Introduction

Border Encounters
Asymmetry and Proximity at Europe's Frontiers

Jutta Lauth Bacas and William Kavanagh

Europe has experienced tremendous changes over the past two decades, and some of the most significant are those affecting its borders. The era of political and socio-economic transformation after 1989 reconfigured the European landscape to an extent not seen since the Second World War. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, the dismemberment of Yugoslavia and the enlargement of the European Union – particularly the accession of twelve countries to the European Union (EU) in 2004 and a further two in 2007 – entailed complex processes affecting many state borders. Borders that had been closed were opened (the fall of the Berlin Wall being the most prominent example), but borders were also redefined, radically reshaping the 'inside' and 'outside' of the EU. Previously open borders were strengthened, and in some cases of former political coalitions (the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia) falling apart, borders now exist where there once were none.

These complex processes of borders being opened in some parts of Europe and redefined or reinforced in others have also fundamentally changed the social relationships of those living in borderland regions. The aim of the present volume is to investigate ongoing developments at some of these changing borders from the ground up, taking a local perspective. The primary focus is on border encounters in Europe (though not necessarily limited to EU countries), that is, face-to-face interactions and relations of compliance and confrontation as people bargain and exchange goods and information while manoeuvring at, and most importantly be-

---

Notes for this chapter begin on page 21.

yond, state borders. The second aim is to analyse social hierarchies that are questioned, contested or confirmed in these border encounters. Since frontiers bring people together in spatial proximity (though clearly such physical proximity does not necessarily entail social proximity), the present anthropological case studies from a number of European borderlands wish to shed light on the question of how, and to what extent, the border context 'colours' and shapes the changing interactions and social relationships between people at the frontier. Of great interest are the hierarchical relations between the people who meet at international borders: permanent residents on one or another side of an international frontier, as well as travellers, tourists, petty traders and pensioners in interaction with border guards, police officers or security personnel with the power to grant or to delay passage beyond the physical limit of the frontier. In the changing Europe of recent decades, a new and multifaceted reality – far from the metaphorical figure of the omnipotent guard in front of Kafka's 'Castle' – has developed in the border encounters the present volume aims to investigate in more detail.

Border Studies in Anthropological Discourse

Anthropological interest in borders did not begin with the political and socio-economic transformations in Europe in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, but those events certainly helped to make the 'anthropology of borders' one of the 'growth industries' of the discipline today. The changes in the geopolitical landscape of Europe were paralleled by social scientists' increasing interest in understanding and analysing social processes concerning and occurring at borders.

In many ways it was Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth's introduction to the collection of essays he edited in 1969 under the title *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* that prompted anthropologists to question the structural-functionalist assumptions of bounded tribes and communities, and the view of culture focused on shared patterns of meaning that left little room for change. For Barth (1969: 10), 'ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves'. He argues that

> the critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses. … Ethnic groups are not merely or necessarily based on the occupation of exclusive territories; and the different ways in which they are maintained, not only by a once-and-for-all recruitment but by continual expression and validation, need to be analysed. (Barth 1969: 15)

Later, in 1974, a pair of North American anthropologists, John Cole and Eric Wolf, published *The Hidden Frontier: Ecology and Ethnicity in an Alpine Valley*, a study of two neighbouring villages on the provincial border between the Romance-speaking Trentino and the German-speaking South Tyrol in Italy. Although the villages are only a mile apart, Cole and Wolf (1974: 281) conclude that the two communities 'differ not only in internal structure and in their external relations to larger polities. They are also engaged in essentially distinct symbolic games.' They point out that the theoretical approach of their study

> supports the statements made recently by Fredrik Barth in an introduction to a book on ethnic groups and boundaries, where he emphasizes that boundaries are created and persist despite a flow of personnel and social relations across them (Barth 1969: 10–11). We are sympathetic to his view that since it is the ethnic boundary and the conceptualizations of a people themselves about the boundary that define interaction between two ethnic groups, one must direct attention to understanding the ethnic boundary. (1974: 281)

And while admitting that they have followed an approach essentially similar to Barth's in their own study, Cole and Wolf (1974: 281) go on to state: 'Yet we have found that the actions of people at the local level – particularly with regard to interlocal contact across the ethnic boundary – do not respond only to local influence, but are affected by actions and ideals of a much wider area.' All of this ties in with their emphatic claim in the preface to the book (Cole and Wolf 1974: xi): 'We strongly believe that the study of small populations which form components of complex societies must take account of that complexity before the interpretation of what happens "on the ground" can become meaningful.'

The social anthropologists Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, authors of a number of fine scholarly publications on the anthropology of borders, in which they also evaluate Cole and Wolf's (1974) scientific approach and contribution to border studies, point out in their book *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (Donnan and Wilson 1999: 33):

> Cole and Wolf could be said to represent the coming together of a symbolic boundary focus with a political economy perspective which attempts to situate local boundary making within wider historical and political processes.… By introducing a political economy perspective to Barth's emphasis on symbolic boundaries, Cole and Wolf effectively marked an important transition in the anthropological study of boundaries and heralded the beginning of a new form of inquiry.

Bringing the anthropological interest in what is happening 'on the ground' together with an awareness of the importance of the wider social context

that deeply influences the events and interaction in the local arena is also an important starting point for the present volume, where both the physical and social proximity of the actors involved in face-to-face interaction on the border, as well as the hierarchical setting in which they might interact due to asymmetric economic factors and complex state regulations, are taken into account in the following chapters.

Since the pioneering works of Barth and Cole and Wolf, anthropologists have used their research at international borders to examine the often subtle interrelations between local communities and their nation states and neighbouring nation states, showing in more detail how proximity to a border may influence local culture. Starting from the realization, noted by Donnan and Wilson (1999: 40), that since all borders are arbitrary constructions based on cultural convention, in a sense all borders are metaphors (although the boundaries of nation states are always more than metaphorical), other authors have extended the terms 'border' and 'borderlands' to literary theory, cultural studies and debates about ethnic, class and gendered identities. Dissatisfied with anthropological theorizing about 'community' that focused mainly on structure, British anthropologist Anthony Cohen (1985: 12) took up a number of Barth's ideas and developed a new definition of the concept of community, stating that the term 'community':

> expresses a relational idea: the opposition of one community to others or to other social entities. Indeed, it will be argued that the use of the word is only occasioned by the desire or need to express such a distinction. It seems appropriate, therefore, to focus our examination of the nature of community on the element which embodies this sense of discrimination, namely, the boundary. By definition, the boundary marks the beginning and end of a community. But why is such marking necessary? The simple answer is that the boundary encapsulates the identity of the community. … Boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or other with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished.

Cohen went on to say that while the marking of the boundary may be physically expressed, 'not all the components of any boundary are so objectively apparent. They may be thought of, rather, as existing in the minds of the beholders. This being so, the boundary may be perceived in rather different terms, not only by people on opposite sides of it, but also by people on the same side' (Cohen 1985: 12).

An important characteristic of the boundary is its openness to multiple interpretations or meanings, to 'multivalency' or 'polysemy'. In his writing, Cohen (1985: 13) concluded that 'consciousness of community is, then, encapsulated in perception of its boundaries'. Thus, both the term com-

munity and the term boundary imply the idea of a relation to an Other. All identity, therefore, is constructed in the double sense of similarity and difference with respect to Others. Self-definition depends on antithesis, identity on counter-identity. As he said in another book, Cohen (1982: 2) was intent on advancing the view that community difference and identity rest not on structures, but in the minds of those who perceive and live them, a view of social organization 'as a means through which people order, value and express their knowledge of their worlds of experience, rather than as a structural determination of such knowledge and experience'. This epistemological approach to boundary studies, which is well aware that borders do not exist 'per se' but have to be understood also as perceived boundaries that become relevant and meaningful to social actors in relation to an (imagined or present) Other, is essential for the anthropological contribution in the present volume.

However, both Cohen and Barth have had their critics. Donnan and Wilson (1999: 25) pointed out that Cohen's recognition that it is not enough to focus on the relations within a local boundary and that any local collectivity must be viewed in the wider context of which it forms a part, 'often comes down to … an argument about the ways in which external forces can be manipulated to symbolic advantage at the local level', with the result that 'one side of the boundary between localities and the structures beyond has tended to receive rather more attention than the other'. They went on to note that 'similar criticisms have been leveled at Barth … he too tends to focus on one side rather than the other, emphasizing internal identification rather than external constraint and the shaping influence of wider structures, such as those of class and the state' (Donnan and Wilson 1999: 25). Their comment is another hint at the relevance of hierarchies *between* social actors and the asymmetries of their power relations that might gain special importance in border encounters, where social actors are not only engaged in cross-cultural communication but frequently have to deal also with the constraints of a hierarchical setting as well. The present volume aims to present more empirical evidence of these complex processes and to investigate in more detail how social actors deal with asymmetry occurring in cross-border encounters.

In 1989, historian Peter Sahlins published *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees,* a study of a Catalan valley divided by the border between France and Spain, which has influenced anthropologists' as well as historians' understanding of nationalism and state formation. Sahlins's (1989: 8–9) basic thesis was that

> States did not simply impose their values and boundaries on local society. Rather, local society was a motive force in the formation and consolidation of

nationhood and the territorial state. The political boundary appeared in the borderland as the outcome of national political events, as a function of the different strengths, interests, and (ultimately) histories of France and Spain. But the shape and significance of the boundary line was constructed out of local social relations in the borderland.

Citing Benedict Anderson's (1983: 15) description of nations as 'imagined communities', in the sense that they are created and invented, 'because the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion', Sahlins (1989: 9) commented that this definition 'usefully corrects the positivist conception of national identity as a product of "nation building", focusing our attention instead on the symbolic construction of national and political identities'. Pointing out that other authors have emphasized the importance of differentiation in the development of ethnic, communal and national identity, Sahlins (1989: 9) stated: 'In the French-Spanish borderland, it is this sense of difference – of "us" and "them" – which was so crucial in defining an identity. Imagining oneself a member of a community or a nation meant perceiving a significant difference between oneself and the other across the boundary.'

It is important to note that according to Sahlins (1989), the proximity of the Other across the boundary contributed to the construction of national identity long before the local society was assimilated to a dominant centre. By introducing the aspect of proximity as a crucial element in the process of constructing and structuring national identity, he moved borderland communities from the margins into the focus of attention of social anthropologists as well as historians studying the appearance of national identity in various contexts. Sahlins's study also showed, as Donnan and Wilson (1999: 52) stated in their review, 'that there is no intrinsic, inherent, nor necessary relationship between territory, identity and sovereignty. Borderlands are places where these converge in ways which must be interrogated, in order to discover the role which culture plays in wider processes of state and national politics, economics and society'.

An important development in the anthropology of borderlands was Wilson and Donnan's work on the role of the state and relations of power as they are experienced and contested at the local level of national borders. In the edited volume *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers* (1998), Wilson and Donnan and their contributors scrutinized the influence of state power on cultural identities and everyday life at the periphery of the state. They wrote: 'Borders are always domains of contested power, in which local, national and international groups negotiate relations of subordination and control' (Wilson and Donnan 1998: 10). They

went on to refer to the negotiation of identity in places where the border might simultaneously bind people together or separate and divide them:

> In terms of their ethnic identities, at least three main types of border population can be identified: (i) those who share ethnic ties across the border as well as with those residing at their own state's geographical core; (ii) those who are differentiated by cross-border ethnic bonds from other residents of their state; and (iii) those who are members of the national majority in their state, and have no ethnic ties across the state's borders. (Wilson and Donnan 1998: 14)

One could, however, point out that there is certainly a fourth type: those who do not share (or do not wish to recognize that they may share) ethnic ties with those at their own state's geographical core and, at the same time, have no ethnic ties (or do not recognize that they have ethnic ties) across the state's borders.

Donnan and Wilson further pursued their interest in comparative consideration of state borders' importance to the construction of identity and culture in *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and the State* (1999). Extending their analysis of borders as domains of contested power and drawing on comparative ethnographic material concerning highly conflictive borders (for example, that of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland), they elaborated their argument on the role of border regions in the processes of negotiating, strengthening or weakening of state power. Their analytical approach took as a starting point the cultural aspect of international borders and the role that culture as everyday practice plays in the social construction and negotiation of these borders. Wilson and Donnan (2005a: 3) later commented: 'The ethnography of everyday life in border communities is simultaneously the study of the daily life of the state', admitting that 'state power is always unstable and in continuous need of being re-established' (Wilson and Donnan 2005a: 4) by meaning-making and meaning-carrying cultural practices. Donnan and Wilson (1999: 62) concluded that 'borders are simultaneously structures and processes, things and relationships, histories and events'. Inspired by Donnan and Wilson' emphasis on a dynamic approach to border studies, the editors of this present volume decided to investigate one aspect of social interaction at state boundaries, namely, the dynamic interrelation of proximity and asymmetry in face-to-face encounters at changing (be they opening or closing) European borders.

In the growing field of border studies, an international research network, called EastBordNet, aims to explore the ongoing transformations of 'Eastern' European borders, drawing together researchers focusing both on the north-east (the Baltic area) and on the south-east (the Balkan area) of Europe.[1] Under the title 'Remaking Eastern Borders in Europe', the pro-

cesses of redefining borders at the eastern periphery of Europe are studied from an anthropological perspective. In the framework of this EastBord-Net programme, anthropologist Sarah Green (2009) introduces a new conceptual perspective to border studies by discussing the differentiation between borderlines, traces and tidemarks. She reviews the anthropological critique of conceptualizing the border as a geographical line by stressing that 'lines are obviously insufficient, in themselves, as an understanding of border' (Green 2009: 10), since thinking of the border as a line tends not to take into consideration how people actually experience this borderline in their everyday lives. She avoids introducing the term 'borderlands', as used by Alvarez (1995), or the term 'frontier', as per Donnan and Wilson (1999), but suggests the metaphor of 'tidemark' to mix the notion of a particular place with the sense of time passing: 'tidemark combines space and historical time, and envisages both space and time as being lively and contingent' (Green 2009: 18). Green (2012: 125) sees borders not simply as located somewhere *here* (italics in the original), but as multiply qualified places, related to other historical, political or economic entities and also located in past and future/imagined experiences of people living there. With her understanding of transforming borders as 'tidemarks', Green argues for a multidisciplinary approach to the study of borders, which 'appear, disappear and change shape, location and meaning in line with activities, relations, conflicts, ideas, and regulations that come together, leaving their particular mark as borders until something else comes along'.[2]

In discussing border studies and its related concepts, Robert Alvarez (2012) also reflects on some methodological implications of recent scholarly investigations on borders. Especially in studies investigating the Mexican-U.S. border (to which he mainly refers), Alvarez considers the unchanging presence of the geopolitical borderline to also have shaped the anthropology of borderlands, reproducing a rather state-centric approach. However, in the quest for a better understanding of the reality of the border, more recent studies have focused on connections and crossings along the Mexican-U.S. border (Alvarez 2012: 27) and on the forms and types of connectivity that the border zone creates. This concept of connectivity and the newly growing interest in networks of social, cultural and economic exchange across lines of strong geopolitical separation (Alvarez 2012: 28) echo the reasoning of European social scientists who have investigated 'connectivity' as a key feature of social interactions and multiple exchanges between the physically separated shores of the Mediterranean (Horden and Purcell 2000; Kavanagh and Lauth Bacas 2011).

To summarize the above presentation and discussion, we would like to stress that border studies has turned out to be one of the fastest growing and fruitful branches of the discipline of anthropology, as well as of

other social and political sciences. As the review of the relevant literature shows, two main features appear to characterize the anthropological focus on international borders. One definitive common feature of anthropological studies of borderlands is an emphasis on the cultural aspects of international borders, where the social meaning attributed to borders is accented to provide a better understanding of the role culture might play in processes of boundary construction or border maintenance. Another important characteristic of the anthropology of borders is the emphasis on first-hand information gathered through fieldwork and participant observation in border areas themselves. As already noted, anthropological border studies take as their main premise that 'some things can only occur at borders' (Donnan and Wilson 1999: 4). Though of various sorts, these social 'things' have in common that they happen at a meeting place between two states and different national cultures. Since life at the border is thus structured very specifically by the presence or proximity of the Other, the present volume looks at various forms and features of 'proximity' as a main point of interest in all the contributions presented here. Because international borders are simultaneously shaped by wider processes of state and national politics, they are also places where institutionalized hierarchies and asymmetries between social actors exist and might be negotiated, processes that all the contributors to this volume have also taken into consideration.

Proximity and Asymmetry in Border Encounters

This summary will discuss three basic features of the underlying theoretical assumptions of the present volume, and the following chapters will further develop them in one way or another. First, border areas that mark off one state from another frequently turn out to be, unsurprisingly, areas of ethnic tension or cross-national conflict. In many cases the geopolitical borderline itself may be the result of international conflicts. Precisely because of their contested geographical position, border regions often become battlegrounds for conflicting parties with opposed claims, either international or intra-national. Second, and despite the sword of Damocles of territorial disputes and conflicts, border regions are also most likely to be social settings for cross-national encounters. Numerous anthropological case studies from various border regions have shown that hardly any border control system, even one with a fierce security apparatus, can ever completely suppress social contacts across borders, although it may severely curtail them. Third, whereas border areas are important fields for defining the state's territory and sovereignty, they are, as anthropo-

logical evidence shows, mainly peripheral to the national centres of power and decision-making. Border denizens' relation to the state of which they are supposed to be an integral part may itself turn out to be a source of conflict. State agents may treat members of their own nation state differently from members of the nation state across the border and from third-country nationals, especially in cases where the latter arrive without visa documents and thus are considered to have crossed the border illegally. In this regard borders can offer special insight into how social actors relate to 'their' nation state. According to Donnan and Haller (2000: 8), social anthropologists at borders can explore how those who cross and live alongside them manage competing loyalties and multiple identities.

It is important to keep in mind that no two borders are identical in all respects, as Wilson and Donnan (1998: 12) recognized when they said that '*a priori a*ssumptions about the nature of "the border" are likely to founder when confronted with empirical data; far from being a self-evident, analytical given which can be applied regardless of context, the "border" must be interrogated for its subtle and sometimes not so subtle shifts in meaning and form according to setting.'

Features of locality have to be understood as strong elements in the process of constructing social identity at the border, as Sarah Green underlined (Green 2005: 5). Since most border regions are set apart from other areas of the national territory by the features mentioned above, borderlanders' sense of identity and belonging may differ from that of residents of more central, more developed or more powerful areas of the state. In this respect we can speak of the emergence of a 'border identity' that takes into account the specific locality and proximity to the Other present in the region under investigation. Acknowledging the danger of reifying a highly contested category, we can use the term 'border culture' to refer to the ensemble of locality, social practices and border identity, stressing the specificity of 'what happens on borders'. In this anthropological understanding, the notion of border culture is closely linked to the physical existence of international borders and the reality of state control, which may result in a frontier that is either 'soft' or 'hard', meaning that the border may be more or less 'porous'.

International borders are social fields for defining difference and distances, and at the same time are places conducive to cross-cultural encounters and proximity. As has been pointed out, borders 'are where the "space of flows" meet (or collide?) with the "space of places"' (Anderson, O'Dowd and Wilson 2003: 10). Face-to-face interaction at the border brings people with different ethnic and national backgrounds into close social contact and physical proximity at the same time. But the underlying institutionalization and hierarchy of the border setting often goes hand in

hand with 'backstage' activities where actors seek to reach personal goals by manipulating the Other. Or as M. Anderson (1996: 7) noted: 'Frontiers are the limits of permissible behaviour, but these limits are necessarily perceived in very different ways by different people.' In the fluidity of the face-to-face encounter at the border, social actors sometimes try to create mutual understanding and intimacy in order to arrange a personal deal. The point to reflect on is the interconnection of antagonism and asymmetries involved in face-to-face border interaction, which will be the main interest of the following ethnographic case studies.

The present volume presents new anthropological contributions on various forms of face-to-face relations at international borders, including case studies on conflictive interaction with state agents, case studies on smuggling and bribery at the border and studies on the reception of 'clandestine' migrants arriving in Europe. The contributions presented here are unique in their investigation and exploration of precisely this interrelation between physical proximity and social asymmetry, whereby they focus on aspects that until now have been under-researched in other borderland studies. The central dimension of the analysis is the interaction of social actors, often in an antagonistic, conflictive relationship, establishing proximity through face-to-face contacts in a specific border context.

In analysing these diverse, often conflicting processes, physical proximity is understood as a key category characterizing the spatial closeness of social actors involved in cross-border interactions. The interesting point about proximity occurring in border encounters is that the border situation brings the actors involved into social and physical contact, whereupon they are able to build some sort of social relationship in the framework of nation states bordering each other, although they are often strangers. These social encounters in borderlands may include physical closeness quite different from that experienced in other places and forms of social interaction. For example, common consensus holds that a meticulous body check of passengers boarding a plane is but a standard routine, even though very private zones of the body are touched in public with many viewers present. Neither are travellers' personal belongings any longer 'private matters'. Who, if not a security officer or a border guard, would want or be allowed to rummage through someone's personal luggage or handbag? In other words, the border brings security officers and travellers into both physical closeness and rather intimate interactions in a very particular way. The present volume will present various such cases that explore and discuss in detail who the actors involved are and how they get into relations of proximity.

However, not all the chapters in this book discuss the often fleeting, nearly anonymous types of proximity such as that between travellers and

border police, or immigrants and immigration control officers. Some focus instead on long-term relations of social proximity that permanent residents of villages and towns near a borderline maintain with their neighbours living on the other side of the frontier.

A second category central to the following case studies is the concept of social asymmetry. According to Bourdieu (1984), asymmetry occurs whenever one actor occupies a higher position than another in the social hierarchy of the different types of capital they have access to. These asymmetries, as they relate to economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital, are not fixed but produced and reproduced over time in historically changing forms of social interaction. Based on this assumption, asymmetry in border encounters can be understood as social relations that bring actors into a hierarchical relationship involving asymmetry especially with regard to the nation state of which they are or are not members. Membership (or not) of the state one wishes to enter – one of the most relevant symbolic resources in borderland encounters – largely defines and structures the interactions of both strangers and neighbours meeting at a border. As Wilson and Donnan (2005a) have argued elsewhere, state power is always present at the edge of the state, investing its representatives with authority and means of coercion in the borderland. The contributors to the present volume analyse and elaborate this subtle relationship between asymmetry and its recognition or subversion based on solid ethnographic fieldwork, showing how social asymmetry becomes highly relevant in some of the border settings under investigation, whereas it may be less important in others. This understanding of social behaviour on redefined European borders, informed by long-term ethnography, permits the examination of processes related to border crossings from the ground up, in a local perspective. All the authors engaged here in investigating European border encounters are interested in the question of the circumstances and ways in which partners in hierarchical relationships interact and react to the underlying asymmetry at the very moment of the border encounter. Since borderlands are also transitional spheres of negotiating and challenging state power, some contributions present more explicit examples of how social actors in specific fields handled or manipulated asymmetry in power relations.

The contributions to this volume help expand this theoretical discussion and further contextualize the key terms 'proximity' and 'asymmetry' with regard to European border encounters. This contextualization becomes even more interesting when their focus turns to the present EU enlargement and the actual processes of opening and redefining borders of the European Union. As borders in Europe are constantly made and remade by the social constructions of those who live and work on them, the relations of actors engaged in borderland encounters are similarly de-

fined and redefined in an ongoing process. Finally, the essays presented in this volume encourage reflection on some of the political determinants of social interactions at both the internal and external borders of the European Union, with special reference to the Schengen Agreement and the European Policy of Migration and Asylum.

Changing Border Encounters in Today's Europe

The following chapters especially emphasize investigation of changing forms of interactions and changing dynamics of asymmetry and hierarchy that have recently become observable in numerous border encounters. Fine-tuned anthropological case studies from EU countries such as Spain, Italy and Greece, and from non-EU countries like Ukraine, Georgia and Turkey, explore how cultural differences are perceived and negotiated in personal encounters at the border, where the social setting often gives rise to antagonistic and hostile positioning of the cultural Other. The cases are grouped and presented according to three main themes that are central to characterizing major trends and developments in borderland regions in various European countries.

Border encounters on Europe's eastern frontiers are framed and structured by a basic divide between EU countries and non-EU countries, as well as the divide between the Schengen Area and the non-Schengen world. The European Commision Home Affairs office defines the Schengen Area as an 'area without internal borders' based on a treaty that came into effect in 1985 and led to the removal of systematic border controls between the participating countries and the simultaneous enhancement of border controls at entry points to the Schengen Area.[3] By 2012 the area encompassed most EU states (except the United Kingdom, Ireland, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania) and included a few associated non-EU countries (Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Lichtenstein).[4]

Although member countries of 'Schengenland' have abolished regular police controls at their internal frontiers and tightened controls at their external borders, national borders as the geopolitical boundaries of the member states certainly continue to exist. EU states whose land or sea borders became external borders of the Schengen zone are obliged to maintain strict border surveillance and perform obligatory checks on travellers exiting or entering the area. The European Commission is entitled to address any failure on the part of a Schengen state to fulfil its obligation to patrol its section of the external border.[5] Enhanced efforts to control entry into the Schengen Area have become particularly relevant in terms of preventing and fighting the trafficking of human beings and controlling and

managing irregular migration to Europe.[6] Fears of 'waves' of irregular migrants clandestinely entering the EU via land and sea routes[7] were widely discussed in the European press after the Arab Spring and led to political reactions by some member states. In July 2012, following an initiative made by France and Germany, the EU accepted a 'reform' of the Schengen Treaty that allowed Schengen countries to again carry out passport checks for incoming travellers at national borders 'for a limited period'.[8] These dynamics of the shifting politics of border control and border regimes in Europe will be further discussed below.

The Collection

The first common theme to be investigated by the contributors to this volume is the theme of Opening Borders, which concerns new forms of social interaction and cross-border contact that were made feasible by the reduction of on-the-spot border controls between most EU countries following the signing of the Schengen Agreement in 1985. Although 'limited' passport controls of travellers arriving at ports or airports were reintroduced in 2012 by some EU countries that saw themselves as affected by irregular migration, the overall architecture of the 2009 Stockholm Programme (a five-year plan with guidelines for justice and home affairs of EU member states for the years 2010–2014), with its stated intention of creating 'an open and secure Europe serving and protecting citizens', is still in effect.[9] Therefore the chapters in the section Opening Borders will address altered processes along European borders and review the social consequences of the Schengen Treaty before the partial reform of July 2012.

The chapters in the second part of the collection investigate the theme of Strengthening Borders, addressing recent developments at the frontiers of a number of central and eastern European nations. The third and last section of the book centres on the theme of Crossing Forbidden Borders, examining, amongst other forms of crossing 'forbidden' borders, the irregular entry of undocumented migrants to the territory of the European Union. All the contributions emphasize processes of connectivity in border encounters, which are framed or shaped by contrasts in the social standing or hierarchies of the actors involved.

Opening Borders

The cases presented in the first part of the collection, referring to the 'opening' borders between member states of the European Union, exam-

ine changes occurring on the inter-German border (before and after reuni-
fication), the German-Polish border, the Czech-Austrian border and the
Portuguese-Spanish border.

The first chapter, 'Consumer Rites: The Politics of Consumption in a
Re-unified Germany', by Daphne Berdahl, explores transformations that
occurred at the former East German borderland village of Kella in the im-
mediate post-reunification period. When the Berlin Wall fell, people who
lived along the recently dismantled inter-German border found their lives
drastically altered. Berdahl concentrates especially on how these changes
have affected daily life, including social organization, gender roles and
consumer patterns, at a place where the border was until recently a very
powerful presence.

In his chapter 'Cross-Border Relations and Regional Identity on the
Polish-German Border', Robert Parkin investigates the dramatic changes
at an international border that formerly divided 'Eastern Europe' from
'Western Europe' but is now an internal European Union border. Poland's
entry into the EU on 1 May 2004 was the culmination of a long-term goal
after the collapse of the communist system in 1989. The largest of the 2004
accession states, it has already made its presence felt in the new Europe
by exporting hundreds of thousands of citizens seeking work elsewhere
in Europe. Such population movements may extend to long-term sojourns
in Spain or the UK, or may be limited to day trips to Germany, just over
the border from western Poland. The chapter describes attempts by local
officials and some local people to reduce the significance of the Polish-
German border even further, even as the eastern border – now an external
EU border – is subject to ever greater control.

The chapter 'The Skeleton versus the Little Grey Men: Conflicting Cul-
tures of Anti-nuclear Protest at the Czech-Austrian Border' looks at a case
where the international border was reopened after the fall of the Iron Cur-
tain but was blocked again temporarily by anti-nuclear activists as part of
an act of political protest. Birgit Müller investigates the circumstances of
this 'border blockade' and the political conflicts between Czech and Aus-
trian political activists in the border region of Temelin. The construction
and, in 2001, the start-up of the Czech nuclear power station at Temelin
brought Austrian NGOs, citizens and regional politicians to block all the
border crossings between the Czech Republic and Austria for two weeks
in 2001. Although Austrian activists took pains to explain that the action
was not directed against the Czech people but at the Czech and Austrian
governments' unresponsiveness to their worries, it led Czechs to increas-
ingly identify Temelin as a solely national issue and to reject Austrian in-
terference. The chapter examines the forms of interaction and interdepen-
dence between Czech and Austrian anti-nuclear NGOs close to the border,

as well as the different forms of political action directed towards their own governments and towards that of the other state.

The following chapter, 'Powerful Documents: Passports, Passages and Dilemmas of Identification on the Georgian-Turkish Border', looks at a non-EU border before and after the fall of the Soviet Union. Mathijs Pelkmans analyses conflicts in the interaction between border crossers and state officials at the border between Georgia and Turkey, especially during the immediate post-socialist period. His analytical interest focuses on passports, which, as official documents of identification, are useful tools for studying the linkages between border drawing, categorization and the formation of collective identities. Discussing the role of passports in the delimitation, solidification and partial demise of the Iron Curtain between (Soviet) Georgia and Turkey, Pelkmans argues that passports have different meanings and values depending on the 'identity' of the holder of the document and his or her relation to a specific border. It is particularly revealing to study those shifts in meaning in relation to changes in the nature of the border, as the focus on different stages of border regulations between Georgia and Turkey illustrates. In the 1990s, after the border between Georgia and Turkey was reopened, border dwellers found themselves at a moment of opportunity. Living in the border zone, they were among the first to hold international passports and thus could capitalize on new opportunities for trade. Moreover, by altering the data in these passports they put themselves in a favourable position due to the greater permeability of the borders between the neighbouring states.

William Kavanagh, in his chapter 'Proximity and Asymmetry on the Portuguese-Spanish Border', investigates what has or has not changed, not only in identities but in the social interaction and cross-border contacts between inhabitants of villages on either side of an 'old' EU border from which barriers and border guards completely disappeared after the Schengen Agreement came into force. Although the 'meaning' of the border appears to have changed after 1992, the ideal of the internal EU borders as 'open borders' is contrasted with anthropological evidence suggesting that on this northern section of the Portuguese-Spanish frontier, the removal of border controls has not erased the 'border in the mind'. As one of Kavanagh's informants told him: 'You may remove the door, but the doorframe remains.'

Strengthening Borders

The chapters in the second part of the collection investigate the theme of Strengthening Borders, which concerns recent developments at the fron-

tiers of several central, eastern and south-eastern European nations. Very dramatic changes have occurred between countries that used to cooperate under the umbrella of the Soviet Union. The EU enlargement agreed upon in 2004 led to completely new arrangements at state borders that had formerly been permeable. Thus the opening up of borders inside the EU corresponds now to the 'hardening' of borders and the stressing of border surveillance between EU and non-EU countries. An equivalent process of 'hardening' can be observed between neighbouring regions that once formed part of the Soviet Union and are today independent nation states. The following essays illuminate those changes in border control and cross-border contacts as borderlanders experience them in daily life. The anthropological view 'from below' intends to shed light on the practical consequences of decisions taken in faraway centres of power and their 'side effects' and impact on the lives of those bordering the Other.

The chapter by Laura Assmuth, 'Asymmetries of Gender and Generation in a Post-Soviet Borderland', is based on a larger research project on 'Transnational Lives: A Comparative Ethnography of Communities at the Estonian-Russian and Latvian-Russian Borders'. In the framework of this project, cross-border interaction and movement in two cases of newly established borders in the former Soviet Union are studied. The borders in question, the easternmost borders of the European Union facing Russia, have enormous importance in the lives of many local people. Not all borderland residents are necessarily affected by the borders and border regimes, but those who, for various reasons, need and want to cross the border most definitely are. Who are these border crossers? How and why do they go to the other side? What kinds of ties do they maintain or develop? Assmuth explores these questions by focusing on actual border crossings and individual and family visits to the adjacent region in the neighbouring country or countries.

In the chapter '"We Are All Tourists": Enduring Social Relations on the Romanian-Serbian Border in Different Mobility Regimes', Cosmin Radu examines patterns of economic interaction and cross-border migration before and after the break-up of Yugoslavia. The on-site research for this contribution took place in the Romanian village of Gogosu and various Serbian communities on the other side of the border. After 1990 the villagers of Gogosu began crossing the border to look for informal jobs in construction, agriculture, housekeeping and forestry. Villagers from the once Yugoslav, now Serbian side of the border have been migrating since 1966, leaving many Yugoslav households incomplete as most of their young people are working in Austria and Germany. The Yugoslav/Serbian rural settlements thus came to constitute an informal labour market for

Romanians living on the border. The chapter looks at the implications of this short-term labour migration for household organization in Romania and at the significance of marriage and economic alliances between Romanians and Serbians at the local level.

In the chapter '"We Used to Be One Country": Rural Transformations, Economic Asymmetries and National Identities in the Ukrainian-Russian Borderlands', Tatiana Zhurzhenko investigates changes in two regions of the former Soviet Union where newly created nation states meet. The research, conducted at three border villages in the 'controlled near border area' of Ukraine's Kharkiv oblast, focuses on the role of the new border in the everyday lives of people on the Ukrainian-Russian borderland, and their perceptions of and attitudes to this new reality. The new border interrupts or reshapes family ties and social and economic contacts, and creates new advantages and disadvantages. At the same time, by integrating the new border into their everyday lives and adopting informal, often illegal, practices of dealing with the fact of the border, the local population challenges and changes the formal border regime and its symbolic meaning. For the people of Kharkiv oblast, the experience of 'becoming a borderland' has been part of another fundamental experience, that of 'becoming Ukrainians' through the Ukrainization of the administration, education system and media. The new national identity – a feeling of belonging to the 'Ukrainian people' and loyalty to the Ukrainian state – is not a function of their near-border location, but rather of social and economic changes in the region. But permanent contacts with Russian citizens and visits to Russian territory allow local inhabitants to compare changes on both sides of the border, and in some cases the border becomes a symbol of 'post-Soviet nostalgia'.

Crossing Forbidden Borders

The third and last section of the book concentrates on the theme of Crossing Forbidden Borders. The chapter 'Under One Roof: The Changing Social Geography of the Border in Cyprus' by Lisa Dikomitis examines the realities surrounding the crossing of a contested and officially unrecognized border in the Mediterranean area. In the case of Cyprus, which entered the European Union in 2003, formal and informal barricades known as the Green Line divide the island into two different political entities, the Greek-speaking Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish-speaking part of the island known as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which is recognized only by Turkey. Guarded by UN peacekeepers and marked by omnipresent 'forbidden zone' signs, the Green Line has functioned as a de facto bor-

der since 1974 and cuts the island's capital, Nicosia, in two. Dikomitis investigates what happened when this partition line was partially opened in 2003, allowing Greek and Turkish Cypriots to cross from one side of their divided island to the other after twenty-nine years of separation. Based on participant observation on both sides of the border, the author explores Greek and Turkish Cypriots' experience of passing through the forbidden zone, actors' perceptions of the problems involved in border crossing and the differing social meanings given to those journeys by Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Dikomitis reveals in detail the different manner in which the two ethnic groups on Cyprus handle and evaluate the possibility of visiting the opposite part of the island. Her anthropological analysis concludes that although border crossing has became a routine ritual in recent years, the ethnic stereotypes that Greeks Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots hold about each other are still very much alive, and both sides express a strong feeling of a lack of understanding by their counterparts on the other side of the Green Line.

The final two chapters in the book deal with undocumented migration to the territory of the European Union, specifically to the southern European countries of Italy and Greece. The chapters have in common a focus on undocumented migrants' ability to cross the border at places where the borderline seems most difficult to control, that is, not on land but on the Mediterranean Sea. The Strait of Otranto and the Aegean Sea are maritime frontiers where the sea serves as both a barrier and a bridge, allowing small boats to enter national waters clandestinely. Based on an analysis of the specific reception structure of undocumented migrants in the two distinct national contexts, the essays discuss different national concepts of managing the encounter with the Other and strategies of coping with asymmetry and proximity in border encounters.

Maurizio Albahari's chapter, 'The Birth of a Border: Policing by Charity on the Italian Maritime Edge', is based on fieldwork in the south-eastern Italian border region of Apulia. It investigates border enforcement practices and discourses of the Italian state's surveillance and classification of mainly Muslim undocumented migrants, as well as discourses of assistance to these migrants by Italy and by the Roman Catholic church. Those who maintain, cross and debate the sociopolitical site of the border do not merely locally implement but also co-produce practices and discourses of secularism, citizenship and migration management. Meanwhile, this borderland has historically been subject to a disparaging moral geography. The national discourse of the underdeveloped Otherness of the Italian 'South' finds supranational analogies: how and where the 'North' secures its distinction vis-à-vis the 'South' is arguably integral to the New Europe's institutional and popular quest for distinctiveness.

The final chapter, 'Managing Proximity and Asymmetry in Border Encounters: The Reception of Undocumented Migrants on a Greek Border Island', by Jutta Lauth Bacas, examines the reception of undocumented boat migrants on the Greek island of Lesbos (also known as Mytilene, after the name of the island's capital). When undocumented migrants enter Greek national territory by boat, face-to-face interaction between local state agents and newcomers in the border zone takes place with limited means of communication and in a hierarchically structured atmosphere. By analysing the reception structure on the island of Lesbos, the chapter draws attention to images of the Other established in these interactions and seeks to shed light on different forms of managing proximity and hierarchy in the process of receiving undocumented migrants. In more general terms, the case study explores how cultural differences are perceived and negotiated at the border, where the basic social setting fosters opposed and hostile positioning of cultural conceptualizations.

Conclusion

International borders are social fields where people with different ethnic and national backgrounds come into close physical and social contact, at the same time defining and stressing asymmetry by mechanisms of control and surveillance, and establishing social hierarchy. Inspired by the tremendous changes at Europe's borders over the past two decades, the present volume aims to dissect the complex processes occurring at the redefined state borders, and more specifically the dialectic relationship between proximity and asymmetry in cross-cultural encounters at European borders after 1989. The central dimension of the chapters in this volume is the focus on social interaction in often antagonistic and sometimes conflictive contexts where social relations and proximity are established through face-to-face contacts in specific border settings. The collection, which offers new evidence to the growing body of anthropological work on changing borders in Europe by focusing on proximity and asymmetry, presents first-hand ethnographic accounts of borders between EU member countries as well as borders between EU states and non-EU countries. Its co-editors have chosen, as a common starting point, to focus on face-to-face encounters and connectivity across the border, delving into the ambiguities, contradictions and conflicts occurring there. In contrast to border studies in political science, the anthropological approach allows the researcher to concentrate on the micro-context of the field site and thus illuminate details of interaction with the Other across the border and the formation and re-formation of social and cultural identities of actors

involved in Europe's contemporary transformations. In other words, the specific methodological approach of the co-authors of this volume is to investigate the 'face-to-face' experience of these border encounters, which in many cases, as the empirical contributions here show, are experiences of conflict and confrontation at Europe's frontiers. It is this turn to the micro-level that fills the often used theoretical concepts of European unification and post-socialist transformation with specific empirical meaning, tracing how the people involved 'on the ground' themselves make sense of the changes and asymmetries they experience in their everyday lives on the border. The present volume hopes to contribute to this deeper understanding of the complexity of geopolitical changes across European frontiers.

Notes

1. Further information on the European research programme 'Remaking Eastern Borders in Europe: A Network Exploring Social, Moral and Material Relocations of Europe's Eastern Peripheries' (COST Action IS0803) is provided on the website http://www.eastbordnet.org.
2. Quote from the 'Remaking Borders' conference web page (Catania, Sicily, 20–22 January 2011), organized by the scientific network EastBordNet (COST Action IS0803). See http://www.eastbordnet.org/conferences/2011/index.htm. Retrieved 15 August 2012.
3. European Commission. 'Schengen area'. Europa web portal. URL: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/index_en.htm . Retrieved 15 August 2012.
4. A map of the Schengen Area can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen/index_en.htm.
5. See http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/immigration/irregular-immigration/index_en.htm Retrieved 15 August 2012.
6. EU priorities in the fight against organized crime and irregular migration have been defined on the basis of the Stockholm Programme of 2009 and the Pact on Asylum and Migration of 2008. For more information see the EU Home Affairs web portal: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/index_en.htm. Retrieved 15 August 2012.
7. For a short overview of EU positions and policy decisions relevant to fighting irregular migration, see http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/immigration/irregular-immigration/index_en.htm. Retrieved 15 August 2012.
8. Various European newspapers, but not the EU Home Affairs' website, reported on the reform. The German edition of the *Financial Times* headlined its report of 7 June 2012 'This Schengen Reform Is a Defeat for Europe'. See: http://www.ftd.de/politik/europa/:mehr-grenzkontrollen-die-schengen-reform-ist-eine-niederlage-fuer-europa/70047589.html. Retrieved 15 August 2012.
9. In 2009 the EU adopted the Stockholm Programme with the title 'An Open and Secure Europe Serving and Protecting Citizens'. See: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:115:0001:0038:EN:PDF. Retrieved 15 August 2012.

References

Alvarez, R.R. 1995. 'The Mexican-US Border: The Making of an Anthropology of Border-lands', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 447–70.

Alvarez, R. 2012. 'Borders and Bridges: Exploring a New Conceptual Architecture for (U.S.-Mexico) Border Studies', *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 17(1): 24–40.

Anderson, B. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso.

Anderson, J., L. O'Dowd and T.M. Wilson (eds). 2003. *New Borders for a Changing Europe: Cross-border Cooperation and Governance.* London: Frank Cass.

Anderson, M. 1996. *Frontiers: Territory and State Formation in the Modern World.* Oxford: Polity.

Barth, F. (ed.). 1969. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference.* London: George Allen and Unwin.

Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* London: Routledge.

Cohen, A.P. 1982. *Belonging: Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

———. 1985. *The Symbolic Construction of Community.* London: Tavistock.

Cole, J.W. and E.R. Wolf. 1974. *The Hidden Frontier: Ecology and Ethnicity in an Alpine Valley.* New York: Academic Press.

Donnan, H. and D. Haller. 2000. 'Liminal No More: The Relevance of Borderland Studies', *Ethnologia Europaea* 30(2): 7–22.

Donnan, H. and T.M. Wilson (eds). 1994. *Border Approaches: Anthropological Perspectives on Frontiers.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

——— (eds). 1999. *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State.* Oxford: Berg.

Green, S. 2005. *Notes from the Balkans: Locating Marginality and Ambiguity on the Greek-Albanian Border.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

———. 2009. *Lines, Traces and Tidemarks: Reflections on Forms of Borderli-ness.* COST Action ISO803, Working Paper No. 1. URL: http://www.eastbordnet.org/wiki/Documents/Lines _Traces_Tidemarks_Nicosia_2009_090416.pdf . Retrieved 30 August 2013.

———. 2012. 'Reciting the Future: Border Relocations and Everyday Speculations in Two Greek Border Regions', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2(1): 111–29.

Horden, P. and N. Purcell. 2000. *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Kavanagh, W. and J. Lauth Bacas. 2011. 'Editors' Introduction', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 20(1): v–xvi. Special Issue: Unfolding Perspectives in Mediterranean Anthropology. Malta: Mediterranean Institute.

Sahlins, P. 1989. *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wilson, T.M. and H. Donnan (eds). 1998. *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2005a. 'Territory, Identity and the Places In-between: Culture and Power in European Borderlands', in T.M. Wilson and H. Donnan (eds), *Culture and Power at the Edges of the State: National Support and Subversion in European Border Regions.* Münster: Lit 1–29.

——— (eds). 2005b. *Culture and Power at the Edges of the State: National Support and Subversion in European Border Regions.* Münster: Lit Verlag.