

Received: 19 December 2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33182/ijor.v4i1.2830>

Editorial

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It has become commonplace for political commentators and others to refer to our present moment as an era of global migration and a period of historically unprecedented levels of forced migration. While migrants are currently leaving from a greater number of countries and seeking out a greater diversity of destinations, rates of cross-border migration have remained steady for more than a half-century. Likewise, though both world wars produced untallied levels of forced migration, it is undeniable that the exodus of asylum seekers fleeing violence in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Central America, and elsewhere has prompted new levels of humanitarian concern and political backlash, often overshadowing internal displacement as the hidden “migration crisis”. Adding to the political and ethical complexity of these challenges is the fact that migrants often seek asylum in countries with historic political and military involvement in their home countries, as is the case with Central American migrants in the US, as well as Syrian and North African migrants in France. Though fears of religious “others” and appeals to religious morality have mobilized both humanitarian concern and political backlash in these destination countries and others, religion itself has seldom been the focus of analysis in much of the literature on borders and migration. The trans-historical persistence of this movement has produced new forms of cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity that has been sustained by increased access to transnational transportation, communication, and commodity consumption.

With the exception of studies examining religion as a source of resiliency for migrants (Levitt, 2008, 2007), much of the literature on borders, migrants, and citizenship treats religion as synonymous and interchangeable with ethnicity (Mills and Gökariksel, 2014). As geopolitical expressions of state power and sovereignty exercised over physical territories, the study of borders has largely remained the domain of political geography (Paasi, 2013), with religion being seen as a “residual category” (Kong, 2001). Though borders are indeed political, they are also central to understanding a whole host of religious and cultural issues related to migration, mobility, diaspora, national and regional identity, ethno-national conflict, as well as religious identities and practices. This special issue seeks to present religion as a category of significance to the study of borders where borders are crossed and transnational communities are formed in place. In addition, this issue explores what border studies and borderlands thinking can contribute to the study of religion, doing so largely through the embodied experiences of everyday life. The papers included herein are situated at the nexus of border-studies and religious studies in three ways. First, they grapple with how religious and secular belief systems are mobilized to variously care for, “save,” or discipline bodies and souls in marginalized border zones. Secondly, they examine how religion—as belief systems that transcend territory and connect believers across lines of spatial and temporal division to form eternal communities of the faithful—can be mobilized to shore up as well as challenge the existence and imposition of national borders. Finally, by bringing together a diversity of disciplinary perspectives, we hope the papers from

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this issue serve as a kind of interdisciplinary borderlands, where methods, tools, and terminology are blended and exchanged to give way to syncretic approaches to the study of religion at the borders. Before introducing the papers, however, we begin, first, with some background on approaches to the study of borders, and what a focus on religion brings to this conversation.

In this set of papers, borders and borderlands are taken not as mere metaphors for difference or division, but as lived, physical, empirical realities with embodied effects (Johnson, et al., 2011). Specifically, borders are political institutions that limit or facilitate the movement of people, things, and money (Newman, 2006a; Paasi, 2013). Feminist geographic perspectives on bordering processes, reveal how people move across raced and gendered borders in different ways depending on their material means and social identities (Massey, 1997). Though discourses of globalization imagine a smooth, borderless world of travel and communication, this is very much not the case for migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers who face racialized religious and ethnic othering and gender-based violence as they seek to move across borders. Borders serve as lines of inclusion/exclusion that define the “limits and contours” of national and other forms of belonging, often predicated on norms and ideals related to gender, race, ethnicity, language, class, and religion (Silvey, 2005). Crucially, borders do not merely separate distinct groups of people, but are themselves productive of difference (Newman, 2015: 15). That is, political borders are the effects of nationalist state-building projects designed to create stable, coherent, and cohesive “bounded identities” (Paasi, 2013: 483).

As containers and producers of national identity, borders are not merely political boundaries delimiting territorial sovereignty, but also “discursive and moral precepts” about legitimate belonging (Rexhepi, 2018: 2215; Ehrkamp and Nagel, 2017; Ridanpaa, 2009). Borders are thus physical symbols of inclusion and exclusion that serve the purposes of territorial “purification,” a salient concept in many religions as well (Sibley, 1995). In this way, borders dichotomize inside/outside, us/them and good/bad (Dalby, 1990), as well as sacred/profane (Paasi, 2013). Indeed, religion has long been used as a marker of difference legitimizing the creation of political borders. The British and other colonizers in South Asia and elsewhere drew borders on the supposition that religious coexistence was impossible (Cons and Sanyal, 2013), or was at least inconvenient to colonial rule. Today, as Rexhepi (2018) observes from the precarious borders of European Union, political sovereignty and regional identity, “racial and religious categories,” particularly related to notions of “good and bad Muslims,” are central to projects of mobilizing and materializing borders (Rexhepi, 2018: 2215). This underscores how “cultural practices and discourses are mobilized in bordering” (Paasi, 2013: 479), including and perhaps especially religious discourses and practices.

While the papers in this issue emphasize the material and embodied affects and effects of various borders and boundaries, they also emphasize the multi-scalar ways in which borders proliferate beyond and within the particular borderlines of specific states (Brunet-Jailly, 2011; Cons and Sanyal, 2013). This includes how borders materialize within broader “meta-geographies” by which people mentally order their knowledge of the world (Lewis and Wigen, 1997), such as the imagined geographies of “civilizational faultlines” between “the West” and the “Muslim World” (Said, 1978; Huntington, 1997). Likewise, borders also penetrate into spheres of everyday life, dividing groups that live physically proximate yet socially separate lives, as with many South Asian Hindu and Muslim communities (Cons and Sanyal, 2013). In this way, it is important to remember that borders are mental as well as material, psychological as well as physical, and bound up not only in the aspirations of political state-building processes but also in the collective memory of imagined national, ethnic, and religious communities.



As part of their psychic functioning, borders operate in the collective memory of a people long after the physical borders have shifted (Doris, 2020). According to Bradatan (2011), Germans referred to this phenomenon as *mauer im kopf* (wall in the head) to refer to the mental barrier that reinforced social, cultural, and economic differences dividing East and West Germany even decades after the Berlin Wall collapsed. Such collective memories may continue to divide people in a once separate but now unified territory, but also may drive feelings of longing and belonging across imposed lines of territorial partition (Marshall, 2021). The papers in this issue, in part, examine the ways in which religious beliefs and feelings of collective religious belonging can militate against bordering processes as much as they can reinforce them. Indeed, if, as Agnew (2008: 176) reminds us, borders can “limit the exercise of intellect, imagination, and political will,” which he calls the “territorial trap,” it is possible that transcendental religious belief can spark the spiritual and intellectual imagination and ignite the political will to mobilize beyond bounded territory.

In attending to the ways in which religious and secular belief systems are variously mobilized to manage, reinforce, and challenge borders, this issue responds to calls to examine borders from the bottom up, within their cultural and historical contexts and as understood through narratives of collective memory and experiences of everyday life (Paasi, 2013: 490). The persistence of borders in a globalized world necessitates the use of ethnographic approaches that examine the various ways in which different bodies experience bordering processes differently, as well as the diverse forms of contact, exchange, and syncretization that proliferate in borderlands (Paasi, 1996; Megoran, 2004; Newman, 2006b). Researchers must recognize commonalities across diverse cases as well as be careful not to homogenize the specificity of particular borders (Boyce, Marshall, and Wilson, 2017). Borders can be closed, semi-permeable, and permeable, places of conflict as well as spaces of interaction, economic and cultural exchange (Doris, 2020: 377). Borders are bridges as well as barriers, serving as liminal spaces of creolization, as “zones of cultural overlap” where “identities become blurred” particularly in context of shifting borders. Cross-border networks and cultural ties connect two-sides of the border into close relations, such that borderlands communities may take on a unique character distinct from that of the “rest of the country” on either side of the border (Doris, 2020: 378).

This notion of borders as barriers but also points of contact, points to the paradoxical, dual nature of borders. Though borders are physically peripheral to centers of governmental power, and often home to marginalized ethnic and indigenous minorities, borders are also central to state politics, the exercise of state power, and political debates about national identity (Cons and Sanyal, 2013; Doris, 2020). Borders represent bounded ethno-national and religious identities, but they are almost always contested by other modes of ethnic, linguistic, or class-based affinities (Paasi, 2013: 483). Religion in particular, can be used to define bounded territories of inclusion and exclusion, but can also mobilize modes of belonging that cut across national borders. For example, religious institutions play a role in maintaining migrant transnational identity (Vasquez and Marquard, 2003), while at the same time serving as a cultural bridge and liminal space of syncretism. Religious spaces can serve as places of belonging in the context of marginality, connecting migrants both to their new local surroundings, diasporic community, and sense of home (Ehrkamp, 2005). As such, sacred spaces can be found in and can themselves constitute borderlands. As Sheringham’s (2010) study of migrant Pentecostalism reveals, religious worldviews and lifeways appeal to and provide social and psychological resources to “those on the margins of these modernizing processes - the ‘poor and down-trodden’ - providing them with the means to elaborate new lifestyles.” By viewing religion as a “lived experience” and “embodied practice,” constituting the ways in which “people make sense of their world” and “stories” by which they live (McGuire, 2003: 3), it becomes clear that understanding the religious lives and

imaginings of border-crossers and border communities is vital to understanding processes of bordering and ordering themselves.

The essays in this special issues journal expand on the notions of borders and bordering aforementioned and center religion as a lens in understanding these processes. The interventions by both Serat and Sheikholharm each examine how religious and secular ideologies are mobilized to manage and discipline migrant bodies and produce reformed and redeemed subjectivities. A`Serat's paper shows, religion can ignite transnational and transhistorical imaginaries of liberation. Serat examines the extension of colonial order not only as it relates specifically to border violence but also as migrants are removed from the borders and brought into privately sanctioned yet federally regulated detention centers. It is in these centers where Serat finds that bodies are transformed into commodities to maximize profit and a selective appropriation of life force occurs. While Sheikholharm's focus is less on the physical body and more on the architectural spaces that borders can often divide, he too is looking at borders as spaces of encounter and bordering practices as they relate to cultural tradition. Examining the process of urbanization and its impact on immigrant communities, Sheikholharm's work reveals what can be seen as failures for politics of immigration and integration as material culture is transformed from the sacred to the profane. Together these works illuminate borders as spaces of encounter as well as how bordering practices participate in cultural tradition. Similarly, Howe's paper examines the ambiguity of borderlands by focusing on transnational (Islamic) anti-colonial liberation, and the production of rigid gendered and classed boundaries of domesticity. Analyzing how the transnational mobilization of revivalist print culture shaped and created communities, with keen attention to the perception of women's bodies in Islamic tradition, Howe continues to complicate our understandings of borders and border construction as it relates to the delineation of space, as well as how it is perpetuated by religious and cultural traditions. Likewise, Patel's paper is situated in the everyday realm of transnational religion and the establishment of borders and boundaries of nationhood and domesticity. Patel draws on personal experience to examine how religious practice in the home recreates diasporic identities in ways that create the care and comfort necessary to cross boundaries. Finally, transitioning away from the contemporary period of transnational migration, Green's paper explores religion's role in bordering processes from a pre-modern perspective, taking a borderlands approach to analyzing the intentionality behind creating monastic identity in the ninth century. Noting the fluidity of the region of the monastery under examination, Greene argues that monks were able to create a unique identity as it both related to and opposed the multiple, overlapping, and contested borders of the region. Taken together these essays illustrate how borders and religion demarcate edges, and explore how edges can be powerful places from which to understand, undermine, or underscore the stability of centers.

The papers in this special issue were originally presented at "On the Edge," a bi-annual symposium at Elon University that brings together scholars working at the theoretical and methodological boundaries of religion, law, history, psychology, anthropology, geography, literature/textual studies, philosophy, art history, political science, classics, and gender studies. In February 2021, participants gathered virtually and in-person at Elon University in North Carolina to present papers at this symposium organized around the theme of "Religion on the Border(s)" Participants examined topics that were oriented around, related to, or situated within particular conceptual, physical, or geographic borders, drawing their theoretical conclusions from empirical data and textual material situated within specific geo-historical location(s) and/or religious tradition(s). In this way, the symposium attended to the specificity of place and tradition, while maintaining a thematic focus on material and metaphorical bordering more broadly. Growing out of this symposium, this examination of "Religion on the Border(s)" presented in this special issue offers the opportunity to expand and redefine the



intersections of religion and borders by advancing our understanding of religious tradition, identity, and practice, within the context of built, material, psychological, social, and political boundaries.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank our wonderful colleagues and symposium co-organizers Evan Gatti, Amy Allocco, and Brian Pennington for their support, cooperation, and leadership from conceptualizing the “Religion on the Borders” symposium to developing this special issue. We also express our gratitude to Banu Gökarkırsel for her intellectual contributions as a discussant at this symposium, as well as to all those who presented their research. Finally, our thanks go to editors Eric Trinkka, Guven Seker, Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, and Ibrahim Sirkeci, as well as all our anonymous peer reviewers, for helping to bring this special issue to fruition.

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