Jean Terrier

Moments of Boundary Research: A Long-Term Perspective

Introduction

In this chapter, I will offer a selective survey of the research done on identities and boundaries in the social sciences from a long-term perspective, focusing on the question of national and ethnic boundaries (at the expense of the rich socio-psychological research on categorization, classification, and boundary drawing in artificial groups: see Diehl 1990 – at the expense, also, of other groups, such as gender groups or classes). This chapter has found methodological inspiration in conceptual history for its analysis of conceptual transformation (Koselleck 1982; Richter 1995); and in Pocock's (1990 [1987]) concept of a "language" for its analysis of the social sciences as a continuous discourse held together by a small set of core assumptions and problems (see Terrier 2011). In the first part of this chapter, I will look into the various meanings taken by the boundary concept through history. I will especially suggest that "boundary", as a scientific concept, has undergone a shift in meaning from the concrete to the abstract during the twentieth century: while it traditionally meant "dividing line", it has now acquired the prevalent meaning of "principle of differentiation" or "set of distinctive features of an object". I will then move to a description of some important stations of boundary research since the nineteenth century, by way of a presentation of some key authors and their legacies. Lastly, I will offer some more systematic and theoretical reflections in my conclusion.

Boundaries defined

When tracing the semantic trajectory of words it can be useful, as a first approximation, to compare the definitions offered by two dictionaries situated at both ends of the period under examination. In its first edition, the Oxford English Dictionary (1888) (still called at the time the New Dictionary of English) defined boundary as "[t]hat which serves to indicate the bounds or limits of anything, whether material or immaterial; also the limit itself." This definition has
something fascinating because of the distinction it introduces between the limit itself and that which merely indicates or materializes the limit, which is the boundary in its narrow sense. The boundary, therefore, has the connotation of a physical barrier.\(^1\) To take the city of Berlin as an example, the limit between Western and Eastern neighbourhoods before 1989 was determined by the border between the two states of Germany; the wall materialized the border in the form of a concrete boundary. The things that are limited here are the same time material (two distinct state territories) and immaterial (two legal systems, two zones of influence, etc.). However it is obvious, as the definition itself indicates, that in common usage these subtle distinctions were discarded: thus "boundary" means both the limit and its concrete indication, it is at the same time, in the formulation of Collier's Dictionary of English (1977) "something that limits" and something that "marks a separation". This dictionary further add that boundary is "precise in meaning, suggesting the actual line as marked on a map"; while "border" is often used for natural features (rivers, mountains) and "frontier" for the separation between states. Finally, the Oxford Dictionary of English (2009) defines boundary as 1) "a line which marks the limits of an area; a diving line" and 2) "a limit of something abstract, especially a subject or sphere of activity". For meaning 2), this dictionary gives the example of a "community without class or political boundaries".

From this look at various definitions, it seems possible to suggest that the word "boundary" historically possessed clear connotations of a visible dividing line, but this connotation did not preclude a more abstract use of the word as "any kind of limitation". For instance John Locke, as quoted by the Oxford English Dictionary, described in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1693) the "simple Ideas we receive from Sensation and Reflection" as the "Boundaries of our Thought" – an expression that can be translated into "the extension or limitation of our thought" (in other words: humans cannot know anything beyond what their senses tell them, and what their thinking does with this basic sense data – for instance through combination). In other words, to say that two things are bounded can either mean that it is

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1 Interestingly, the etymology of the boundary concept as reconstructed by William Skeat may account for the connotations of objectiveness of the boundary concept. In Low Latin, bodina or bona means limit, border. The root bon- is found in many words meaning "limit" in Celtic languages; for instance, and interestingly, the Old Breton boden means "a cluster of trees used as a boundary". Bonn in current Breton means boundary stone. See Skeat (1888), entry BOUND.
surrounded by a sharp dividing line, or that it is not infinite, limitless, regardless of the sharpness of its limits. In the social sciences, the term has been used in a concrete sense, as I will show below, but in recent years it has become more abstract, so that the connotation of a visible dividing line has receded in the background. Nowadays "boundary" is virtually synonymous with "principle of differentiation".

**Boundary research: quantitative growth, semantic change**

In my quantitative analysis of the occurrence of the boundary word in scholarly literature, conducted on the basis of the databases of the Library of Congress, the University of Münster, and the Library of the London School of Economics, it was easy to detect, first, a growing absolute number of publications on the boundary question in the past decades. In the first half of the twentieth century (1900-1949), the Library of the LSE added on average each decade about 15 books pertaining to the boundary question to its catalogue. By contrast, it added 67 books in the decade 1960-1969; 75 between 1970 and 1979; 88 in the following decade; 198 between 1990 and 1999; and 266 in the years 2000 to 2009. In order to control for the overall growth of scientific publications during the twentieth century following the educational and scientific boom of the 1960s, it is useful to express this evolution in percentage (Figure 1).

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2 For this section, I have found methodological inspiration in Hacking (1999) and Mintzker (2008). Hacking looks at the titles of books and articles published on the topic of social construction to draw conclusions on the meaning and role of the expression. Mintzker uses quantitative tools to detect the rise of the concept of the "social" in eighteenth-century France.

3 I have limited this research to the titles and subtitles of published monographs and PhD theses.

4 The proportion, however, remains minute: less that 0.25%.

5 My thanks go to Philippe Terrier for his invaluable help with statistical matters.
Percentage of items with 'boundary' or 'boundaries' in their title, since 1900;
Source: Online catalogue, Library of the London School of Economics
What this illustration suggests is that there has recently indeed been a growth of interest for the boundary question, relatively to all other topics represented at the LSE Library. This is especially true for the past 20 years. This fits nicely with Lamont's and Molnár's suggestion that "[i]n recent years, the idea of 'boundaries' has come to play a key role in important new lines of scholarship across the social sciences." (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 167) However, it is not that the boundary question was completely absent in earlier phases. For instance, several titles (including some official documents) indicate a strong interest, in the years around 1900, for the question of colonial boundaries. After the First World War, the question of the boundaries of Germany and of the newly created states was at the forefront, with titles such as *Boundaries in Europe and the Near East* (1918) or *New Boundaries of Germany* (1919). In 1945, the question of how to draw the borders of Europe, unsurprisingly, appears again (*Boundary-Making: a Handbook for Statesmen, Treaty Editors, and Boundary Commissioners* or *Germany's Post-War Boundaries: a Suggestion*).

Even more significant, it seems to me, than the absolute and relative growth of the literature on the boundary question, is the semantic shift that can be detected. In my survey of the literature on the question in library catalogues, I have found the first occurrence of the expression "social boundary" in 1956 (Gnodzins 1956), with no further occurrence before 1973 (Reina 1973); and the first occurrence of the expression "cultural boundary" in 1975 (Krane 1975). Before that, in virtually all occurrences, the boundary word had the simpler meaning of a dividing line between states or distinct administrative areas (e.g. Pope 1886; Guzman Blanco 1896; Nicholson 1954). In some cases, "boundary" was used as a synonym of "natural border" (Finch 1844). So until the 1960s what had "boundaries" where primarily (nation-)states. Since the 1970s, the boundary word has been applied to many more entities and phenomena, such as of course, societies and cultures, but also the ethnic groups (Barth 1969), the "social world" (Luckmann 1970), the self (Davis 1986), communities (Smiley 1992), the political (Benhabib 1996), science (Gieryn 1999), and even "southern womanhood" (Coryell 2000), "Germanness" (O'Donnell, Bridenthal, and Reagin 2005), and "belonging" (Plascencia 2012). Now while states, cities or perhaps nations may be conceived as having clear-cut borders, the boundaries of e.g. "culture", "the political" or "Germanness" (as opposed to "Germany") are necessarily, for lack of an official codification,
more fuzzy. In such cases, the use of the boundary word will tend to be more markedly
metaphoric and abstract. As suggested, the increasingly abstract quality of the entities whose
limits scholars are seeking to investigate has led to a growing abstraction of the meaning of the
boundary concept. This can be felt in the two definitions of the boundary concept offered by
Lamont and Molnár. These two authors, on the basis on an extensive survey of the literature on
boundaries, distinguish between two meanings of "boundary" (a similar distinction is proposed
by Tilly 2004). "Symbolic boundaries" are "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to
categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space." (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 167)
The formulation is interesting: boundaries do not "rest on", "depend on", "express" or "indicate"
conceptual distinctions: they are these conceptual distinctions. For instance, if sociologists
detects different representations of identity in two social groups, they will conclude that the
existence of such representational differences constitute a boundary per se. The second kind of
boundaries, "social boundaries", are defined not as divisions in the consciousness of actors, but
as "objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal
distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities." (Lamont and
Molnár 2002, 168) Here too, boundaries are social differences, and not the line between them.
What these definitions seem to confirm is that, at least in some scholarly contexts (but, of course,
ot overall), "boundary" seems to be taking the meaning of "distinctive features" or "difference".

In this first part, I have ascertained two things. First, the growth of scholarly interest for the
boundary question in the social sciences is confirmed. 1970 seems to have been a turning point,
especially at the semantic level: this gives strength to the conviction that in the history of ethnic
studies the publication of Barth's Ethnic Groups and Boundaries (1969) has represented a
watershed (Verdery 1994, 33; Wimmer 2007; Poutignat, Streiff-Fenart, and Barth 2008; Hale
2004, 460). Second, the boundary concept has acquired a new meaning the social sciences, a
question to which I now turn.

**Perspectives on boundaries in the history of the social sciences**

I have argued elsewhere (Terrier 2011) that the social sciences, born in their modern form in the
aftermath of the French Revolution (Baker 1989; Wokler 1990 [1987]; Wokler 1998), constitute
a specific intellectual language (Pocock 1990 [1987]) with two main characteristics. To begin with, it starts from an assumption of the relative thickness of human relationships. Rejecting the Enlightenment's association of custom with prejudice and irrationality, as well as the notion that prejudice could easily be overcome by universal education, the language of the social paid a special attention to the strength of social arrangements, looking for instance at the the influence of identity, the force of belonging, the authority of belief, or the power of ideology. Conversely, the social sciences attempted to show how institutions and habits could be shattered to pieces by new social forces, such as, for instance, capitalism or urban growth. Overall, they downplayed the role of individual and collective will and highlighted the hidden impact of less obvious natural, cultural and economic factors. Because of this (and this is the second characteristic, which is really a consequence of the first one), the language of the social is characterized by its tendency to subordinate the sphere of the political to the sphere of the social. This stands in direct opposition to earlier projects, such as the one of social contract theory or the one of natural law doctrines, whose aim was a radical reshaping of social affairs by way of political action. Such an attempt, as we will see, is well exemplified by the French Revolution.

This is really a minimal description of two elements that are common to all social sciences throughout their history. It is useful, however, to introduce a distinction between two "dialects" within the language of the social (Terrier 2011, 175–192). I have mentioned above the attention paid by the social sciences to the "thickness of human relationships": now this thickness can be accounted for in markedly different ways. We can classify the various explanations into those highlighting extra-social factors (such as the influence of race and climate) and those highlighting factors internal to society (such as population density, culture, ideology or interest). During the early history of the social sciences (say, between 1800 and 1870) the "naturalistic" dialect within the language of the social was especially prominent. It was later forced to retreat when the newly constituted disciplines of sociology (Levine 1996; Mucchielli 1998; Wagner 2002) and social anthropology (Stocking 1987; Deliège 2006) rose to prominence, especially in the years between 1890 and 1920. These disciplines where indeed constituted on the critique of nature as an explanatory factor of the social world. What authors as different as Franz Boas, Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, Gabriel Tarde, Bronislaw Malinowski, Marcel Mauss, or Max Weber, among others, had in common, is a rejection of such things as the impact of inherited
forms of behaviour, the role of animal instincts, the influence of climate or of territorial features, etc., as valid explanations for social events and arrangements.⁶

In the following sections, I will argue that the history of the boundary concept also fits into this broad narrative: it is, overall, a history of 1) de-naturalization: boundaries are made by humans, not nature; and of 2) "liquidization" (see Bauman 2000): boundaries are not fixed but moving, their existence depends on being permanently maintained. This is reflected in the fact that the expressions such as "boundary crossing" or "across boundaries", which indicate an emphasis on the openness of boundaries, has become ubiquitous – the library of the LSE possesses almost 40 items, published in the past thirty years, which use such metaphors in their titles. The two transformations mentioned above, of course, are only tendencies: I do not want to deny that more naturalistic approaches have persisted: my suggestion is merely that they are nowadays adopted by a minority of researchers (I come back to this issue below). In effect, even a cursory look at history suggests that no social or political theory can ever be never hegemonic: any dominant vision, precisely because of its dominance, produces its own contestation – alternative theorizations are always present.

As shown above the research on social identities and their boundaries has undergone a very strong development in the past decades. However, it is my contention that an interest for the boundary question is intrinsic to the social sciences: this because they work on objects so abstract and multifaceted (e.g. "society" or "class") that their identification and delimitation represent in itself an intellectual problem. Many of the current theorizations have clear ancestors, some of whom are explicitly claimed as such by today's scholars. Also, many methodological debates known to us have been foreshadowed in the past, even though the terminology used was often markedly different. Following Foucault (see esp. 1982), I am strong believer in historical variability, so even though I will emphasize some continuities in this chapter, my point is not that there are "perennial problems" or "core human ideas", somehow persisting without change throughout history. Rather, my conviction is that historical variability often takes the form of

⁶ Needless to say, this "rise of anti-naturalism" describes merely a moment in the history of the social sciences; it does not apply generally for the period under examination. On the contrary, as political phenomena such as colonization, militant nationalism, or fascism indicate, the first half of the twentieth century is, overall, the era of naturalizing politics.
mutations within the boundaries of a discursive structure whose assumptions, without being eternal, have a certain stability: as noted above, I call such structures "languages". Despite some claims to the contrary (Cabrera 2005; Latour 2007), I believe that the contributions of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century social scientists, on the one hand, and the recent research on boundaries, on the other, belong to the same language. This is what I will now try to show.

1. State, nature, society: perspectives on boundaries during the long nineteenth century

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, the conviction was widespread among French intellectuals that politics could and should dictate its shape to the social. In its strive after liberty and justice, the French government, in the words of the Jacobin Billaud-Varenne, should dissolve prejudice and "all the ties that bind a degenerate nation to ancient usages".\(^7\) To help in the effort to "regenerate the social system", some revolutionaries advocated that new boundaries should be created within France, according to rational (and even geometric) principles. This was the case of one of the most influential figures of the French Revolution (Sewell 1994), Emmanuel Sieyès. In September 1789, he pleaded for "a new division of the territory of France" (Sieyès 1989, 1) in order to undercut the traditional influence of regions, with their "privileges" and eternal rivalries, and in order assert instead the pre-eminence of the nation: the remaking of boundaries would promote "political adunation\(^8\), which is so necessary to create one great People living under the same laws" (Sieyès 1989, 2). Sieyès's plea triggered a process which led to the creation the French Département, a territorial and administrative entity drawn according to rational criteria: a roughly circular administrative unit (Sieyès had even supported a division in squares), with a town at its centre, all of approximately equal size. To mark a rupture and to indicate its power (see Giraut, Houssay-Holzschuch, and Guyot 2008), the National Assembly, like parents to their newborn, gave new names to its Départements (in most cases, the name of a river). During the extension of French influence throughout Europe in the era of Napoleon, regions abroad were similarly redefined and boundaries redrawn as France saw fit (the example of Switzerland is well known, see Zimmer 2011, esp. p. 762).

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\(^8\) A neologism created by Sieyès, this term means the becoming "one" (*ad-unum*) of the members of the nation.
This notion that states can easily shape the social by imposing boundaries onto passive populations has resurfaced regularly in history. A clear example of this is the imposition of colonial boundaries: from the mid nineteenth onwards, colonial rule, as noted by Cooper and Stoler (1989, 618), was a project of social transformation: colonial powers view it as an effort to build new structures such as a "stable government" to replace "the violent, conflictual tyrannies of indigenous polities"; "orderly commerce and wage labor" to replace "the chaos of slaving and raiding"; as well as clear "group boundaries, racial identities, and permissible forms of sexual and social interaction." Another example, richly described by James Scott (1998) in *Seeing Like a State*, is the "high modernist" project of twentieth century urban planning: the proponents of the international of architecture, especially Le Corbusier, expected states to eradicate old, irrational and unhygienic forms of dwelling. They advocated a complete redesign of cities with clear, open spaces; straight avenues; neatly divided neighbourhoods; functional blocks of flat. The expectation was that new forms of social life would emerge from this top-down redesign.

During the aftermath of the French Revolution, the early promoters of the language of the social picked up on precisely this neglect of established boundaries (and the utter failure, i.e. instability, of the newly created ones) to highlight the flawed social theory that was at the core of French governmental action. In his *Study on Sovereignty* (posthumous, written around 1795), the prominent conservative Joseph de Maistre judged severely the revolutionary way of tampering with existing boundaries; he argued that each nation has natural borders, established by the action of God himself: "The Creator has traced on the globe the boundaries [limites] of nations ... These boundaries are visible, and each nation can be seen trying to fill entirely each one of the areas within these boundaries" (de Maistre 1993, 326).

In a similar vein John Finch, a little known figure from Northern America on whom I could not find much information, published in 1833 a volume entailing a study of "the natural boundaries of Empires* – one of the few occurrences of such an expression in the title of a scholarly volume (Finch 1833). The expectation was that new forms of social life would emerge from this top-down redesign.

9 The expression is, overall, little used. I have found some occurrences of the expression "natural boundary" in the work of the British geographer Thomas Holdich, for instance in Holdich (1916), p. 2, 162 and in Holdich (1918), p. 116. But even this author observes, interestingly: "Boundaries are the inevitable product of advancing civilization; they are human inventions not necessarily supported by nature's disposition, and as such they are only of solid value so long as they can be strong enough and secure enough to prevent their violation and
"eternal", caused by the "physical geography of the soil", and the others variable, caused by "the power of man". Of the two, it is obviously the first that "produces the most permanent effect" (Finch 1833, 338). To prove his point, Finch gave, among other ones, the example of revolutionary and Napoleonic France. He exclaimed: "How often have wars terminated in the 'statu quo ante bellum.' Look at the wars of the French Revolution!" At the end of a bloodshed involving the united strength of millions, "each monarch", Finch observed, "retained his original dominions, with a few trivial exceptions" (Finch 1833, 345).

Naturalistic approaches to social phenomena, as we will see, have lost their appeal during the twentieth century: the notion that boundaries are made by humans is by now firmly established. However, it is not uncommon to encounter contributions to scholarship in which cultural boundaries are treated, consciously or not, as if they were a product of nature: such contributions emphasize closure, permanence, homogeneity, and independence from social practice, thereby taking up all the connotations of the boundary concept as used by early, naturalistic social scientists. A good example of covert naturalism in current research is the work of Samuel Huntington. In his *Clash of Civilizations* (Huntington 1996), he described the identity of the seven or eight "world civilizations" as strongly continuous, having been forged over millennia. He also emphasized, against the concept of identity as political strategy, that human action is primarily determined by culture. Lastly, Huntington emphasized the difficulty to empathize across civilizational boundaries: he thus saw the rigidity of borders and the enmity of civilizations as almost inevitable phenomena. This led him to detect strong conflict potentials (risks of "clash") wherever two civilizations are contiguous (on Huntington, see Terrier 2002).

This can be interpreted as an absorption of the connotations of nature into the concept of culture, a phenomenon which has been well described by Etienne Balibar (Balibar and Wallerstein 1993, 22):

> biological or genetic naturalism is not the only means of naturalizing human behaviour and social affinities. ... culture can also function like a nature, and it can in particular

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infringement. Nature knows no boundary lines. Nature has her frontiers truly, but lines, especially straight lines, are abhorrent to her." (Holdich 1916, 2). This suggests a further connotation of the "boundary" word: not only a line, but a relatively *straight* line.
function as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin [emphasis original, JT].

Because of this, it is possible, in my view, to see strong cultural determinism as a distant heirs of nineteenth-century naturalistic social science. May the persistence of such approaches in a new guise be due, as some have suggested, to the fact that essentialization and reification are innate tendencies of the human brain (Gil-White 2001; see also Brubaker 2002, 165–166)? I am not convinced: this explanation is yet another naturalism, this time essentializing the mind. It seems safer to assume that essentialization is merely one among many possible operations of the brain: it belongs to the repertoire of the mind, without constituting a necessary tendency (on this point, see the critique of Gil-White's approach in Kurzban, Tooby, and Cosmides 2001; Banton 2001).

It is not my intention to offer here a full history of the boundary concept during the nineteenth century. My aim is merely to highlight the way in which the revolutionary (and also liberal) understanding of boundaries as easily amenable to political modification was heavily challenged during the first phase of development of the language of the social, whose promoters emphasized the existence of natural (and also in part cultural) constraints. This naturalistic approach to boundaries was of course not, theoretically speaking, the only available option, but its influence was, it seems to me, very considerable in the social sciences until quite late in the nineteenth century (on this point, see Mucchielli 1998; Brooks 1998). It is not surprising, thus, that during the progressive institution of sociology and social anthropology as academic disciplines in Europe and the United States around 1900, the naturalistic paradigm was indicated as one of the two major intellectual obstacles limiting the establishment of the new approach (the other one being traditional philosophy, whose weakness was a lack empirical grounding – cf. Karsenti 2013). Especially clear in this respect is Emile Durkheim's *Suicide* (Durkheim 1994), whose first half was dedicated to a critique of the explanation of suicide rates in European societies by way of an appeal to natural and individual factors. Durkheim denied the relevance of "extra-social factors" such as climate, race, psychological pathologies or imitation to explain suicide. Instead, he highlighted the decisive role of social contexts.

Similarly, Simmel repeatedly contrasted the sense of human beings for boundaries and the continuity and "limitlessness" (*Grenzenlosigkeit*) of space. The drawing of any boundary has
something arbitrary to it, he argued: even in the case of an island, the coastline is a boundary only as long as its inhabitants accept it as such (and have no plan, for instance, to extend their territory by conquering neighbouring islands) (Simmel 1992a, 695). Simmel used such arguments to dismiss the notion of natural boundaries, and to emphasize the priority of intellectual and social boundary-drawing. Thus he defined a border (Grenze) as a "crystallization or a spatialization of mental (seelische) processes of limitation, which alone are real" (Simmel 1992a, 697). And he affirmed, more generally, that a "boundary (Grenze) is not a spatial fact with sociological effects, but a sociological fact that takes a spatial shape." (Simmel 1992a, 697) Simmel gave a great importance to the social phenomena of boundary-drawing and boundary-crossing. Already in his early contribution to sociological thought, On Sociological Differentiation, he proposed a distinction between two kinds of groups: on the one hand small, relatively homogeneous and tightly bounded groups leaving little freedom to individuals; on the other hand larger, differentiated societies with more porous boundaries, offering more opportunities for individuals not only to circulate within them, but also to cross their borders (Simmel 1989, 159–160). Simmel also formulated a fascinating theory of individualization as boundary-crossing: the more individuals move beyond the limits of their own group and are confronted with previously unknown social practices and representations, the more they will gather particular experiences and acquire a feeling of the uniqueness of their own personality (Simmel 1989, 331–336; Simmel 1992b; on Simmel's concept of personality see Terrier 2012).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, other sociologists and social anthropologists have reflected on the question of nationality, ethnicity, and identity starting like Durkheim and Simmel from anti-naturalistic premises. In the following sections, I discuss the contributions of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Marcel Mauss. As we will see, the outcome of the research done by the promoters of the "non-naturalistic dialect" within the social sciences for the boundary concept was threefold. 1) First, as we saw, boundaries should be seen as outcomes of social and political processes, not as extra-social phenomena. They stop to exist in the long run if they are not re-asserted through some kind of social action. 2) As a consequence, the assumption of the "perennial nature" of boundaries was challenged: when race, the nature of climate or the configuration of the territory are invoked as explanatory factors of boundary formation, then
boundaries are assumed to have, by logical implication, the same durability as the natural factors themselves. By contrast, if boundaries are envisaged to primarily depend on interhuman relationships, they immediately acquire the same fluidity (or stability) than the one attributed to the overall structure of social relations: typically the assumption of fixity is considerably diminished. 3) Lastly, boundaries can be envisaged as less hermetic – as thresholds, not as barriers. Natural boundaries resist crossing or displacement; if they are challenged by the action of human beings (like the state borders during the wars following the French Revolution), their return to their previous position is only a matter of time. By contrast, the proponents of the "non-naturalistic dialect" within the social sciences (most clearly, perhaps, Marcel Mauss) are in a position to view society as an entity which is permanently in contact with its neighbours and which is more capable of social transformation: even mergers between societies, Mauss argued (taking up a suggestion of Emile Durkheim), are a very common phenomenon in history (Mauss 2013, 120).

2. Walls in collective consciousness: boundaries according to Emile Durkheim

Given his insistence, on the social origin of things, thoughts and events, it is little surprising that Durkheim envisaged boundaries are established socially, too. Correspondingly, Durkheim could give great importance to some phenomena that the proponents of the naturalistic dialect of the social had often envisaged with much scepticism: in particular, the redrawing of social boundaries through a merger of smaller societies into a bigger one. At the same time, Durkheim envisaged society as a kind of sphere with an identifiable centre (or at least an identifiable centripetal movement). His primary interest lay on the analysis of the "pull" exerted by the core institutions and values of society, thereby holding all individual members together. In modernity for instance, argued Durkheim, society is held together by the attraction of a few ideals (most importantly the belief in the intrinsic worth of the human person: cf. Joas 2011; Terrier 2012), and by the common belief in the capacity of the state to represent and uphold these ideals (cf. Durkheim 1997). Because of his interest for what is located at the core of the social, Durkheim did not have the same interest as Simmel or Mauss for borders, boundaries and peripheries. Correspondingly, his conceptual reflection on the nature of intersocial (international, interethnic, etc.) boundaries remains embryonic.
On the other hand, however, Durkheim offered a fascinating conceptualization of another kind of boundary, located within society itself: the boundary between the sacred and the profane. Durkheim envisaged this dividing line between two domains, or perhaps two "modalities" of social life, as very strong. In fact, he even argued that the sacred/profane boundary was not just a boundary, but the clearest and strongest of all boundaries. Durkheim, on the basis of ethnographic and historical material, argued that all societies have a sense of the sacred. Sacredness in turn is defined, not by its content, but by its form: that which is sacred is kept separate from ordinary, daily social life (Durkheim 1912, 49–58). It is present in the mind of social actors as something special, which inspires them at the same time awe and love, and which can be approached only when precise rules are followed (this the meaning of ritual) (see Terrier 2013). If the rules are broken (in this case: if the sacred is profaned), the offending individual or group is sanctioned in various ways: mockery, reprobation, blame, formal punishment. The sacred is typically materialized in places, objects, images and symbols more generally. There is a variety of thresholds (or boundaries) around sacred objects: they can be kept elevated, protected by ad hoc buildings (such as a church), etc. In modernity, the sacred is not confined to the religious in the classical sense: political items (such as flags), can be revered as sacred, too (Durkheim 1912, 315; on this point, see Tiryakian 1988). In fact, the individuals themselves pertain to the sacred, they are the object of a specific cult whose sacred text is the Declaration of the Rights of Man (Durkheim 1969).

Sacred objects are the product of social processes, of which Durkheim offered a precise description. Sacralization emerges, according to Durkheim, in specific moments of collective excitation during which large numbers of individuals gather (usually physically) and take part in something akin to a celebration (Joas 1997; Shilling and Mellor 1998; Collins 2004, chap. 1). These moments can be of two kinds . In some cases (Durkheim 1975, 14, gave the example of intense political events, such the French Revolution or the Dreyfus Affair), these moments take place spontaneously. In other cases, sacralization is institutionalized: for instance, ceremonies, commemorations or pageants are organized to celebrate a particular event, a particular historical experience, or a particular political value (what he had in mind were religious or political holidays such as Easter, 14 Juillet, or the Fourth of July).
Durkheim suggested that the feelings of sacredness, commonality and sociality were always under threat. For instance, in modern "organic" societies, individuals are overwhelmed by the complexity of their daily experiences: they are taken away from society by the forces of work and family life. Durkheim argued that the sacred keeps its vivacity in the minds of individuals through institutionalized collective remembrance and recurrent celebrations of the kind I mentioned above. When sacralization processes are successful, the social sense of the sacred, the individual feeling of attachment to the collectivity and its ideals, takes the form of spontaneous emotions triggered by the presence of specific objects. These emotions, in turn, inspire the solidaristic, uninterested actions that are necessary for the long-term preservation and cohesion of society.

What is interesting in Durkheim's theory of the sacred is that it furnishes a model for the conceptualization of boundary and boundary maintenance. In this model, we encounter at the same time an emphasis on the social nature of boundaries and on their remarkable strength, durability, and authority. Concerning the characteristics of the sacred/profane boundary Durkheim focuses on, a few things can be said. 1) Boundaries are in the mind: for instance, the boundary between the sacred and the profane rests on collective representations that individual have internalized. 2) Boundaries are deep-seated mental representations; they possess a relatively strong authority and inspire automatic / spontaneous (as opposed to calculated) forms of action. 3) Boundaries are often associated with concrete, visible symbols, and acquire thereby a material dimension. What me call, following Marcel Mauss, boundary "fetishism" is a quite common attitude in which the symbol is misinterpreted as the cause of the boundary, rather than its effect (see Terrier and Fournier 2013). 4) The strength of boundaries depends on systematic maintenance. Groups maintain boundaries by imparting formal and informal social sanctions when they seem them threatened, and by re-asserting their importance in collective rituals.

It is a common complaint among researchers that the emphasis on the socially constructed nature of boundaries is often taken to imply that boundaries are fluid, moving, weak, easily modifiable by individual will, etc. (see Hacking 1999; Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 1) However, Durkheim's approach strongly suggests that a theorization of boundaries as socially constructed does not necessarily go hand in hand with a relativization of their importance and power: in Durkheim's
thought boundaries are more walls than thresholds. Moreover, Durkheim also offers, with his concept of collective effervescence, a theory of the way in which boundaries are the outcome of non-strategic, emotion-laden social processes: boundaries can thus be constructed without being engineered. Lastly, Durkheim proposed a subtle and complex depiction of the human mind: he distinguished between fleeting, idiosyncratic, individual representations, on the one hand, and collective representations, on the other. Such collective representations are acquired during the socialization process and re-affirmed daily in social life; they entail fundamental concepts (such as force or substance), distinctions (such as the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane), and evaluations (such as political ideals) which are the condition of meaningful thought and action. Such reflections resurface in current research on identity and boundaries, as illustrated by the success of the new "cognitive" approach to these questions (Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004; Jenkins 2008).

Because of these elements, it is possible to locate in the Durkheimian tradition, broadly understood, many contemporary contributions to boundary research, such as the one by Bentley (1987), Hale (2004) or Brubaker (see below). These authors criticize the instrumentalist/primordialist dichotomy and advocate some form of critical constructivism which acknowledges both the constructed and the (at least potentially) solid nature of identities and boundaries. This sounds very Durkheimian indeed – however, Durkheim's influence seems, in the case of the authors considered, to have been indirect: an important mediation here was the work of Pierre Bourdieu, especially with his concepts of habitus (habitual scheme of action) and practical sense (an incorporated feeling of the rightness and wrongness of some actions) (Bourdieu 1979; Bourdieu 1980).

Critical constructivists argue that primordialists have often been misunderstood: what primordialists emphasize is not that cultures and boundaries are as fatal and fixed as the cosmic order, or that subjective identification is irrelevant to the existence of boundaries.10 Rather, their suggestion is that boundaries, while being in the minds, occupy in these minds a very deeply seated region indeed. To borrow a formulation from Isaiah Berlin (1962, 131), it is not the case that human beings are always "moved by reasons, by conscious purposes." Very often (perhaps

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10 As observed by Brubaker (2004), p. 49, Geertz, who is often described as an arch-primordialist, speaks of perceived "givens".
most of the time), they act automatically, on the basis of pre-existing conceptions and dispositions (such as categories, images, stereotypes, internalized moral beliefs) that are not further questioned. Such conceptions and dispositions are typically (though not exclusively) social: as Durkheim also suggested, they have been acquired during socialization and are confirmed in everyday interactions. Specifically, when human beings classify things and persons into groups, they use powerful inherited schemes in a spontaneous and pre-reflexive way. These schemes dictate what things and people are by isolating typical characteristics. They also often prescribe an appropriate kind of behaviour.

Primordialists envisage boundaries as solid because they assume that individuals cannot distance themselves from the schemes they use: they are as it were necessarily victims of their own categories (for instance, they prefer the familiar to the unfamiliar; they uncritically homogenize groups; they take boundaries between classes of persons or things to be insurmountable). On this point, however, critical constructivists part company with primordialists: they assume, in effect, that while boundaries can be very solid, they also can by very thoroughly challenged. In other words, the solidity of boundaries is less a theoretical than an empirical question. I will come back below to these questions when discussing Brubaker.

3. Boundaries and the struggle for social honour: Max Weber

Max Weber's approach to nationality and ethnicity is well-known in the field and had, of the three classical theorists discussed in this chapter, the clearest intellectual impact (Schnapper 1991; Stone 1995; Kim 2002; Brubaker 2002), despite becoming available in English only in 1961 (Banton 2007, 31), and despite its cursory and fragmentary character. Weber rejected what he called the theory of the "acting collective personality" (Weber 1968, 14) as an intellectually and politically dangerous form of "groupism" – i.e. the assumption that groups are agents distinct from their members, and that they are endowed with a mind of their own. For Weber nations and ethnic groups are not "pre-existing" or "natural" groups of individuals with an identity fixed by their past, traditions, or hereditary dispositions. Rather, he understood them as communities of belief – as collections of individuals who all share the intimate conviction of common descent and cultural distinctiveness (Weber 1968, 398). Thus Weber displaced the research agenda from
the question of identity to that of identification.

Concerning the motivations of individuals to accept and promote and the belief in the existence of distinctive ethnic and national groups, Weber gave a great importance to interest and power (see Banton 2007, 23–24). Weber's view of society was one in which individuals struggle to secure their access to scarce resources, both material (property, lifestyle) and ideal (prestige, honour). He argued that groups were in many cases instruments in the hands of individuals that could give them an edge in this struggle. For instance, trade unions may strive to enforce the principle that only their members could be hired by certain companies. In the same way, individuals may argue that only the members of certain ethnic groups may legitimately exert certain professions or enjoy certain rights. A noted by Weber, this practice is historically quite common in a variety of settings, for instance Western Europe before the nineteenth century; the United States, with its racial categories supporting slavery and later Jim-Crow style segregation (cf. Stone 1995); or the Ottoman Empire until its disappearance.

As we see, thus, Weber gave a great importance to the social practice of drawing boundaries between groups. He suggested that the drawing of such boundaries could be made more plausible when objective characteristics such as skin colour or language could serve as indicators (Weber 1968, 385). However, there was for him no necessity that mere visible differences should turn into principles of separation. Groups exist because individuals identify with them, share the values they are taken to represent, adopt its project, and expect (material and ideal) advantages from membership. Correspondingly, what is crucial for the emergence of bounded groups are concrete, situated interactions and political processes: the familiarity emerging from repeated local encounters, the memory of collective experiences, the recognition of common interests, the desire to realize certain projects, including – most importantly – political projects.

The Weberian approach to ethnic phenomena is too fragmentary to constitute a passage obligé for researchers on ethnicity. Nonetheless, a Weberian inspiration can be detected in the work of many researchers. Moreover it is legitimate, as Stone (1995) argues, to use the "Weberian" label to describe some contributions to scholarship who meet certain criteria, regardless of a direct mention of, or reference to, Weber. I think that any approach to national or ethnic groups emphasizing political strategy, the prevalence of social honour over cultural identity, and / or the
strongly historical and thus fluctuating nature of ethnic boundaries can be located within the Weberian tradition broadly understood. As suggested by Stone (Stone 1995, 398), there are some Weberian echoes in the work of Fredrik Barth, especially in his reflections on the role of honour and status in Pathan identity (see below). In current research, the Weberian heritage is explicitly assumed by a number of researchers, including, importantly, Rogers Brubaker (whose work will also be discussed later): for instance, he approvingly recalls Weber's famous dictum that "the umbrella term 'ethnic'" is "entirely unusable" for "truly rigorous investigation" and should perhaps be "thrown out altogether" (cited in Brubaker 2002, 186).

It may be fruitful to distinguish between three possible, and not mutually exclusive, directions in which to take Weber's analysis. Starting from the assumption that identities and boundaries are outcomes of conscious political processes, it is possible to focus on three kinds of political actors: 1) state personnel; 2) non-state elite groups, including intelligentsias; and 3) large social movements. In identity and boundary research, the role of all three groups has been analyzed by a variety of authors – the examples I give below are merely very well known illustrations.

1) The role of the state in imposing boundaries has been often emphasized, for example by the research of Amselle, M'bokolo et. al. on Africa, which has been seminal in France (Amselle and M'Bokolo 1999b; see also Bensa 1994; Amselle 1996; Bensa 2006). These researchers argue that in many parts of Africa before the colonial period, the categories used by local actors to describe groups were more fluid. Exchanges across social boundaries were common; societies were perceived as connected with one another, thereby constituting relatively open "chains of societies" (Amselle and M’Bokolo 1999a, p. III; Amselle 2008, 187–188). By contrast, many anthropologists and colonial administrators tended to see ethnic groups as clearly distinct and mutually exclusive. In some cases, this scheme of perception was reinforced by official policies of "ethnic promotion": in Burundi and Rwanda for instance, the Belgian state introduced official ethnic categories, the Tutsis and Hutus, and initially favoured the former over the latter in particular through their recruitment for administrative jobs. This contributed to the hardening of Tutsi and Hutu identities, triggering a process of social estrangement of the two groups which culminated in the violent conflicts of the mid-nineties (cf. Chrétien 1999).

2) Liah Greenfeld, in her celebrated *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, gives a major
importance to elites in the emergence of national identity, which she envisages as a form of "consciousness" (a set of deep-rooted convictions) inspiring specific policies. According to Greenfeld, nationalism, whose core component is the cult of the people's "substance", emerged as a weapon in the fight of elites in their struggle with the absolutist state. In France, the enlightened nobility, allied with the bourgeoisie, identified with the people against the monarchy and redefined the "people' in such a way that being of it would become an honor rather than a disgrace." (Greenfeld 1992, 154) In Germany, the educated bourgeoisie "found national identity attractive because it implied an unassailable dignity for, and automatically elevated members of, the national collectivity ... putting them on a par with the most exalted nobility" (p. 314). The social situation of elites also determined the characteristics of national consciousness in each country. For instance, in Germany the persistence of the monarchic-aristocratic order led to the exclusion of the Bildungsbürger from power. This led to the development of an irrational, Romantic culture emphasizing emotion and sacrifice as "substitute[s] for the self-fulfilment in the world" (p. 334). Lastly, Greenfeld suggests that the national consciousness initially developed by intellectuals and social elites was transferred to the population as a whole, for instance through the work of political movements and associations. She argues (p. 360) that in Germany, for instance, the "intellectuals forged the national identity of the German-speaking people."

3) In his famous *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson described the slow, bottom-up historical process through which modern societies acquired a "national consciousness" – understood as a feeling of "deep, horizontal comradeship" among people sharing a common culture and defended by a sovereign state (Anderson 1983, 15–16). Fundamental for the emergence of national identities was the spread of vernacular languages during the Early modern period through "Protestantism and print capitalism" (p. 44). The "new reading publics" (id.) acquired a sense of the fixity of language and of clear-cut linguistic boundaries which slowly developed into a full-blown national consciousness. At the end of this phase of "largely spontaneous popular nationalisms", during the long nineteenth century, a new, state-based "official nationalism" appeared, which further solidified national consciousness (p. 102).
4. Nationhood as establishment and cancellation of boundaries: Marcel Mauss

The French anthropologist Marcel Mauss deserves to be seen as one of the most important theorist of the openness of societies and the porosity of social boundaries. This aspect of his thought has been little discussed so far, due to the unavailability of some key unpublished texts; but this may now change with a new edition of his important contribution to the sociology of the nation-state and of international relations (Mauss 2013). In 1913, Mauss published, together with his uncle Emile Durkheim, a small article on the concept of civilization. In this text, the two authors opened up a theoretical space to overcome the "methodological nationalism" of the social sciences (Chernilo 2007).

It is a common assumption, they wrote, that "collective life can develop only within a political organism with fixed boundaries (contours arrêtés) and clearly drawn limits; in other words, [that] national life is the highest form" of collective life (Durkheim and Mauss 1913, 46; a translation of this text is available in 2006). The authors did not deny the correctness of this assumption. Durkheim, in particular, had emphasized in his earlier work the existence of a force of attraction tying all inhabitants to a central core made of shared values and ideals. However, the two authors argued, the "supra-national" level of social life should not be neglected (Durkheim and Mauss 1913, 47). They proposed to use the concept of a civilization to describe a "kind of moral milieu within which certain nations are immersed and of which each national culture is only a specific form" (Durkheim and Mauss 1913, 48). Within a civilization there exists a continuous flux of exchange, not only of goods (through trade), but also of "art, techniques, tools, languages, words, scientific knowledge, literary forms and ideals"; all these things "travel", they are "borrowed", and thus belong to "a history which is not that of a single society" (Durkheim and Mauss 1913, 49).

Mauss later radicalized this conception (see Ramel 2006; Bert 2009; Terrier and Fournier 2013). In his text on the national phenomenon, he insisted that societies exchange goods, ideas and ideals not only within, but also across the boundaries of a civilization. Furthermore, Mauss introduced the concept of the "intersocial" to emphasize that some social phenomena belong to several societies at once and thus challenge the very concept of society as a neatly bounded object: he mentioned for instance the case of nomadic and diasporic groups, as well as the case
of international communities of artists or scholars whose network extend beyond the boundaries of their own nation (Mauss 2013, 152–163). Mauss also argued that some juridic institutions are international by nature. For instance, he interpreted the emergence of the League of Nation as the consolidation of a new level of social life, as an intersocial institution where new ideals and norms, backed up by a power to impart sanctions, were enshrined. In order to assess the boldness of these claims, we need to compare them with the position held in the article from 1913. In this text, Durkheim and Mauss had suggested that at least some things cannot possibly be exchanged or shared: and they mentioned the case of legal norms, political institutions, and social groups.

Mauss abandoned these restrictions. He argued that it is "an abstraction to believe that the internal life of a nation is not for a large part conditioned by that which is external to it, and vice versa" (Mauss 2013, 122). More concisely, he argued that societies "subsist because they borrow" (vivent d'emprunts) (Mauss 2013, 124). He suggested that sociology, instead of taking single societies or nations as its object, should focus on the interaction between clusters of relatively open collectivities which he called "hypersocial system[s] of social systems" (Mauss 1969, 463).

It is interesting to know that Mauss also developed a theory of national identity, coupled with a normative assessment of its benefits and dangers. Mauss's approach to nationhood can be summarized by highlighting five core elements.

1) Nationhood is a historical, not a perennial phenomenon. Not all societies are nations: nations are only one of many possible social forms, alongside clans, tribes, and empires.

2) What is characteristic of nations as opposed to other societal configurations is, on the one hand, their way of drawing boundaries. Georg Simmel had argued that the sociological research on spatiality should pay attention not only to the drawing of boundaries, but also to their "erasure". It is, in effect, a characteristic of social groups at the same time to imagine a threshold between themselves and other groups, and to conceive of themselves as an open space, as a unity deprived of insurmountable divisions.\footnote{Simmel wrote: "A further quality of space which has a deep impact on social interactions is the fact that space, in order to suit our practical needs, can be divided in smaller pieces which we perceive as cohesive units (Einheiten) ... A society, insofar as the space within which it exists is surrounded by sharp, consciously-drawn boundaries, [subjectively] acquires the characteristic of internal cohesion." (Simmel 1992a, 694)} A similar line of reasoning can be found in the work of

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Marcel Mauss. A nation, on the one hand, has fixed borders which separate the outside from the inside: this is important, among other things, to define the limits of validity of legal orders. On the other hand, the inhabitants of nations (as opposed, for instance, to the members of tribal societies) have a conception of the national space as continuous: strong internal social boundaries, for instance between ranks or estates, professional guilds, or regions, have disappeared (Mauss 2013, 89–90).

3) A further characteristic of nations is the way in which power is exerted within them. As all social boundaries within themselves progressively wither away, nations also erode the division between rulers and subjects, replacing it with the division between citizens and representatives. While not all nations are necessarily democracies, the presence within them of a process democratization seems to be intrinsic to the national phenomenon, as Mauss understood it. When describing this phenomenon, Mauss spoke of the "intrinsic nature of power" within nations. By contrast, other societies locate the source of political power "out there": for instance, they see it as imposed by tradition or divine will (Mauss 2013, 82–84).

4) Because individuals circulate freely within their nation, and because they are directly involved in national life through economic and sometimes political participation, a feeling of belonging, a belief in the "relative moral, mental, and cultural unity" (Mauss 2013, 84) of the nation develops among members. Nationhood, for Mauss, depends crucially on subjective dispositions, most importantly self-ascription / identification, and a belief in the legitimacy of the state as a representative of social life ("the conscious adhesion to the state and its laws" is the formulation used by Mauss 2013, 84).

5) Mauss's approach to nationhood entails a normative part. On the basis of his understanding of nationhood as a form consciousness, Mauss implicitly took up Marx's opposition and distinguished between true and false national consciousness. The latter, which Mauss also called national "fetishism" (Mauss 2013, 107), is characterized by an essentialization of the cultural features of the nation. The nation, for Mauss, is primarily a social and political, not a cultural phenomenon: it exists as long as its members identify with it and concretely partake in national

12 However, as we saw, national boundaries always remain porous.
life, regardless of the transformation of their cultural habits. The false national consciousness, by contrast, understand nationality not as a project but as fixed national traits, which it envisages as distinctive and immutable. This, according to Mauss, has two negative consequences: first, the emphasis on tradition slows down social progress, especially democratization and the economic empowerment of the working class. Second, the emphasis on closure and distinctiveness creates an atmosphere of enmity between nations which can result in military conflicts: the First World War, according to Mauss, had been in part caused by essentialist, traditionalist nationalism. In order to secure long-lasting peace, which was Mauss's primary political goal, one thing was necessary: the eradication of national "fetishism", which Mauss called a "disease of national consciousness" (Mauss 2013, 72).

5. Ethnic interaction and the drawing of boundaries: Fredrik Barth

Leaving classical sociologists and anthropologists behind, I now turn to brief presentations of two contemporary scholars, Fredrik Barth and Rogers Brubaker. The reasons for my focus on them are – in the case of Barth – the tremendous influence of his work in the field I am investigating here; and – in the case of Brubaker – the originality and systematicity of contribution; moreover, Brubaker's work is fairly recent, so that only parts of it is assessed, for sheer reasons of chronology, in Lamont and Molnár's (2002) canonic survey of the research done on boundaries.

For reasons that I cannot present in full detail here (cf. Terrier 2011, chap. 3), the culture concept rose to prominence after the Second World War; however, it initially contained relatively strong connotations and fixity and unity, sometimes culminating in the "culturalist" view that society is a) internally homogeneous, b) stable over time, c) clearly bounded and distinct from its neighbours (see Vermeulen and Govers 1994, 5; also Friese and Wagner 2000). It is precisely such a view of culture that Fredrik Barth was trying to supersede with his Ethnic Groups and Boundaries, as he made clear in the 1998 preface to the second edition of this work (Barth 1998b, 6). The search for a new concept of culture can be understood by a look at the social and

13 Note the proximity of this position to the one later defended by Edmund Leach and Fredrik Barth. See on this point Eriksen Eriksen (1991), p. 129-139.
political context. In the 1960s, the "culturalist" view of the social was deemed increasingly difficult to square with the social and political events of the time: cultural change, in the sixties, was everywhere to be seen (from the erosion of the traditional family and the questioning of gender roles to the higher-education boom and the rise of geographical mobility). This rendered a description of cultures as stable and homogeneous more and more problematic. It is in this framework that new, more dynamic theories of culture were developed (e.g. Berger and Luckmann 1971; Geertz 1973; Swidler 1986; Amselle and M’Bokolo 1999b) as something that was not passively inherited, but actively constructed, interpreted, transmitted, contested. There was a growing interest for (national) identity, but for social and political identities.

Barth can be seen as an important contributor to this revision of the culture concept. Instead of emphasizing cultural homogeneity and stability he depicts culture "as in flux, ... contradictory and incoherent, and ... differentially distributed on variously positioned persons." (Barth 1994, 14) Instead of emphasizing cultural difference, he affirms that "global variation in culture is continuous, it does not partition into separable, integrated wholes" (Barth 1994, 30). This view of culture is at the root of Barth's famous sentence according to which groups are more defined by the boundary they draw than by the "cultural stuff it encloses" (Barth 1998b, 15): ethnic groups exist because individuals identify and are identified with them (these phenomena are called "ascription" and "self-ascription" by Barth). Very often, identification occurs despite remarkable dissimilarities of culture with other members of the group and remarkable similarities of culture with other groups (note that if culture is indeed continuous, such phenomena are little surprising): Barth gave the example of a few social groups, such as the Southern Pathans and Norwegian mountain farmers, which identify with a cultural community despite marked differences of social practices and representations (Barth 1998b, 13). Also, identification persists despite permanent intersocial relations across boundaries (Barth 1998b, 9). In Barth's formulation there is a "flow of personnel" (Barth 1998b, 9, 23) between ethnic groups, frequent

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14 I draw here on Brubaker and Cooper (2000) as well as on Boltanski (2002) for his description of the link between political movements and styles of theorizing.

15 See Brubaker and Cooper (2000), p. 3. As Brubaker also observes, this interest for identities later developed into two directions: a furthering and deepening of constructivism on the one hand, leading to the ironic attitude of postmodernism; and a return of substantialist "groupism" on the other hand (Brubaker 2002), as illustrated by multiculturalism (in some of its forms) or the highly successful metaphor of the "clash of civilizations", discussed above.
interaction between "persons of different culture" (Barth 1998b, 16), often involving people "changing" their ethnic identity" (Barth 1994, 11).

The question Barth is asking is: why do these interactions often fail to cause a merger of the groups involved? How to explain the "persistence of cultural differences" (Barth 1998b, 16.)? His answer is that ethnic divisions should not be understood primarily as cultural commonalities, but as boundary maintenance, i.e. as the persistence of individual "self-identification" with a specific group regardless of "objective" cultural congruence or divergence. Barth later suggested, in a re-appraisal of his work, that Ethnic Groups and Boundaries has sometimes been wrongly interpreted as entailing a denial of the relevance of culture. Of course, Barth was and remains critical of the anthropologists' tendency to prepare lists of objective cultural specificities: what is relevant, in his view, are perceived differences of culture (Barth 1994, 12, 16). Such perceived differences can, in effect, play a fundamental role in the process of social (self-)identification: for instance, in his own analysis of Pathan identity in Ethnic Group of Boundaries, Barth showed how the Pathans use cultural criteria to draw a boundary between them and other groups, such as a belief in a common ancestor, religious faith, or language (Barth 1998a, 120).

In "Pathan Identity and Its Maintenance", Barth focused on the perspective of individual actors, accounting for identity change in terms of the conscious strategies of individuals striving for social status. For instance, many Southern Pathans change their ethnic identity when they fall under the influence of another ethnic group, the Baluchs. While Pathan tribes are ruled by egalitarian councils, Baluch tribes are organized, in a more hierarchical fashion, around patrons. Remaining a Pathan in such a setting implies a challenge to one's own concept of honour: "it is hardly surprising, then, that any one assimilated" chooses to "embrace the identity that makes his situation more tolerable" (Barth 1998a, 125). Similarly, Eastern Pathans moving into Pakistani territory often drop their identity in order to adapt to a "social system where pursuit of Pathan virtues is consistently punished, whereas compromise, submission and accommodation are rewarded." (Barth 1998a, 129)

Barth later argued, that other perspectives, beyond the micro level of individual conduct, needed to be taken into account as well. He mentioned a median level of analysis: how identities can be forged or modified through the action of ethnic entrepreneurs who seek to mobilize groups to
engage in political action (Barth 1998a, 21); and a macro level of state policies through which "[v]alued resources are arbitrarily allocated, or denied, by bureaucratic action, thereby creating communities of fate – which will next tend to emerge as social, self-aware groups – from form legal categories." (Barth 1998a, 19)

As noted earlier in this chapter, Barth's *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* has been extremely influential. An important factor to explain this influence, I believe, is the book's combination of a new theoretical perspective on culture and identity with the presentation of very strong empirical evidence to support it – Barth's chapter on Pathan identity, of which some aspects have been presented above, is a marvellous piece of anthropological writing which strikes a balance between close factual descriptions and challenging theoretical reflections. Overall, however, it is easy to perceive why Barth's model has been criticized as well as praised (Poutignat, Streiff-Fenart, and Barth 2008, 143–145). Most importantly in my view, Barth does in the end (despite his reflections on the role of political movements and state institutions), give the impression that identities are a matter of individual decision. Of course, such decisions are taken in social settings which entail opportunities as well as limits. But the connotations of choice are unmistakable in a quotation like the following one:

> In most situations it is to the advantage of the actors themselves to change their [identity] label so as to avoid the costs of failure, and so where there is an alternative identity within reach the effect is a flow of personnel form one identity to another[.] (Barth 1998a, 133)

Barth's research is complex and subtle: I agree with Poutignat, Streiff-Fenart, and Barth (2008) that the accusation of subjectivism is an exaggeration. Other authors emphasize more than he does the aspect of choice in ethnic identification: for instance, Lyman and Douglass (1973), p. 360, write about the way in which "[a]ny ethnic identity available to an actor may be invoked or hidden, projected or rejected, affirmed or denied", so that the actor tend to assume "the identity most advantageous to him." Moreover, Barth can also be read as a forerunner of the (currently increasingly widespread) cognitive approach to ethnicity as categorization (Poutignat, Streiff-Fenart, and Barth 2008, 127; Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004, 32), which seek to move
beyond the instrumentalist/primordialist dichotomy by insisting on the deep-seated mental level at which ethnic ascription occurs. However, for the purpose of this chapter, it is not unfair to see Barth's work as an illustration of a certain concept of boundaries – one which emphasizes their porosity and "thinness". I will come back to this issue below.

6. Critical constructivism: Rogers Brubaker

In his study of "ethnicity without groups", Brubaker (2004) has proposed to turn away from the notion of groups as real, bounded, homogeneous collective entities comparable to persons. Instead, he favours an approach in terms of variable feelings of "groupness" within a population (consciousness of the group and identification with it). How do such feelings emerge and develop? An interesting aspect of Brubaker's work is what we may call his "methodological pluralism": he does not provide one definition of what an identity, an ethnic group, or a boundary is; neither does he offer a single theorization of the emergence and maintenance of identities, groups, and boundaries. He does start from a constructivist perspective, inspired by the work of Weber and Bourdieu, and thus rejects any explanation in terms of "substance" or "nature". However, he is also critical of what he calls "clichéd constructivism" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 11): a kind of post-modern approach which wrongly equates "constructed" with "fluid, temporary, blurred, malleable". Faithful to his Weberian inspiration, Brubaker is sensitive to historical processes: he shows that identities, or boundaries can be, depending on the historical situation, either imprecise and open or very sharp and seemingly insurmountable, due to the strength of mental categorizations and divisions.16

Especially central to Brubaker's work is the analysis of the role of political actors in promoting and consolidating social categories. Depending on the strength of the actors involved and their success in mobilizing given populations, group identification and group boundary will become more or less clear-cut and enduring. According to Brubaker, official categorization by the state (or any institution with the monopoly of violence) has an especially deep and lasting impact.

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16 See for instance his analysis of national boundary-drawing in four successor states of the Soviet Union. Due to state policies and political processes, the boundary between the members of the titular nationality and the Russophone minority has been "strong ... in Estonia and Latvia", with the tendency to weaken over time; "blurred and permeable in Ukraine"; and "quasi-racial, and intergenerationally persistent in Kazakhstan" (Brubaker 2011, 1806).
his work on the Soviet Union, Brubaker analyses the social impact of the introduction of official categories of nationhood. All permanent inhabitants of the territory of the Soviet Union possessed, parallel to their Soviet citizenship, a nationality (e.g. Russian, Ukrainian, or Kazakh). In order to build legitimacy for the Soviet Union, some nationalities were granted a certain amount of autonomy through the allocation of a territory, some right to self-govern through local party members, the right to receive an education and to be administered in their own language, etc. The Soviet Union took great care to produce for each region an intelligentsia capable of running the region and teaching in its schools. It also fixed identities by codifying languages and collecting ethnographic information (on these processes, see Slezkine 1994). Most Sovietologists considered the Soviet policies on nationhood to be a mere façade. However, Brubaker argues that it rather deeply shaped categories, identities, and political processes. The result of the Soviet policy of national promotion was the emergence of local elites who took for granted the equivalence "one nation, one territory, one state". The rapidity with which the Soviet Union disappeared can be, in part, explained by the existence of a national imaginary and even an imaginary of independence within the territories of the Union:

Constructing national territories as the polities of and for ethnocultural nations, classifying and categorizing people by "nationality," and giving preferential treatment to members of national groups in "their own" territories fostered and legitimated the habit of distinguishing between the core, state-bearing nation – or titular nation, as it came to be called in Soviet and post-Soviet studies—and the total population of the republic. It also fostered and legitimated the sense of titular "ownership" of or primacy within each republic. (Brubaker 2011, 1787)

Brubaker also gives a great importance to what he calls political (or ethnic) "entrepreneurs" (e.g. Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 14). His concept of politics is broadly Weberian: political is any activity aiming at transforming the extant relations of power within a given collectivity. This can be achieved in many ways, but especially important is the capacity to mobilize followers, i.e. to create a group of followers. In his analysis of group relations in Transylvania, Brubaker shows that "Romanian" and "Hungarian" are indeniably present as categories (Brubaker 2002, 182). However, "ethnic" tensions between the Romanian majority and the Hungarian minority are, on
average, less dramatic than suggested by the discourse of local nationalists (Brubaker 2002, 182). It would thus be wrong to view the conflict, in essentialist fashion, as case of "interethnic hatred". However, as Brubaker suggests, political mobilization and agitation by associations and political movements, as well as specific events, can lead to a hardening and sharpening of "groupness", sometimes culminating in violent conflicts.

**Theoretical discussion and conclusion**

In this chapter, I have attempted to offer a long-term perspective on the research on identities and boundaries in the social sciences. I have emphasized at the same time the unity of the project that the social sciences represent and the variety of the positions within this project. I have suggested that, considered as whole, the social sciences offer some kind of *repertoire* of possible research foci, methods of analysis, and modes of explanation. Phenomena such as repetition, reformulation or borrowing must, in my view, be acknowledged as much as the entropic development of infinite nuances between the various contributions to this research. In conclusion, I will highlight three theoretical insights that the historical analysis conducted in the present chapter has given us.

1. *The two notions of "identity" and "boundary" are mutually implicative.* Boundary-drawing can be seen as an essential operation of human consciousness, insofar as it logically derives from the essential activity of classifying things and people, of "making them up", in the expression of Ian Hacking (1986). The fundamental character of classification can be easily understood if we see the intimate connection that exists between the classification of things, animals and peoples and the sheer capacity to act in a meaningful way – think for instance of basic divisions such as the one between the dirty and the clean, the toxic and the edible, friend and foe, whose importance has been analysed by a variety of authors from different disciplines, including Carl Schmitt (1986), Mary Douglas (1966), or Claude Levi-Strauss (1960). In other words, at the most general level, it is a condition of action that humans can recognize certain things and persons as belonging to a certain set or class, as having an identity in situation (e.g. "this is an apple", "she is a political science student"). "Being in a set" / "having an identity" means *sharing* specific properties with similar things and persons; it also means *differing* from the things and persons not possessing the property or properties. Consequently, as soon as it is possible to identify
something on the basis of given criteria, it is also possible to draw a boundary between this something and "something else" ("all the apples here, all the pears there"). Applying this reasoning to social and cultural identity, Raymond Geuss (2010, 92) writes:

Even if it is the case that different cultures have vague, indeterminate, or shifting boundaries ... one must have some conceptions of the limits or boundaries of a culture ... in order for the concept to be intelligible. A 'culture' ... has identity and substance at any given time by virtue of the fact that it excludes certain ways of behaving, attitudes, forms of thought.

2. **Boundaries do not operate without human action.** It is common to distinguish between boundaries (purposefully) made by humans and natural or objective boundaries. Yet even natural boundaries separate people only because they are reflected in consciousness and inspire action, because they are seen as significant by social individuals. Following a point made by Simmel, the natural world (and the social world as well) is traversed by an infinity of potential divisions: "the image of external things is always for us ambivalent, in so far as out there in nature everything can be seen as either connected or discrete." (Simmel 2001, 55) At the risk of sounding somewhat intellectualist, it is probably a fair approximation to say that boundaries emerge in the world because consciousness identifies certain spaces and things within it. An existing line is taken to divide because it is seen to coincide with assumed differences. Alternatively, lines can also be artificially created: for instance roads can be traced, fences and walls erected. Chronologically speaking, thus, the identification of two things as distinct seems to be a condition for the observation of a given line as "relevant", i.e. as a valid indicator of the relative separation of the two things. For instance, it is because we operate with the distinction between the Orient and the Occident, and because we attribute a high cultural and political importance to this distinction, that we are able to envisage, say, the Straight of the Bosphorus, or the Ural, or the Amur River as boundary lines. It is true that scholars may have good reasons to distinguish between groups (such as professional categories) even when no socially shared representation exists concerning such groups. However, as Tilly (2004, 214) observes, boundaries with a political and social relevance imply "some actors on each side ... [who] reify it by naming it, attempting to control it, attaching distinctive practices to it, or otherwise creating a
shared representation."

3. **Two criteria – the "mode of emergence" and "mode of existence" of boundaries – can be used to classify boundary research.** Following the classical Comtian distinction between social static and social dynamic, I would like to suggest boundaries can be approached from two complementary perspectives. The first question that can be asked is the one of the **mode of existence** of boundaries. What role do boundaries play in the daily life of individuals? Can they easily be crossed or are individuals reluctant of doing so? How common is the notion and the practice of identity change (permanent boundary crossing)? Borrowing from Georg Simmel (Simmel 2001) it may be helpful to use the metaphors of the *threshold* and the *wall* to mark two extreme positions in a continuum. Boundaries can be seen as abstract dividing lines between two areas that do not preclude crossing and exchange, as *thresholds*: this is the perspective, among many other authors, of Barth and Mauss. It is also the perspective of those, like Lyman and Douglass, who emphasize the strategic use individuals make of their identities: these two authors (1973, 349) explicitly write that "[e]thnic boundaries are not impregnable barriers to trespass or escape." Alternatively, boundaries can also be taken to be as stable and hermetic as a material *wall*. This is, as we saw, the perspective of the naturalistic social scientists of the nineteenth century, or that of primordialists like Huntington; it is also, to a more limited extent, the perspective adopted by Durkheim and some critical constructivists who envisage identities as a form of *habitus*.

The other question that can be asked is the one of the **mode of emergence of boundaries**. As indicated earlier, the notion that boundaries are made by humans (so that their emergence always depends on some kind of social action) has now become widespread among scholars. However, the concept of a "social construct" can be understood in two distinct ways. There is a widespread tendency to assume that "socially constructed" is equivalent to "purposefully engineered", i.e. consciously designed, typically in a top-down rational process. Yet humans "make" many things without designing them in the strict sense: for instance, they build families, forge friendships or create religions. Correspondingly, boundaries may result from relatively anonymous, collective, bottom-up historical developments: this is the case of the emergence of national consciousness as described by Armstrong; or of the nationalization of modern societies through increasing
interaction between members, generated by a strong increase of geographic mobility, as theorized by Marcel Mauss. Alternatively, boundaries can be drawn through conscious top-down processes of social engineering: this is the case of the invention of the French Départment, or of the colonial drawing of boundaries between regions or ethnicities. To a more limited extent, boundaries are also consciously drawn in a top-down process when elite groups (such as the famed "ethnic entrepreneurs") attempt to mobilize specific populations, a phenomenon analyzed by Greenfeld, Brubaker, mentioned by Barth, and also present (although more implicitly) in Mauss's reflections on national fetishism.

I have tried to classify these various approaches in Figure 2. It is important to remember that some of them are mutually exclusive, but many are not: it is perhaps better to see them as "perspectives" than as "theories". For instance, boundaries can be envisaged as more or less solid, depending on the historical circumstances – there is no necessary contradiction, thus, between a concept of boundary as threshold and a concept of boundary as wall, as long as these metaphors are not applied simultaneously to the same boundary. Many authors, such as Mauss, Barth, or Brubaker, can be placed at several locations in the figure.
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<tr>
<th>Mode of emergence</th>
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<tr>
<td>engineered</td>
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<td>state imposition theory</td>
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<td>group mobilization theory</td>
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<td>identity-as-habitus theory</td>
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<td>clash of civilizations theory</td>
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<td>identity-through-interaction theory (e.g. Anderson, Mauss...)</td>
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<td>natural boundary theory</td>
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<td>minimal group theory (Tajfel)</td>
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| boundary as wall | boundary as threshold |

**Mode of existence**

**Figure 2 – A tentative classification of boundary research**
What boundaries are is an empirical question; and empirical research suggests that boundaries can be different things in different social settings and at different moments in time. What we should be wary of, in my view, is less to have the wrong theory than to have poor empirical material. As long as it does not fall into sheer "indifferentism" (I have no doubt, for instance, that some theoretical frameworks are irreparably flawed), some methodological pluralism can make our data collection richer. Appropriately for boundary researchers, we should see theoretical differences as thresholds, not as walls, and avoid either / or attitudes when trying to pinpoint the identity of social phenomena.

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