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TB or not TB: Disease and the Adaptiveness of Political Borders

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Title: TB or not TB: Disease and the Adaptiveness of Political Borders

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Abstract. This article describes adaptive and nonadaptive aspects of political borders at the threshold of the 21st century.

Social science studies can strongly reinforce the adaptive consequences of borders, with the term "adaptive" denoting increasing the probability of human survival and reproduction for individuals and others who share varying amounts of physical, psychological, and sociocultural similarity with these individuals. At the most basic of levels, borders between the self and the other seem crucial to psychological functioning--the adaptive features of the mind. Another adaptive feature of the mind is the capability and penchant to perceive borders between, among, and within people. The perception of difference between self and other and of similarity between self and other after self and other are differentiated can provide adaptive cues. The same is the case for differences and similarities between, among, and within people.

These psychological borders seem to be necessary--if not sufficient--for the formation of physical borders, because the former lead to perceptions of opportunities and threats necessitating the latter. Historically, common opportunities and threats have included the protection of (1) food from theft or contamination and (2) oneself, one's kith, and one's kin from violent attack and from the violence of nature.

However, borders may have nonadaptive aspects as well. Friends may be misperceived as adversaries, adversaries as friends. The violent and noxious forces of nature may operate across borders as may those of human-created phenomena such as nuclear meltdowns and the discharge into the atmosphere of chlorofluorocarbons.

Another nonadaptive aspect of borders becomes salient in the context of increasing human mobility across borders due to immigration, business, refugee status, and so on. An example of this is the rise in the international incidence and prevalence of tuberculosis (TB). The differences in policies, motives, and assets to implement policies among nation-states--each defined by political borders--are impediments to effective action against TB. The country with the strongest policies and most significant assets is still at the mercy of the country with the weakest and least significant.

Thus, as analysts ponder the continued viability of the nation-state and of conflict resolution gambits such as partition and demarcation that allegedly are due those who seek and strive for self-determination, they should also consider that of any political border in the face of threat that transcends them. If not, TB or not TB may truly be the question of To Be or Not To Be for significant numbers of human population. (See Central Africa and the political psychology of borders. (October 31, 1997). *IBPP*, 314; Coover, G.E., & Godbold, L.C. (1998). Convergence between racial and political identities: Boundary erasure or aversive racism? *Communication Research*, 25, 669-688; New defense against an old killer. (April 5, 1999). *The New York Times*, p. A22; On the Border of Poligenic Crime. (March 5, 1999). *IBPP*, 69; Phillips, T.L. (1996). Symbolic boundaries and national identity in Australia. *British Journal of Sociology*, 47, 113-134; Rothbart, M., Davis-Stitt, C., & Hill, J. (1997). Effects of

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arbitrarily placed category boundaries on similarity judgments. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 33, 122-145.) (Keywords: Adaptation, Borders, Boundaries, Tuberculosis.)