

THEMATIC FOCUS: EXPERIENCING AND REMEMBERING BORDERS

Introduction: Experience, Memory and Locality in the Cultures of European Borders

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Anthropological attention to political and cultural borders has grown considerably over the last twenty years. This has been due in most part to the increasing scholarly attention paid to international and other political borders, in ways that mirror political and economic elites who have continued to place borders centre-stage in their debates on the good and bad effects of globalisation. Once principally the focus of geography, today the study of borders – including their territorial, geophysical, political and cultural dimensions – has become a primary interest across the disciplines due to changing scholarly approaches to such key research subjects and objects as the state, nation, sovereignty, citizenship, migration and the over-arching forces and practices of globalisation. All of these approaches to borders and frontiers have been complicated by various attempts to understand and express how identities can be better understood through reference to metaphors of borders, in what can be called 'border theory', as opposed to 'border studies' that focus on the geopolitical and legal demarcations between nations and states.¹ These interests in various metaphors and concrete realities of borders are based at least in part in the efforts to identify and investigate many of the cultural effects of globalisation, including but not limited to hybridity, creolisation, multiculturalism, post-colonialism and many other central concerns of scholarly investigation.

The effort to understand globalisation is but one factor at work in what amounts to a virtual explosion in studies of: changing social and cultural boundaries; the removal and strengthening of various state and other political borders; the mix of populations and the agencies of the state and others where countries and their peoples meet; and the metaphorical borderlands



of hegemonic and minority identities. The various ways scholars consider the flows of people, goods, ideas and services in a globalised and transnational world have come a long way from the era of the Cold War, and the continuing transformations of global economies and polities suggest that more borders than in years past frame our collective lives today. This increased scholarly attention to borders and frontiers calls into question the ‘end of the nation-state’ thesis that is so crucial to much globalisation theory and rhetoric. In this thesis, globalisation is seen as a process that has led to, and must inevitably lead to greater, decline in the power of nation-states to provide the necessary services related to the economic and political security of their citizens.² Yet, despite this seemingly inexorable drive to undermine the nation-state’s ability to control sovereignty and security in its territory, there has been a proliferation in the number and extent of nation-states, and a resultant increase in the number of geopolitical borders that separate and cross-cut these new and old states.

The scholarly turn to borders in anthropology is particularly driven by the contradictions which borders offer to scholars: are they coming down or getting stronger? Are there fewer or more? Have they been fundamentally transformed or are they just changed in form but not in substance? What do changed borders mean to local and global culture? This last question in particular has occupied anthropologists over the last twenty years, and it reflects the overall turn to culture and identity in our cognate disciplines. In fact, as part of this change in the meaning and function of international and other borders of government and governance, the impact of these great changes on identity and culture in every place and space of the globe is widely debated in the social sciences and humanities.

This continuing fascination with borders and frontiers, in and beyond anthropology, is hardly an invention of scholars. On the contrary, anthropological studies of borders, which in most cases and in most approaches is about border cultures,³ have been provoked and challenged by real events that have affected us all over the last twenty years. The fall of the Iron Curtain; the expansion of the EU; the rise of new and old ethnonationalisms; the creation of many new states and regional trading blocs to rival the EU and the US; the rise of new global forces, from neoliberal economics to New World Political Orders; the clash of civilisations; and new engagements between developed and less-developed countries and hemispheres have all made borders and borderlands new sites of empirical investigation, of processes of localisation

and globalisation in the face of so many forces of change. Borders and frontiers are also elements in the transforming dimensions of culture, politics, society and economics at every level of social and political complexity, experience and expression across the globe. Recent events and ongoing dilemmas brought on by 9/11, the war on terror, and the new security, health and economic problems and opportunities of world populations on the move, all indicate that the related notions of borders, boundaries and frontiers will attract more attention in the near future from scholars, policy-makers and other peoples of the world who must negotiate and cross the barriers and bridges that borders offer.

Despite all of the changes which borders and the societies and polities they enclose have undergone in recent decades, there has been a remarkable consistency in the ways in which anthropologists have approached them in research. This may be in large part due to anthropologists' abiding interest in people, ideas and actions in localities. To many anthropologists this fascination with the quotidian lives of people – many if not most of whom lack the wealth and power to be obvious elites in their societies, but who nonetheless may often constitute major forces in social and cultural change – leads them to consider how politics and economics intersect with local society and culture. As a result, many anthropological studies of border cultures focus on identity and identification, and the ways in which people chart their courses through the frontiers that seem to separate and join groups of people who express similar or different notions of being and belonging. However, it would be a mistake to reduce anthropological attention to borders to one that relies solely or even mainly on descriptive and comparative studies of culture and identity. The majority of border studies in anthropology today in fact have used the issues of identity and cultural change as windows on wider processes in the political and economic systems that meet and often overlap in borderlands. Thus recent anthropological analyses of borders and in border zones have examined the changing dimensions of state security, neoliberal policies, environmental degradation, sovereignty, and the illegal economies that are essential to all borderlands (but are often subversive threats to the legal economy and to the state).⁴ Nowhere is this anthropological attention to how borders, cultures, identities, politics and economics intersect and affect each other more apparent than in the anthropology of Europe, new and old.

Within the anthropological studies of European borders can be found most of the themes that have given meaning to the anthropology of borders

across the globe, yet until recently other parts of the world have received more attention in terms of the importance of their borders.⁵ The changing dimensions of Europe, through the expansion and transformations of the European Union, the demise of the Soviet bloc, the resurgence of old nations and the rise of new ones, and the mass movement of peoples across the continent, from south to north and from east to west, are but some of the factors that have not only transformed borders in Europe but have transformed the scholarship on borders. Border studies in Europe, in anthropology but also in other disciplines, of course contain elements of analysis that are found globally in studies of borderlands, such as customs and other security concerns, smuggling, refugees and other forced migrants, labour movement, and cross-border kinship, marriage and other social relations. However, it is worth considering if studies of European borderlands might also contain elements of scholarly research that are less apparent in border studies in other parts of the world. Equally, whether there are other topics of scholarly interest that have been well-researched elsewhere but are only now receiving scholarly attention in those parts of Europe where anthropology is still developing as a major field of study. These are questions and interests that have motivated the contributors to this special issue of the *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*.

The volume which this essay introduces had its birth in the workshop ‘Experiencing and Remembering Borders in Europe’ at the 9th SIEF Conference in Derry/Londonderry, University of Ulster, in June 2008. The panel, organised by Thomas K. Schippers, became the basis for this special issue. Both the panel and a later call to scholars sought research papers on how people perceive and deal with various types of local, regional, national and supra-national borders and boundaries, particularly given how shifts in the ‘softening or hardening’ of borders relate to people’s feelings of belonging.⁶ These issues of being and belonging, of identity as they relate to historical and contemporary borders and frontiers, are central to the analyses contained in this special issue, as may be predicted in any compendium devoted to the examination of culture and borders. But these essays also ask us to push the limits of our own ethnographic, historical and anthropological approaches to these same borders, and they do so with their exploration of border-crossers, border consumers and border makers.

Ivall in his analysis of pleasure boaters in this special issue captures the ways in which an anthropological attention to localities, at and across inter-

national borders, is always at least in part about how borderlanders 'live' their borders, namely make them their own and make sense of them in their own ways. Idvall shows how living this border involves various ways to experience the border region, spatially and temporally, and along patterns that may be at odds with others' notions of the border and border region. Thus he shows how the boaters sail and stay across, along and around the Öresund, and sometimes do all of these through the same action! Locals obviously treat the border as a resource, not as a barrier, and as a fact of everyday existence that has particular importance to them. They also recognise that the border and its region have significance elsewhere, to many people who live and work in non-border areas, and to the nation and states themselves, but these, while important, may not be the main factors of significance to those who live the border as a local experience. As consumers of the border, pleasure boaters live on one side of the border between Denmark and Sweden, but travel so regularly and in such pronounced and perhaps idiosyncratic ways that they truly serve as members of a transnational community of the Öresund region. How these border people live, experience and remember this border offers us a window on the liberating effects of borders, contrary to the common conception that borders are mainly there to control and enclose.

Borders as liberating spaces is a key theme in other contributions to this issue. Ruotsala presents a case study of a different Nordic border region, that between Finland and Sweden, where the predictable activities associated with smuggling are also seen by local people to be a means to subvert and escape the strictures of state control. This is not new: all borders have smuggling, and smugglers among many other border people often see such activities as defensive, symbolic of border life and a natural adaptation to the border as an opportunity and resource. But what is particularly noteworthy here is the way in which Ruotsala documents how *joppaus* served as the principal means for the economic and social revival of the Tornio River Valley after years of political and environmental destruction. In this case, *joppaus* operates less as a local form of smuggling and more as a local cultural practice, vitiating local and regional identity, to become the central form of border and cross-border heritage in a region that has been passed back and forth between kingdoms and states. In fact, through this local form of smuggling and the illegal movement of goods and people across borders, we see the history of ethnic and national integration and division, and of changing forces of sovereignty and governance. The importance of this practice to local and regional identity has

even been enshrined in recent development programs, where in Lapland the reciprocal exchange of goods and services, *johppaus*, has given cultural definition to this border region, and provides alternative expression to local identity.

Borders are expected to be places and spaces of various forms of culture and expression, particularly the national. In his essay, de Rapper examines the many ways in which history and historiography collide in border regions of Greece, where different national communities see their past in alternative ways. This is another way to live and make the border, to see it as a physical marker of the continuity of a nation, and as such a force in the simultaneous practice of integration, of the nation and its culture, and dis-integration and differentiation, between citizens and inhabitants within one country and between nations. De Rapper shows how the return to the past for some inhabitants of the Greek–Albanian borderland is both defence and offence: the past is testament to the territory and accomplishments of the nation and, depending on one’s sense of that history, is a statement of current politics. The return to the past, provoked by so many changes in the dynamic European Union, is one important way to live in the present, and de Rapper raises the inescapable issue about borders in Europe: they are the physical embodiment of the past and present of the nation, but are also central features of the daily life of borderland people, whose experience of the border may put them at odds with large segments of the populations of the countries that meet in the borderland. The Pelasgic debate goes one step further, though, for it provides an example of how local people experience the contradictions of history and identity, but may do so in ways that allow people to live and work together. In this case, the Pelasgic theories may be used to show the divergence between Albanian and Greek, or their common origin, and as such may facilitate more border crossing.

The ideas of borders are intertwined with the ideas of nation and autonomy. This is so even under authoritarian state control. In his contribution to this issue, Jääts offers an historical case study of the ways in which calls for autonomy can create cultures of ethnicity and the nation, and vice versa: in the Soviet Union the idea of Komi autonomy, driven by nationalistically minded socialists, framed the formation of a political entity that itself helped to create a cultural entity. Unlike the case of the smugglers in Finland, these borders were given meaning and found expression first in the minds of a Komi elite. This was a top-down process, where the first way to live the border was to think of it as an idea and ideal, and then to make it happen. While

de Rapper examines the myths that motivate nationalism today, Jääts gives a case study of how borders arise and flourish for many reasons related to nations and states, including the need to create nations where there were none, or to create states in order to create their own ethnic and cultural citizens. This also meant that ethnic groups that had not seen themselves as members of the same collectivity were given new opportunities for political and territorial expression.

Borders are often symbolic of this liberation and empowerment, but just as often perhaps they are signs of the opposite forces. Sandberg and Eisch-Angus have each presented ways in which people approach, internalise, articulate and move on with an appreciation of the ways borders may matter in personal and group lives. Eisch-Angus addresses these processes through the spatial expression of memory, and shows how borders may encapsulate often distressful collective memories. The Eisenstein train station is one such place, where borders as barriers and bridges – between nations and peoples – may be observed. In her case study, the ambiguities and certainties of identity are called into question for a group of art students in their border crossing. This situation also draws our attention to the border as artistic expression, as the geopolitical manifestation of the contradictions and emotions these students worked through in their workshop. They not only walked the border, they lived it for a while, and in so doing they reveal aspects of the ways in which we all cross and otherwise experience borders wherever we are. Sandberg also focuses on the border as performed and enacted. In her analysis, she examines the multiplicity of borders, of any border, and she does so through the cartographies of meaning provided by young people in a German–Polish borderland. In these mappings, the students show how borders are absent and present, visible and invisible, depending on many social factors that may often escape the practitioners of borders elsewhere. The simple notions that there are multiple and co-existent borders at one borderline, and that recognising the character of the border is dependent on the cultural lenses through which one looks, are at the heart of anthropological practice. As Sandberg so ably points out, such notions and practices are at the heart of the processes of Europeanisation. If one wants to understand and foster Europeanisation, then one must surely need to understand how multiple social, political, cultural and economic borders are crossed, are made and are made meaningful.

In this collection of essays two things are clear. There are many new and old borders that have not been the subject of much anthropological research

to date, yet borders are still going up and coming down across the continent, often at dizzying rates. These borders continue to multiply their effects on borderlanders and others. The case studies presented here are but a small indication of the exhilarating research that waits to be done on memory and experience in the cultures of European borders.

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Notes

1. For a review of the convergence and divergence in these two approaches in anthropological scholarship, see Heyman (1994).
2. The dimensions of this globalisation debate about the present and future of the nation-state may be found in Blake (2000), Dittgen (2000) and Newman (2000).
3. Earlier anthropological case studies of border cultures caught up in local and international forces of change were collected in Donnan and Wilson (1994) and Wilson and Donnan (1998), but the history of borders, frontiers and boundaries in anthropology has often gone beyond issues of border cultures. For an overview of this history, see Donnan and Wilson (1999). Perhaps the best example still of an ethnographic study of the intersection of culture, politics and history is Cole and Wolf (1974). Following on from Cole and Wolf, this longstanding interest by anthropologists in how people move within various levels and places of political, economic and social integration, especially in a world that forces increasing numbers of people to relocate, continues to frame much recent anthropological attention to borders (see, for example, Kearney 1991; Driessen 1992; Chalfin 2004; Cunningham 2004; Cunningham and Heyman 2004; Heyman 2004).
4. Examples of these recent studies of culture and identity as they relate to issues of political economy include Haller and Donnan (2000); Heyman and Cunningham (2004); Wilson and Donnan (2005); Horstmann and Wadley (2006).
5. For example, in a review essay about the anthropology of borders, the 'borderlands genre' in anthropological writing which was being considered was almost entirely concerned with the study of the Mexico-US border (see Alvarez 1995).
6. The panel, call for papers and early co-organisation and co-editing of this special issue was done by Dr Thomas K. Schippers. All of the contributors to this issue of *AJEC* would like to acknowledge his contribution with our thanks.

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