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**THE TROUBLED HISTORIOGRAPHY OF
CLASSICAL BOUNDARY TERMINOLOGY**

KJ Rankin and R Schofield

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ABSTRACT

THE TROUBLED HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CLASSICAL BOUNDARY TERMINOLOGY

This paper seeks to explore the evolution and mutation of terms and concepts in boundary studies. It re-examines the context and actual letter of some items of classical boundary terminology, developed largely within the half-century period following the appearance of Friedrich Ratzel's *Politische Geographie* in 1897. While traditional political geography's coverage of territorial questions was substantial, the conventional wisdom holds that, in academic terms at least, it was far from enlightened—and has justifiably been criticised for its lack of objectivity, imagination and focus. Yet to dismiss the contributions of this period collectively as negative and deterministic is clearly too simplistic. Many individuals were more far-sighted than is generally recognised—Ratzel himself identified the essential premise of borderland studies some 70 years before it was developed more fully when commenting: “*der Grenzraum ist das Wirkliche, die Grenzlinie die Abstraktion davon*”. The pioneering attempts made to develop a specialised vocabulary for the study of international boundaries and territorial questions have not always been represented accurately or fairly by academics and policy makers. Ideas, good and bad, have been distorted through phraseology, poor translation and simple errors and corrupted for political means—in the latter instance, particularly the pursuit of questionable analogies and ideals, such as the living state organism and natural boundaries. This paper re-examines the rudiments of early territorial conceptions, while acknowledging the historical paradigms in which they originated

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THE TROUBLED HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CLASSICAL BOUNDARY TERMINOLOGY

KJ Rankin and R Schofield

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to re-examine the rudiments of the classical terminology utilised in boundary studies. In doing so, the concept of the international political boundary is briefly discussed and a review is conducted of some of the salient terminology conceived to help describe, analyse, and classify boundaries from the late nineteenth through to the mid twentieth century. It is important to stress that although boundaries have maintained their significance and continue to attract a widening disciplinary appeal, the terminology associated with them can be applied ambiguously in both conceptual and technical contexts. For example, confusion still exists between boundary, frontier, and border; delimitation and demarcation; and the exact meaning of a natural boundary. Thus, there is a premium in pursuing precision in definition and this necessarily involves reappraising the genesis of such terminology.

THE WORD "BOUNDARY": SEMANTICS AND ETYMOLOGY

Before delving into the very semantics and etymology of the word "boundary", one is immediately struck by the acute and ironic dichotomy existing between nature's generally transitional divisions and the consistently determined human endeavour to impose rigidity, abruptness and absolutism in developing terminology to define and classify them.

Political geographers have tended to absolve themselves of the charge of failing to distinguish between the terms boundary, frontier, and border. However, the recent proliferation of boundary discourses and interest in other academic disciplines, while opening new perspectives in boundary studies, has widened the scope for possible confusion over definitions and meanings. Malcolm Anderson's 1996 book, *Frontiers*, employed the term frontier to designate an international boundary, and boundary itself to refer to divisions at the sub-state level (Anderson, 1996: 10). So although all this may be derided or dismissed as a futile exercise in pedantry, the pedant's defence would be that it is a constructive pursuit of clarity and accuracy.

Because boundary, border, and frontier may be accepted as synonyms and excused in common parlance, this makes it all the more essential to clearly distinguish them as terms of conceptual analysis. However, apart from the disciplinary scope for confusion, one could source any confusion to the actual lexicography, semantics, and etymology of the English language. And, ultimately, there is the issue of taxonomy.

As the conceptual atom of boundary studies, the *Oxford English dictionary*, when considering the word "boundary", defines it as "that which serves to indicate the bounds or limits of anything whether material or immaterial; also the limit itself".¹

One can observe that even the word "boundary" must be a derivative. The basic structure of the word implies that it is an adjective to the word "bound", such as "imaginary" is to "imagination". "Bound" is complicated by the fact that it is both a noun and verb, as the following definitions show.

Bound (noun)

1. A landmark indicating the limit of an estate or territory.
2. The boundary line of a territory or estate; gen. a limit or boundary, that to which anything extends in space.
pl. The limit or boundary beyond which soldiers, sailors, students, schoolchildren, etc., resident in particular building, quarters, or area, may not pass. Now chiefly in out of bounds, outside or beyond this boundary.
3. *pl.* The territory situated on or near a boundary; a border-land; also land within certain limits, a district, neighbourhood, tract.
4. *fig.* A limit with reference to immaterial things, as duration, lawful or possible action, feeling, etc.

Bound (verb)

1. *trans.* To set bounds to, limit; to confine within bounds; to mark (out) the bounds of.
intr. To limit itself; be limited.
2. *trans.* To form the boundary of. To enclose, confine, contain; also with in.
to bound on: to abut upon, adjoin.
to bound with: to have the same boundaries as.

Its origins derive through Middle English from Old French, *bodne*, from medieval Latin, *bodina*, earlier *butina*.²

There is the added problem of the plural. When referring, say, to boundaries of the state, it could be inferred that the state concerned is territorially fractured. Yet, in common parlance it tends to concern the generic singular.

This difficulty is illustrated in an excerpt from Article 12 of the Anglo-Irish Treaty signed in 1921 that set the terms of reference for a Boundary Commission to redraw the boundary between Northern Ireland and the then Irish Free State.

a Commission...shall determine in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants, so far as may be compatible with economic and geographic conditions, the *boundaries* between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland, and for the purposes of the Gov-

¹ Oxford English Dictionary Online: <dictionary.oed.com>

² Oxford English Dictionary Online: <dictionary.oed.com>

ernment of Ireland Act, 1920, and of this instrument, the *boundary* of Northern Ireland shall be such as may be determined by such Commission [emphasis added].³

There is a great deal to criticise in what was a loosely drafted legal document. But lapses like these illustrate the potential for confusion, dissent, and, in the worst cases, conflict over boundaries. As Newman and Paasi noted in 1998,

The language used when discussing boundaries is also changing. The ideas of borders, boundaries, borderlands, border-crossings and transgression of borders that the representatives of various disciplines use, are increasingly employed in a metaphorical sense so that they do not inevitably refer to the material spaces with which geographers typically deal (Newman and Paasi, 1998: 188).

These concepts are increasingly used not only in relation to state boundaries, but also applied more generally to social and cultural boundaries. Political geographers have themselves become increasingly interested in the cultural and social meanings of political boundaries, and in boundaries as contested cultural and symbolic manifestations of territoriality. Reference to a thesaurus indicates the range of synonyms to which one can resort:

border, frontier, line, border line, bounds, front line, edge, limit, margin, periphery, rim, frame, perimeter, circumference, fringe, lip, brim, enclosure, outskirt, belt, discontinuity, divide, littoral, mete, parting, screen, barrier, threshold, fence, pale, wall, vallum, palisade, barricade, cordon, watershed, verge, march, bourn(e), brink, confines, membrane, rampart.

The myriad of words indicates the significance attached to how one describes and differentiates between landscapes, let alone the comprehensive metaphorical application the concept encapsulates in general contexts.

On the common confusion between boundary and frontier, Kristof, a political scientist, helped to distinguish them. He characterises the frontier as open and outer-oriented, a manifestation of centrifugal forces, and a phenomenon of history. Being on the physical periphery of the state it is likely also that it is peripheral in relation to being politically integrated in the state. This is apparent when the frontier is viewed as a zone of transition. The boundary in contrast, is distinguished as being closed and "inner-oriented", reflecting centripetal forces and as such is an abstract concept but indicates precisely the outer line of effective control exercised by the state. He argued that it was difficult to identify essential features of the frontier which are universally valid, contrasting with his observation that boundaries are regulated and defined by law, status and characteristics that are more uniform, precise, and closed and inner oriented (see Kristof, 1959).

³ Article 12, Articles of Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland as signed in London, 6 December 1921 (Cmd 1560, British Parliamentary Papers)

PARADIGM, LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION: CONCEIVING THE BOUNDARY IN POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

The pioneering attempts to develop a specialised vocabulary for the study of international boundaries have not always been represented as accurately or fairly as they might have been by generations of succeeding academics and policy makers. The study of political boundaries has a well-established heritage and constituted a core element at the inception of academic, institutionalised political geography at the end of the nineteenth century, one which has endured ever since.

The word "frontier" had acquired a new prominence when applied to colonial expansion in previously undivided territories to distinguish the settled and unknown areas. As part of the unilateral advance of American settlement across the continent, Frederick Jackson Turner first espoused in 1893 that the frontier was the outer edge of a wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilization. Turner conceived the frontier as a unilateral spearhead, and not merely a state centred periphery. It was a frontier for humans with nature, not like with like (Turner, 1921: ch 1.). Turner even stated that in census reports it had a quantitative definition: "it is treated as the margin of that settlement which has a density of two or more [people] to the square mile" (Turner, 1921: ch 1; also cited in McDonald, 1978: 174).

Ratzel's *Politische Geographie* of 1897 included a long discussion of the meaning and roles of boundaries for both humans and states. The orthodox convention regarding Ratzel tends to class him as a determinist in social Darwinist mould. However, he is unfairly implicated with the later *Geopolitik* school, with its Nazi expansionist connotations, which adapted his writings for its own justifications.

As part of a revisionist argument, Hunter (1983) articulated a robust defence of Ratzel's purloined reputation. Hunter devotes extensive sections to translating Ratzel's work. This perhaps indicates the imperative for a complete English translation, as has been done in French (Ratzel, 1988). Hunter scrutinised what became generally known as Ratzel's laws on the territorial growth of states as principles, rules or norms. Hunter claims that while *Gesetze* is logically translated as "law" this takes the word out of context and thereby could not be considered as final (Hunter, 1983: 397). So close examination of Ratzel's use of the term in its correct context is needed.

This raises another salient point on terminology adopted in different languages. As has been explored in the field of ethnolinguistics⁴, one can doubt that translation between languages equates to exact meanings and nuances. Composite words have been coined to express the areal concept such as *lisière-frontière* or *région-frontière* in French and *Grenzsraum* in German (Broek, 1941: 4). A crude list of some translations of selected terms is presented in Table 1.⁵

⁴ The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis states that perception is limited by what can be described in one's own language (see Phillips, 1998).

⁵ <dictionaries.travlang.com>

Table 1. Translation of boundary terminology from English to selected European languages

English—German	English—French
<i>border</i>	<i>border</i>
1. Grenze	1. lisière
2. Rand	2. bord [M], rive
3. Einfassung	3. frontière
4. Rand; Saum	4. bord, lisière
5. Rahmen, Schmuckleiste	<i>boundary</i>
administrative border—Verwaltungsgrenze	1. frontière, limite
border zone—Umsäumte	<i>frontier</i>
zonal border—Zonengrenze	1. frontière, limite
<i>borderland</i>	English—Latin
1. Grenzgebiet	<i>border</i>
2. Randgebiet	1. limbus, ora
3. Grenzbereich	2. labrum, limbus, ora
4. Grenzland	<i>boundary</i>
<i>borderline</i>	1. finis, limes, ora
1. Grenze	<i>frontier</i>
2. Grenzlinie	1. finis, limes, ora
3. Scheide	English—Spanish
<i>boundary</i>	<i>border</i>
1. Grenze	1. orilla
2. Grenzlinie	2. borde
area boundary—Bereichsgrenze	<i>boundary</i>
boundary stone—Grenzstein	1. frontera
customs boundary—Zollgrenze	<i>frontier</i>
international boundary—Staatsgrenz	1. frontera
<i>frontier</i>	English—Italian
1. Grenze	<i>border</i>
2. Landesgrenze	1. orlo
customs frontier—Zollgrenze	<i>boundary</i>
frontier crossing—Grenzueberschreitung	1. confine, frontiera
	<i>frontier</i>
	1. confine, frontiera

Apart from anything else, this perhaps points to the richness of the English language. To illustrate another case in point, Ratzel's Fourth Law, or "General principle, rule or norm of territorial growth" reads thus:

Die Grenze ist als peripherisches Organ des Staates sowohl der Träger seines Wachstums wie auch seiner Befestigung und macht alle Wandlungen des Organismus des Staates mit [The boundary, as a peripheric organ of the state, is the bearer of its growth as well as of its security, and is affected by all changes of the state organism] (Hunter, 1983: 453; translation by Hunter).

Stephen Jones's translation of the fourth law is similar but uses the word "frontier" instead of "boundary" (Jones, 1959: 249). Jones goes on to observe that stripped of its organismic terminology, this law is little more than a truism so far as it refers to territorial growth. Moreover, it is difficult to keep analogies in the role of servant. They can beget further analogies that can diminish and distort the original concept. With regards to Ratzel's germane epigram "Der Grenzraum ist das Wirkliche, die Grenzlinie die Abstraktion davon" (Hunter, 1983: 456), we encounter two rather different translations: "The border seam is the reality, the borderline is its abstraction" (Hunter, 1983: 459); or "The border fringe is the reality and the border line the abstraction thereof" (Prescott, 1987: 12). Furthermore, we find Broek (1941: 7), paraphrasing this as: "We always find the frontier as the reality, and the boundary merely as its abstraction".

Broek does not acknowledge Ratzel but this may have reflected a reluctance to do so as a consequence of belief that this might be perceived as lending academic currency to the tainted *Geopolitik* school. However, Bassin identifies Ratzel's specific contribution as lying in the creation of an appealing system and terminology that supplied a seemingly "scientific" explanation and justification for expansionism (Bassin, 1987: 485).

Another German writer, Robert Sieger, employed such terms as *Grenzgürtel* (boundary zone), *Grenzlinie* (boundary line), along with *Grenzlehre* (boundary pattern, model or precept) and *Raumgrenzen* (boundary space) (quoted in Hunter, 1983: 471). This accords with the Ratzelian thesis about the boundary abstraction and the seam or border area constituting the reality. Sieger explained that this secondary boundary line derives from the fact that the border zone functions as a peripheric organ (Hunter, 1983: 471). This is the zone of mutual political, economic and cultural influence, and can be recognized by the government as a border space with, for example, customs enforcement. If the influence from both sides is not equally strong, the width can vary on either side. This is the case, for instance, where state boundary lines do not coincide with national boundaries and an irredentist movement encounters a weak state authority.

Lapradelle, a French lawyer, introduced a vocabulary that possibly reflected his occupation's predilection for careful wording, arguing that frontiers existed before and after the delimitation of a boundary, and that there were distinct processes and aspects to their evolution, with boundaries classified by their method of definition. He introduced a processual model for boundary evolution: preparation (allocation), decision (delimitation) and execution (demarcation) (Lapradelle, 1928). This identification of processes was refined by Stephen Jones, who outlined but did not strictly prescribe the processes of allocation, delimitation, demarcation, and administration (Jones, 1945). Allocation, delimitation and demarcation (and especially the latter two) are accepted, explicit terms in both political geography and international law. Yet the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Boundary Demarcation Commission that essentially "settled" that land boundary in the 1991-1993 period seemingly misused the terms. In its final report of 21 May 1993, the demarcation commission claimed that it had "demarcated" the Kuwait-Iraq boundary by nominating geographic coordinates

of longitude and latitude. Essentially by doing so it had, of course, not demarcated a boundary but refined its rudimentary delimitation formula (Schofield, 1993: 205).

Lapradelle called the border *le voisinage*, and he distinguished three parts of this region on the basis of law. The central area immediately adjacent to the boundary was called *le territoire limitrophe*, which is the zone where international law may apply (Lapradelle, 1928). The word *limitrophe* is difficult to translate because it is a technical term for land set aside to support troops in the border. According to Prescott, the phrase *le territoire limitrophe* may be translated as “neighbouring territory” or “adjacent territory”. The other two parts flanked this central region and are subject only to the internal laws of the states. Lapradelle called such zones *les frontières* (the frontiers) (Lapradelle, 1928, translated in Prescott, 1987: 13). Lapradelle’s contribution is generally neglected in the literature, barring the exceptions of Boggs and Prescott.

One could argue that from Ratzel to the inter war period much of the boundary studies literature came to be dominated by French and German writers as they were closely associated with territorial issues with which, say, North Americans were not greatly involved until the second world war period. This was largely paralleled by the development of boundary terminology as well; a process that was slower to develop in the English language, but which gradually proliferated.

THE SUBJECTIVITY AND DECONSTRUCTION OF NATURAL BOUNDARIES

Prior to the emergence of Ratzel’s ideas or indeed to the emergence of geography as an academic discipline, one major idea had been that of “natural boundaries”; this emerged in the Middle Ages and was influential in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Pounds outlined how France’s realms at the time of the revolution came to be conditioned by the ideal boundaries of the Ocean, the Rhine, the Alps, and the Pyrenees (Pounds, 1951; 1954). To their advocates, natural boundaries were seen as the only real borders, because they were written and drawn in nature—and sometimes assumed to be legitimised by divine providence, and under the premise of natural law acquiring a perpetual and indelible character. All other laws and boundaries were then deemed artificial, arbitrary, and temporary exercises in expediency. It was not appreciated at that time that the idea of a natural boundary was also fundamentally an artificial creature of human activity, and thus an intrinsically fallacious, deceptive and disingenuous ideal. The word “natural” itself has many different and potentially confusing connotations and thus is flawed and unsatisfactory.

An undoubted imperialistic discourse on boundaries was articulated from a British perspective. To the British Imperial administrator, Lord Curzon, the boundary-making exercise was unilateral (Curzon, 1907). A scientific frontier was a composite of natural and strategic elements. Science was military science that focussed upon establishing good boundaries to the advantage of one side. He did not distinguish between frontier and boundary in his seminal 1907 lecture. Although the word boundary rarely appears, the lecture is liberally punctuated with the word frontier

possessing a capital “F”. He recognised the process by which a frontier may become a demarcated line. McMahon, whose name was lent to the boundary in the Himalayas, credits himself with coining and distinguishing the terms delimitation and demarcation 10 years before Curzon’s lecture (the claim is recorded in Boggs, 1940: 32). Curzon asserted that it was “futile to assert that an exact Science of Frontiers has been or is ever likely to be evolved: for no one law can possibly apply to all nations and peoples, to all Governments, all territories, or all climates...” (Curzon, 1907).

Another British boundary-maker, Holdich, served on boundary commissions in Persia and Afghanistan and was an ardent advocate of the barrier function of boundaries (Holdich, 1916: 46). This buttressed his belief that the best ones, judged by their potential to prevent conflict, were natural ones. Thus mathematical lines were bad. The classification of “good” or “bad” was completely contingent on their military utility. Even a section of Ratzel’s *Politische Geographie* was entitled “Good and bad boundaries. Boundaries of large and small states” (Rumley, Minghi and Grimm, 1973: 275).

Jacques Ancel was foremost in the French school of political geography in discussing boundaries. He conceptualised the boundary as the passive indicator of state power, deriving its origins from dominant social and political groups and as such reflected a bilateral power equilibrium as political isobars. However, boundaries can remain static as state power balances alter and do not necessarily indicate where state pressures are neutralised. Emphasis was thus placed on types of state than types of boundaries. He sought to prove that it was not useful to attribute a subjective label of what constitutes a “good” or “bad” boundary.

Il n’y a pas de “bonne” ou de “mauvaise” frontière: cela depend des circonstances. La frontière des Pyrénées est aujourd’hui un frontière morte...Jadis, c’était une frontière de tension [There are no “good” or “bad” boundaries; it all depends on the circumstances. The boundary of the Pyrenees is today a quiet boundary...Formerly it was a tense boundary] (Ancel, 1936: 210; translated in Prescott, 1978: 26).

In the 1920s, German geographer Karl Haushofer adapted, and is sometimes erroneously credited as having originated *Geopolitik*, to support German expansion (see Haushofer, 1927). While *Geopolitik* was loosely assumed to have been derived from the ideas of Ratzel rather than Rudolf Kjellen, the political climate allowed the philosophy to flourish. Not only did Germany lose its colonial possessions, but there was also the perceived punitive loss of German territory. The third edition of *Politische Geographie* was published in 1923 and possessed a ripe appeal that was interpreted as offering scientific grounds for strengthening the German state. Indeed, boundary stability was denigrated as an effort to limit the growth of a living thing. Haushofer founded and edited the journal *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* in 1924, as *Geopolitik* assumed an academic credibility that was acquiring significant momentum.

While the concept of “natural boundaries” remained prevalent, critiques did exist. A year after Haushofer published his key text in 1927, Lapradelle had preceded his fellow Frenchman, Ancel, in recognising the inadequacy of the “natural boundary”

concept with regard to terminology. He suggested that “natural” boundaries would be better labelled “derived artificial boundaries”, with geometric artificial boundaries as “artificial boundaries properly speaking” (Lapradelle, 1928, translated in Boggs 1940: 24).

Hartshorne’s suggestions on political boundary terminology were inspired by his recognition of the need for more precision (Hartshorne, 1936). His terms—“antecedent”, “pioneer”, “relict”, “subsequent” and “consequent”—all relate to the boundary’s formative origins in relation to the cultural landscape. These sequential terms were set out in the few paragraphs of an abstract published in 1936 (Hartshorne, 1936).⁶ The significance of this may lie in his reference to German writers like Robert Sieger on terminology. Hartshorne credits Sieger with recognizing the confusion implicit in the term “natural boundary”. Sieger had coined “organic boundaries” (translated in Broek, 1941: 9) and “boundaries borrowed from nature” (translated in Boggs, 1940: 24).⁷ Hartshorne goes on to suggest “natural marked boundaries”, where some natural feature marks a line used for a boundary; “natural defence boundaries”, “natural barriers to trade”, and “natural communication divides” differentiated further as to “degrees of hindrance” (see Hartshorne, 1936).

Hartshorne notes that the concept was imported from physical geography and the ambiguity of the term in political geography to include linguistic boundaries (Hartshorne, 1939: 47). The oceans provide the most obvious basis upon which states are separated, but, of course, the world does not conveniently consist of distinguishable islands and peninsulas. But the idea of water as a separating factor has been extrapolated into rivers, which by no means proved universally satisfactory. Even adopting watersheds and by extension mountain ranges cannot always provide the sharp delineation sought.

In 1940, Broek presented a well-argued critique of natural frontiers, seeing them bedded in nationalism which regards them as natural means for unifying language and people (Broek, 1941). The mere adjective “natural” endowed a frontier with a perceived scientific logic, sentimental appeal, and superior and even moral legitimacy. Natural boundaries invariably invoke a state’s aspirational expansionist tendencies and not a magnanimous impulse to withdraw back to them. Broek suggests the term “conformal” for those boundaries that conform to an existing division, and “physiographic” in order to remove the subjective connotation of natural.

Boggs devised a more comprehensive and phenomenological classifications of physical, geometric, anthropogeographic, and compound (Boggs 1940: 25-6). However, he qualified his terms by asserting that they were not mutually exclusive and that there were some examples that would defy such an abstract classification. Nevertheless, these new terms acknowledged that natural frontiers do have a place

⁶ Our efforts to locate his more expansive article in a Leipzig journal, as yet, remain elusive.

⁷ Yet, Broek (1941: 12) credits the term to Sölch.

in boundary making, but simply that they cannot embody the universal ideal, and as shown here, actually proved useful in stimulating further debate about boundaries.

The discourse recognised that not only is “natural” too ambiguous and abstract an adjective to adequately serve as a descriptive term in boundary studies, but also is a flawed ideal upon which to base a boundary. As Broek expressed it, “The protection afforded by a natural barrier is nothing compared to the security given by a mere mathematical line that is accepted in good faith by both neighbours” (Broek, 1941: 18).

CONCLUSION

In boundary studies, precision and consistency are both key but ambiguity pervades the operations of professional bodies as well as the academic literature. The issue of translation will be ever present and nuances on meanings will always be debated. Indeed, even this paper relies on translations with which not everyone could absolutely accord.

Recourse to analogy can be dangerous, as illustrated by *Geopolitik’s* slant on Ratzel, but can be effective too as epitomised in Jones’ classic epigram that “A boundary, like the human skin, may have diseases of its own or may reflect the illnesses of the body” (Jones, 1945: 3). Jones’ own *Handbook on boundaries* explicitly spells out the dangers of ambiguity in definition and process. In contemporary boundary dispute resolution there has also been a notable tendency to move away from accepted terminology in defining territorial limits. The term delineation is becoming increasingly evident. Like alignment, it is by no means an unclear term but is completely lacking in status and authority.

There has been a proliferation in the field of border studies that is welcome and testified by the number of dedicated institutes.⁸ This can be seen as satiating Jones’s call to study boundaries in accordance with their geographical and historical milieu, which amounted to a call to look at the wider spatial context and not the narrow linear approach (Jones, 1959: 241). However, one must not lose sight of the fact that all derive from the phenomenon itself. It certainly has more of a spatial element to it than boundary, but the word border can be widely applied as an adjective or word stem. There is border landscape, borderland, border area, border inhabitant, borderer, border war, and of course, salient to this paper, borderline. One could trace border studies back to Ratzel and Lapradelle, but there was a gradually evolving interest in areas adjoining a boundary, rather than the boundary and the state themselves.

⁸ For example, the Centre for Cross Border Studies (Armagh, Northern Ireland); The Center for Inter-American and Border Studies (University of Texas at El Paso, USA); The Center for Latin American and Border Studies (New Mexico State University, USA); The Centre for Border Studies (University of Glamorgan, Wales); The Border Studies Research Circle (Wisconsin, USA); The Nijmegen Centre of Border Research (Netherlands).

Boundaries can constitute a complex compound of natural and human features, and it would be a truism to claim that no two boundaries are alike. One should aspire to clarity and precision in both boundary classification and description although one must always acknowledge that no word or map can do absolute justice in representing reality. Some boundary treaties should define their terms. In boundary drawing, boundaries should not be made a slave to convenient description. Like maps, words cannot replicate reality, but one should not desist in the attempt to do so. As highlighted here the work of Ratzel and others laid substantial foundations for boundary studies that are not fully acknowledged and it is important that this is recognised. Returning to such fundamentals can offer greater understanding of boundaries. Perhaps the cynicism of the writer, Ambrose Bierce, put it best in 1911 when defining it in *Devil's dictionary*:

BOUNDARY, n. In political geography, an imaginary line between two nations, separating the imaginary rights of one from the imaginary rights of the other (Bierce, 1911).

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