collective threats," *Political Studies Review* 18, no. 2 (2020): 162-177; Chiara Brambilla and Reece Jones, "Rethinking borders, violence, and conflict: From sovereign power to borderscapes as sites of struggles," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no. 2 (2020): 287-305; Maja Korac-Sanderson, "Bordering and rebordering Security: Causes and Consequences of Framing refugees as a 'Threat' to Europe," *Towards understanding of contemporary migration Causes, Consequences, Policies, Reflections*. Beograd: Službeni glasnik, ISI FF (2017): 25-40.

²² Chiara Brambilla and Reece Jones, "Rethinking borders, violence, and conflict"; Daniel Béland, "Right-wing populism and the politics of insecurity."

United States and Mexico, Poland and Belarus, and Ethiopia and Somalia. Furthermore, these networks of power extend beyond the physical borderline, as states craft laws and agreements that outsource their authority to foreign territories. For example, it is increasingly common for core states to outsource prison and migrant detention centers to countries in the global periphery and semi periphery– the US exports migrants to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, and Italy their migrants to Albania.²³ As states transcend their own borders, sovereignty becomes an increasingly transnational and relational phenomenon, allowing some states to further accrue disproportionate power in the global system. These phenomena underscore a central claim of this introduction: borders are not merely static lines on maps, but relational sites through which sovereignty and power are exercised, negotiated, and projected.

The growing prominence of transnational non-state actors further complicates state-centered understandings of borders and sovereignty, as these actors both reinforce and contest sovereign power across territorial lines. Today, the world becomes increasingly connected via nonstate actors: global capitalist and banking institutions,²⁴ global cities and borderlands,²⁵ the internet and digital communication,²⁶ and cross-border travel

²³ Nick Vaughan-Williams, "Borders, territory, law," *International Political Sociology* 2, no. 4 (2008): 322-338; Giuseppe Campesi, "The 2023 Italy-Albania protocol on extraterritorial migration management. A worst practice in migration and asylum policies," In *CEPS Papers on Liberty and Security* (2023): 1-23.

²⁴ Kimberly Kay Hoang, *Spiderweb Capitalism: How global elites exploit frontier markets* (Princeton University Press, 2022).

²⁵ Victoria Reyes, "Global borderlands: A case study of the Subic Bay Freeport Zone, Philippines," *Theory and Society* 44, no. 4 (2015): 355-384; Saskia Sassen, "Overview of global cities," *Cities and Society* (2005): 81-90.

²⁶ Kennedy Chi-Pan Wong, "Sowing hate, cultivating loyalists: Mobilizing repressive nationalist diasporas for transnational repression by the people's republic of China regime," *American Behavioral Scientist* 68, no.12 (2024): 1655-1678; Dana M. Moss, "The ties that bind: Internet communication technologies, networked authoritarianism, and 'voice' in the Syrian diaspora," *Globalizations* 12, no.2 (2018): 265-282).

and tourism.²⁷ On the one hand, transnational non-state actors and phenomena serve to consolidate state power by perpetuating neoliberalism, facilitating surveillance, and reinforcing core-periphery inequalities.²⁸ On the other, they create pathways for resistance and alternative forms of social and political belonging. Scholars have documented transnational social movements that challenge both repressive states²⁹ and entrenched international norms,³⁰ transnational labor organizations advocate for robust worker protections,³¹ and collaborative projects that cultivate cross-national solidarity and empathy.³² Politics, profit, and community remain geographically ambiguous rather than territorially contained. Taken together, these dynamics point beyond any single causal actor or mechanism, underscoring the need to understand borders as outcomes of intersecting, multiscalar processes and actors.

Borders are far less fixed than they are often portrayed, which has implications both for global governance and the study of hegemony and inequality. They are continually reshaped and negotiated amid securitization, militarization, economic

²⁷ Gary Adler, *Empathy beyond US borders: The challenges of transnational civic engagement* (Cambridge University Press, 2019); Vikramendra Kumar, "Emerging trends in sociology of tourism," *Sociology International Journal* 2, no. 3 (2018): 225-237.

²⁸ Kennedy Chi-Pan Wong, "Sowing hate, cultivating loyalists"; Florian Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism and the Governmentality of Empire, 1893–1982* (Cambridge University Press, 2022); Dana M. Moss, "The ties that bind."

²⁹ Philip M. Ayoub and Lauren Bauman, "Migration and queer mobilisations: how migration facilitates cross-border LGBTQ activism," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 15 (2019): 2758-2778; Dana M. Moss, "Transnational repression, diaspora mobilization, and the case of the Arab Spring."

³⁰ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn A. Sikkink, *Activists beyond borders: Advocacy networks in international politics*.

³¹ Tamara Kay, "Labor transnationalism and global governance: The impact of NAFTA on transnational labor relationships in North America," *American journal of sociology* 111, no. 3 (2005): 715-756.

³² Gary Adler, *Empathy beyond US borders: The challenges of transnational civic engagement*.

dependencies, and shifting geopolitical alliances. These processes intersect with globalized racism,³³ persistent mismatches between nations and the states that house them,³⁴ increased global migration,³⁵ and recurring cycles of violence. Well-intended non-state institutions work hard to redress global inequality; however, they are not immune from its effects, as international institutions designed to promote peace, stability, and development must grapple with their colonial origins.³⁶ Furthermore, efforts to understand the consequences of global inequality are also complicated because academic institutions must grapple with their often-complicated pasts,³⁷ and much of the scholarship on these issues must contend with methodological nationalism and Western biases in research and publishing.³⁸ Ultimately, to empirically address these complexities, scholarship must resist the temptation to assume state power is confined to borders, opting instead for relational

³³ Michelle Christian, *The Global Journey of Racism* (Stanford University Press, 2025).

³⁴ Benedict Anderson, “Imagined communities”; Nina Caspersen, “Making peace with de facto states,” in *Unrecognized states and secession in the 21st century*, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017); Nina Caspersen, *Unrecognized states: The struggle for sovereignty in the modern international system* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013); Scott Pegg, *De facto states in the international system* (Vancouver: Institute of International Relations, University of British Columbia, 1998).

³⁵ Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky, “Transnational migration studies.”

³⁶ Florian Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism and the Governmentality of Empire*, 1893–1982.

³⁷ Sarah Federman and Clare Bath, “The University of San Diego: Curated histories and forgotten stories,” *The Journal of San Diego History* 70, no. 1 (2025): 133-176.

³⁸ Raewyn Connell, “Decolonizing Sociology,” *Contemporary Sociology* 47, no. 4 (2018): 399-407; Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, eds., *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield publishers, 2008). Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, “Methodological nationalism and beyond: nation–state building, migration and the social sciences,” *Global networks* 2, no. 4 (2002): 301-334.

and transnational frameworks to capture how borders, power, and inequality are reproduced and negotiated.³⁹

This special issue does just this, as it explores the causes and consequences of the aforementioned conditions, bringing together five contributions that illuminate how borders are made, contested, and lived in different contexts. The contributions are organized thematically. The opening article situates borders within broader historical and political-economic processes, examining how colonial legacies and state-building projects continue to shape sovereignty and territoriality. The middle contribution, along with the book review, turn to social and affective dimensions, highlighting how borders are lived and contested by local economies, migrants, and activists. The final two articles look outward, considering contemporary geopolitical and transnational projections of military and ideological power that reshape sovereignty and belonging in a globalized world.

In the first article, “Understanding the Malawi and Tanzania border dispute on Lake Malawi (*Lake Nyasa*),” Raege Omar explores a post-independence border dispute, where two recognized states use well-established, yet contradictory, legal rationales to negotiate a border first drawn during the colonial era. On the one hand, Malawi bases its claim to the entire lake on the 1890 Heligoland treaty and the African Union’s affirmation of the *uti possidetis juris* principle, which affirms colonial-era boundaries. On the other hand, Tanzania advocates for splitting the lake at the meridian line, citing international legal precedent. The discovery of valuable hydrocarbon resources has aggravated the conflict, demonstrating how enduring and unresolved colonial legacies—manifested in both physical borders and contradictory international legal precedents—can complicate each state’s role, access, and power within the global economy. This article demonstrates that international law is not always a resource for resolving disputes, but at times reproduces the very ambiguities it purports to settle.

³⁹ Navid Hassanzadeh, “Africa in Du Bois’s Internationalist Thinking; Michelle Christian, *The Global Journey of Racism*; Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*.

The next two contributions investigate how borders and citizenship are lived and experienced by local actors, both as sites of exclusion and transcendence. Aimee Watkin's article, "A Mirage of Protection: Statelessness and Legal Failures in Côte d'Ivoire," examines a case in which state borders are legally recognized, yet the boundaries of the corresponding national community remain contested. A combination of legal contradictions, post-conflict mass migration, inter-ethnic tensions, and a lack of political will has left nearly 700,000 people in Côte d'Ivoire without legal citizenship, despite the country's legal commitments to protect them. Watkins conducted a comprehensive review of international, regional, and national laws, conventions, and reports published between 1960 and 2018 to illustrate how these legal instruments have created what she calls a *mirage* of protection for stateless individuals, rendering legally guaranteed rights inaccessible in practice. More broadly, this article exposes the critical gap between formal human rights commitments and the exercise of sovereign power. The very pathways intended to resolve marginalization can instead serve to normalize exclusion as a permanent condition in both society and law.

Théa Klement reviewed Daniel K. Thompson's 2025 book *Smugglers, Speculators, and the City in the Ethiopia-Somalia Borderlands*.⁴⁰ Drawing on years of ethnographic fieldwork, Thompson describes the historical and contemporary economy surrounding Jigjiga, an Ethiopian city situated near the border with Somaliland. Klement outlines Thompson's argument, as he offers a striking critique of liberal and capitalist theories that bolster narratives about the merit of securitization and law enforcement in borderlands. The book depicts the local economy as a dynamic site of cultural reproduction where goods, both legal and illicit, travel between diverse communities and across borders— a process that both emancipates and constrains these spaces and actors. Klement's review balances modest critique with high praise and highlights implications for researchers and practitioners engaging with peacebuilding, postcolonialism, borderlands, and human security studies.

⁴⁰ Daniel K. Thompson, *Smugglers, speculators, and the city in the Ethiopia-Somalia Borderlands* (Cambridge University Press, 1945).

The final two articles investigate macro phenomena, including geopolitics and soft power. Nasir Ali's article "U.S.-China Strategic Competition in the Horn of Africa and Implications for Regional Security" draws on interviews with regional policy experts and a comprehensive review of policy reports, academic literature, and geopolitical analyses to explore the power dynamics between core, semi-periphery, and periphery states in the Horn of Africa. The region is strategically vital, contested by the U.S., China, and several Middle Eastern powers due to its role in global supply chains and digital infrastructure. Ali details how this multi-layered geopolitical competition exacerbates existing regional security dilemmas, creating a fragile environment susceptible to proxy war that local states are ill-equipped to manage. The article emphasizes the need for revised national policies and stronger regional institutions that prioritize self-determination and dispute resolution, shielding peripheral states from the zero-sum calculations of competing core powers. This article offers implications for scholars of geopolitics, maritime security, African studies, and international peace and conflict studies, highlighting how global connectivity infrastructure increasingly catalyzes external intervention and proxy conflict in a multi-polar world.

Finally, this issue features "Citizenship as a Contested Global Caste Order: How Political Rhetoric Creates Symbolic Boundaries in World-System Hierarchies," by Farrah Bennett and Ana Velitchkova. The authors analyze speeches, press releases, and diplomatic communications from 2025 using qualitative discourse analysis and world-systems theory to examine how political rhetoric both reproduces and contests global citizenship hierarchies. They argue that leaders of core states deploy symbolic language to construct boundaries that rank the perceived value of national citizenships. Paternalistic and stigmatizing discourse institutionalizes a global caste system, ranking human value by national origin, primarily when such claims resonate with domestic audiences and international peers. Conversely, when this rhetoric fails to gain legitimacy, it can spark counter-hegemonic alliances that challenge a state's strategic interests. Bennet and Velitchkova demonstrate that

symbolic boundaries and violence, when successful, perpetuate global stratification and, when unsuccessful, delegitimize perpetrators and offer pathways for resistance.

The five pieces in this issue collectively reveal the paradoxes of borders: they are legally drawn yet frequently contested, selectively include and exclude populations, and are transcended in practice. These dynamics serve as a prudent reminder that borders are not natural or inevitable features of human society but rather social and political constructs that are continually fortified and reshaped.

These paradoxes underscore the importance of critical border studies. Watkins, Omar, Ali, Bennett, Velitchkova, Klement and Thompson not only expose the flaws of the current global system but also highlight the agency and capacity for resistance that persist within it. Their analyses demonstrate that borders are not only sites of control and exclusion but also of negotiation, adaptation, and possibility. This conceptualization of boundary-making, rooted in the empirical findings of this issue, highlights the need for new empirical work that utilizes postcolonial thought to transcend state-centric approaches to understanding nationhood, law, and borders. Learning from the cases in this issue opens pathways for future research and points toward alternative models of belonging and governance in a world where borders remain consequential, contested, and transcended.

Bibliography

Adler, Gary. *Empathy beyond US borders: The challenges of transnational civic engagement*. Cambridge University Press, 2019.

Ali, Nasir. "U.S.–China Strategic Competition in the Horn of Africa and Implications for Regional Security," *Dhaxalreeb* 21, no. 2 (2026): 91-122.

Almeida, Paul, and Chris Chase-Dunn. "Globalization and Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (2018): 189–211.

Anderson, Benedict. "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism." In *The New Social Theory Reader*, 282–288. Routledge, 2020.

Ayoub, Phillip M., and Lauren Bauman. "Migration and queer mobilisations: how migration facilitates cross-border LGBTQ activism." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 15 (2019): 2758–2778.

Bath, Clare, and Philip Gamaghelyan. "Benefits and Challenges of Institutionalizing Peacebuilding and Activism in a Post-Liberal World." *International Negotiation* 29, no. 1 (2024): 164–191.

Béland, Daniel. "Right-Wing Populism and the Politics of Insecurity: How President Trump Frames Migrants as Collective Threats." *Political Studies Review* 18, no. 2 (2020): 162–177.

Brambilla, Chiara, and Reece Jones. "Rethinking Borders, Violence, and Conflict: From Sovereign Power to Borderscapes as Sites of Struggles." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no. 2 (2020): 287–305.

Carlson, Kerstin Bree. *The Justice Laboratory: International Law in Africa*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2023.

Campesi, Giuseppe. "The 2023 Italy–Albania Protocol on Extraterritorial Migration Management: A Worst Practice in Migration and Asylum Policies." In *CEPS Papers on Liberty and Security*, 1–23. CEPS, 2023.

Carter, David B., and Paul Poast. "Why Do States Build Walls? Political Economy, Security, and Border Stability." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 2 (2017): 239–270.

Caspersen, Nina. "Making Peace with De Facto States." In *Unrecognized States and Secession in the 21st Century*, 11–22. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017.

———. *Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

Christian, Michelle. *The Global Journey of Racism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2025.

Connell, Raewyn. “Decolonizing Sociology.” *Contemporary Sociology* 47, no. 4 (2018): 399–407.

Croxton, Derek. “The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 and the Origins of Sovereignty.” *The International History Review* 21, no. 3 (1999): 569–591.

Diener, Alexander C., and Joshua Hagen. “The Political Sociology and Political Geography of Borders.” In *The SAGE Handbook of Political Sociology: Two Volume Set*, 330–346. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018.

Dorn, A. Walter, and Jonathan Matloff. “Preventing the Bloodbath: Could the UN Have Predicted and Prevented the Rwandan Genocide?” *Journal of Conflict Studies* 20, no. 1 (2000): 9–52.

Du Bois, W. E. B. “The Realities in Africa—European Profit or Negro Development.” *Foreign Affairs* 21 (1942): 721–734.

Federman, Sarah, and Clare Bath. “The University of San Diego: Curated. Histories and Forgotten Stories.” *The Journal of San Diego History* 70, no. 1 (2025): 133–176. https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=university+of+san+diego+curated+histories&btnG=.

Hassanzadeh, Navid. “Africa in Du Bois’s Internationalist Thinking.” *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* (2024): 1–20.

Hoang, Kimberly Kay. *Spiderweb Capitalism: How global elites exploit frontier markets*. Princeton University Press, 2022.

Kay, Tamara. "Labor transnationalism and global governance: The impact of NAFTA on transnational labor relationships in North America." *American journal of sociology* 111, no. 3 (2005): 715-756.

Keck, Margaret E., and Kathryn A. Sikkink. *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014.

Klement, Thèa. "Review of 'Smugglers, Spectators, and the City in the Ethiopia–Somalia Borderlands.'" *Dhaxalreeb* 21, no. 2 (2026): 87-90.

Korac-Sanderson, Maja. "Bordering and Rebordering Security: Causes and Consequences of Framing Refugees as a 'Threat' to Europe." In *Towards Understanding of Contemporary Migration: Causes, Consequences, Policies, Reflections*, 25–40. Beograd: Službeni Glasnik, ISI FF, 2017.

Kumar, Vikramendra. "Emerging trends in sociology of tourism." *Sociology International Journal* 2, no. 3 (2018): 225-237.

Levitt, Peggy, and B. Nadya Jaworsky. "Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, no. 1 (2007): 129–156.

Mahmud, Tayyab. "Colonial Cartographies, Postcolonial Borders, and Enduring Failures of International Law: The Unending Wars Along the Afghanistan–Pakistan Frontier." *Brooklyn Journal of International Law* 36 (2010): 1–52.

Mann, Michael. *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 3, Global Empires and Revolution, 1890–1945*. Vol. 3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

McMichael, Philip. "Globalization: Myths and Realities." *Rural Sociology* 61, no. 1 (1996): 25–55.

Moss, Dana M. "The ties that bind: Internet communication technologies, networked authoritarianism, and 'voice' in the Syrian diaspora." *Globalizations* 15, no. 2 (2018): 265-282.

Moss, Dana M. "Transnational Repression, Diaspora Mobilization, and the Case of the Arab Spring." *Social Problems* 63, no. 4 (2016): 480-498.

Omar, Raege. "Understanding the Malawi and Tanzania Border Dispute on Lake Malawi (Lake Nyasa)." *Dhaxalreeb* 21, no. 2 (2026): 35-56.

Pegg, Scott. *De Facto States in the International System*. Vancouver: Institute of International Relations, University of British Columbia, 1998.

Reyes, Victoria. "Global borderlands: a case study of the Subic Bay Freeport Zone, Philippines." *Theory and Society* 44, no. 4 (2015): 355-384.

Sassen, Saskia. "Overview of global cities." *Cities and Society* (2005): 81-90.

Schachtner, Christina. "Transculturality in the internet: Culture flows and virtual publics." *Current Sociology* 63, no. 2 (2015): 228-243.

Schmidt, Elizabeth. *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Thompson, Daniel K. *Smugglers, speculators, and the city in the Ethiopia-Somalia Borderlands*. Cambridge University Press, 1945.

Vaughan-Williams, Nick. "Borders, Territory, Law." *International Political Sociology* 2, no. 4 (2008): 322-338.

Vogel, Kathleen Margaret, Nicole Janice Ball, and Milton Leitenberg. "Rwanda and Burundi Genocide: A Case Study of Neglect and Indifference (1977)." In *Milton Leitenberg: Pioneering Work on Weapons of Mass Destruction, Wars and Arms Control*, 563–584. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025.

Wagner, Florian. *Colonial Internationalism and the Governmentality of Empire, 1893–1982*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

Walton, John, and Charles Ragin. "Global and National Sources of Political Protest: Third World Responses to the Debt Crisis." *American Sociological Review* (1990): 876–890.

Wai, Zubairu. "The Empire's New Clothes: Africa, Liberal Interventionism and Contemporary World Order." *Review of African Political Economy* 41, no. 142 (2014): 483–499.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. "The Modern World System." In *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings*, 427–445. 1993.

Watkins, Aimee. "A Mirage of Protection: Statelessness and Legal Failures in Côte d'Ivoire." *Dhaxalreeb* 21, no. 2 (2026): 57–86.

Wimmer, Andreas, and Nina Glick Schiller. "Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation–State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences." *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002): 301–334.

Wong, Kennedy Chi-Pan. "Sowing hate, cultivating loyalists: Mobilizing repressive nationalist diasporas for transnational repression by the people's republic of China regime." *American Behavioral Scientist* 68, no. 12 (2024): 1655–1678.

Zuberi, Tukufu, and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, eds. *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology*. Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008.

ⁱ Clare BATH is a doctoral student in the University of Notre Dame sociology department, and her research focuses on civil society, democracy, and social and political inequality across global contexts.

ORCID 0000-0003-0982-8552.