In our constantly changing, increasingly globalizing and, on the one hand increasingly privatized, but on the other hand increasingly transparent world, new borders are being created, new alliances are forged, and some old boundaries are dissolved. We witness some historical antagonisms lingering on, while new antagonisms are born. We are living in an era when the international organizations which have claimed to represent the well-being of the whole community of nations, such as the United Nations and NATO, are being sidelined on important issues. Simultaneously the concentration of military, political and economic powers in the hands of a single superpower is writing history anew. We are living in an era in which we see a heightened awareness and respect for ethnicity, race and gender, while at the same time, we witness the continuation of archaic and fossilized tensions and conflicts on the very same dimensions. Living in a world where boundaries are constantly being dismantled, challenged and re-built, we thought that our social inquiry must also follow suit. Thus, the current special issue is dedicated to the new theoretical orientations, empirical studies and emerging methodologies for studying negotiated boundaries, in the intersecting areas of race, ethnicity, nationality and gender.

Shifting boundaries can be happening at the relatively micro level, such as in interpersonal interaction or within neighbourhoods, or at much more macro levels such as cultural patterns or in national and international domains. Likewise, boundaries may be shifting in tangible ways such as within national or international laws, policies and practices, just as they may take shape in purely ideological terms. As sociologists and anthropologists, some of us are interested in exploring changing boundaries in race, ethnicity and class, critically evaluating the changing faces of racism and emerging forms of ethnocentrism, as well as analysing the means through which traditional oppressions are challenged and spaces are re-apportioned and allocated.

Against this backdrop we will now present the six papers which are included in this special issue on negotiating boundaries in a globalizing world.

Working at the macro level, Gerardo Otero & Heidi Jugenitz look at the changing boundaries from within nation states. Their interest centres on the indigenous peasant movements in Latin America (Mexico and Ecuador) at the start of the 21st century. According to the authors, these movements articulate a strong challenge to the hegemonic definitions of nationhood by seeking legal (and moral) recognition of their cultural distinctiveness. The nature of the indigenous struggles, Otero & Jugenitz suggest, is not a simple “class” struggle like the traditional Marxist theories of yesteryear have proclaimed. According to the authors, these movements also transcend the simple “identity politics” brought into vogue by post-modern and new social movements theories. On the one hand, these movements have focussed attention on struggles for re-apportioning autonomy, self-governance and control over resources. On the other hand, they are deeply rooted in the identity politics of recognition and respect for meaningful differences. Thus the struggles over boundaries are located within nation states, and these boundaries that are defended, altered, preserved and negotiated are all class and identity-based. According to the authors, a revised theoretical model which gives equal weight to class and identity concerns within indigenous movements will benefit nation states by guiding them toward more equitable and less contentious re-allocations of power and resources. Insightfully the authors quote from the Supreme Court of Canada: “the accommodation of difference is the essence of true equality.” We feel, however, that their own arguments go beyond simple accommodation: rather, their model highlights that respect is the essence of true equality.

While Otero & Jugenitz explore re-negotiations on the basis of old and historically entrenched claims, Susan Frohlick is more interested in how globalization results in new transnational boundary negotiations within a national context. Focussing on the identities of “tourist” and “guide”, she examines the changing contours and conceptualisations of tourist spaces that globalization has brought to tourism on Mount Everest. On the basis of her fieldwork both in Nepal and in the Canadian Rockies, she illustrates racialized and class-based inequities, showing how Western-based definitions of the meanings and practices of (commodified) mountaineering close off possibilities for Nepalese to take up positions as mountaineering subjects, either as professional guides or as tourists/clients. The discursive practices also circumscribe the Nepalese who do achieve professional recognition by defining them only as (local) climbers of Everest rather than acknowledging that some are also recreational climbers of peaks within Nepal and elsewhere in the world - tourists as well as workers. Frohlick also illustrates how the neo-imperial,
exclusionary Western practices are challenged within Nepal by institutionalised ceremonies, by the
advertising of local companies and by the negotiated identities of Nepali mountaineers. Her study is
particularly valuable due to its emphasis on these negotiations of identities and boundaries between
unequals. Such negotiations have generally been ignored in tourism studies about the impact of
globalization. Regrettably, most other studies in the area have failed to assess the impact of
globalization on the tourism industry.

Like Frohlick, and Otero and Jugenitz, Marie-José Nadal’s inquiry concentrates on changes
involving the negotiation of identities within national boundaries in an increasingly globalizing
world. She examines the discourses of an international organisation, UNIFEM, which, with
partner NGOs and using a gender and development framework, is endeavouring to commercialise
the production and sale of items decorated with traditional Mayan embroidery. This organization
thus attempts to combine the conservation of indigenous women’s cultural production with their
integration into the global market place. Although the project includes peasant Mayan women in the
Yucatan, Chiapas and Guatemala, the article concentrates on the Yucatan, where the work is most
advanced. Nadal shows not only the contradictions between the social construction of gender and
essentialism within the project’s discourse, there are but also contradictions between discourse and
implementation. For example, design of the items and cutting are done by non-indigenous urban
women, versed in the demands of the foreign markets. Another example is that the hand-done
embroidery done by hand is simplified in order to reduce the costs (cost?) of production so that the
workers will receive “fair” remuneration. Such handwork is executed by indigenous peasant
women in their villages, with the outlining done by more skilled embroiderers and its filling in by
those with less skill. In an ironic twist, the Mayan embroidery project, despite its aspiration to
celebrate indigenous art and encourage women’s empowerment, has instead become a production
line in the service of the global appetites. In the name of women’s empowerment and respect for
indigenous cultures, new hierarchies and specialisations within the commercialised craft work are
created; a distinction between the traditional (on display, in museums) and the commercial is
established. Nadal also observes that new gender roles are negotiated in the family and community.
The project obviously intends to combine sustainable development and cultural preservation.
However, to what extent the women will embrace the transnational Mayan ethnic identity being
promoted by this relatively new endeavour remains to be seen. What is clear is that a wide range of
boundary negotiations are on-going, again within a context of unequal power relations.

Globalization fuels the emerging distributions of power.

Unlike the first three papers that deal with shifts in boundaries in other parts of the world,
the remaining three papers discuss emerging and changing boundaries in Canada. Gillian Creese
and Edith Ngene Kambere are interested in tracing how the forces of globalization are reflected in
the boundaries that language creates. As physical boundaries are shifting in a globalizing world, it
seems that symbolic boundaries are being erected almost as if to compensate for the erosion of
former barriers. These new boundaries are at play in the social definitions of language use or in
how the existence of an “accent” affects interpersonal relations. In focus group discussions about
their experiences as African immigrant women in Vancouver, participants identified accent as a
perennial and frequently experienced barrier to their participation in employment and in civil society
in Canada. Almost all of the participants were highly educated and defined themselves as having
been fluent in English when they arrived. Despite residing in Canada from anywhere between two
to thirteen years and considering themselves to have an excellent command of English, participants
believed that their accent prevented them from crossing the barrier from an “immigrant” to a
“Canadian.” The presence of an accent results in people being ignored or having their English
usage corrected. Auditory cues are used to define immigrants as unqualified for particular jobs,
despite their impressive (and relevant) credentials. In fact, despite the participants’ resistance, an
accent justifies discriminatory behaviour that would be unacceptable if the basis of discrimination
were skin colour, gender or religion.

Like Creese and Kambere, Laura Simich explores micro-level negotiations. More
specifically, Simich is interested in the settlement pattern negotiations between immigration officers
implementing the policies of Canada as the host state and the more than 7000 refugees, who arrive
every year from different parts of the world. Refugees sometimes openly express, but more
frequently covertly hold, personal wishes about where to settle. The tension is between a relatively
stringent and deterministic state policy which attempts to distribute the refugee claimants and the
rarely successful efforts of the refugee claimants’ self-determination. The government policies
often reflect macro-level considerations about economic well-being of regions, the changing
growth rates of population, and availability and ease of distributability of resources. The self-
determination efforts of the refugees are based on more micro-level social support and social
network considerations. One undesirable outcome for the state as well as for the refugees themselves is that the latter often become secondary migrants: they move away from their original, government-imposed destination. This reflects their desire to settle where their kin, extended family and friends are, despite the state’s efforts to help them with their basic needs in the place of original settlement. The negotiation of boundaries takes place between unequal partners (official policies and bureaucrats versus the refugees), but Simich’s research informs us that refugees are resilient. Her work also shows us the necessity of going beyond heavy-handed state policies and toward more tolerant and flexible patterns. Whereas in Otero and Jugenitz’s macro-level work, mutual respect was advocated in the settling of indigenous people’s claims, Simich’s micro-level work shows us the need to allow, encourage and enhance the social support networks of the newcomers.

Driedger returns us to the importance of macro level analysis. His article provides an analysis of space, ethnicity, race boundaries and class based shifts. To keep his inquiry manageable, Driedger focuses on urbanization patterns in Ontario’s populous southern belt. Reviewing the basic premises of the class-based zone models and the population-cluster-based multiple nuclei models of urbanization, Driedger’s work discusses the ethnic and racial concentrations in Ontario’s three most populous and seven other growing cities. He observes that the larger the population concentration, the more likely that such centres will show a zone pattern (with some exceptions). Moreover, Driedger identifies not one, but at least four distinct urbanization patterns. He categorizes these patterns as the “Visible Minority,” “British/Loyalist,” “Blue Collar” and the “Fringe” types. An interesting and thought provoking finding in this study is that particularly in the Toronto’s “Visible Minority” urbanization pattern, but also to a lesser degree in the other typologies, class, ethnicity and race interactions are crucial determinants of boundaries. He suggests that while dealing with communities at the macro level, political decisions must also take into account how individual members of identifiable groups will negotiate their place within these communities. Thus we again are reminded of the need for macro level analysis to be augmented by micro level detail. For example, according to Driedger, these boundary negotiations, especially in Toronto, are very much linked to the interpretation of the degree of skin pigmentation.

Discussions of the negotiation of racial, ethnic and/or national boundaries are a theme common to all six articles. Power differentials are another common, if not always explicit theme, and in the articles by Creese and Kambere, Frohlick, Simich, and Otero and Jugenitz we see how the less powerful are increasingly challenging, with more or less success, the definitions imposed by the more powerful. Sometimes openly, at other times, more subtly, gender also configures in the shifting boundaries. A further commonality that should be noted is that, although with varying degrees of explicitness, all of the articles in this special issue point to new policy implications.

When we made the proposal for the current issue, we were interested only in tapping into work that would analyze the changing boundaries of race, ethnicity, gender and nationality in an increasingly globalizing world. After reviewing many insightful articles and undertaking the difficult process of selecting the six presented to you in this issue, we realized that there are also shifting boundaries within sociology and anthropology themselves. We welcome the changes in the theories and the methods that usher us into the 21st century, and interpret these changes as our disciplines’ reflexivity to the changing world they studies.

Ann Denis & Aysan Sev’er