

BORDERS: ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

The anthropology of borders and the rich intellectual traditions in ethnology and anthropology upon which it builds can provide important insights into how borders and border practices shape everyday life. This monograph provides readers with a basic introduction to the anthropology of borders and presents a contemporary case of a Slovenian border region. The first chapters outlines many of the key lines of inquiry that have influenced anthropological research on borders, border studies localized at selected border regions, and contemporary issues shaping anthropological research within the interdisciplinary field of border studies. The second half of this book is dedicated to presenting diverse aspects of the case of the Slovenian-Hungarian border around Goričko. These chapters aim to provide a grounded understanding of the way that borders and border regimes have changed over the last decades, how these changes have informed the border region in diverse ways, and how border actors both experience and respond to these changes – through a myriad of their own border practices.

This border, in many ways, exemplifies the phrase employed to refer to European borders as being constantly in flux. As Katalin Munda Hirnök and Ingrid Slavec Gradišnik portrayed in their chapter, this region experienced numerous, even drastic changes in the last decades, which actors on both sides of the border experience and remember in diverse ways, thus informing the particular border dynamics that shape daily life there. Tatiana Bajuk Senčar and Miha Kozorog center their analyses on current issues



that have to a great extent emerged in against the backdrop of the present border regime, particularly those that underlie the EU's image of a "borderless Europe." Bajuk Senčar's study examines EU cross-border programs and initiatives meant to strengthen this formulation of Europe from the perspective of the experiences of varied groups of ground-level border actors. Kozorog's study centers on how farmers and other border actors experience and depict the cross-border movement of animals – movements facilitated by the border landscape and the dismantling of a virtually impermeable border regime.

Anthropological border research helps bolster the understanding that borders and boundaries are an integral aspect of everyday life and of the way we as social actors experience the world. This axiom does not change, even though developments in the last half-century – economic, political, technological – have contributed greatly to rendering the world ever more connected. Numerous flows help to forge diverse ties, reconfiguring relationships across time and space, seemingly rendering borders and boundaries useless. However, as many border specialists have pointed out, these sorts of globalization and deterritorialization processes do not supplant borders, a fact that is underscored by the growing number of states and their role in maintaining state territoriality through borders. In an analogous fashion, many who specialize in the study of European borders posit that debordering and rebordering processes represent a "continual duality in the EU" (Yndigegn 2011), with the former not existing without the latter. Instead, processes of bordering – creating, reinforcing, transgressing, dismantling, transcending, invoking, commodifying, or capitalizing on borders – are a constant of social life, even though borders and border regimes themselves may shift and change from time to time. A grounded understanding of borders and bordering processes as well as their social relevance serves as a productive starting point when examining situations characterized by new or extreme border regimes and practices, such as that of the Coronavirus pandemic.

As mentioned in the introduction, the year 2020 will not only be remembered as the year of the onset of the Coronavirus



pandemic but also the year when the influence of borders and bordering practices on daily life drastically increased. The implications of the imposition and adaptation of diverse border regimes due to multiple waves of COVID-19 infection are still unfolding. The continual imposition, fortification, and relaxation of a range of borders informed daily life to such a degree that it is hard to identify any aspect of social life unaffected by it. Varied levels of quarantining set in place across the world have even affected animal migration patterns and levels of carbon emissions, with inhabitants of many cities plagued with chronic smog due to excessive daily traffic finally able to see the sky. Others were surprised to observe how different animal species had begun to appear in seemingly abandoned cities and towns during periods of general lockdown. Anthropology's long history of studying the cultural, historical, and ecological specificities of borders – and the processes of demarcating, reinforcing, dismantling, and crossing them – offers a solid foundation for grounded and integrated examinations of interconnected bordering processes set in motion by such an event. Furthermore, such an integrated approach can also address and encompass other levels of bordering – particularly in the face of global, transborder political processes – studying how they are interconnected, interdependent, and mutually constitutive. A recent, unprecedented event of this kind that can be mentioned here is Brexit, which has attracted the attention of numerous anthropologists.¹

Another contribution of anthropological analyses of borders lies in anthropology's long-term focus on local communities and culture at borders and its more recent emphasis on borders as manifestations of state power and state territoriality. This multi-tiered approach, which incorporates the practices and experiences of (predominantly local) social actors and communities into border work, contributes a more broad-based look into the range of practices and processes that comprise daily life in any given border region. Such an approach is particularly important in the case of European borders, the research of which has historically been dominated by political scientists whose approach to bordering and debordering processes is often limited to the top-down perspective centered



on the interplay between supranational, national, and local state representatives and agencies. This perspective, while important, does little to examine or draw insights from how communities and social actors live with the reality of the border on a daily basis. Instead, the anthropology of borders, whose historical emphasis has been on how borders are constructed, negotiated and viewed from a bottom-up perspective, characteristically examines the interplay between the state and other border actors in any given border region, with a distinctive interest in the local specificities of any given border region and the state as an everyday border actor. Employing such an approach is useful for analyzing contemporary border-related projects and processes, even those on Slovenia's borders. One such example is the joint hosting of the European Capital of Culture on the part of the adjoining border cities of Nova Gorica (Slovenia) and Gorizia/Gorica (Italy), which will take place in 2025. The cities' program, "Go!Borderless", demonstrates the ways in which local communities plan to transcend the border in diverse ways to strengthen the links between both cities.²

As mentioned in the introduction, anthropologists Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (2012) once stated that certain issues and problems are more evident or pronounced at the border than elsewhere – including migration, security, and trade, to name a few. Following this line of thinking, one could argue that anthropological research on borders and border regions can serve as a lens for gaining insights that contribute to broader discussions within anthropology. One such issue concerns the issue addressed in the previous paragraph: the evolving interplay between growing levels of global interconnection and the groundedness of social experience. This issue, which is one of the cornerstones of contemporary border research, addresses questions at the center of broader interdisciplinary discussions. They include discussions concerning glocalization, which focus on the dialectic between the global and the local (e.g., Hannerz 1990, 1996; Robertson 1994, 1995), as well as those concerning ecology, which highlights planetary interconnectedness and (trans)local ecological responses – including bordering – as responsible actions (e.g., French 2000; Fall 2011; Smart and Smart 2016). Analytical and empirical

discussions concerning borders may operate as significant fieldsites for researching the interplay between the local and the global as an integral facet of social life and how it evolves in the face of increasing levels of global interdependence and interconnection.

Another significant field of inquiry that insights of border studies can contribute to is centered around the anthropology of the state. A complex and historically difficult subject for anthropological study because state authority can take varied or ambivalent forms (Abrams 1988), the state can be addressed as an abstract reality, an institution, a mode of governance, or even a cultural formation. One of the contributions of anthropological research of borders – as well as the border regimes that maintain them (Heyman 1995) – centers on the emphasis on borders as expressions of state power. The state can exercise its power at the border in diverse ways, most importantly as the physical demarcation of state territory and the means for controlling movement into and out of a given territory. Approaching borders and state actors in this manner can serve as an important lens for analyzing state power and its operation at the border, thus contributing to a better understanding of the state, its influence on everyday life, and the imaginations of the state among differently positioned citizens or agents. In this manner, border research can contribute to those researching the state from its margins (e.g., Asad 2004; Das and Pool 2004).

Finally, scholars' in-depth studies of borders in practice can offer important insights into the form and function of borders and boundaries in everyday life and how they are either markers or catalysts of different systems of categorization and difference. As we have portrayed in these pages, borders as objects of research have been understood in numerous diverse ways: as empty spaces or frontiers, as geographical barriers, as social markers, as state formations, as social processes, as economic systems, and as discursive formations – to name only a few of their manifestations. In most cases, one can observe the overlapping of a range of the abovementioned formations in a single border region. The lively discussions among border scholars about the concepts and formations of borders center on elaborating an understanding of

borders that accounts for the different dimensions of borders as concepts, material formations, and processes (see, for example, Green 2018). These sorts of discussions can provide important insights into the nature and formation of categories of difference, offering a complex and nuanced understanding of borders as a basic dimension of social life.