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# Frontier Effects and Tidemarks: A Commentary in the Anthropology of Borders

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## 1. Introduction

Dealing with the issue of transformation at borders, this paper is aimed at a critical review of some contributions to the scholarly field known as the anthropology of borders. Taking a position against some of the assumptions this literature has developed, it claims that the border is not only enacted, but also an actant. It argues for conceiving the frontier as an activity and agentive capacity itself, beyond the state or an assumed centre to which it is usually referred as a margin. Consequently, unlike much of the body of work undertaken so far, the border is hereby considered beyond the territorial dimension and appears as a multiplicity of spaces imbued with subjectivity reflected in areas of crossing and dwelling, a space in its continuous becoming, a tidemark, to use the Green's (2009) suggestion. The border is therefore much more than as a fixed geographical, marginal location, concentration of state institutions or site of culturally-patterned negotiations.

The chapter argues that there are important contributions from anthropology that open borders to full spatio-temporal consideration and multiplication at different scales. The border, as my ethnographic vignettes show, is both a conscious and unconscious domain, both visible and invisible. The border, through its subjective productions of dwelling and crossing, is multi-form, representable and unrepresentable, known and unknown – a view that can stimulate further visions of spatiality and give way to more everyday subjective modes to relate to the edges of the state. Subjectivity and various spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces involved in crossing and dwelling constitute traces of the continuous transformation of the border-object.

## 2. The problem

The chapter proposes an anthropological literature review on borders that takes into account recent developments in this particular area of research. My approach to this already vast literature is selective and critical. Criticism comes from the observation that, although anthropology is equipped with the methodological practice necessary to enable the understanding of everyday spatio-temporalization of borders, research done so far at frontiers has been poorly engaged to that aim. Instead, anthropologists usually analyse borders as secondary objects of inquiry and thus take for granted and reiterate

representational canons of space and time developed in approaches to international frontiers in other disciplines. By holding on conventional views of territory and its relations to states and sovereignties, anthropologists obscure the complex interactions between individuals and regimes of border crossing. This essay is therefore committed to locate borders at the level of the intersubjective relation in order to enable an analytical framework for scholars to understand why borders do sometimes stay the same and why do they change significantly over short periods of time, what are their spatio-temporal creations, how they enact themselves or how are they enacted from outside. Borders are seen as sites of permanent spatio-temporal production, by means of both borderlanders and hinterlanders' everyday engagement with practices of crossing and dwelling. As an implicit intermediary effort, the paper is thus aimed at indicating the ways in which borders serve reification by obscuring and minimizing intersubjectivity.

'What is a border' is a question usually asked by scholars, unless frontiers are secondary focus of analysis. Although important, the ontologization of the research object is more effectively answered through a different question, related to praxis and transformation. Following this, I argue that more useful interrogations would be 'how borders are (re)made' and 'how do borders become actants'. The how-question is indeed complicated. It is assumed in this question that a border does not change with the transformations in the limits of sovereignty or with the state-making processes only. In the last 20 years, the experience with the borders across Europe, to speak about a small area of the globe only, reveals numerous transformations in the border-crossing regimes which affect both perceptions and practical involvement with living and crossing at frontiers. Therefore, the transformative activity that lies behind borders and border regimes is understandable not only from a statist point of view, but also from a more detailed account which takes into consideration issues of (inter)subjectivity, space, and time. 'Who makes the border' and 'what makes the border' are also meaningful questions to answer. Taking into account the scope and potentiality of the anthropological inquiry, the essay advances the idea of the border as activity, thus subsuming the series of questions mentioned above. The border as activity also entails the possibility to scale down and up the frontier's spatiality and temporality according to the reference that concentrates the transformative activity which is considered to make or remake the border.

Another contestation deployed in the chapter departs from the observation that borders have been seen by anthropologists as territorial and socio-cultural annexes of the state and, consequently, as a sort of unproductive notion of politics and power. This implies seeing the border as a simple duality and place of negotiation and confrontation between asymmetrical forces: representatives of the sovereign state and crossers/non-crossers. Using the notion of border as a duality of state and society without a clear understanding of a spatio-temporalized subjectivity, anthropologists contribute to the reification of 1) the state and 2) border populations. First, anthropologists offer a sort of state centrism fully referred in various concepts of borders they use. Second, anthropologists emphasize border populations as stable, with limited and predictable movement/mobility in relation to the state. Using this sort of duality, and others that reinforce meanings of the frontier as separation, the border, as worked by anthropologists, assumes a limited understanding of space and time, producing an analytical isolation of the border in time and space. My

contention, however is that borders interact in various ways with other times and places. Two notions recently developed in relation to these prove particularly helpful. One of these notions is Green's (2009) concept of 'tidemark'. The other one is Donnan and Wilson's (2010) 'frontier effect'. Although not explicitly stated, these two conceptual developments in relation to the anthropology of borders constitute in my reading a major opening towards an intersubjective spatio-temporality of the border and a glimpse into conceiving the border as activity and process, rather than a fixed entity and as an actant, rather than an entity enacted from the 'outside'. In the same logic, an earlier attempt to redefine the border's spatio-temporality has stressed the border as becoming, rather than dwelling (Radu 2010). The hereby argument is that anthropologists will be more beneficial to borders, and viceversa, if they consider the frontiers as processes and activities and redirect a closer look at both internal-personal and relational experiences of crossing and dwelling the frontier in their multiplicity and various scales.

### **3. Ethnographic illustration of the problem**

With the aim of introducing empirical ways to see and understand the scales and spatio-temporalities of the border, this chapter reflects a part of my recent ethnographic work at the border between Romania and Serbia. The discussion refers to ways in which my respondents speak in the present about their past (generally socialist, pre-1989) experiences with the border. The border has apparently been closed and fixed for decades in the post-WWII period, until 1989. It was part of a Cold War border regime that enforced harsh restrictions to crossing and dwelling in the border areas, restrictions that, will become clear, had not stayed the same. Restrictions had been either enforced or relaxed, negotiable or mandatory, and that various subject positions and practices that (re)made the border spaces and times in many different ways. In the postwar context, Romania has historiographically been described as an anxious and restrictive state due to a heavily centralized economy and its vicinity with the 'revisionist' Yugoslavia. In the face of such evidence, it was the life at the border with its peculiarities and the always-changing conditions of crossing and dwelling, which disenched the strict socialist bordering. The Iron Gates I dam had been opened on the Danube, the Southern Romania-Serbia border, in the early 1970's, in the middle of the country's party socialism, after almost a decade of preparation, work and massive displacements of the local populations, also reflected in urbanization, industrialisation and significant migration flows from the inland into the border area. The dam had prompted important changes in the life of borderlanders as much as it transformed the state relations between Romania and Yugoslavia significantly. On the one hand, it generated insecurity and internal and material disown to people as many had lost their houses, properties and even entire places that were flooded, such as the island of Ada-Kaleh. On the other hand, it gave way to possibilities of border crossing, after twenty years of absolute restrictions. Crossing had stimulated a wide range of 'entrepreneurial' activities in a socialist period in which the private room of manoeuvre of this kind had usually been very limited. Everyone from the border used to love smuggling. The journeys across the border to Yugoslavia provided borderlanders opportunities for extra cash incomes and access to the Western consumerism.

While these new practices produced a consistent joy with life, a deep dissatisfaction was at times connected to the living conditions, due to increasing control and surveillance and

heavy shortages that affected a wide range of areas of private and collective life. It was crossing and the small trade that had largely fallen beyond the party-state's control, whereas the deceptive dwelling was directly stimulated through the interaction between individuals and the coercive institutional apparatus. Therefore, the border meant very different things and had subjected borderlanders in various realms of their lives. The splitting subjectivity perpetuated by the duality of dwelling and crossing has been a constant force of generating different senses of the border, by multiplying spaces and temporal references.

An account from Ilie, one of my respondents is suggestive to this point, describing the experience of dispossession and the perpetuation of the sense of marginality in the present dwelling, since the construction of the dam.

“People have no work here. People live off day labour. Everybody runs off outside the country. Especially the young people. Even me - before autumn comes, I'll be gone again. What can I do here?”

When he looks at the deceptive landscape of his neighbourhood he immediately reminds, in contrast, of the good life in his family house at the Danube, in Vârciorova, which is now under the waters of the Danube. He recollects that they were almost entirely part of a friendly natural landscape.

“People go to the border with cigarettes now, they take a chance, but it's not worth it, as far as I am concerned. When people don't have what to do, they still need to do something”.

This illustrates the place of crossing in a context with no proper opportunities. On the other hand, crossing had clearly been stimulated by the dam, and it probably offered the only compensation for the loss of properties and the familiar in their lives. Ilie told me that the small cross-border trade was the only memorable good thing about the dam.

“A lot of people here have led a good life (before and after 1989) just because of the small trade across the border.”

However, crossing has been engaged with differently. In socialism, Esin and his wife did not go to Yugoslavia for the small commerce, but they have got to cross regularly after 1989. Esin's brother-in-law had worked in the local police and he constantly prevented him get a crossing pass before 1989. By doing this in the context in which commerce was however officially disapproved, they just wanted to avoid any possible reason that could undermine his relative's public position. Avoiding doing business openly was a common tendency amongst those with good authority positions in socialism. However, Esin crossed the border a lot after 1989. They used to buy cheap stuff from Orşova, then went to the other side and sold everything.

Another respondent, Constantin, had never gone to Yugoslavia before 1989. Constantin had a leading position within the local party's hierarchy. Although the construction of the dam and the relocation had affected him and subverted his loyalty to a considerable measure, he still uses the 'socialist' rationale against crossing in the present. He says he was all the time a real patriot so that he could not try the advantages of the small smuggling across the border. He associates the small trade with the factories being robbed and the transportation and

selling of materials into Yugoslavia. As he reminds me, many border crossers have done that.

“Those who went into this had no character. They made a fool out of us. Those who knew how to make real trade ended up real bosses today. That’s where it all started”.

Constantin recollects that the peak of crossing has been the embargo and the contraband in the 1990’s (Radu 2009). Besides those doing the small trade, there were people enjoying the real advantages on account of them.

“The poor man was carrying 5 liters and others were carrying 4-5 tones, by the same ship. The powerful were using the small to make profit. It was done under the impression of small trafficking. But they were all on big embargo”.

Although he did not cross the border, he would have done if the context would have been more secure for him.

“Freedom, that was dearly missed, the freedom to cross whenever I wanted the Danube.”

One of the numerous small smugglers in cigarettes I have met in my fieldwork was Mariana, a poor woman living with her old and unhealthy mother. Her only income was secured from selling unstamped cigarettes. She has got fined and seized cigarettes two times in 2010 by the local police because of the illicitness of her job. From 4-5 years on, this small smuggling is the only available occupation to her. Mili, one of her customers and the owner of a small bar where she comes to retail the merchandise, tells me that the small smuggling is probably the only motive for the heavy concentration of police and patrols in town. It is a complicated relationship between those who pass the cigarettes through the customs, those who sell them in the city, the border policemen who let the cigarettes pass through the border checkpoint and the local policemen who hunt those petty traders in the city. Mili is right asking: “Why on earth do they let the cigarettes come into town? What happens in the customs?”

Coming up from the above stories, crossing and dwelling appear as different, yet related modes of subjectivation. Although crossing appeared all the time as a desirable alternative to a deceptive dwelling, it had been engaged with as everyday activity very selectively. The experience of dwelling and crossing at the border, in both everyday practice and fantasy, is therefore very fragmented and producing a multiplying effect in the border’s space-time.

“The Danube is Danube; it has historically been no border”, as Sorin, another respondent, told me. Although it formally was a state border, he considers that people had no perception of the river as a barrier, until socialism. To Sorin, the river appeared in socialism as a frontier which is dangerous to cross. And he never crossed it. Unlike Sorin, Daniel, another respondent, had lived much of his experience of socialist crossing with the impression that the border does not exist. “In my mind there was no border”, as far as he could cross it so easily, for every need or purpose, backed by his friends working in the border post. Although residents of the same border area, Sorin and Daniel, Mili and Mariana, Ilie, Constantin and Esin have all developed different experiences of space and time in relation

to the socialist and post-socialist border and its changing mobility regime. These experiences form a productive context materialized in activities that (re)create the border.

#### **4. Border scenario 1: Territory, state and culture**

Departing from the previous ethnographic vignettes, this section is devoted to pointing out two main explanatory fashions in the anthropology of borders. These are the territory, with its assumptions of marginality of border areas and the centrality of the state as the main actant in the border space, and culture. The main argument is that the unproblematic use of these notions in explaining border situations overlooks much of the everyday dynamics at borders and disown the border of spatiality and temporality.

In social sciences, borders are considered to represent marginal territories of the state, relatively fixed in space and continuous in time (Donnan, Wilson 1999; Wilson, Donnan 1998; Heyman 1994). Fixity and continuity produce a homogeneous notion of the subjective experience of the border: people are expected to react in similar ways to the opportunities and restrictions enacted through the presence of the border. Marginality and the significant presence of the state create the impression that the border is acted from afar, by a different entity. Territoriality, linked with the enforcement of sovereignty leave us with the understanding of the border as duality, barrier and separation. All these ideas linked to territoriality converge to the representation of the border as a line (Green 2009). However, an unproblematic notion of territory seems less desirable in explaining borders. The appearance of the border as a territory constituted a good reason for many to treat borders in their dimension and capacity to separate cultures, societies and sovereignties, thus reiterating the magicalities and fantasies of states in relation to their geographical margins. Yet, it is more to borders than their capacity to separate and demarcate. In Eastern Europe, even during the Cold War, as the previous section showed, there were created border regimes in which fixity and continuity had permanently been challenged (Berdahl 1999; Green 2005; Radu forthcoming a; Radu forthcoming b) through interventions and transformations of the territory and landscape. The effects of these interventions had not necessarily been restrictive to crossing and dwelling. Rather, such interventions had multiplied the possibilities to live with the border and to redefine it. It is not just the engineering by the state that pressures borders to change and become different spaces, but also the daily activities by borderlanders and hinterlanders, all related to crossing and dwelling the border.

First, the problem with the territory is that it includes the assumption of the naturalization of borders as the limits of sovereignty enacted by the state and its apparatuses. A significant counter-argument to this comes from Elden (2009), who demonstrates that 'territory' is primarily a political-strategic term. It represents a bundle of political technologies, a measure of control. Only secondary it can be taken as a reference to the spatial organization of the everyday activities. Also, territory is considered as a fixed and immovable thing. All in all, the concept constitutes a mere ideological construction, less reflected in the everyday life of border dwellers and crossers. My fieldwork on the Romania-Serbia border confirms the absence of the territorial dimension in the everyday life. On the other hand, speaking of territory includes the assumption of an existing center and margin in its distribution and

organization, assumption with important consequences in conceiving power relations and marginality of border areas. However, marginality of borders has been widely criticised from the standpoint of confronting evasive discourses with practicalities and movements of the everyday life (Green 2005).

Second, borders are anonymously and imprecisely linked to the concept of culture. There is a positive side in the treatment of borders in relation to culture though. Anthropologists have sought to argue against the fixed parameters of borders in terms of territory by using the coexistence, sameness and the imperfect fit of cultures at international frontiers. Culture has thus been used extensively into an anti-territorial critique of sovereignty and nationalism which affected much the way anthropologists think about borders today (Cole, Wolf 1974).

There is however a risk in getting to borders via concept of culture. Culture, especially in its cognitivist, evolutionist, ecological and holist understandings (Geertz 1973; Rappaport 1971; Kroeber, Kluckhohn, Meyer, Untereiner 1952) has been fetishized to a large degree to the point that it can provide a false spectrum of the social. Usually seen monolithically, and less intersubjectively, culture promotes a 'natural' reproduction and continuity of the social life, leaving limited room to explaining disruptions of order, creative events and change. The more recent poststructuralist critique of culture points out these aspects (Marcus, Fischer 1999). Culture thus provides little manoeuvre with transformations, temporality and spatiality. In general, the cultural aspects are understood by the anthropologists of borders as autonomous, self-generating sources of patterned practices. In this context, time seems to make little sense to culture.

Culture is also highly debateable from the point of view of the ways it is being used on a daily basis as a technology, as a way to create meaning to other ideological and analytical objects of the social. In this fashion, borders become meaningful through their cultural treatment. A relevant argument of this point is the materialist and neo-Marxist critique of culture that generally points out the ways in which culture becomes the ideal tool in preserving notions of sovereignty, state apparatuses, and capitalist domination. Lukacs' (1968) discussion on the reification of both commodities and the working class' consciousness is a case in point. In order get in full shape into the realm of borders which are usually processes of political exaltation and derangement, 'culture' needs a different vision that takes into consideration its interdependence, interaction with processes of power and activity and the potential to differentiate and connect at various scales, including the intersubjective one.

"(...) I accepted that the cultural is always political, but took issue with theories that constructed culture as a specific "realm," "domain," or "signifying system." To me, such theories both re-reified culture, and rehabilitated something like a base-superstructure model, only this time with causality running in the opposite direction. I argued (though not exactly in these terms) that "culture" needed to be reintegrated into the social totality of capitalism as a moment of power. Culture was an effect of struggles over power that was expressed as a reification of meaning, certain ways of life, or patterns of social relations: it is a materially based idea (or ideology) about social difference." (Mitchell 2004: 62)



'Culture' has usually been invested in the anthropological thinking with the power to determine social life in an atemporal, ahistorical and homogeneous manner. A useful way to see how culture is imbricated at various levels of the social comes from a E. P. Thompson's discussion of experience, particularly the experience of the law, in his critique of the Althusserian antihumanism - an effort to reinstate the human agency in the imprecise forces of indetermination that shape the social and economic life.

"I found that law did not keep politely to a "level" but was at every bloody level; it was imbricated within the mode of production and productive relations themselves (as property-rights, definitions of agrarian practice) and it was simultaneously present in the philosophy of Locke; it intruded briskly within alien categories, reappearing bewigged and gowned in the guise of ideology; it danced a cotillion with religion moralising over the theatre of Tyburn; it was an arm of politics and politics was one of its arms; it was an academic discipline, subjected to the rigour of its own autonomous logic; it contributed to the definition of the self-identity both of rulers and of ruled; above all, it afforded an arena for class struggle, within which alternative notions of the law were fought out". (Thompson 1978: 96, cited in Mitchell 2004: 59)

If we are to study borders in their becoming and activity, in the ways they are made and remade and by whom, culture can be seen as a contentious object for the anthropology of borders. Fixity and continuity in both territory and culture deprive borders of (historical) time and transforming spatiality which are so common references during the border fieldwork. While the territory is organized by the state and sets the limits, culture is usually seen as a counterhegemonic, abstract entity in relation to the state and its territorial enforcement. However, this relation proves to be changing over time and it needs to be permanently re-scaled, aspects which are not always visible in an analytical framework territory-culture-state. Therefore, culture and territory may be often seen as powerful fictions and ideological constructs which are not very helpful in our understanding of borders.

## **5. Border scenario 2: Activity, effect and subjectivity**

In addressing borders as activity and agentive capacity beyond the atemporality and fixed spatiality of culture and territory, it is particularly interesting to discuss two recent contributions in the anthropology of borders: Green (2009) and Donnan and Wilson (2010). Examining these two materials comparatively and complementarily brings to light a promising effort to spatialize and temporalize borders and a productive framework for future analysis.

Similar to their previous seminal contributions to the anthropology of borders (Donnan, Wilson 1999; Wilson, Donnan 1994, 1998), Donnan and Wilson (2010) ground their discussion in the global evidence that borders and states resist globalisation and present high ethno-territorial variation. Mobility - legal, illegal, forced or voluntary - is a key conceptual category which defines borders as areas of tension and transformation. The degree of mobility and the tensions that characterise borders to a variable measure determine the institutional concentration at borders. Borders thus appear as institutions aimed at controlling the mobility flows. The institutional nature of borders indicates that the

relation between border and state is still a strong one, analytically. The experience with the borders is thus largely seen as an experience with the state power. This experience is more precisely seen in the light of the coercive power of the state, a relation fuelled by the fact that state and economy do often come into conflict at borders. The centrality of the state at borders is well expressed in the following statement:

“in the midst of so much that is in flux some things that give substance to the social, political and economic life still remain remarkably fixed in place”. (p. 6)

It is perhaps the very marginality of the border area that pushes people into circumventing the state's rules and restrictions upon mobility. From the autonomous dynamics of the border populations overlooking the state, an important bottom-up consideration is drawn - borderlanders are active agents of change at borders. Yet, the ways in which the agentive capacity of borderlanders is set into motion and the degree to which they can transform and (re)make the border, eventually, is dependent on a series of considerations which lie at the core the authors' conception of the anthropology of borders. According to Donnan and Wilson, there are three layers and scales from which one can consider thinking analytically of borders. First, there are the 'international frontiers', defined as areas in which cultures, both national and transnational, are negotiated. International frontiers constitute the larger territorial reference for borders and function as territorial containers for cultures and arenas of the performativity and interaction of those cultures. Second, there are 'borders', articulated as areas that extend beyond borderlines. Third, there are the borderlines themselves, abstract representations of the demarcation between states (and sovereignties). Considering the border as a multi-scaled entity is a very useful argument and observation. Yet, the criterion from which this multi-scaling is considered is offered by the notion of 'territory'. All in all, whatever the scale we take into consideration for a discussion of borders, it is strikingly two aspects that are important: the territory and culture, animated through political negotiations and contestations. Therefore, the space and time of the agency of borderlanders that antagonize or not with the state, or the institutional dimension of borders, are restricted to territory and culture.

However, borders are dynamic areas in which the interactions between state and different cultures reverberate wide and far from the marginal territories of the state. Related to the fact that what happens at the border cannot be limited to a particular geographical site, the authors introduce 'the border effect' - a key notion which is hereby considered as a way to open borders to a different spatio-temporalization. The 'frontier effect' is discussed as a process of de-localization of the frontier, a spatialization which can make the border either visible or invisible to others, according to circumstances and interests. The frontier effect, as an ideological construction stemming from the presumed relation between the state and the borderland is the one that gives identity and specificity to the border area:

“This 'frontier effect' really does set borderlanders apart from others, close and distant, and does so within often stark political and economic realities.” (p. 10)

Furthermore, I argue that the frontier effect is a valuable notion from which one can start thinking to relate the border to processes and transformation occurred in time and space and not limited to specific marginal geographical areas within the territories of the states. On the other hand, the border effect allows individual and subjective variation and

situational re-scalings of the border space and time, by multiplying and opening the border far beyond the metaphor of the border as line and barrier between different national territories and cultures. As it can draw attention to an ideological, reifying construct, the frontier effect can also be a very useful tool into reconsidering the nature and role culture plays at borders. On the other hand, the frontier effect can indicate directly the agentive capacity of the border, the border as an actant.

Also against the line metaphor, Green (2009) advocates the border as a site of relatedness and connectedness. There are no absolute differences between the two sides of the line as far as distinctions are products and effect of an ideological assumption of the 'natural border'. The natural border is not reflected as such in the dynamics of life at the border, is not indicated by the changes in mobility regimes and the unexpected social worlds that go with them. In other words, the cultural negotiations that Donnan and Wilson (2010) frame in the territorial dimension and base in the duality of state and society, state and border, are not natural givens - they rather indicate a significantly different approach by the borderlanders themselves that distance from the official, ideological bordering carried by the state.

In distancing from the view of borders as lines and barriers, Green (2009) proposes two alternative representations of frontiers. First, it is the border as 'trace', that incorporates both space and time, simultaneously and irreducibly. How negotiations and activity are able to change the relation between state and border? How activity produces respatializations and re-territorializations of the 'marginal' areas? Green claims that the space-time of borders are crucial vectors of permanent change that set the border as "something that is best thought of as an active entity". (Green 2009: p. 12) It is the permanent movement and transformation into something else, the constant becoming of the border, the author considers, that describe relations and the frontier in spatio-temporal terms. The high variability of border spaces and temporalities already assume rescalings and negotiations, by "evoking a notion of absolute difference, without necessarily implying either inequality or separation". (p. 12) Difference and permanent transformation involve multiplication:

"all borders are multiple, generated from multiple vantage points - though of course, this does not mean that people are free to imagine border in any way they please: the simultaneity of-stories-so-far, and the entanglement of relationships and 'power-geometries of space' regularly constrain whatever vantage point emerges". (p. 16)

Starting from Massey's (2005) idea of a multiple and lively space as condition and product of politics, a second conceptual alternative developed by Green (2009) in the same context of conceiving the border as a permanent process is the 'tidemark', that incorporates both the idea of 'trace' and the 'line', in their multiple instantiations and spatio-temporal transformations.

"Tidemark also partially evokes the sense of trace, without as yet being clear how much of that is a Taussig kind of trace, with visceral connections to histories that have been erased from view; and/or a Derrida kind of trace, where borderli-ness is generated from the always-already existence of difference and otherness that did not ever exist, but whose traces are crucial to the sense of border. Tidemark also retains a sense of line - or rather, multiple lines - in the sense of connection and relation, in the sense of movement and trajectory, and in the sense of marking differences that make

a difference, at least for a moment. Most of all, tidemark combines space and historical time, and envisages both space and time as being lively and contingent.” (p. 17)

The metaphor of tidemark implies both divisions and connections within sites of ongoing reterritorializations. The territory is not stable, nor eternal, and the border as tidemark is a valuable conceptual tool that points to transformations, both top-down and bottom-up, with full consideration of the various scales and lenses of crossing and dwelling activities at the border. The border as tidemark is also open to interdisciplinary approaches of subjectivity, particularly useful in examining the border as activity. Cultural geography and psychoanalysis are here valid bodies of knowledge of which anthropologists need to be aware as they provide “categories are already thoroughly spatial providing theoretical orientation to examine complex cultural practices, identities, discourses, and landscapes” (Kingsbury 2004: 110) and as they enable “powerful critical explanations at various scales.” (p. 119)

## **6. Agentive borders, instead of conclusions**

There has recently been established significant agreement on the fact that international borders are not natural entities, but constructions through which political fictions and realities live. Borders’ fixity and stability were challenged by both the everyday dynamics of social relations and the scholarly work of dereification of analytical objects. It took effort and much research in social sciences to view borders beyond their naturalness, to realize that frontiers are discursive and material fields aimed at artificially separating states, communities, cultures and social relations. In particular, social anthropology has taken a great deal of scholarship in border studies and has got a special merit in showing, by means of its specific approach to fieldwork, that borders are in many ways different from what they are aimed to represent. However, anthropology, as well as other disciplines, is often in position not to reformulate the analysis of borders, but to reiterate some of the stately constructions of international frontiers.

Here comes the point of this chapter. Dealing with the issue of how transformations occur at and within the “margins” of sovereignty, this paper argued that the border is as much agentive as is the political center supposed to make and reinforce it. As far as we analytically see that the border is much more than the territory line assigned to it in many different ways, we realize that the border is a space imbued with subjectivity reflected in areas of crossing and dwelling, a space in its continuous becoming, a tidemark, to use the Green’s (2009) suggestion. It argues for the border as activity and productive capacity, rather than as a fixed geographical, marginal location, concentration of state institutions or site of cultural negotiations.

The invitation of rethinking the international borders has been suggested by a number of important scholarly contributions. For example, Paasi (1996) has pointed out an alternative way in which we can look at borders: borders are not just stretches of territory, but also places invested with subjectivity. The significance of this is that whereas a territorial representation of the frontier stands for a limit, for an end, a subjective meaning of the border might be the place where relations and connections precisely start. Similarly, Van

Houtum and Struver (2002) show that borders are arguments, and activities of connectedness, acting like bridges, as much as they sustain separatedness. These statements suggest that borders are hardly analyzable as entities speaking about clearly demarcated territories. The idea is that frontiers are rather processes which dynamize both the border spaces and the political and social hinterland in relation to them. From this point of view, Van Houtum, Kramsch, and Zierhofer (2005) suggest that borders are interesting especially for the processes they entangle, for the question “how” which is contained in actions and operations of bordering, rather than for the location they suggest – a point with which this chapter also started its inquiry. Also against the border as a simple marginal location, Hassner (2002) points out the invisibility and complexity of borders. In line with this, the author argues that the territorial vision of the boundary is too simplistic and fixed to allow scholars think of the ways in which borders change, disappear and appear, restrict or allow relations.

I have argued that two important contributions from anthropology discussed earlier (Green 2009; Donnan, Wilson 2010) offer important clues for such rethinking efforts and open borders to full spatio-temporal considerations and multiplication at different scales. The border, as my ethnographic vignettes also show, is both a conscious and unconscious domain, both visible and invisible (Balibar 2002). The border, through its subjective productions of dwelling and crossing, is multi-form, representable and unrepresentable, known and unknown – a view that can stimulate further visions of spatiality and give way to more everyday subjective modes to relate to the edges of the state. Subjectivity and various spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces (Lefebvre 1991; Pile 1996) involved in crossing and dwelling constitute traces of the continuous transformation of the border-object and (re)make the frontier as an actant itself.

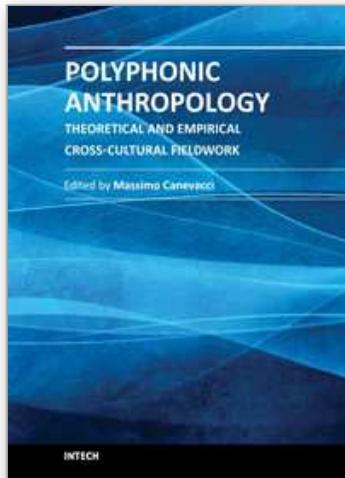
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## **Polyphonic Anthropology - Theoretical and Empirical Cross-Cultural Fieldwork**

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This book connects anthropology and polyphony: a composition that multiplies the researcher's glance, the style of representation, the narrative presence of subjectivities. Polyphonic anthropology is presenting a complex of bio-physical and psycho-cultural case studies. Digital culture and communication has been transforming traditional way of life, styles of writing, forms of knowledge, the way of working and connecting. Ubiquities, identities, syncretisms are key-words if a researcher wish to interpret and transform a cultural contexts. It is urgent favoring trans-disciplinarity for students, scholars, researchers, professors; any reader of this polyphonic book has to cross philosophy, anatomy, psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology, architecture, archeology, biology. I believe in an anthropological mutation inside any discipline. And I hope this book may face such a challenge.

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