

Introduction

Contested Images of Boundaries

The central aim of this thesis is to investigate the image of state boundaries. Using migrant activism in Japan as an empirical example, the thesis ultimately attempts to offer a new perspective on the boundary. This new perspective can be helpful in reflecting on what we mean by the political community of the state in the discipline of International Relations (IR).

For the purpose of this thesis, it is possible to read the current debates on the boundary of the state by rejecting the image of the boundary as a line. Despite the significance of the concept of the boundary in analysing the way we understand international relations, it has been a relatively marginal topic in IR for a long time.¹ However, various phenomena associated with globalization, which became widely acknowledged in the late 1980s and 1990s, propelled IR scholars to review the dominant world view: the world as a collection of states, each neatly separated by territorial borders.² The discussion then was primarily defined by the question of whether the boundary of the state was becoming obsolete or not.³ The presence/absence

¹ Brown, Chris. (2001) 'Borders and Identity in International Political Theory', in Albert, Mathias, David Jacobson and Yosef Lapid (eds.) *Identities, Borders, Orders: Rethinking International Relations Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), pp.117-136; Lapid, Yosef. (2001), 'Introduction. Identities, Borders, Orders: Nudging International Relations Theory in a New Direction', in Albert, Jacobson and Lapid (eds.) *Identities, Borders, Orders: Rethinking International Relations Theory*; Williams, John. (2002) 'Territorial Borders, Toleration and the English School', *Review of International Studies*, Vol.28, No.4, pp.737-758.

² Newman, David. (2006) 'Borders and Bordering: Towards an Inter-Disciplinary Dialogue', *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol.9, No.2, pp.171-186.

³ Strange, Susan. (1999) 'The Westfailure System', *Review of International Studies*, Vol.25, No.3, pp.345-354; Starr, Harvey. (2006) 'International Borders: What They Are, What They Mean, and Why We Should Care', *SAIS Review of International*

Introduction

debate on the boundary generated another set of debates in the 2000s which call into question the image of the boundary itself. Tighter border controls and stringent regulations on the movements of people, instigated by several ‘terrorist’ attacks on cities such as New York and London in the 2000s, complicated the terms of the previous debate. Bordering practices have become increasingly common in the everyday lives of ordinary people and have taken place beyond the airports and ports, the traditional sites of state borders.⁴ The current debates on boundaries manifest these complicated aspects of bordering practices. They do so by going beyond the simple understanding of a boundary as a line separating one state from another.⁵

The thesis is driven by my curiosity to explore what the boundary might look like if it is *not* a line. If the boundary is no longer just the territorial marker of the state to distinguish citizens from foreigners, and if it has become more diffused in terms of its locations and its forms, how might the boundary look like? By reading, or *translating*, the debate of the boundary in category-vocabularies, the thesis seeks to address a different image of the boundary which reflects the complexity of bordering practices.

The specific image of the boundary, that is, the boundary as a line, has dominated IR. Most debates on boundaries in the late 1980s and the 1990s illuminate this persistent image. They were animated by predicting the future of the boundary to examine whether the lines which exist among states

Studies, Vol.26, No.1 pp.3-10.

⁴ Newman, David. (2006) ‘The Lines that Continue to Separate Us: Borders in our “Borderless” World’, *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol.30, No.2, p.149 (pp.143-161).

⁵ See, for example, Amoore, Louise. (2006) ‘Biometric Borders: Governing Mobilities in the War on Terror’, *Security Dialogue*, Vol.38, No.2, pp.336-351; Doty, Roxanne Lynn. (2009) *The Law Into Their Own Hands: Immigration and the Politics of Exceptionalism* (Arizona: Arizona University Press).

Introduction

would vanish altogether to create a borderless world, or remain the same.⁶ For instance, John MacMillan and Andrew Linklater describe the two competing world views held at that time as follows: while ‘the significance of national boundaries has been eroded by various processes operating above and below national governments’ and the world is imagined more with the references to ‘post-Westphalian era’ or ‘post-international politics’, the state equally ‘retains various crucial monopolies’ in the field of taxes, violence, and the aspiration to create the political community in post-colonial and post-war countries.⁷ What shapes the tension between these two opposing views is, as they argue, a particular image of the political communities of states as ‘bounded communities’. The political communities of states are regarded as a communities surrounded by boundaries. Therefore, they call for the need to analyse ‘how boundaries were constituted in the first place and reconstituted subsequently’.⁸

MacMillan and Linklater’s call for looking at the notion of the boundary marks a serious turn in the subsequent debates on state boundaries in the 2000s. As Nick Vaughan-Williams argues, despite the differences between the two competing positions on the future of the boundary, they both share the same image of the boundary, which allows the presence/absence debate to take place to begin with.⁹ In this imaginary, the function of the boundary is to draw a neat line between citizens and foreigners and to demarcate the inside

⁶ Strange, ‘The Westfailure System’; Starr, ‘International Borders’.

⁷ MacMillan, John and Andrew Linklater. (1995) *Boundaries in Question: New Directions in International Relations* (London and New York: Pinter), p.12.

⁸ MacMillan and Linklater, *Boundaries in Question*, pp.12-13.

⁹ Vaughan-Williams, Nick. (2009) *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), p.5.

Introduction

from the outside in terms of the political community. As Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber point out, the state realises itself first and foremost by drawing the boundary around it for ‘having a territorial basis’ and ‘the construction of domestic communities’.¹⁰ Precisely because this statist boundary is, both figuratively and literally, a sacred line to uphold the unity of the state, mobility, for instance, is considered to be perilous to the ‘bounded communities’. The image of boundary as a line forms the basic assumption attached to political community: that it ‘requires enclosure’.¹¹ As Warren Magnusson argues, this enclosed space of the state is regarded as instrumental for ‘proper’ politics. The creation of this enclosed space is instrumental for the political community of the state because of the assumption that ‘politics proper is impossible without a protected space where ideals can be realised and interests ideally adjudicated’.¹²

Meanwhile, an increasing number of works calls into question the basic assumption of the boundary as a simple line. They revisit the concept of the boundary itself and suggest a need to rethink the boundary in different terms. Writing in the late 1990s, Étienne Balibar argues that borders are ‘no longer at the territorial edges of the state’ to signify ‘where one sovereignty ends and another begins’ but ‘vacillating’ in terms of sites and contents.¹³ Balibar’s understanding of borders can be seen in a cluster of works which analyse

¹⁰ Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber. (1996) *State Sovereignty as Social Construct* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.13.

¹¹ Magnusson, Warren. (1990) The Reification of Political Community, in R.B.J. Walker and Saul H. Mendlovitz, *Contending Sovereignties: Redefining Political Community* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers), p.49.

¹² Magnusson, ‘The Reification of Political Community’, p.51..

¹³ Balibar, Étienne. (2002) ‘The Borders of Europe’, trans. James Swenson, in *Politics and the Other Scene* (London: Verso), p.89.

Introduction

borders through what a group of border studies scholars recently put it, three 'Ps': place, performance and perspective.¹⁴ In this approach, the concept of state border is expanded to include cyberspace and offshore immigration centres far away from the geographical entry and exit points of the state.¹⁵ Furthermore, bordering practices are manifested as not just immigration status checks by border officials but also as border patrols by vigilante groups and demonstrations by undocumented workers to demand legalisation of their status.¹⁶

In other words, these works question the assumption of boundaries as 'lines in the sand': the boundary is an embodiment of 'the pathos of merely human acts to draw fixed and tangible territorial lines and to expect that no one will dare to cross them'.¹⁷ Borders are not a priori lines but *enacted* by various people in different manners and places to 'generate conflicts, hopes, and frustrations for all sorts of people, as well as inextricable administrative and ideological difficulties for states'.¹⁸ It is in questioning the 'line-in-the-sand' assumption of boundaries and thinking of them as junctures of different desires and reasons for engaging in bordering practices that boundaries are regarded as a site of 'politics', to use Balibar's term.¹⁹ The

¹⁴ Johnson, Corey, and Reece Jones, Anssi Paasi, Louise Amoore, Alison Mountz, Mark Salter and Chris Rumford (2011) 'Interventions on Rethinking "the Border" in Border Studies', *Political Geography*, No.30, p.62.

¹⁵ For instance, Amoore, Louise. (2009) 'Algorithmic War: Everyday Geographies of the War on Terror', *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, pp.49-69.

¹⁶ For instance, Doty, *The Law Into Their Own Hands*.

¹⁷ Parker, Noel, and Nick Vaughan-Williams (et al.) (2009) 'Lines in the Sand? Towards an Agenda for Critical Border Studies', *Geopolitics* No.14, p.582 (pp.582-587).

¹⁸ Balibar, Étienne. (2004) *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p.110.

¹⁹ Balibar, 'The Borders of Europe', p.92.

Introduction

boundary is a site where politics takes place because it generates struggles to seek democratization, 'at the service of men and submit it [*the institution of the border*'] to their collective control, make it an object of their "sovereignty" [...].²⁰

However, the current debates on the expanding notion of the concept of boundary remain relatively, if not completely, reticent on the image of the boundary. To be sure, some have introduced new phrases to replace the image of the boundary as a line. For example, Balibar proposes the idea, *borderland*, to argue that Europe is not surrounded by lined boundaries. Instead it is 'borderland: everywhere in Europe, [...] you are at the border. The border is not on the borderline [...].'²¹ Others use the word, zone, to argue that it is no longer possible to draw a clear line to contain space.²² However, these new terms, such as *borderland* or zone, are not entirely forthcoming about their own need for the image of the boundary as a line to articulate themselves. Although the political community of the state cannot be conceptualized through the image of a line, as these new terms suggest, the image of the line and the vocabularies including 'border' that invoke such image, are persistently used to articulate the world around us. Even the word, zone, derives from the juxtaposition between, zone as an open-ended, non-definable and unlocatable space and a space as a container surrounded by lined boundaries. What does it mean then

²⁰ Balibar, *We the People of Europe?*, p.108.

²¹ Bojadžijev, Manuela and Isabelle Saint-Saëns. (2006) 'Borders, Citizenship, War, Class: A Discussion with Étienne Balibar and Sandro Mezzadra', *New Formations*, Vol.58, p,11.

²² See, for example, Squire, Vicki. (ed.) (2011) *The Contested Politics of Mobility: Borderzones and Irregularity* (Oxon: Routledge); Minca, Claudia. (2006) 'Giorgio Agamben and New Biopolitical *Nomos*', *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, Vol.88, No.4, pp.387-403.

Introduction

that we still resort to words such as boundary or border, and its lined image, to argue that the ‘boundary’ no longer delineates the bounded community of the state? What kinds of images of the boundary are now suggested by these arguments that the boundary is not a line, while resorting to the idea of the ‘boundary’ which evokes lines? The thesis is driven by my desire to explore these questions.

As R.B.J. Walker tenaciously insists, political possibilities, and imagining these possibilities, are conditioned by the boundary-driven thinking of the modern state sovereignty. For Walker, boundaries are both ‘territorial and intellectual’ in the sense that they both demarcate one political community from others, as well as, more broadly, determine the way we think about the world.²³ Territorial boundaries, such as the border of the state, are necessarily intertwined with intellectual boundaries we draw in discussing territorial boundaries. In this thinking, the boundary, or a line in Walker’s term, dominates the way we imagine worlds: a line to separate present from future, modern from postmodern and universality from particularity. From this standpoint, Walker points out that alternative world views tend to be entrenched in this boundary-driven movement, ‘from a politics of the international to a politics of the world’ where the former indicates a world consisting of bounded state communities and the latter the

²³ Walker, R.B.J. (1995) *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.18. Walker’s intention is ‘to understand how theories of international relations—theories of relations across borders—have been constituted on the basis of historically specific and increasingly contentious claims about what it means to establish, defend, or transgress borders, whether territorial or intellectual’. (ibid.)

Introduction

world beyond boundaries.²⁴ By pointing out the persistence of boundary-driven thinking, Walker insists that it is imperative to examine what constitutes this boundary-driven movement itself, instead of rushing to think of the world beyond boundaries. To do so is 'to pay far greater attention to what goes on at the boundaries, borders and limits of a politics orchestrated within the international that simultaneously imagines the possibility and impossibility of a move across the boundaries, borders and limits distinguishing itself from some world beyond'.²⁵

Taking Walker's call seriously, I think it is crucial that we explore an image of the boundary when the word, 'boundary', no longer means a line but is still used, in our own thinking, to articulate a world where evasiveness and complexity characterise the concept of boundary. Borrowing Walker's terms, it can be argued, somewhat pessimistically, that persistent reliance on words such as boundaries and borders, which is shown in the recent debates on the boundary, exemplifies 'the resilience of boundaries' as lines and 'the sheer difficulty of imagining a politics beyond the horizons of a politics beyond the horizons of a sovereign space'.²⁶

But this can also mean that, between the resilience of the boundary-vocabularies and a different image attached to these vocabularies lies an image of, or even just a hint of, what we mean by 'the world'. Taking the persistence of these terms as the starting point, I am interested to explore the image of the boundary which conditions our understanding of a world

²⁴ Walker, R.B.J. (2010) *After the Globe, Before the World* (Oxon: Routledge), p.2.

²⁵ Walker, *After the Globe, Before the World*, pp.2-3.

²⁶ Walker, *Inside/Outside*, p.175. See also p.21.

Introduction

where boundaries no longer mean lines to mark the territorial edge of the state. If boundaries shape the way we understand and imagine the world around us, both physically and intellectually, and if they are increasingly regarded as diffused practices rather than a simple line, the way we think about the political community of the state, and the image we attach to it, must be undergoing a profound shift from a bounded community (conditioned by the image of the boundary as a line) to a different image of a community based on a different image of the boundary. Therefore, in broad terms, it can be said that the overarching aim of this thesis is to contribute to the debate on community by unravelling what kinds of images of the boundary we use to think about the political community of the state.

My quest for the image of the boundary, found throughout this thesis, should not be understood as contradicting the works which study compound bordering practices. By showing the ways in which the border becomes ever so complicated in its locations and forms, the extant debates suggest futility, or even danger, in positing a unified definition of what the boundary is.²⁷ In this respect, it is fair to suggest that even exploring *an* image of the boundary might undermine the very intention of these works on boundaries because such an image can impose a totalizing understanding of the boundary. Seeking another image of the boundary can be tantamount to bordering itself, replacing one image of the boundary with another. Though this may be an understandable concern, my intention lies elsewhere. By exploring an image of the boundary which mirrors the complexity of borders rather than their

²⁷ See, for instance, Newman, David. (2006) 'The Lines that Continue to Separate Us', p.145.

Introduction

simplicity, the thesis intends to reflect on the basis of our imagining of the world around us. It critically reflects on the *process* of bordering, as it were. In this respect, this thesis should not be read as seeking an image of the boundary to offer an endpoint for the current debates on bordering practices. Rather it should be read as reflecting on the framework of the debates itself.

Reading the Images of Boundaries in the State Language

How might an exploration of the image of the boundary be done? The thesis attempts to do this by taking the boundary-as-a-line as its starting point. As Walker argues, alternative world views, the world *beyond* lines, necessarily derive from 'conventional' world views, the world *with* lines. If this is the case, as I assume, taking the conventional image of the boundary, which is a line, necessarily has to be the entry point for exploration of any images of the boundary, including the one which reflects complex bordering practices. Therefore, the thesis starts from the tenacity of the image of the boundary as a line. With this starting point, I narrow my focus on the 'territorial' aspect of the border, in this case, the boundary of the state, and critically engage with what the boundary-as-a-line does, that is, categorization.

To border the political community of the state is to administer and govern people on the move. Categories, produced and sustained by various statist boundaries, play a central part in this governing process.²⁸ These boundaries include the ones between international and domestic, regular and

²⁸ See, for instance, Jones, Reece. (2009) 'Categories, Borders and Boundaries', *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol.33, No.2, pp.174-189.

Introduction

irregular and voluntary and involuntary.²⁹ The categories of citizen and foreigner, for instance, are produced through the assumed distinction between national and international. The categories of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) also hinge upon this distinction. The distinction between regularity and irregularity separates people who travel and reside with legal means and/or legal status, such as legal travellers and legal residents, from illegal residents, illegal temporary and permanent settlers, people who are smuggled and so on. The boundary between voluntary and involuntary categorises people depending on the purpose of travel. People who move with the aim of improving their living conditions and careers are categorised as economic migrants, international students, professionals and tourists, while those who are forced to leave their countries of origin are categorised as refugees, for instance. Depending on the categories, people establish vastly different relationships with the state. Through taxonomic language, people are re-read from random nameless people into 'the' people with specific names, such as 'refugees', 'citizens', 'illegal migrants', 'foreigners' and so on. Each name comes with different measures to be applied to treat people differently. In this way, the movements of people become legible to the state. In identifying people with specific categories and naming them accordingly, the state makes each movement visible and intelligible to itself. By using these 'names' as basic resources, the state applies appropriate measures to manage mobility.

²⁹ Peoples, Columba and Nick Vaughan-Williams (2010) *Critical Security Studies: An Introduction* (Oxon: Routledge), p. 135; Guild, Elspeth. (2009) *Security and Migration in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press), pp.13-20.

Introduction

In this thesis, I call categories the language of the state precisely because they are a device for the state to translate incomprehensible movements into comprehensible ones, random movements into ‘meaningful’ ones, and invisible movements into visible ones. This classification depends on various boundaries which explain the world through dividing practices such as the world between inside and outside, between voluntary and involuntary and so forth. It is through the language of the state that a particular image of the world, the world consisting of lines, is created. By focusing on categories, I am critically engaging with the part played by the language of the state in managing people, based on the image of the boundary as a line and thus, creating a world dominated by divisions.

By reading discourses on boundaries from the angle of categorisation, that is, in the language of the state, it might be possible to examine what exactly we mean by saying that boundaries are no longer lines. This might be possible because an image of the boundary of the state is a manifestation of what the boundary does. For example, the image of the boundary as a line is a reflection of the dividing practice of the state to identify what one is in relation to the state. If what the boundary does is no longer the dividing practice and hence the image attached to it is more complicated than a mere line, the focus on categorisation, what the boundary does, can lead us to explore an image attached to the boundary. Furthermore, exploration of an image of the ‘territorial’ boundary necessarily involves reflection on what conditions our way of thinking about the boundary. Therefore, the focus on categorisation might also invite us to probe critically the production of an

Introduction

‘intellectual’ boundary, as is done in recent debates.³⁰ In this way, the thesis *translates*, in a figurative sense, the concept of the boundary of the state into the language of the state. This translation between boundaries and categories is the key move that the thesis endeavours to propose. Throughout this thesis, my aim is to demonstrate that the focus on categories is a productive way to analyse the way we think and talk about boundaries.

For this purpose, the thesis is divided into two sections. The first section, consisting of chapters 1 and 2, carefully translates the concept of state boundary and the complexity associated with bordering practices into the language of the state. Meanwhile, the second section, discussed in the remaining chapters of the thesis, investigates how this translation into category-vocabularies can deepen our understanding of the boundary.

The key references in the first section include Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Rancière. Based on their work, I will demonstrate how people are given specific identities and are assigned to particular kinds of subjectivities through bordering practices. In particular, Agamben and Rancière argue this by looking at the production of categories as being instrumental to social order which determines what one is and how one behaves. They argue that social order is based on an impervious image of the boundary, that is, the boundary as a line.

The significance of their works, and what is pertinent to this thesis, is that both Agamben and Rancière evince a more complex reading of the

³⁰ Bartelson, Jens, James Brassett, Costas Constantinou, Sergei Prozorov, Nick Vaughan-Williams, Angharad Closs Stephens, Tom Lundborg, and R.B.J. Walker. (2011), “Critical Exchange” on R.B.J. Walker’s *After the Globe, Before the World*, *Contemporary Political Theory*, Vol.10, No.2, pp. 286-310.

Introduction

boundary to argue that social order is realised through ambiguity. Agamben does this by highlighting the ambiguous zone across, or *in*, boundaries. According to Agamben, the production of this ambiguous zone, where people cannot be categorised by drawing the impervious boundary, is constitutive of sovereignty.³¹ For Agamben, what is crucial is not that sovereignty produces categories based on the image of the boundary as a line but that its power suspends this categorization. Sovereign power is realised through its ability to obfuscate which categories of life people belong to.³² Thus Agamben shows that enacting categories necessarily depends on the production of ambiguity, which challenges the image of the boundary as a delineating line. For Rancière, this ambiguity is explained as contestability of the boundary. Rancière argues that categories are changeable and therefore the boundary to separate one group from another is contestable.³³ This contestability of the boundary is central to what he calls politics.³⁴ Since the boundary is challengeable and people can question the categories assigned to them by social order, politics takes place in this contestation to expose the inability of bordering subjectivity. Despite some differences, both Agamben and Rancière show that categories are produced by ambiguity inherent to bordering practices.

From here I will review an array of works on migration that examine,

³¹ See, for instance, Agamben, Giorgio. (1998) *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press), p.31, p.64.

³² See, for instance, Agamben, Giorgio. (2000) *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minnesota: University of Minneapolis Press), p.40-41.

³³ See, for instance, Rancière, Jacques. (1999) *Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy* (Minnesota: University of Minneapolis Press), pp.29-30.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Introduction

both implicitly and explicitly, the production of categories in relation with multifaceted bordering practice.³⁵ I call this scholarship border-migration (BM) scholarship and demonstrate that the scholarship approaches categories in two ways. Firstly, it links the production of categories as a process of controlling human mobility. It does this by generally relying on the Agamben-inspired reading of the boundary. Secondly, BM scholarship also resonates with the Rancière-inspired understanding of the boundary to argue that creation of categories generates movements to resist these categories.

One of the great assets of reading the boundary through Agamben and Rancière is that the boundary of the state can be understood through its limit: the boundary is conceptualised through its inability to draw a clear line separating one category from the other. The boundary among categories is theorised through ambiguity. BM scholarship picks up on this to interrogate subjectivity in relation to the ambiguity of the boundary.

I will argue that while BM scholarship successfully examines the political significance of categories by problematising them in relation to control of mobility and challenging them in relation to resistance, it fails to address the tenacious reliance on category-vocabularies indicated by the scholarship. By drawing on a number of examples where categories perceived problematic are merely replaced by other categories, BM scholarship somewhat inadvertently reveals that continual reliance on categories is impediments to resisting and problematising categories.

³⁵ What I call border-migration scholarship offers this line of work. For reference, see, for example, the section titled *Problematising Categories: Categories as Control* and *Challenging Categories: Categories for Resistance* in chapter 2.

Introduction

The consequences of not paying careful attention to this tenacity is that BM scholarship pays too much heed to the inability of categorisation, that is, drawing a line to border subjects. It tends to assume that the production of categories is to be challenged or avoided because classifying people is regarded as an obsolete practice. This somewhat one-sided reading of categories traps the scholarship within its own contradiction: the scholarship unwittingly produces its own categories. This finding points to the need to look more carefully at the ways in which people use category-vocabularies and engage in the politics played by them.

Proposing the Image of the Boundary as a Dot

Having identified the resilience of taxonomic vocabularies characterising the complexity of bordering practices in chapters 1 and 2, the thesis moves on to the second section. It takes the persistence of category-vocabularies as the centre of attention to eventually address an image of the boundary which reflects the complexity of bordering practices. The key material dealt with in this section, especially in chapters 3, 4 and 5, is my fieldwork on migrant worker activism in Japan. The examples of migrant activism in Japan are apposite to the present analysis because, as the thesis will unfold, taxonomic vocabularies were extensively used in a wide range of contexts by the participants in activism.

While the interviews of about 40 people used in these chapters were collected during the period between March and June 2010, my observations on migrant activism in Japan started in March 2004 when I began to join

Introduction

various activities related to migrants in Japan in different capacities.³⁶ Based on these interviews and observations, the fieldwork comprises two aspects. Firstly, it studies how migrant worker activism in Japan is organised, by whom and for what purposes. Secondly, it specifically examines the ways in which people use taxonomic vocabularies in making demands and organizing demonstrations and meetings. While the former covers various stages of activism to advance a general understanding of migrant activism in Japan, the latter focuses on one specific facet of activism to show that categories, in this case, those of citizen and foreigner, are instrumental in shaping the social movements of migrant workers.

Chapter 3 looks at instances where classifying people into the categories of citizen and foreigner were vital in realising the rights and demands of migrant workers. Having identified some as citizens and others as foreigners, the participants in the activism attempted to maximize the impact of the meetings they attended and make the best of the time and energy they spent on joining demonstrations and meetings. In chapter 4, the thesis investigates an incident where one labour union was divided into 'Japanese' union members and 'foreign' union members. The split was caused by dissatisfaction among some union members on the ways in which they were identified as foreigners. In chapter 5, the thesis looks at the routine work of the people joining the activism such as union organisers and lawyers. For them, representing some as foreigners and others as citizens is integral to what they do in their jobs.

³⁶ The lists of interviewees as well as the events I participated especially in 2010 are provided in Appendices.

Introduction

Each chapter will show that, albeit differently, categories of citizen and foreigner were utilised in a paradoxical manner. Categories were unable to identify some people as citizens and others as foreigners, and in this way, contained an excess. They included people who could not be identified with the labels attached to them. Despite their inability to categorise people, taxonomic vocabularies were indispensable tools for the participants in the activism. The ways in which categories were used in migrant activism illuminate the contradictory aspect of categorising practices. The categories are rendered obsolete but simultaneously made essential.

The examples of migrant activism in Japan generate a provocative question of how we might effectively analyse the paradoxical aspect of categorisation. This is an important question to understanding the complications of borders, exemplified as dispersed border locations and various kinds of bordering practices. If the complexity of the concept of border is translated into contradictory ways of using categories, as I will be arguing, understanding this contradiction might provide a useful way to explore an image of the boundary. Therefore, the final chapter of this thesis will be dedicated to exploring a new framing of the boundary, that is, what 'bordering' means, through the contradiction of categories.

Up to this point the thesis has dealt critically with the contradictions arising from the perception of boundary as a line, both through theoretical discussions and through observations from my fieldwork. Chapter 6 draws these themes together and presents an alternative theoretical understanding of boundaries, the image of 'boundary as a dot'. The key move that the thesis

Introduction

is making in chapter 6 is that it approaches categories as a representational device. I will elaborate on this approach with reference to Alain Badiou in particular who expatiates on the representational role of language in relation to ontology.³⁷ By reading his works, I will develop an image of the boundary as a dot which emerges every time people are represented with categories. Unlike the image of the boundary as a line, the image of the boundary as a dot allows us to read the opposing desires which constitute bordering practices. Categories are not simply labels to name people, but operate in the double acts of representing people with names, and at the same time, of failing to represent them to perfection. I will argue this doubly-structured aspect of categories points toward an idea of the boundary which emerges as a dot. And it is in this image of the boundary as a dot that border practices become more dispersed and diverse.

What is the implication of the image of boundary as a dot to the way we think about the political community of the state? The final part of chapter 6 addresses this question by exploring how this dot image of the boundary might offer a different understanding of the political community of the state. I will suggest that the political community of the state is no longer a community enclosed within a lined boundary but a collection of dots. To allow for a contrast between the former type of community and the latter, I will use Jean-Luc Nancy's works on community where Nancy challenges the assumption of the enclosure of community.³⁸ In doing so, I hope to offer an

³⁷ Badiou, Alain. (2006) *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum).

³⁸ Nancy, Jean-Luc. (1991) *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Lisa Garbus, Peter Connor, Michael Holland and Simona Sawhney (London: University of Minnesota

Introduction

alternative register for the study of international relations.

The extant debates on the boundary are abundant with suggestions that the border is no longer just a line. By reading these works from the perspective of categorisation, the thesis suggests that the political community of the state is already imagined differently from the enclosed community. The ‘alternative’ community is realised in slippage of the very vocabularies, of boundary and border, which we use to seek for ‘alternative’ world views.

A Note on Structure and Terminology

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the main perspective that this thesis is proposing, that is, the politics of categories, in analysing the concept of the boundary of the state. It introduces the reader, in fairly broad terms, to how categories are used to describe people who cross the boundary of the state and how categories are implicated in practices of sovereign power. The first chapter also provides background information on migrant activism in Japan, including an overview of its immigration policies. Chapter 2 expatiates on category-vocabularies in depth by using Agamben and Rancière as well as an array of BM scholarship. In different ways these authors translate the complex border practices into politics of categories. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 apply the angle developed in the previous two chapters to the analysis of migrant worker activism in Japan. Based on rich empirical analysis, these chapters examine how categories are used in activism. They show that categories are used in a contradictory way to expose futility to

Press).

Introduction

categorise people while maintaining the need to identify people with categories. Taking this contradiction as the prime focus, chapter 6 translates *back* category-vocabularies into the concept of boundary. By doing so, it investigates what alternative understanding, or image, of the boundary can be proposed from the perspective of categories.

The inquiry on categories poses a formidable question to this thesis: what is at stake in categorising people as the target of an inquiry when the purpose of the thesis is to question categorising practices itself? Since the thesis focuses on ways in which categories are used in migrant worker activism, it relies on various phrases, such as, ‘migrant worker (activism)’, ‘migrant (activism)’, ‘*the* people of migrant activism’ and ‘*the* participants in migrant activism’, to clarify who is the object of its analysis, and in this way, to transform people into ‘the’ people by using taxonomic vocabularies. To avoid being trapped in the politics of categories, the thesis uses these phrases with great care. Some phrases, such as migrant (worker) activism, are used to follow a widely-held expression in the relevant literature, and other phrases to describe ‘the’ people as generally as possible to avoid specificity.³⁹ The thesis also deliberately avoids defining these terms to prevent itself from being entangled with its own politics of categories.

However, it has to be recognised that these are feeble attempts and unconvincing escape routes. In light of the arguments presented in the thesis, the above question has to be understood in conjunction with the more

³⁹ The examples of the former include: Nyers, Peter and Kim Rygiel. (eds.) (2012) *Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement* (Oxon: Routledge); Rygiel, Kim. (2011) ‘Bordering Solidarities: Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement and Camps at Calais’, *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 15, No.1, pp.1-19.

Introduction

provocative and difficult question about what it means to discuss subjectivity in an academic context. As I will elaborate in this thesis, to talk about some groups of people as the objects of research is to classify them into specific categories and name them. In this respect, no matter what general phrases are applied, to identify people as the object of investigation inevitably enacts the language of the state which captures the subject as the nameable and legible subjects. So I wonder: what does it mean that we examine the subjects, let alone talk about them, in writing academic papers? How can we—or can we?—write about ‘fluid’ and ‘ungraspable’ subjects in academic journals and books which by themselves attempt to capture this fluidity and ungraspability into the language of the state, into tangible and comprehensible arguments? How can academic texts — or can they? — suggest ‘new’ and ‘alternative’ ideas of subjects when writing about and verbalising subjects is an act of naming this new-ness in language derived from the familiar ‘old’ language of the state?

These questions mirror the unavoidable connection between, if we were to borrow Walker’s distinction, intellectual boundary and territorial boundary. As Walker adamantly warns us, there is the tenacity of boundary-dominated thinking in our own thinking on territorial boundary.⁴⁰ In some respects, these questions are not the central focus of this thesis because the thesis primarily looks at the territorial boundary of the state and examines how categories are used by ‘the’ people attending ‘migrant worker’ activism. This

⁴⁰ Walker, R.B.J. (2011) ‘World, Politics’, in Bartelson, Jens, James Brassett, Costas Constantinou, Sergei Prozorov, Nick Vaughan-Williams, Angharad Closs Stephens, Tom Lundborg, and R.B.J. Walker, “‘Critical Exchange’ on R.B.J. Walker’s *After the Globe, Before the World*”, *Contemporary Political Theory*, Vol.10, No.2, pp.303-310.

Introduction

thesis is not designed to investigate the juncture between territorial boundary and intellectual boundary, that is, an implication of academic intervention in producing categories. However, in other respects, this juncture shapes the thesis because writing about and thinking about categories itself is to generate categories, regardless of what the primary research topic is. This question of how we think and talk about the boundary lies at the background of my analysis, but surfaces every now and then, most clearly in my re-reading of Agamben and Rancière in chapter 6 and in conclusion.

So we come back to the original question of how we might examine the politics of categories if categorising some group of people is a prerequisite for such an examination. Crucially, as I will argue in this thesis, using categories is not merely to capture the subject with identifiable names but to lose it at the same time. Precisely because categories are the language of the state, representation is operative in category-vocabularies. Categories may be successful in representing the subjects and in this way capturing them, but at the same time, always include possibilities for failing to represent perfectly what they intend to capture in language. It is here, in representational slippage in language, that I find justification for using categories to describe the targets of my research. And it is here that I find not a limit but solace in writing this thesis to articulate my own thoughts in language and to draw an intellectual boundary of my own, so that I can speak while failing to speak.