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Introduction

Engaging with Borders

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Conceptually, borders have been a traditional anthropological topic, playing a central role in distinctions between self and other (or purity and danger) and in processes of inclusion and exclusion within or between groups. Not surprisingly, socio-cultural bordering and its impacts have been receiving significant attention within recent anthropological work (see e.g. Fassin 2011; Green 2013; Wilson and Donnan 2012). In addition to socio-cultural borders and processes, however, physical borders play a highly important role in reflecting and reproducing geographies of inclusion and exclusion. In this issue of *Etnofoor* we tackle the idea of borders from a number of distinct angles, focusing on the material, social and symbolic aspects of physical borders. We focus on processes of difference-making at and within physical borders, exploring how physical borders are delineated and constructed, and

how various groups of people design, rearrange, transgress and destroy them.

Ever since Durkheim and Weber, a common distinction has been made between 'borders' and 'boundaries' (Fassin 2011). The concept of borders was seen to represent an actual physical border, while boundaries were taken to be those social and symbolic barriers at work in society (Yuval-Davis and Stoetzler 2002). However, as Fassin (2011) argues, a combined approach that focuses simultaneously on physical, social and symbolic barriers is necessary in truly understanding the effects of borders on societies and those who pass them. Such an approach can show, for example, how migrants experience borders and the policies that accompany their regulation. As Alvarez (1995) argues in his work on the Mexican-US border, understanding the meaning of political-legal borders necessitates tran-

scending the division between 'real' borders and more symbolic and ideological notions of boundaries.

Following from this point of departure, a first line of analysis that is addressed in this issue focuses on physical borders at different levels of scale: borders between continents, nation-states or even between different parts of cities and public and private spaces (cf. Demetriou 2007; Flynn 1997; Hocking 2012; Lentz 2003). The present moment is characterized by a world-wide mushrooming of comparable barriers – 'security fences', 'apartheid walls' and 'anti-terrorist fences' – by which states, gated communities, neighbourhoods, and even luxury resorts attempt to guarantee their sovereignty and (economic, political or existential) security. Examples include the infamous Israeli-built wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory or the 'Peace Walls' in Belfast. How do these 'real' physical borders at different levels of scale express and influence processes of territorial inclusion and exclusion? How do they contribute to the shaping of political subjectivities within as well as beyond the borders of the nation-state?

Milena Komarova describes everyday life bordering processes in Sofia through the lens of mobile practices. Her contribution analyses how perspectives on bordering reveal wider urban imaginaries associated with senses of place, belonging and alienation. The article discusses the ways in which borders are generated and made visible through mundane mobilities and, in so doing, emphasises the conceptual and methodological importance of the mobilities paradigm in the understanding of urban borders and their significance in producing urban imaginaries and relationships with place and others.

Related to this issue is Patrick Höning's contribution who seeks to link recent writings on sovereign power, the function of borders and the workings of regimes of exception to the figure of the unauthorised migrant. Höning tries to explain how the concept of the unauthorised migrant has served to justify a range of bordering practices in a supposedly integrated, borderless global society. He argues that 'the image of Fortress Europe does not do justice to the subtleties of a system that has established a state of exception by way of co-option, coercion and outsourcing. Rather, the EU migration apparatus works as a sponge that expands and contracts. The unauthorised migrant is confronted with a layered system of borders and boundaries, a system that has started to change the very fabric of European societies it was designed to preserve.'

A second, related approach to borders focuses on economic inequality and profit. While it is often implied that economic boundaries are increasingly flexible – the EU continues to expand as it accepts new members, economic relationships are strengthened between many different regions around the world – the globalized freedom of movement of certain categories of people and products is beyond the reach of many. Considerable effort is invested in maintaining this inequality, as the increased militarization of international as well as intra-urban borders indicates. A focus on material borders at these scales entails exploring the processes of social, political and economic exclusion that work through them. In our time of neo-liberal globalization, in which liberal markets create more freedom and wealth for some while producing the opposite effect for others, who do physical borders exclude, and to whose benefit (cf. Galemba 2012)?

Supported by what could be termed a ‘security ideology’, many people not considered part of the privileged West, or of national elites, are being restrained by such borders (cf. Barbero 2012 on migration regimes; Feldman 2011 on the migration apparatus). While for some, international borders – at airports, at highway checkpoints or on trains or boats – indicate and symbolize security against the foreign other, for others they represent the main obstacle to a dignified life.

In his contribution, Tobias Holzlehner elucidates the range of actors that use the border as a resource, from small-scale traders to well-connected individuals inside of state institutions. He focuses on small-scale traders in the Russian-Chinese borderland, who operate in a zone where legal and illegal practices coexist, and formal and informal domains are not clearly demarcated. In the absence of trust in state institutions, more practical and consequently more reliable solutions are developed. Informality is conceived of as a strategy that allows for an easier, less restricted way of enabling commodity flows. The informal does not clearly demarcate a sphere outside of the state, as zones of informality equally exist inside the state in forms of bribes, corruption in the customs office, and the complicity of border agents in smuggling operations.

At the same time, borders and securitization more broadly present opportunities for economic gain. Which individuals and groups profit from strictly maintained borders? In addition to political actors, private security companies literally profit from ideas about who is in and who should be outside of specific political-economic territories. On a more mundane level, borders allow low-paid guards, immigration officers and other civil servants to earn an income and

often to exercise inordinate power over others. Elsewhere, smugglers and human traffickers make a living from circumventing or manipulating borders. How can we understand the economies produced by borders and the meanings they take on for participants?

A third line of analysis, taking a more aesthetic, performative approach, asks how these material borders are able to *do* something to people living around them or to those who cross them. What impact do different kinds of borders have on people, how does their physical form create new spaces and new social realities on the ground? Borders can be seen as disciplining entities that produce both mobility and immobility, regulating steady flows of people but also facilitating the detention and persecution of people. What is the role of design in these processes, and how might a study of the phenomenology of borders help us understand their embodied effects? Specific border designs and materialities – concrete walls, metal gates, glass windows, barbed wire, security cameras, cheerful posters, sober uniforms, guard dogs, high-tech biometric equipment – enable distinct sensorial experiences in terms of sight, smell, sound or touch. What do these different forms of borders mean for people longing to cross them? What are the differences between ‘old fashioned’ border crossings that involve face-to-face interactions with border patrol officers and crossings typified by indirect communication and de-personalized procedures? Is a border more meaningful when it is visible than when it is an imagined line? Studies show that even the absence of borders, walls and fences *after* they have been taken down has an effect on social reality; fear may increase and the invisible wall that replaces the visible border may seem even higher than the latter (Donnan 2010).

Agnethe Overgaard addresses the relation between material and immaterial aspects of borders when she explores what it means to undocumented West African migrants to cross the sea border between Libya and Malta. She argues that it should not so much be seen as the passing of a physical line, but rather as a process entailing a set of stages. By approaching border crossing contextually she is able to grasp more fully the experiences of the migrants of the different dimensions of the border, which is not solely material, political, or social, but a combination of these. Instead of a movement in space, border crossing is studied as a process in which the border is constructed in an interplay between material and social dimensions articulated differently at different points in time and space.

Such imageries also play an important role in the contribution of Flavia Cangià and Camilla Pagani as they study the role of emotions in the ways in which Italian adolescents experience migration of others into their country. They aim to understand how these adolescents make sense of and reproduce borders and to examine how 'national borders' are represented through the explicit and implicit reference to emotions by youths expressing their opinions about immigrants in Italy. In particular, the definition, construction and de-construction of 'physical borders' by these adolescents are informed by complex and at times ambivalent feelings relating to their sense of identity, of belonging, of their more profound emotional states, as well as of their and others' experiences.

A final focus is on the permeability and opacity of borders, as well as their temporalities. Increasingly, anthropologists are studying the legitimacy and permanence of borders in specific areas (Wilson and Donnan,

2012). As Mary Douglas noted early on, borders and boundaries often serve to create a sense of order in a world that is perceived as otherwise chaotic and complicated. However, wherever there are borders there are mechanisms to cross them illegally, by crawling through holes in fences, jumping over walls, or digging tunnels under the ground. People engage in these various forms of 'messing' with the border for political, economic or personal reasons. Anthropologists are perhaps best equipped to go beyond dichotomies of order and chaos and to examine the real consequences of borders on the ground – how they limit and frustrate social life but also how people continue to subvert them in spite of concerted attempts to solidify them.

Natalie Konopinski explores this issue in an ethnography of security checks and guards in Tel Aviv. She looks at the ways physical borders and their difference-making practices may reflect and generate certain temporalities. She suggests these checks represent a border of anticipations, that involves, simultaneously, the pre-emption and regulation of potentially threatening movement and people, and the reinforcing of ethno-national differentiation. But working at the border is as much about feeling bored and long hours of repetitive, possibly ineffective security work. Ethnographies of security guards and their contemporary bordering practices can contribute to the anthropology of borders, not only by reflecting on the experiences of those whose job it is to enact the border and boundary-marking but also by attending to the times and temporalities of the border.

Finally, in a personal, reflective piece, Lauren Wagner describes how 'three rhythms of marriage – coupled life, coupled livelihood, and bureaucratic

mobility – intertwine’ in her personal life, sometimes destabilizing each other. Her paper documents the topological impediments that borders, in both space but especially in time, present within her marriage. She analyses how bureaucratic suspicions become topological borders, and eventually a perpetuating, multi-layered limbo as they try to ‘become a couple occupying the same rhythmic mobility.’ The different bureaucratic statuses of herself as a highly educated knowledge migrant and her husband as a family migrant cause them to live in different temporalities and localities. Wagner elucidates how they deal with these bordering practices and try to live their lives in sync.

Drawing on different perspectives, the contributions to this issue of *Etnofoor* discuss the various aspects involved in dealing with physical borders. The issue investigates what happens at these physical spaces, and how differences are constructed, policed and experienced both symbolically and materially. We hope that this overview may serve as a guide to more fully explore this much-debated topic from a wide range of angles, elucidating the complexity and multi-layeredness of borders as both anthropological concept and material reality.

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