

Borders
Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State

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Introduction: Borders, Nations and States

There has always been a tension between the fixed, durable and inflexible requirements of national boundaries and the unstable, transient and flexible requirements of people. If the principal fiction of the nation-state is ethnic, racial, linguistic and cultural homogeneity, then borders always give the lie to this construct.

Horsman and Marshall, *After the Nation-State*

Borderlands are sites and symbols of power. Guard towers and barbed wire may be extreme examples of the markers of sovereignty which inscribe the territorial limits of states, but they are neither uncommon nor in danger of disappearing from the world scene. In Northern Ireland the relatively dormant security apparatuses on the Irish border remain, despite the rhetoric of a Europe without frontiers and the negotiations between the British and Irish states and a variety of political parties and paramilitary groups in the Northern Irish peace process. Observation towers, security gates, concrete pillboxes and helicopter pads appear and disappear overnight, testament to the adaptability of the state. In fact, the resilience of the physical power of the state is one of the dominant themes in the lives not only of those who live and work at the Irish border but also of the peoples of the borderlands of the world. But while the negotiation of state power is a central motif in any narrative or image of the world's borderlands, it is certainly not the only one. In this book we explore some of the ways in which these signs of military might must compete with, and in some cases accommodate, other forms of power in the borderlands of nation-states. We examine how an anthropological focus on international borders can illuminate the role of border identities and regions in the strengthening or weakening of the nation-state, an institution synonymous with the creation and exercise of political power, but one experiencing the twin threats of supranationalism from above, and ethnonationalism and regionalism from below. Through this review we hope to place the anthropology of borders firmly within the anthropological analysis of the relations of power between and among nations and states.

We take as our starting point that anthropologists have much to contribute to an understanding of the transformations in nations and nationalisms in the world today. Attention to these changes is timely and appropriate. It has become increasingly apparent over the last decade that as some states cease to exist, others come into

being, and that allegedly new forms of nationalism are both creating and destroying traditional borders, thereby setting in motion the forces of war, racism and the mass movement of refugees. Many of these developments have been claimed by the other social sciences as their domain, yet few recent studies of nationalism by political scientists, sociologists, geographers and historians deal adequately with the cultural aspects of international borders, the frontiers with which they are associated, and the physical and metaphorical borderlands which stretch away from the legal borderlines between states. This book seeks to place general anthropological studies of border

communities and border cultures within the wider social science of borders, nations and states. At the same time, it seeks to problematise the role of culture within other disciplines' investigations of international borders and frontiers, in an effort to provide a fuller picture of the historical, ethnic and nationalist forces which sustain a variety of identities in the borderlands of modern nation-states.

Old and New Borders, Nations and States

On one level, our focus on the anthropology of international borders is a reflection of the many and startling changes which the world has undergone since 1989. A list of these world transformations is now something of a cliché, but is nonetheless a compendium of such radical change in global politics, economics and social relations that it is worth repeating. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the most famous symbol of the border between two competing world systems, heralded the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet empire and state, and the reawakening of long quiescent nation-states, as well as the creation of some new ones in Europe and Asia. The dissolution of Yugoslavia was the spark to another twentieth-century Balkans conflict, a series of ethnonationalist wars which overshadow all processes of nation- and state-building in the region. The Gulf War, which marked a so-called New World Order of American, Arab and European cooperation, followed so closely on almost a decade of Iranian and Iraqi conflict that the effects on the sovereignty of small and large states alike in that part of the world are still unfolding. The European Community, an intergovernmental association of twelve states which worked towards a common internal market, has become, since the Maastricht Summit of 1992, the European Union (EU), a group of fifteen states seeking monetary and political union and the establishment of rights, entitlements and protections for its 'European' citizens. The EU's success, coupled with the major advances in economic performance in the Asian Pacific Rim, stimulated similar moves in the western hemisphere, leading to the North American Free Trade Agreement, an economic arrangement among the United States, Mexico and Canada, which will have far-reaching social and political effects, not least in the borderlands of those three countries. And the accords in the Middle East and

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Northern Ireland have given hope to people around the world that a 'peace process' can lead to lasting solutions to the problems of ethnic and nationalist strife.

As a result of these and other changes, in all of the continents, the number of states in the world has risen at a rate not seen since the heady days of the dissolution of the Great Empires after the two world wars. The membership of the United Nations has grown to today's total of 185 states. As a necessary complement to this, the number of borders between states has grown apace, resulting in no fewer than 313 land borders between nation-states. Along with the growth in numbers of states and their borders comes a redefinition of their structure and function. However, some of these changes do little to increase communication and cooperation between nations. The transformations of the post-1989 world have brought with them a rise in the number, type and intensity of border disputes. These include conflicts between states over their supposed sovereign territory (for example, between Iraq and Kuwait, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Israel and Lebanon, Greece and Turkey, Serbia and

Bosnia and Croatia), cross-border ethnic conflict (in such areas as Nagorno-Karabakh, Zaire and Rwanda, Greece and Albania, Ireland and the United Kingdom, Palestine and Israel, Serbia and Albania), regional contests over self-determination and nationhood (for example, among the Chechens, the Kurds, the Basques, the Irish, the Sikhs and the Quebecois) and local, regional and national efforts to support or to curb the cross-border movement of refugees, immigrants, illegal workers, smugglers and terrorists (perhaps most notably at the US–Mexico border and at the many external borders of the EU).

In fact, border wars have been a long-standing if not necessary component to the processes of nation- and state-building in the post-imperial age, and have not only inspired their protagonists to greater nationalist endeavours but have fired the imaginations of people everywhere who sympathise with the rights of minority nations and small states to rule themselves. Such border wars are too numerous to list them all here, but we might mention as examples the impact which the conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, India, Pakistan, China, the Belgian Congo, Nigeria and Biafra, Chad, Mozambique, South Africa and Israel have had on the balance of power, both in the world and in the regions in which they took place.

Borders no longer function as they once did, or at least not in every respect. Globalisation of culture, the internationalisation of economics and politics, and the decline in Cold War superpower and satellite hostilities have apparently resulted in the opening up of borders and the relaxation of those state controls which limited the movement of people, goods, capital and ideas. Scholars debate the extent and the depth of these border transformations, which seem to fly in the face of numerous examples of international borders which have been made stronger and more impenetrable. This book explores some of these debates in ways that make them more relevant to anthropological concerns, and it presents arguments regarding the role which culture plays in the social construction and negotiation of these borders.

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One thing is clear. Changes in the structure and function of international borders, whether they be world-wide or restricted to one state, reflect major changes in the strength and resilience of the nation-state, and in the variety of social, political and economic processes long thought to be the sole or principal domain of the state. State borders in the world today not only mirror the changes that are affecting the institutions and policies of their states, but also point to transformations in the definitions of citizenship, sovereignty and national identity. It is our contention, moreover, that borders are not just symbols and locations of these changes, which they most certainly are, but are often also their agents. It is not surprising that the concept of transnationalism, which has become central to many interpretations of post-modernity, has as one of its principal referents international borders, which mark off one state from another, and which sometimes, but not as often as many people seem to suppose, set off one nation from another. However, these borders, structures of the state themselves, are constructed by much more than the institutions of the state which are present there, or of which the border's framework is a representative part, as in customs, immigration and security forces. Borders are also meaning-making and meaning-carrying entities, parts of cultural landscapes which often transcend the physical limits of the state and defy the power of state institutions.

Nations and the ‘Great Fiction’

There are many definitions of ‘border’, ‘frontier’ and ‘boundary’ in the social sciences, and almost as many research designs for their study. The anthropological approach to international borders which we advocate in this book entails the study of power in and between nations and states, including the ways in which versions of that power are enhanced or growing, or diminished or declining, with particular reference to border cultures and identities. In this and subsequent chapters we consider how the state is subverted in its borderlands, how borderlanders are often victims of the abuse of power, and sometimes agents or the sources of state power, and how the state's borders may be strengthened, in the face of the so-called processes of globalisation, internationalisation and supranationalisation.

Almost all that occurs in the everyday lives of people in the modern world can and does occur in its borderlands. This makes borderlands interesting to social scientists, but not necessarily special. However, *some things can only occur at borders*. This is because of the function of borders in the relations between states, and because of the role played by borders in the origin and development of states, a role which they may continue to play in the future. Moreover, many features peculiar to borders are significant to their respective nations and states, both historically and today. We are not alone in recognising that borders have characteristics that differentiate them from other areas in states, and that border people are

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part of social and political systems unlike most others in their respective countries. Like Adeyoyin (1989: 378), we assume that ‘border regions as socio-cultural systems are a living reality. They are ... characterized by an inner coherence and unity which is essential to their nature’.

Martínez has suggested that five key processes help to shape the ‘borderlands milieu’ (1994b: 8–14; see also 1994a: 10–25). *Transnationalism* is the process whereby borderlanders are influenced by, and sometimes share the values, ideas, customs and traditions of, their counterparts across the boundary line. This is partly a function of their peripheral location in their states, which, together with their unique local culture and shared economic relations with other border communities, gives them a sense both of political and social *separateness* and *otherness*, i.e. of being culturally different from core or majority populations in their ‘national societies’. Martínez also recognises that borders are areas of *ethnic conflict and accommodation*, due in large part to their cultural heterogeneity and their role as areas of immigration. But perhaps most predictable of all, borders are places of *international conflict and accommodation* unlike any others in their respective states, precisely because of their geographical location, the structures and agents of the state present there, and the aforementioned cultural characteristics which set most borders apart from more homogeneous, developed and powerful zones in the state.

These special characteristics of borderlands correspond to those identified by Malcolm Anderson (1996a: 1–3). To Anderson, borders (he uses the term ‘frontiers’) are both institutions and processes. As institutions, they mark and delimit state

sovereignty and rights of individual citizenship. As processes, borders have a number of functions. They are instruments of state policy, although the state's policies may be enhanced or impeded by the degree to which it exercises actual control over the border and its people. Anderson also recognises that borders are markers of identity, and have played a role in this century in making national identity the pre-eminent political identity of the modern state. This has made borders, and their related narratives of frontiers, indispensable elements in the construction of national cultures. This important role of the border, in the creation and the maintenance of the nation and the state, is one reason why borders have also become a term of discourse in narratives of nationalism and identity.

Anthropology may be the best placed of the social sciences to examine some of the least studied and understood phenomena of international borders, namely border cultures and identities (sometimes called border 'mentality' by our colleagues in other academic disciplines; see, for example, Rumley and Minghi 1991a). To do this, anthropologists must return to a topic long studied by the discipline, but one which has proved mercurial and exasperating to many of the scholars who have immersed themselves in its study. Ethnicity, and its correlate, national identity, is a fundamental force found at all borders, and it remains the bedrock of many political,

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economic and social activities which continue to befuddle the institutions and agents of the state, in the borderlands and in metropolitan centres of power and influence. As the geographer Ilidio do Amaral (1994: 17) remarked when considering the present condition and future of international boundaries:

Even in Western Europe, the home of the ideal homogeneous nation-state, ethnic divisions are readily apparent in regional and nationalist political activity. Conflicts whose origins stem from the multi-ethnic compositions of the state are the most difficult with which governments have to contend, and their severity can be great enough to threaten the territorial integrity of the state. Therefore, the ideas about the role of ethnicity need to be reconsidered in a new light.

Ethnicity and national identity pose threats to many states today, as they have in the past and will in the future, precisely because ethnic groups and nations have as one of their defining characteristics a perceived and essential relationship to a real, i.e. historically recognised, territory, or to a homeland to which they can only aspire. We define nations as communities of people tied together through common culture, who have as their pre-eminent political goal the attainment of some form of independence, autonomy or devolution. Nations can be distinguished from ethnic groups by their political role in a state, and by their political goals. Ethnic groups are often – we go so far as to venture most often – minority nations within states which are dominated by one or more majority nations, or within which some form of political autonomy is all but impossible for the members of the minority. Most such ethnic groups are in fact ethnically tied to nations elsewhere, but this does not prescribe their actions within the state in which they are a minority. Minority nations in a state may have as their principal political objective such things as the avoidance of ethnic strife, an active role in party politics, the attainment of wealth and prestige, and/or assimilation in a variety of ways. These behaviours do not preclude their affiliation or ascription to a nation

elsewhere, whether that nation be just over the border, as among ethnic Hungarians who reside in all of Hungary's neighbouring states, or among Mexican-Americans, or be found in much more distant locales, as among the Armenian diaspora. In fact, whether self-ascribed or imposed by the wider society, the vast number of ethnic groups have a national identity as the cultural cement which binds them together, and their nationalism is linked in varying degrees to a past, present or hoped-for future national territory and nation-state sovereignty.

Affiliations such as these are based on what can be called the 'great fiction' of world politics, which has guided the actions of poets, priests, peasants and patriots since the nineteenth century, namely, that all nations have the right, if not the destiny, to rule themselves, in their own nation-state, on their own territory. Yet not all nations have been able to achieve this. States have a number of internal structural

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requirements. There are simply not enough natural resources, territory or wealth around to give every nation a star role as a nation-state. Said differently, there is too much power in the hands of too few to allow minority nations to achieve the type and degree of independence to which such gilded terms as 'self-determination' continue to inspire. This has become especially apparent in one area of the world which, because of its history of nations and states, and its current role in the redefinition of traditional relations between borders and states, is of particular concern to us in this book. 'In Europe, events since 1918 ... have proved the bankruptcy of the idea of every ethnic nation forming its own state' (do Amaral 1994: 20).

Much recent scholarship in the social sciences has debated the future of the nation-state, particularly in the context of such 'threats' as multinational corporations, supranational trading blocs and political entities, globalisation of culture and society, and the perceived demise of imperialism and other forms of nationalistic enterprise (for an excellent review of these scholarly debates, see Milward 1992). Not surprisingly, much of this debate centres on Europe, birthplace of both the nation and the state, and where the European Union is both a symbol and an agent of the changes which may befall the states of the world in the future. And it is Europe that provides supportive case material for both sides in the debate: both for the view that the nation-state may be losing political and economic competencies, such as agricultural, fiscal and foreign-policy making, to the elites and institutions of an integrating Europe, and for the view that the reports of the nation-state's demise may be premature. In fact, it has been persuasively argued that the nationstate may be reconfiguring itself in Europe today, and is certainly not losing ground to either supranationalism or to the globalising pressures of consumer culture and capitalism. Michael Mann boldly concludes that the 'Western European weakenings of the nation-state are slight, ad hoc, uneven, and unique' (1993: 116) and that 'The nation-state is ... not in any *general* decline, *anywhere*. In some ways, it is still maturing' (1993: 118, emphasis in original). Other scholars, however, contend that the nation-state is experiencing a crisis. But even if the states of Europe have been surrendering areas of national sovereignty to the European Union, they have done so in what Milward believes is a successful attempt to rescue themselves after the debacle of this century's wars, and to resist the pressures of integration on their own structures and power. Milward also stresses the importance of national identity and notions of popular sovereignty to the

successful rescue of the European state. 'That the state by an act of national will might pursue integration as one way of formalizing, regulating and perhaps limiting the consequences of interdependence, without forfeiting the national allegiance on which its continued existence depends, appears to be confirmed by what we know of public opinion about the [European Union] in the member states' (Milward 1992: 19). Although empirical studies of national and European identities and the relationships between them are

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few, there is growing evidence from throughout the Union that European identity, regardless of the intentions of Eurocrats, cannot displace the national as the paramount political belonging.

If the fate of the European nation-state is in question, then it seems fair to us to query the future of the international borders of Europe. Are they too withering away, or proudly withstanding any attacks launched against them from within and without? Borrowing from Milward, can we say that the rescue of the European nation-state within the European Union has meant the rescue of nation-state borders as well? And what would this mean to the borders and the people who live at and use them? While much research in political science, sociology, geography, economics and law has been at Europe's borders (see, for example, Strassoldo and Delli Zotti 1982; DeMarchi and Boileau 1982b; Anderson 1996a; O'Dowd and Wilson 1996), little of this work deals with issues of identity and ethnicity. A review of the state of the art in border studies in Europe (Strassoldo 1989: 383–4) shows that the 'new' type of European border study, i.e. that conducted since the 1960s, has eschewed earlier legal and geographical models, which concentrated on conflict and were laden with statist ideological perspectives, in favour of focusing less on the problems of the state *per se* and more on integration, socio-economics and the problems of border peoples. These new border studies have been fostered by local, regional and European organisations and have been 'policy-orientated'. Regrettably, however, few such studies have been based on 'empirical, broadly social, research' (Strassoldo 1989: 386).

This situation has begun to change. In the following chapters we consider examples of empirical research at borders in Europe, North America, Africa and Asia. We use this case material to ask whether in the midst of the transformations affecting states, states are able to maintain or extend their already considerable power. But even more important given the concerns of this book, we ask which aspects of border cultures thrive, if any, in spite of the restrictions of the state, which elements of border life exist because of the relative impermeability or porosity of their borders, and how do ethnic and national identities find meaning, if not strength, at the periphery of their states, in the face of the centralisation of power?

We focus throughout the book on anthropological research in communities which live along state borders, whose members have social and political networks which are sometimes extremely small and local, and which sometimes stretch across the globe. Such networks are the very substance of border life, while border life is itself an essential ingredient in the history, myths and legends of every state. Regardless of the problems associated with the role of nations and ethnic groups in the definition of the state, it is clear that all so-called 'international' borders are the places where states

meet, and where the leaders and institutions of the state must negotiate with their counterparts in neighbouring states. Although the structures of the state at international borders are often static, the negotiations of political

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and economic actions and values (a theme to which we shall return in chapter six) among the agents and organs of the state, wayfarers, and those who live at the border are continuous and dynamic.

Old and New Anthropological Perspectives

If on one level this book must explore international borders because of the reconfiguration of nations and states in the geopolitical environment of post-1989, on another level our focus on the anthropology of borders is a reflection of changes in anthropology and the social sciences over much the same period. During this time anthropologists have increasingly probed new ways of theorising the conditions and practices of modernity and postmodernity. Much of this theorising has sought to liberate notions of space, place and time from assumptions about their connection to the supposedly natural units of nation, state, identity and culture. These new theories regard space as the conceptual map which orders social life. *Space* is the general idea people have of where things should be in physical and cultural relation to each other. In this sense, space is the conceptualisation of the imagined physical relationships which give meaning to society. *Place*, on the other hand, is the distinct space where people live; it encompasses both the idea and the actuality of where things are (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Keith and Pile 1993; Hastrup and Olwig 1997). The dialectical relations between a people's notions of space and the political and economic conditions of their places are at the core of anthropological interest in accounting for cultural disjuncture, displacement and distress, which to many anthropological and other theorists are integral conditions of post-modernity. In order to understand the forces that have transformed modernity, with its apparent fragmentation of culture in conceptualisation and lived experience, many anthropologists have rethought the concept of culture itself.

Contemporary anthropology does not accept the culture concept uncritically. As Clifford suggests (1988), the predicament of culture in anthropology today is similar to the predicament of culture in the world around us. Part of the problem of culture for anthropologists is in the determination of its boundaries. Although anthropologists often assume that local cultures are partial elements in wider cultures, they just as often treat cultures at these levels as limited and concrete objects in their own right. This problem of bounding culture is compounded by the notion that cultures of disjuncture and difference are still seen to provide maps of meaning and charters for action among peoples who no longer can rely on the unity, homogeneity and protection of discretely bounded nations, communities, states, identities and territories. In short, although some anthropologists underplay culture as the matrix in which social life finds meaning and substance, culture is still seen by many people to provide exactly what these anthropologists have decided for them is no longer there.

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The real predicament of culture for anthropologists is not that the usefulness of the concept of culture as an analytical tool is at an end. Rather, it is precisely because it, like the concepts of nation and identity, is recognised by most people to be a charter for behaviour, a marker of social membership, a matrix for changing meanings and relations, and a metaphor for the values and actions of everyday life that the discipline must continue to examine human life through its lens. Culture encompasses both imagined and lived experience, and it provides unity, continuity and boundedness in the spaces, places and times of modernity and postmodernity.

As we noted above, the problems of defining the boundaries between cultures in the postmodern world has been a growing concern for cultural anthropologists (see, for instance, Hannerz 1996). So many social groupings are now qualified by prefixes such as 'post', 'trans', 'supra', 'inter' and 'meta' that it seems everyone in the field is either attempting to theorise the social practices and meanings integral to these formations, or are trying to keep up with the social practices and meanings of the theorists. How to understand has become confused by some anthropologists with what and who to understand. Thus, attempts are made to create new vocabularies capable of articulating conceptual and analytical frameworks for studying people who are no longer as constrained by the boundaries of nation and state as they once were (Basch et al. 1994).

It is clear that the cultural interstitiality on which much anthropology focuses today genuinely reflects the experiences of many of the groups of people anthropologists study, groups which are characterised as no longer occupying discrete spaces or as having discrete cultures. These people, often labelled transnationals, are compelled or choose to cross a wide range of geopolitical and metaphorical borders. Refugees, migrants, workers, criminals, soldiers, merchants and nomads cross and create many boundaries in their movements through their and other people's spaces and places. Even as they problematise the relationship, however, anthropologists must not forget that many of these people themselves still believe in the essential correspondence between territory, nation, state and identity, a correspondence in which each element is assumed to be an integral part of naturally occurring and bounded units. And even if some transnationals have lost this belief, they must nevertheless deal with those who still hold it. The state, which epitomises the belief in the homology between culture, identity, territory and nation, is a structure of power. Boundary making and breaking within and between states is a political act which can be seen to support or oppose that structure. Borders may serve as useful metaphors for understanding the rootlessness of many populations today, but this should not obscure the fact that everyone lives within or between the boundaries of nation-states, and these boundaries are always more than metaphorical.

Border Cultures

Regardless of the clear connection between culture and most definitions of the nation, as well as the oft-presumed relationship of nation to state, there has been a relative dearth of research on the cultural construction of interstate borders. In fact, it is our impression, as noted above, that culture is the least studied and least understood aspect of the structures and functions of international borders. Border studies in the

social sciences have tended to focus on the historical and contemporary conditions of nation- and state-building, and the related themes of sovereignty, diplomacy and security. Although scholars in a variety of fields have recognised the role of culture in the creation and maintenance of borders and borderlands, few have directly tied culture to their analyses of statecraft at, across and as the result of borders. There are notable and important exceptions, of course. In political science, Anderson (1996a) recognises that cultural landscapes transcend political ones in border regions. O'Dowd has led a sociological research team which has set out to examine different forms of Irish and British society and culture as they influence policy making and its reception in the Irish border region (O'Dowd and Corrigan 1995, 1996; O'Dowd et al. 1995). Martínez (1994a) and Sahlins (1989, 1998) have examined the historical role of local, regional and national cultures in the creation and negotiation of the US–Mexico and the French–Spanish borders respectively. Nugent and Asiwaju (1996) have compiled a number of historical and geographic perspectives on culture, space and place at African borders. These and other social scientists, many of whose works we discuss in chapter three, are aware of the importance of understanding the role of culture in the establishment and development of international borders. Many other scholars, however, when tracing the evolution and present conditions of national boundaries, have concentrated on the formal arrangements between states, which often do not take into account the needs, desires and other realities of the people who live at those borders, as well as the cultural significance of the borders to people in more distant metropolises.

It is our contention here that culture is important to the study of international borders in a number of fundamental ways. First, it is a determining factor in states' diplomatic arrangements which establish borders. Culture continues as a force in all subsequent deliberations between the states, especially as these deliberations reflect political and economic conditions in the borderlands. Second, local and regional cultures in borderlands are not just reactive agents. In their proactive role they affect policy formation, representation and reception, at the borders and elsewhere. In fact, our emphasis on culture at borders is a reminder that state policies which encourage cooperation or conflict along international borders not only involve many aspects of 'national' life, in terms of state administration, economics and politics, but they involve just as much of a commitment from the regions and

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localities that straddle the borderline. Third, all border communities and the larger economic and political entities of which they are a part have cultural frontiers which they continually negotiate. Because nations and states have political and cultural frontiers which entail regular and often sharply contested negotiations to mark their limits, border communities are implicated in a wide range of local, national and international negotiations. A focus on border cultures is one way to identify and analyse the networks of politics, economics and society which tie individuals and groups in border regions to others, both inside and outside their own countries.

In an anthropological sense, border culture functions at two overlapping and inextricable levels. Culture ties the people and institutions of the international borderlands to people and institutions within their own states *and* to those very far away. It is in this sense that we speak of cultural landscapes which transcend political

borders. Such landscapes are defined by the social interactions which construct them. They cannot be inferred or deduced from a knowledge of the political and economic structures of the states at their borders. The size and extent of the networks that link border people to others, including those who cross borders on their way elsewhere, those in positions of power in state centres, and those who may never even see the border but whose decisions affect life there, are matters of empirical research. So too are the lives of people who live and work at borders, some of whom do so *because* of the very existence of the border. Their lives are part of border cultures, ways of life and forms of meaning which they share only or principally with other borderlanders, on the same or the other side of the legal state demarcation, the borderline. In this way, too, local border cultures almost always transcend the limits of the state, calling into question yet again the lack of fit between national culture and state sovereignty and domain.

We believe that anthropology provides the best way to study border cultures. Anthropological research, utilising its methodology of long-term residential and participative fieldwork, as well as the range of other social science methods, places economic, political and social institutions and actions within wider contexts of meaning and behaviour and, in so doing, demonstrates how border communities and structures are linked to more encompassing and perhaps more powerful social and political formations.

The anthropology of border cultures does this in several ways. Anthropologists provide the data to explore the cultural bases to ethnic, racial and national conflict at international borders, a task made all the more urgent by the resurgence of ethnic and nationalist violence at many of the world's borders. Border research may thus serve to help policy makers, government leaders and others to understand the local and regional factors which push or pull refugees, migrants and illegal labourers across borders. The policy impact of a wide range of immigration, tax, trade and health laws are often first felt amongst border populations, leading us to suggest

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that the field of applied anthropology has much to do and learn in the borderlands of the world.

Perhaps foremost among all of the anthropological tasks at borders, however, is the investigation and interpretation of the symbolic aspects of the state. Borderlands are often the first or the last areas of the state that travellers see. Ever since the creation of modern nation-states, borders and their regions have been extremely important symbolic territories of state image and control. Yet border cultures are not constructed solely by national centres. The investigation of the symbolic reveals the cultural characteristics that local people use to define their membership in local, regional, national and supranational entities. Ultimately, anthropological research on border cultures contributes to our knowledge of identity formation, maintenance, adaptation and disintegration. Conversely, anthropology's ability to explicate the roles of national, ethnic, gender, sexual, religious and class identities in border areas is one way to demonstrate the importance of culture in the mapping out of the progress of nations and states in the modern and postmodern worlds, and their continuing power

over the imagination (for examples of how anthropologists can provide insight into border identities, see Wilson and Donnan 1998b).

A focus on border cultures thus allows us to engage issues of nation and state by generating data on how these are routinely lived and experienced by ordinary people. By their very nature, international borders highlight ambiguities of identity as people move through interactions based on, for example, citizenship, nationhood and membership in a local community. An examination of such shifting contextual manipulations of identity can reveal much about how the structures of state power manifest themselves in people's daily lives. The 'meeting' between 'state' and 'people' is often particularly visible in border regions, and the identification of the traces left by each upon the other, by drawing attention to relations of power, may help to right a recent tendency to over-emphasise the symbolic in the anthropology of relations between local communities, ethnic groups and nations. In fact, most state borders have been places where people's interaction on the one hand with the forces of the state, with its top-down notions of national culture, and on the other hand with peoples across the borderline, who are in their own contest over their 'national' culture, have helped to fashion distinctive national societies and cultures (see, for example, Douglass 1998; Sahlins 1998).

Although there is a risk of essentialising a notion such as 'border cultures', we believe that there are sufficient grounds for looking at borders generically (cf. Martínez 1994a: xviii; Thomassen 1996: 46). Such a focus looks at states at the extremity of their power, at places where 'national cultures' mix and clash. Border areas are places where nations (i.e. populations who believe that because of shared culture and a common past they share the present and a common political future) must and do deal with two or more states. Nations can end at or cross these borders, but in either case those who have experience of these areas must confront the

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realities of state control which facilitate or constrain the likelihood of transborder movement. This book is organised around the twin themes of viewing border cultures first as windows on nationalism and the state, and, second, as ways of documenting and understanding multiple cultural identities, in the midst of great world social, political and economic change.

Some Definitions in the Anthropology of Borders

The study of borders in anthropology has been patchy. One international border, that between the United States and Mexico, has enjoyed a long and sustained anthropological interest (for a critical review of the literature on this region, see Alvarez 1995). Yet with few exceptions, this literature has had little impact outside of North America, and even there has figured more prominently in research on Mexican and Mexican-American life than in anthropology generally. We trace the history of the anthropology of borders in chapter two, but note here with surprise not only the relative lack of comparative study of international borders in anglophone anthropology, but also how so few problematise or even review issues of identity, nation and state.

This relative dearth of anthropological research on nation and state at international borders is surprising in a number of ways. Most anthropologists cross international, regional and provincial borders to reach their field research sites, and are thus made aware of the political, economic, legal and cultural difficulties which such barriers present both to travellers and residents. Furthermore, the social science of international borders has embraced the interpretative analysis of the historical and cultural construction of nations (see chapter three). Also, as mentioned above, the increasing attention to symbolic boundaries has led many anthropologists to question their definitions of community and culture, and the ways these concepts match with political–legal administrative institutions such as wards, boroughs, constituencies, towns, cities, counties, provinces, states and supra-nations (see Donnan and Wilson 1994a).

We recognise that something that should make border regions attractive as research locales for the study of nationalism, ethnicity, illegality and conflict may actually be something that prevents ethnographers from conducting border field studies. Governments often do not like foreign scholars, or national scholars from their own metropolitan centres, nosing around disputed borders, especially if the governments fear security breaches. Anthropologists may also encounter difficulties in securing funding, because of the administrative problems of obtaining approval to conduct research in two or more states. When compounded by the problems of completing years of training, often in two languages and in two sets of ‘national’ scholarly literatures, the research difficulties give one pause. One other factor which makes anthropological research at international borders difficult is that borders

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are too readily recognised and accepted in a people's or a nation's daily life (Prescott 1978:13). As such they are often unproblematic, if not invisible, to many people, and thus evade the anthropological gaze.

Such difficulties must be overcome if anthropology is to contribute to the wider comparative social science of nations and states on the role of culture in power relations. One goal of this book is to encourage just such a contribution by stimulating anthropological interest in international border research. To achieve this, however, we must be clear on a few important definitions.

Over the last decade ‘borders’ and ‘borderlands’ have become increasingly ubiquitous terms in the work of a wide range of academics and intellectuals including journalists, poets, novelists, artists, educationalists, literary critics and social scientists (see, for example, Chambers 1990; Eyre et al. 1990; Giroux 1992; Hart 1991; McMaster 1995). But while this convergence of interest might indicate agreement about a topic of importance and significance, the terms are used in so many different ways as to suggest that it is not one topic but many. Social scientists occasionally claim precision, though even they employ a range of terms – border, borderland, border zone, boundary, frontier – which sometimes pass as synonyms and at other times identify quite different phenomena.

In anthropology, where ‘borders’ have acquired a new significance in the wake of recent theoretical developments (see, for example, Rosaldo 1989), it is likewise

possible to identify a number of meanings for the term 'border', from its referent as a line in the sand to its use as a metaphor for the cultural and other 'borderlands' of postmodernity. We explore these more fully in the next chapter. For the moment it is enough to reiterate that our concern in this book is with state borders, and to outline what many people believe state borders should be and should do, before providing our definition of borders.

State borders secure their territories, which are the repository of their human and natural resources. These territories may also have strategic and symbolic importance to the state. Borders are signs of the sovereignty and domain of the state, and are markers of the peaceful or hostile relations between a state and its neighbours. They are also a means of maintaining state control over the movement of people, goods, wealth and information, all of which must be deemed acceptable to the state in order to cross its borders. Thus borders are both structures and symbols of a state's security and sovereignty. They are historical and contemporary records of a state's relations with other states, with its own people, and with its own image. In our definition, borders have three elements: the juridical borderline which simultaneously separates and joins states; the agents and institutions of the state, who demarcate and sustain the border, and who are found most often in border areas but who also often penetrate deeply into the territory of the state; and frontiers, territorial zones of varying width which stretch across and away from state borders, within which people negotiate a variety of behaviours and meanings associated

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with membership in their nations and states (see Wilson and Donnan 1998a: 9). As features of the borders of all modern nation-states, these frontiers are territorial in nature, which distinguishes them from the metaphorical frontiers of identity so prominent in much contemporary postmodern analyses.

Culture as Power

This book examines the cultures to be found along and across international borders, because it is here that we can see most clearly how the cultural landscape qualifies the political and economic realities of the power of the state and international capital. We must be careful, however, not to let the images and metaphors of frontiers and borders blur our view of the politics of both anthropology and the borderlands themselves. As Heyman cautions, in regard to the US–Mexico border, 'It is ... when the border is condensed to an image, and when this image symbolizes wideranging political or theoretical stances, [that] understanding of the border becomes reductive and delocalized' (1994: 44). The recent interest in theorising the borderlands of identity, in urban and rural centres and peripheries everywhere, may seem on the surface to be especially relevant at the politico–territorial borderlands, but it does not take us very far unless we also examine how state power is situated in place, space and time. Although images of frontiers and international borders may further the intellectual pursuit of other metaphorical borderlands of self and group identity, they may indicate a superficial and exploitative use of these borders as metonyms, as plot devices necessary for the furtherance of the narratives of identity elsewhere, in an anthropological equivalent to Hitchcock's 'McGuffin' (the thing, event, or moment in

the story which gets the plot started, but which is irrelevant to the narrative once it gets going).

Borders are not just good places to study symbolic boundaries; they are places of specific cultural relations which are based on particular temporal and spatial processes, which have been and continue to be significant to their attached and associated nations and states. We need only examine state and supranational policies, as they are received, perceived and implemented at international frontiers, to see the value of the related concepts of culture and border. And it is in the exercise of state power, in which no two states are equal, regardless of the equality of sovereignty which their border posturing suggests, that borderlands take on significance beyond the frontiers themselves.

The politics of national frontiers are simultaneously bounded, by the state's territorial control, and fluid, brimming over into the next state and inwardly moving to influence national centres of cultural and political dominance. While 'border cultures' are metaphorical images of the state of culture in anthropological discourse today, their fixed nature in space and time may help us also to understand the culture of the state, where power is much more than representational. The study of

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culture is the study of power relations. The border cultures examined in the following chapters are those of transient people and displaced communities, as well as those of the border peoples whose physical distance from the centres of sovereignty is no measure of the power they may hold in locality and nation. We suggest that culture may still serve as the link between the anthropologies of power and meaning, among those who believe in the fixity of nation, state and identity, and those who are adrift in space, place and time.

In the next chapter we examine the development of diverse viewpoints in the anthropology of borders and boundaries, before comparing, in chapter three, perspectives on borders to be found in other scholarly disciplines. Subsequent chapters review how anthropologists have studied the cultural relations of power among borders, nations and states. Chapter four examines rituals and ethnicity; chapters five and six explore economic relations, which sometimes subvert the state, and often create conditions of differential power and value; and chapter seven reviews the border constructions of the politics of the body. We conclude in chapter eight with a discussion of the contemporary crisis of the nation-state, and consider some ways in which an anthropological concern with culture and power may enable anthropologists to contribute to wider debates in the scholarship of borders, nations and states.

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