



## CALL FOR PAPERS

Grenoble Alpes University 8-9 February 2024

### **Contesting national borders today and tomorrow: Actors, discourses, practices, proposals.**

Closely linked to the existence of nation-states, borders are markers of sovereignty and identity, as well as imaginary lines (Sellier 2002). They are intended to legitimize the authority of the state and to delimit its perimeter in terms of legal, political, and administrative competences. However, border limits are not always perceived as fair: imposed, negotiated, resulting from treaties, they are the result of "power relations", of colonial policies, and ideological orientations. They always leave certain populations dissatisfied with the choices made. From this point of view, borders drawn from the perspective of a central power ignore peripheral realities, whether human, linguistic or socio-political: fabricated by the States, they foreground a national narrative, leaving the details of the history of the peoples and their territories in the dark and they then become matters of contestation.

The ambiguity of these international border lines, "time-space materializing norms" (Amilhat Szary 2020), lies in their relationship to memory: the drawing of those border lines is so powerful that it immediately raises them to the level of symbolically powerful political tools, without their existence being able to erase the identities that preceded them, such as plurilingualism or the economic stakes. These tensions and conflicts fuel contestations and can go as far as questioning the legitimacy of political regimes or states in their territorial integrity. This dynamic is described by some as the "revival of borders", in a context where international relations advocate the intangibility of existing borders.

Border disputes often reflect a reconfiguration of local, regional and/or transnational identities on the basis of community, ethnic or confessional, linguistic or cultural affiliations, against a backdrop of political, economic and sometimes opportunistic calculations that demonstrate a desire to redefine collective identity and renegotiate its construction methods. But do these contestations stem from a negation of the idea of the border? Are the contested borders not sometimes replaced by other types of borders? What are the links between the forms of contestation and the new borders? The new borders require, however, the implementation by the contesting actors of strategies that make their territorial construction projects feasible and legitimate, allowing them to be acknowledged. For all that, not all protests are part of nationalist perspectives: whether social movements of indigenous peoples demanding links to places rather than a division of the world, or struggles conducted alongside non-human living beings for a planet of commons.

The notion of *borders* in the context of this conference takes the form of geographical, political, linguistic, communal, ethnic or confessional separations, in the context of the formation and governance of States. We could however question the intersectional dimension of the struggles and question the links between the contestation of the borders and other kinds of social movements. Is the contestation of national borders linked to the questioning of other types of borders (between social classes, genders, etc.)?

In all the States resulting from colonial divisions, the boundaries were preserved at the time of independence in the name of the principle of *Uti possidetis*. And yet, postcolonial

discourses have multiplied sites of contestations, coming both from the regimes in power and from their opponents. These dynamics are a challenge for any Nation-State and represent threats to their territorial integrity and National unity. While challenges to national borders do not automatically lead to the collapse of the State, the new territorial entities that are claimed and the multitude of actors that support them are very quickly confronted with the question of their recognition at the local, regional or international levels. The contestation of land lines engenders international, even transnational effects.

The actions and expressions of border contestation are often political and/or military. They are embodied by the creation of partisan formations, around charismatic personalities, lobbying, armed groups, and guerrilla groups. They are also manifested through artistic, literary and cultural productions. Language, heritage and art are both unifying and divisive factors for a nation and can fuel contestation.

The scientific and academic literature proposes numerous works on border disputes, the role and usefulness of borders, their mobility or tangibility... Protest movements and the modalities of their expression remain to be explored. This conference aims at enriching this aspect. It focuses on the question of the contestation of national borders, with particular attention to the different forms of expression and the logics of mobilization in relation to contested borders.

The concept of contestation is mobilized here in a multidisciplinary approach taking into account the geographical, political, social, cultural, artistic and linguistic dimensions. How do contested borders mobilize the social humanities? Who are the actors? What are the means and tools they use? What are their discourses?

Through an empirical approach, this international conference will seek to study the contestation of borders not only through the prism of political power, but by emphasizing the analysis of the logics and strategies of non-State actors, of their discourses and claims, of the modalities of organization and mobilization. The ambition of this conference is not so much to focus on the analyses from a macro point of view, as to question the logics and dynamics that run through these contestations, from a micro perspective. The temporal framework envisaged corresponds to the long duration of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries.

Axis 1: "Against the unjust division of the world": discourses and struggles for new borders.

Axis 2: Contestation of existing border regimes: struggles in the name of the autonomy of migrations and for a planet of the commons.

Axis 3: Recognition and legitimization of new borders.

### **Possible avenues of reflection**

- Movements contesting borders. The history and historicity of movements contesting borders, the nature of these contestations, the different forms and techniques of mobilization: social, political and religious actors, etc. The question of the recognition of new borders. Mobilizations against regimes of "securitization" of borders and in favor of the autonomy of migrations. The negation of borders in an ecological perspective.

- Contested borders in art (Border Art). Artists question borders through their productions (photographs, music, cartoons, street art, frescoes, murals, cinema...). Borders are sources of inspiration for the artists. The lines of separation (walls, security fences, green zones/lines...) constitute a material allowing to express a political opinion or to make pass a contesting message ("artivism")...

- The contestations of borders in literary works. Literary and linguistic studies, or even sociolinguistic studies, especially postcolonial studies, give a central place to the question of borders (SUTER and FOURNIER KISS 2021). The various productions around borders (novels, poems, travelogues, slogans...) question the relationship to borders and contested territories. How do languages and literatures position themselves in the expression of these mobilizations?

**Deadline for the submission of proposals: October 15, 2023**

Proposals can be submitted in French or English (500 words, biographical note with institutional affiliation of the participant). They should be sent to the following address: [contester-les-frontieres@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr](mailto:contester-les-frontieres@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr)

The proposals will be examined by the members of the scientific committee and validated **before November 10, 2023**.

**Organizing Committee**

Zakaria Taha ILCEA4-UGA ; Anne-Laure AMILHAT SZARY, Pacte-UGA ; Valéry Kossov ILCEA4-UGA ; Miloud GHARRAFI IETT- Université Jean Moulin - Lyon 3 ; NERI Corrado IETT-Lyon 3 ; Daniel MEIER, Pacte- Science Po Grenoble ; Sarah BACHELLERIE Pacte ; Marie POULAIN Université de Genève ; Cristèle Bernard CERDAP <sup>2</sup> UGA - Science Po Grenoble.

**Scientific committee**

BEYLIER Pierre-Alexandre ILCEA4- Université Grenoble Alpes.  
BOULAABI Ridha Litt&Arts- Université Grenoble Alpes.  
GAUDICHAUD Franck FRAMESPA-Université Jean Jaurès.  
MARCOU Jean CERDAP <sup>2</sup> UGA - Science Po Grenoble.  
MARYNOWER Claire Pacte-Science Po Grenoble.  
MIANOWSKI Marie ILCEA4-Université Grenoble Alpes.  
MORIER-GENOUD DAMIEN ILCEA4-UGA.  
SENGUER Haoues Triangle-Sciences Po Lyon.  
VALTER Stéphane CeRLA- Université de Lyon 2.  
VAUTHIER Elisabeth IETT-Université Jean Moulin - Lyon 3.

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