Shifting Boundaries and Borderlands Discourses

AT A TIME WHEN BOUNDARIES ARE becoming more porous and new relationships are being ordained between the competing forces of continentalism, regionalism and nationalism, it is fitting that scholars have finally begun to broach the topic of shifting boundaries. In an age of increasing transnational interactions and globalization, a variety of academic disciplines have become involved in debates over the meaning and consequences of shifting boundaries. The current socio-economic and political context in North America and Western Europe has recently made the topic of border regions and transnational influences more relevant. Gone are the days when historians, political scientists, economists and other scholars could simply ignore the influence of transnational interactions on ideas, culture, institutions and patterns of economic and political development. At the same time, given the lack of previous research on border regions and cross-boundary associations, the reader continues to rely on a small, albeit growing, body of published research.

The reason why transnational issues are now on the agenda and considered to be a worthy area of academic inquiry has a lot to do with the many changes which have taken place in the surrounding milieu. Now, as in the past, academic research is greatly influenced by changes in the economic and political structure and by the changing needs of established elites. In particular, it is quite likely that the ongoing struggle to find a new formula for realigning the three fundamental axes of Canadian federalism has been a principal driving force behind the newly acquired academic interest in transnational research.[1] Such a focus provides a convenient way for organizing the rather broad selection of works in the following review article and for understanding the changes in the political economy that have occurred in Canada during the past decade.

Canadian federalism is a paradox. The whole system continues to revolve around three interdependent axes, with each having a distinct territorial and jurisdictional foundation. As a consequence, every time there has been an attempt to strike a new balance between these competing yet interdependent forces into a new national plan or framework, there has been a struggle over ideas between the various groups who are competing for power and influence. While change is obviously necessary if a society is to evolve and adjust to changing circumstances, at the same time it is perfectly understandable that competing interests would have different ideas about the best way for restructuring old relationships based on the challenges of economic-technological change. It also logically follows that academics would be pressured to deal with current problems and, as a consequence, that less attention would be placed on confronting or challenging old-fashioned ways of defining and thinking about policy issues.

1 The three axes of Canadian political life include the relationship between Canada and the United States, the relationship between the two founding cultures and the relationship between the central heartland and the periphery. For further details on the three axes of Canadian federalism see Donald V. Smiley, *Canada in Question: Federalism in the Seventies* (Toronto, 1976), Chapter 7.

Stephen G. Tomblin, "Shifting Boundaries and Borderlands Discourses", *Acadiensis*, XXIII, 1 (Autumn, 1993), pp. 194-203.

This is particularly relevant when we take into account the well-known inclination of academic elites to support and legitimize a territorial system of power-sharing which is insular, revolves around the processes of executive federalism and tends to ignore issues or problems which are not based on ethnic or territorial considerations.[2] As a result it is not surprising that, as Alan Cairns has written, "students of the constitution have built up sophisticated and extensive intellectual capital around the twin concerns of parliamentary government and federalism", and it is obvious that such people would find it difficult "respond[ing] to new challenges for which their expertise has diminished relevance".[3]

Since 1867 there have been various national policies or attempts to reconcile and balance the competing interests of continentalism, the two solitudes and the centre and periphery within a common federal structure. The quest to manage our increasing dependence on the United States while at the same time achieving a consensus between Ottawa and the provinces on the best way for pooling our sovereignties together while not sacrificing economic efficiency — or giving up too much regional or national control over the development process — has been a principal obsession of governments and academics alike since Confederation. In order to fully appreciate the current debate on transnationalism, we must first understand the forces which shaped the federation in the past.

The first national policy was specifically designed to build a separate political and economic structure on a national basis and to confront the threat posed to the industrial heartland by continentalism. From the beginning, the intent was to exploit the tariff system, the railway and settlement of the western periphery for the purpose of defending the territorial interests of the industrial heartland in Canada against U.S. expansionism. By the 1920s, the sweeping changes introduced by the national plan were finally in place, and the country had the tools required for controlling the process of economic development based on the territorial and jurisdictional needs of the national community. The economic and institutional system was carefully designed to control patterns of communication and economic development, disrupt transborder flows and build enduring alliances while forestalling external challengers. However, by the 1930s changing circumstances and the Depression created a crisis for the country. It was time for a new plan or vision.

The second national policy began with the decision by William Lyon Mackenzie King to appoint some of the leading Canadian academics to a Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations.[4] As argued by Cairns, the Rowell-Sirois report was important to the eventual development of a new plan or vision for the country. Moreover, it was significant that this was the first commission "to recruit academics to an extensive research role".[5] It is also important to note that the various experts who were recruited for the task of restructuring tended to be

2 For further discussion see John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic* (Toronto, 1965).

3 Alan Cairns, *Disruptions* (Toronto, 1991), p. 163.

4 See *Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations* (Ottawa, 1940).

5 Cairns, *Disruptions*, p. 182.

centralist, English-speaking, male, and critical of federalism.[6] Given these circumstances, it is little wonder that many people in the periphery and Quebec had concerns about the design that was eventually selected by Ottawa.

The reconstruction program which began in 1945 under King (and was finally implemented by the late 1960s) saw the rise of Keynesianism, the welfare state and increased federal incursions into many provincial areas of jurisdiction. Ottawa took full advantage of the Depression, the federal spending power, regional development and the popularity of Keynesian economic theory in a deliberate attempt to tilt the power balance away from the provinces. Ironically, at the same time the federal government went out of its way to encourage American investment and the creation of an even more dependent branch plant economy. It is likely that this failure to control transnational flows and interactions during the second policy worked at cross-purposes with the goal of national integration, and this no doubt reinforced the growth of new economic dependencies and cross-boundary linkages among different political entities. It was ironic that Ottawa's second nationalist development strategy, which focused primarily on internal domestic problems and the need for increasing federal power rather than on dealing with the threat posed by continentalism, actually ended up pushing the country further into the American orbit.

The third national policy, which began as an attempt to increase the power of the national state based on the Trudeau vision of federalism, was quickly aborted when it became clear that Ottawa did not have the power or resources necessary to unravel and then re-align the complicated system of overlapping dependencies between the three axes. Despite the ambitious attempt to embrace a more independent policy vis-à-vis the United States as well as the provinces, Trudeau failed in his bid to defend the national interest against the threat posed by continentalism, Quebec nationalism and provincialism.

The new nationalist strategy attempted to loop together the resource and manufacturing sectors of the economy in an integrated and complementary way. In addition, this strategy attempted to restructure economic production in ways that would increase national state power. Trudeau's megaproject approach for restructuring the country offered a new formula for building a national consensus on economic strategies and strengthening national unity while at the same time increasing Ottawa's control over the process of economic and political development. The third national policy came to a screeching halt in the early 1980s when oil and gas prices collapsed unexpectedly. As a consequence, the federal government no longer had access to the resources required to defend the national community against the threat posed by continentalism and provincialism. Recognizing that the plan could not be implemented, Ottawa had little choice but to give up the dream of gaining more control over the process of economic development.

The 1980s was a time when market forces and transnational influences gained momentum. Boundaries were becoming less relevant as governments everywhere

6 See Doug Owram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State* (Toronto, 1986), pp. 63-4, 77-8, 121, 139, 144, 147, 152 and 220.

were yielding their powers over their domestic economies in ways that increased private market power. In Canada, the task of coming to grips with the new realities of borderless economies and societies was left with the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada which was established in the mid-1980s by the federal government to chart a new course for the country.[7] Governments everywhere were losing control over boundaries as well as the processes of economic and political development, Peter Leslie argues:

> The Macdonald report, while confirming the need for drastic change in Canada's economic structure and the orientations of economic and social policies, inverted the suppositions that seem to have informed its mandate. It put forward, not a redesigned national policy for Canada, but the most comprehensive condemnation of the very idea of a national policy ever contained in a Canadian public document. It proposed no strategy or program for economic development except to facilitate adaptation to changing world market conditions, whatever future course they might dictate.[8]

During these times of economic and political change when change by national design has been rejected by many established elites, it is not surprising that a number of academics responded by questioning old assumptions about boundaries. As one might expect, at the same time that Canadian politics was changing and old taboos were vanishing, more and more scholars have become intrigued with the issue of transnational interactions. Several recent works have highlighted various themes which are relevant in an age of borderless societies. The struggle between the interdependent forces of national, continental and regional identities has not come easily, but at least we are now beginning to examine some of the forces which are pushing us in similar and at the same time opposite directions.

Let us begin by examining a study that breaks little new ground, but nevertheless offers a detailed account of some of the value differences which are seen as separating the American and Canadian political cultures. In Seymour Martin Lipset's recent publication, *North American Cultures: Values and Institutions in Canada and the United States* (Borderlands Monograph Series #3, Canadian- American Center, University of Maine, Orono, 1990), we have a thoroughly researched analysis of the national differences between the two cultures and a reason for approaching the issue of transnationalism with a great deal of caution.

In his analysis of cross-national differences, Lipset concludes that despite many economic changes and the push for effective integration, many of the culture value differences identified in earlier work have persisted over time. Underlying Lipset's analysis is the well-known thesis that key historical events will likely continue to shape future patterns of economic and political development in North America:

7 See *Report of the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada* (Ottawa, 1985).

8 Peter Leslie, *Federal State, National Economy* (Toronto, 1987), p. 23.

> The central argument of this essay is that Canada has been a more class-aware, elitist, law-abiding, statist, collectivity-oriented, and particularistic (group-oriented) society than the United States, and that these fundamental distinctions stem in large part from the defining event that gave birth to both countries, the American Revolution, and from the diverse ecologies flowing from the division of British North America. The social effects of this division have been subsequently reflected in, and reinforced by, variations in literature, religious traditions, political and legal institutions, and socio-economic structures that have been created in each country (p. 2).

While Lipset is likely guilty of exaggerating the differences between the two countries, reinforcing old stereotypical images of North American politics and ignoring the influence of cross-border regional cultures, it is also true that the two nations have been based on very different organizing principles and assumptions.[9] When we take into account the extent to which these ideas and myths are permanently embedded in the socio-economic and political experiences and structures of the two countries, it would be hard to deny that there are many obstacles standing in the way of any future attempt to nurture closer associational activities across boundaries. In this vein, Lipset has combined the findings of early research in an attempt to clearly demonstrate that despite the influence of transnational interactions and globalization, Canada and the United States are still distinguished by the presence of unique political cultures.

On the other hand, much of the lag between socio-economic change and government's lack of response to the challenge of shifting boundaries in Canada has much to do with the persistence of old ideas and paradigms among academic and other elites. The primary objective of Lauren McKinsey and Victor Konrad in *Borderlands Reflections: The United States and Canada* (Borderlands Monograph Series #1, Canadian-American Center, University of Maine, Orono, 1989) is to take the reader through some of the questions which require further analysis and to encourage academics to investigate whether there are continental-wide borderlands in North America.

This study is the first in a series of pamphlets produced by the Borderlands project and is essential reading for anyone interested in assessing the debate over the integration question.[10] The authors explore the evolution of the debate over the

9 For example, Neil Nevitts, Miguel Basanez and Ronald Inglehart have directly challenged such a characterization about North America cultures in their paper and presented survey research to support their claim that "the evidence clearly suggests attitudinal convergence in North America". See Neil Nevitts, Miguel Basanez and Ronald Inglehart, "Directions of Value Change in North America", in Stephen J. Randall *et al* ., eds., *North America Without Borders* (Calgary, 1992), p. 259.

10 It is worth noting that the American-Canadian Borderlands Project, which produced three of the titles discussed in this review article, was initiated to challenge old ways of thinking and to encourage American and Canadian academics to break with old traditions and focus more attention on transborder issues. The Borderlands Project is based on the assumption that "North

borderlands concept and pose a myriad of research questions which require investigation. In addition they offer a methodology for organizing future research based on the borderlands paradigm. In doing so, the authors provide the reader with an interesting and well-organized introduction to a complex issue as well as a systematic approach for organizing future investigations. The aim is to challenge old images of the Canadian-American relationship and to encourage others to focus more attention on the many subnational linkages which may exist in spite of national boundaries and old impressions.

Roger Gibbins approaches the study of the relationship between Canada and the United States based on the premise that people on both sides of the border do not view the boundary the same way. In *Canada as a Borderlands Society* (Borderlands Monograph Series #2, Canadian-American Center, University of Maine, Orono, 1989) he examines the differences between the way Americans and Canadians see themselves vis-à vis the boundary. The author provides a fresh approach for thinking about the struggle between nationalism and continental integration. This study does a good job comparing and contrasting the different ways that Americans and Canadians view each other and approach border intrusions. Gibbins makes a convincing argument that Americans and Canadians will likely respond to the challenge of globalization and continental integration in very different ways. Based on his analysis, Gibbins concludes that while the international border has "very limited penetration into American society", for Canadians, "the border looms very large indeed, and its effects are felt not only in communities proximate to the border but also throughout the country" (p. 2). The work itself is divided into three sections. The first deals some of the problems which are important to the theme of borderland societies. The second explores the attitudes of Americans and Canadians in two border communities located in the Pacific Northwest region. Emphasis is placed on demonstrating how attitudes are shaped by political boundaries, but in different ways. The third section offers the reader a focused discussion on how the border has influenced communities on both sides of the great divide. It is an important contribution to a growing literature and required reading for anyone interested in the topic.

The collapse of the third national policy and the emergence of increasing economic interdependence between Canada and the United States has no doubt motivated historians to refocus attention on various kinds of earlier cross-border associations that have been generally ignored in past literature. Stephen J. Hornsby, Victor A. Konrad and James J. Herlan's edited book, *The Northeastern Borderlands: Four Centuries of Interaction* (Fredericton, Acadiensis Press, 1989), brings together a group of six prominent historians to tackle the question of borderland interactions in the Northeast region of North America before Confederation. It should also be noted that the conference which produced the papers and commentaries for this book was initiated by the Canadian-American Center at the University of Maine which has an interest in promoting research on cross-border interactions.

America runs more naturally north and south than east and west as specified by national boundaries". See Roger Gibbins, *Canada As A Borderlands Society* (Borderlands Monograph Series #2, Canadian-American Centre, University of Maine, Orono, 1989), p. iii.

These papers, each focused on a different aspect of cross-boundary associations, provide a contemporary approach for understanding some of the underlying historical forces which may have contributed to the weakening of nation-building processes in North America in more recent times. The collection surveys old patterns of association within the Northeastern region in an attempt to better understand the origins of cross-border identities and interactions. The book challenges conventional wisdom and is based on the need to recognize the various historical linkages within the border region which have been generally ignored by previous historians. Chapters of varied quality offer the reader a number of different ways for thinking about the influence of old historical ties between Quebec, New England and the Maritimes. The advantage of bringing so many scholars together in this way is that the reader is exposed to a number of approaches and ideas. Specific areas addressed include old images of conflict and cooperation between European and native peoples, past research on cross-border interactions, social and economic ties between the Maritimes and New England, historical linkages between New England and Quebec, and a native perspective on traditional borderland interactions. Each of the papers contributes in a unique way to our understanding of various interregional connections within the Northeast, but all are informed by the borderlands concept.

While the book fills a major gap in the literature and in so doing challenges old myths about cross-border associations, it is more than ironic that the conclusion finishes by pointing out the dangers of such scholarship and by attacking scholars who would consider pushing onto the public agenda ideas which directly threaten the unity of the country. P.A. Buckner, who admits to being a Canadian nationalist, goes out of the way to label borderlanders as unpatriotic and promoters of "an even older American concept - Manifest Destiny". It is also argued that "those who deny the validity of the international boundary are promoting continentalism" (p. 158). Such a response provides further evidence that many scholars continue to feel threatened by any approach or concept which directly challenges old ideas or images.

The relationship between a sovereign Quebec and Canada in the context of a changing world is the topic of Daniel Drache and Roberto Perin's recently edited book, *Negotiating With a Sovereign Quebec* (Toronto, James Lorimer, 1992). What the book provides is a dialogue on various issues and options based on what is considered to be the point of view of people and interests outside of Quebec. Each of the 16 experts present their ideas on a range of topics, including the influence of political culture on future negotiations, global economic change, the challenge of managing our interdependency based on new economic and political customs, the quest to redraw boundaries, the jurisdictional and territorial needs of aboriginal nations, and various other cross-border policies and issues. Since few scholars outside of Quebec have shown much interest in this topic, it is commendable that the primary objective of the work is to focus on some of the very difficult questions which need to be addressed if Quebec decides to quit Canada.

Premised on the conjecture that Quebec is going to leave anyway, the book reflects on various ways for facilitating change by design. The contributors concentrate on several critical issues and offer insights on the best way to negotiate

a new and more beneficial affiliation between Quebec and Canada. However, the reader should also be forewarned that the work tends to be based on the assumptions of the Quebec nationalist vision of Canada as well as those of the political economy school of thought. Hence, despite the attempt to deal with native concerns and other issues, it is open to question whether the way problems are framed in the work adequately reflect the views of many Canadians outside of Quebec, especially in Atlantic or Western Canada. For example, it is unclear whether many people at the margins would agree with the argument defended throughout the book by various authors that while Quebecers need more control over the process of development, at the same time any attempt to devolve power in other provinces is simply a ploy on the behalf of neo-conservative ideologues to increase the power of American private interests.[11] Such a characterization is rather simplistic and ignores the centre-periphery dimension of Canadian politics. If borderlanders are guilty of pushing the continentalist agenda, then it is equally true that, by design, the primary object of this book is to force the issue of Quebec sovereignty.

The editors' introduction clearly links for the reader Quebec's dilemma in fighting for empowerment without at the same time destroying a power-sharing arrangement that has always provided Canadians with the resources required to defend a "tradition of social solidarity" against the threat posed by the United States based "market-driven model of economic development" (p. 4). The book calls for a new formula for pooling our sovereignties and managing our interdependence, but they do not want to weaken the power of either nation to defend sovereign aspirations and cultures against the threat posed by American imperialism. It is a difficult balancing act, and the aim of the work is to deal with some of these complex issues. Throughout, the radical and centralist assumptions of the participating scholars are evident. While they tend to ignore or even deny the centre-periphery dimension of Canadian political life and for the most part share in the old myth that English Canada is a monolithic entity, the contributions still offer a first-rate series of papers focused on the ever-changing relationship between Canada, Quebec and the United States.

Another recent collection, edited by Stephen J. Randall, Herman Konrad and Sheldon Silverman, *North America Without Borders?* (Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 1992) analyzes a range of subjects including the challenge of integration in North America, its likely impact on economic development, energy, the environment, culture and other related cross-boundary policies and issues. In the wake of the ongoing debate over the need to promote a more integrated approach to economic and political development in North America, the book is again the product of a seminar that was held at the University of Calgary in May 1991. In all 27 scholars, diplomats and representatives from the business and political communities participated and offered their interpretation of the current struggle to change economic and political boundaries in North America. The kind of analysis provided by these authors tends to be more balanced than *Negotiating With A*

11 For examples see especially the introduction by Daniel Drache and Roberto Perin and chapters by Reg Whitaker, Michael Mandel and Barbara Cameron.

Sovereign Quebec, and there is a broader range of interpretations and ideological prescriptions offered to the reader. However, given the number of participants and the aim of the symposium, it is not surprising that more ground was covered.

The Calgary conference focused not only on the many economic and political sacrifices associated with continentalism, but also highlighted the possible benefits of desegregation in Mexico, Canada and the United States. By adopting a more comparative approach and deliberating on the relationship between economy, politics and culture in the context of North America during the 1980s, the authors provide a number of valuable insights on the roots of change. It is striking, for example, that the Mexican government also changed direction in the 1980s and came to rely less and less on state intervention at the same time that Canada did.[12] It appears that the 1980s were revolutionary times in North American politics, and such evidence shows that it might be more useful identifying and understanding the various external forces which are actually responsible for altering the international trading system, instead of wasting too much energy simply blaming those in political office for abandoning the statist model. As the primary tasks of the state have evidently shifted and political leaders' efforts are less focused on national policies and integration, it is important that we reflect more on the external environmental changes which have undermined old policies and practices. We perhaps need to come up with a new definition of societal integration and of community in North America and not rely so much on yesterday's assumptions or theoretical frameworks.

In part, much of the conflict in the debate over integration stems from the fact that the different schools of thought concentrate on dissimilar consequences of policy change. The contrast provided in *North America Without Borders* is useful because it stimulates scholarly debate and offers the reader novel ways for interpreting the crusade to eliminate economic and political boundaries on the continent. Since no one really knows for sure what impact a borderless society would have on future patterns of economic and political development in North America, it is encouraging that such work is now entering the public discourse.

Scott Reid's *Canada Remapped: How The Partition of Quebec Will Reshape The Nation* (Vancouver, Pulp Press, 1992) breaks new research ground on the partition question and presents a convincing argument that we need to be well-prepared for dealing with a number of complex border issues if and when Quebec decides to quit Canada. By examining the issue from a comparative and historical perspective, the author provides a convincing argument that Canada has much to lose if there is not a plan in place before Quebec makes a final decision. Given the relevance of the topic and the lack of good research, this is a welcome contribution to the literature. Rather than approaching the issue with the clear intention of threatening Quebec from separating, as others have, Reid places the debate in context by examining how other countries have dealt with similar problems, and the cumulative impact of these kinds of actions. Drawing upon the experiences of Irish partition, the Jura, Switzerland division in 1979, and more recent experience in Yugoslavia, Reid

12 For further details see the contribution by Gustavo del Castillo Vera, "Institutional Concerns and Mechanisms Developing from Tripartite Free Trade Negotiations in North America", pp. 41-54.

clearly demonstrates that the costs of intolerance could be very high for everyone involved. Based on this evidence, the author makes a convincing argument that it is imperative that all of the stakeholders in Canada work together in developing a plan for dealing with the partition question before Quebec makes a final decision on its future.

The most impressive section of the work deals with some of the options open to Canada should Quebec decide that it wants to leave. The author deals with several issues, including the problems of enclaves, native rights and the role of a referendum, among others, in an attempt to provide a balanced and logical approach to the partition question. It is proposed that any future enabling legislation dealing with these complex issues should be based on a series of referenda that should be organized into small polling districts. By doing so, it is argued that Canada might be in a better position to avoid many of the problems which have plagued Ireland and Yugoslavia. While not everyone will agree with the analysis or the prescriptions offered, it is clear that this excellent book should be read by anyone with an interest in the topic.

In these various books on changing boundaries in North America, the reader is finally being exposed to fresh ways for dealing with some of the challenges we now face in an age of shifting boundaries and paradigms. However, we have not gone very far in addressing the full impact of the many cross-boundary changes that are taking place, and it is unfortunate that the subject has received so little scholarly attention in the past. The works reviewed here attest to the fact that more and more scholars are attempting to fill the void, but it will be a major challenge responding to these changes based on only a few studies. Perhaps in the future scholars will be less constrained by environmental factors and conventional normative concerns and more open to thinking critically about borders in North America. It is natural that people in North America should be redefining their relationships based on constantly changing conditions. However, coming to grips with change will be easier in the future if academics are more willing to develop competing theoretical models on how society works.

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