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A Companion to Border Studies

Edited by Thomas M. Wilson
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A Companion
to Border Studies

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and Hastings Donnan

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Contents

<i>List of Figures and Table</i>	viii
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	ix
1 Borders and Border Studies <i>Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan</i>	1
Part I Sovereignty, Territory and Governance	27
2 Partition <i>Brendan O’Leary</i>	29
3 Culture Theory and the US–Mexico Border <i>Josiah McC. Heyman</i>	48
4 The African Union Border Programme in European Comparative Perspective <i>Anthony I. Asiwaju</i>	66
5 European Politics of Borders, Border Symbolism and Cross-Border Cooperation <i>James Wesley Scott</i>	83
6 Securing Borders in Europe and North America <i>Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly</i>	100
7 Border Regimes, the Circulation of Violence and the Neo-authoritarian Turn <i>John Borneman</i>	119
Part II States, Nations and Empires	137
8 Borders in the New Imperialism <i>James Anderson</i>	139
9 Contested States, Frontiers and Cities <i>Liam O’Dowd</i>	158
10 The State, Hegemony and the Historical British-US Border <i>Allan K. McDougall and Lisa Philips</i>	177

11	Nations, Nationalism and “Borderization” in the Southern Cone <i>Alejandro Grimson</i>	194
12	Debordering and Rebordering the United Kingdom <i>Cathal McCall</i>	214
13	“Swarming” at the Frontiers of France, 1870–1885 <i>Olivier Thomas Kramsch</i>	230
14	Borders and Conflict Resolution <i>David Newman</i>	249
Part III Security, Order and Disorder		267
15	Chaos and Order along the (Former) Iron Curtain <i>Mathijs Pelkmans</i>	269
16	Border Security as Late-Capitalist “Fix” <i>Brenda Chalfin</i>	283
17	Identity, the State and Borderline Disorder <i>Dan Rabinowitz</i>	301
18	African Boundaries and the New Capitalist Frontier <i>Timothy Raeymaekers</i>	318
19	Bandits, Borderlands and Opium Wars in Afghanistan <i>Jonathan Goodhand</i>	332
20	Biosecurity, Quarantine and Life across the Border <i>Alan Smart and Josephine Smart</i>	354
21	Permeabilities, Ecology and Geopolitical Boundaries <i>Hilary Cunningham</i>	371
Part IV Displacement, Emplacement and Mobility		387
22	Borders and the Rhythms of Displacement, Emplacement and Mobility <i>Pamela Ballinger</i>	389
23	Remapping Borders <i>Henk van Houtum</i>	405
24	From Border Policing to Internal Immigration Control in the United States <i>Mathew Coleman</i>	419
25	Labor Migration, Trafficking and Border Controls <i>Michele Ford and Lenore Lyons</i>	438
26	Spatial Strategies for Rebordering Human Migration at Sea <i>Alison Mountz and Nancy Hiemstra</i>	455
27	“B/ordering” and Biopolitics in Central Asia <i>Nick Megoran</i>	473
28	Border, Scene and Obscene <i>Nicholas De Genova</i>	492

Part V	Space, Performance and Practice	505
29	Border Show Business and Performing States <i>David B. Coplan</i>	507
30	Performativity and the Eventfulness of Bordering Practices <i>Robert J. Kaiser</i>	522
31	Reconceptualizing the Space of the Mexico–US Borderline <i>Robert R. Alvarez, Jr</i>	538
32	Border Towns and Cities in Comparative Perspective <i>Paul Nugent</i>	557
33	A Sense of Border <i>Sarah Green</i>	573
	<i>Index</i>	593



Figures and Table

FIGURES

10.1	The Northwest Territory circa 1790	179
10.2	Oregon Country, Columbia District, 1818–1846	185
11.1	Border zones of the Southern Cone	203
19.1	Badakhshan border crossings	339
23.1	The migrant routes into the US	408
23.2	The migrant routes into the EU	409
23.3	<i>Ceci n'est pas une frontière</i>	411
23.4	Rhizome	414
25.1	The Riau Islands	443
27.1	The Ferghana Valley in its regional context	476
27.2	The Ferghana Valley	477

TABLE

5.1	Categories of bordering	88
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CHAPTER **I**

Borders and Border Studies

*Thomas M. Wilson and
Hastings Donnan*

There are more international borders in the world today than ever there were before. This is a significant fact when one considers the impact of these many borders on the ways in which the billions of people encompassed by them live, work and travel. As important a development as this multiplication in international borders is, however, it alone is not the guiding imperative behind the origin and evolution of comparative border studies in scholarship worldwide. The proliferation of borders, and the many forces that have created and fostered their development, together have drawn scholars from all the humanities and social sciences to a mutual interest in what happens at, across and because of the borders to nations and states, and in extension to other geopolitical borders and boundaries, such as those of cities, regions and supranational politics. Their interest has been as much in what happens at specific borders, frontiers and borderlands as it has been in what borders help us to understand of major forces of change that seem to be sweeping the globe, forces often included as aspects of globalization, but which may also be seen as neoliberalism, neo-imperialism, late modern capitalism, and supranationalism. Within these interests and perspectives, border studies scholars enter into dialogue with all those who wish to understand new liberties, new movements, new mobilities, new identities, new citizenships and new forms of capital, labor and consumption. Border studies have become significant themselves because scholars and policy-makers alike have recognized that most things that are important to the changing conditions of national and international political economy take place in borderlands – as they do in like measure almost everywhere else in each of our national states – but some of these things, for instance those related to migration, commerce, smuggling and security, may be found in borderlands in sharper relief. And some things of national importance can be most often and best found in borderlands.

This book, a collection of essays that represent views both of where border studies have come from and where they are going, reflects the current state of border

studies, or perhaps this might be better expressed as the current states of border studies. In particular, it shows how scholarly attention to political and social borders has grown apace with the growth in numbers of borders, states and the peoples who live in and cross borders, borderlands, frontiers and boundaries. Once principally the focus of geography, the study of territorial, geophysical, political and cultural borders today has become a primary, abiding and growing interest across the scholarly disciplines, and is related to changing scholarly approaches to such key research subjects and objects as the state, nation, sovereignty, citizenship, migration and the overarching forces and practices of globalization. All of these approaches to borders and frontiers have been complicated by various attempts to understand and express identities, an effort often related to the investigation of hybridity, creolization, multiculturalism, postcolonialism and many other central concerns of social theory today.

Scholarly and political interests are not alone in the recognition of the increasing prominence of borders in the lives of many people in all parts of the world. Borders have become a master narrative and hegemonic symbol in popular, commercial, youth and liberation cultures. Borders have captured the fancy of the peoples of the world and they function as a grand motif in everyday life, everywhere. This is true of some people all of the time, others just some of the time, and perhaps seldom for still others. It is difficult in today's world to avoid public debates over borders, or to ignore the many ways in which borders figure in a great deal of popular discourse. This is not just the result of a borders numbers game. While more borders than in years past frame our collective lives today as a consequence of the removal and strengthening of various state and other political borders, it has also been the mix of populations and the agencies of the state and others where countries and their peoples meet, and the metaphorical borderlands of hegemonic and minority identities, that spark so much popular interest. There is every indication that the scholarly fascination with this intersection of the metaphorical negotiations of borderlands of personal and group identity (in what has come to be known as "border theory") with the geopolitical realization of international, state and other borders of polity, power, territory and sovereignty ("border studies") has mushroomed of late and continues to grow.

This scholarly turn is not simply a reflection of ivory tower musings, but is provoked and challenged by real events that have affected us all over the last 20 years. A list of these events that revolve around changing borders would include, but be far from complete with, the fall of the Iron Curtain; the expansion of the European Union (EU); the rise of new and old ethnonationalisms; the creation of many new states and regional trading blocs to rival the EU and the United States; the rise of new global forces, from neoliberal economics to New World Political Orders; the clash of civilizations; and new engagements between developed and emerging countries and hemispheres. These have all made borders and borderlands new sites of empirical investigation, of processes of localization and globalization in the face of so many forces of change. Borders and frontiers are also elements in the transforming dimensions of culture, politics, society and economics at every level of social and political complexity, experience and expression across the globe. Recent events and ongoing dilemmas brought on by 9/11, the war on terror, and the new security, environmental, health and economic problems and opportunities of world populations on the move, all indicate that the related notions of borders, boundaries

and frontiers will attract more attention in future from scholars, policy-makers and other peoples of the world who must negotiate and cross the barriers and bridges that borders represent (see Donnan and Wilson 2010).

The timeliness and relevance of border studies is one theme which runs through the essays in this volume, but there are other thematic motors which have driven us collectively. In the volume our authors show repeatedly that border theory, which seeks answers to questions about how identity, territory and the state are interrelated in the formation of the self and of group identification, has much to offer scholarship on the political economies of geopolitical entities that are encapsulated and in some instances defined by their geophysical borders. But the converse is true too, as our authors also show repeatedly, where the confluence of territory, power and the state is instrumental in many issues of identity and culture, locally and also farther afield. As our authors show through their historical case studies and historical framings of contemporary issues, border studies have proliferated along with borders, and the speed with which border studies are changing and expanding is both remarkable and significant.

This *Companion* is thus a freezing in time of what can best be described as mercurial: who knew in the 1980s how global political and economic order would change, and so drastically, and who knew in the 1990s that so many borders, new and old, in the world would be configured as they have been in the wake of so many epochal events in the global landscape. Some case studies here are offered to illustrate forces at work in those borderlands and in those regions which we anticipate will have corollaries elsewhere and will help to inform scholarship in more distant areas of the globe. Other essays in the volume take a much more explicitly comparative and theoretical view of borders. But we realize too that as soon as a volume like this presents “state of the art” essays, that the “state” and that “art” will change. Our task here is to try to make sense of where we are and where we have been in border studies, to offer some choices for those whose interests and works will make the future changes to the state and the art of border studies. Our introduction is thus both retrospective and prospective and locates the likely future trajectories of border studies within the themes and approaches of the present and the recent past.

In the remaining sections of the introduction we review some of the key features in the border studies which we entered in the early 1990s. These earlier border studies, which were particularly influential on us, were deeply entrenched in geography, but history, political science and sociology also contained much of interest to us, which helped us to formulate our own ideas and to chart our own path. This was especially beneficial to us when we began our assessment of border and boundary studies within our parent discipline, anthropology. But earlier border studies also helped us to fashion the beginnings of what we saw as an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and perhaps even postdisciplinary approach to so much that mattered to scholars and others around us, most of which was related to the changing nature of the territorial dimensions to the state and the nation. In the final section of this introduction we examine what border studies are today. Using our authors as inspiration, we explore how contemporary border studies have in the main eschewed single case studies in favor of explicitly or implicitly comparative analyses, and have largely moved beyond the constraints of their own disciplinary borders to read widely and

consider seriously the evidence and arguments offered by like-minded scholars in other disciplines and from other national traditions.

Border studies today are a “field” made up of many fields and yet no one field in particular. Border studies are akin to what we study: rooted in space and time they are also about process and fluidity. They reflect intellectual convergence as well as scholarly differentiation, and through them we can begin to see not only the interstices of nations and states, but those of a new world understanding of scholarship, where academics increasingly seek cooperation, collaboration and intellectual fellowship across those same borders we are drawn to study. But all of this, as far as we have seen since the 1990s, while quick in the making, has not been without its own variations. Before considering how border studies have changed over the last two decades, and to illustrate some of the difficulties to be faced by scholars in any discipline in their attempt to pursue scholarship at what might be seen by many to be the margins of their own discipline, we turn first to the anthropology of borders, then and now. We do so to offer an example of how border studies have evolved from individual cases seen through the lens of one scholarly discipline to a more comprehensive and comparative perspective on other borders and other intellectual traditions.

OF DISCIPLINES AND CASE STUDIES

In the 1990s when we began our collaboration in border studies, after we had each done separate ethnographic field research in borderlands, it was widely asserted in certain academic circles, associated with what has become known variously in scholarship as postmodernism, cultural studies and globalization, that the world had become smaller, time and space had been compressed, there had been a speeding up in global movement of almost everything significant, and the preeminent institutions of modernity were no longer as powerful and unassailable as they once were. Foremost among these waning institutions, so it was asserted by a host of scholars eager to chronicle and understand the seismic shifts in a globalizing world, was the national state, that is, that particular state conglomeration of government and governance dedicated to the creation and defense of its nation. The predicted withering away of the national state as the preeminent political structure of modernity also was believed to herald the end of institutions and actions dependent on the national state and the dissipation of the affective dimensions to national identities and state identifications. It was expected that the filtering down of these effects would dilute traditional political, social and cultural structures and associations within equally traditional and threatened territorial entities, such as nations and regions. These effects were expected to be devastating for some and liberating for others.

This sort of globalization and postmodernist rhetoric continues to capture the imagination of scholars and policy-makers alike. At times this rhetoric is also used to support scholarly treatments of neoliberalism, now just as pervasive a concept as globalization in the provision of oft-asserted but seldom demonstrated causes of so much that promises salvation or ruin to people (among them scholars) in the world today. Changes in individual and group loyalties, associations and identities have

fueled the new politics of identity, in which the definitions of citizenship, nation and state vie with gender, sexual, ethnic, religious and racial identities for prominence if not preeminence in new national and world orders. Or at least vie with each other in the imaginations of scholars who study such things. The gist of much of this sort of approach to the nation and state as it affected the study of borders was that we were all living in a world where state borders were increasingly obsolete, where porous international borders no longer fulfilled their historical role as barriers to the movement of aliens and citizens, and as markers of the extent and power of the state.

While this sort of argument was heady and persuasive in the 1990s, and moved us in scholarly directions which have led us to this *Companion*, it also persists today in many areas of scholarship. This is so despite so much evidence to the contrary, namely that there are more states, more state institutions, more state intrusion into the daily lives of citizens and denizens (through the utilization of new technologies), and more state intervention into global political economy. Today there are still many scholars globally who argue that the state, as an ideal and abstraction, is weak and in decline. And while we are well aware that there are so-called failed states, the definition of that failure must be held against some standard, some test case of success. The vast majority of states, in the real rather than the ideal, are successful, and there is unlikely to be any form of political and social integration to take the place of the national state for the foreseeable future. (As we write this, the eurozone crises are putting great stress on the European Union, in what may be the only model extant of a possible supranational successor to a world order of states.)

When we began our own foray into comparative border studies, we recognized that globalization and deterritorialization were alternative interpretative slants on politics and power in the contemporary world. We argued that the growing interest in the new politics of identity and transnationalism was incomplete (Donnan and Wilson 1994, 1999; Wilson and Donnan 1998). It needed the corrective offered by modernists and traditionalists, in geography, history, political science and sociology, to renew the commitment to the concrete manifestations of government and politics, at local levels and at the level of the state. In our neomodernist view, definitions of the “political” which articulated self, gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity within discussions of sign, symbol, contestation and representation risked underestimating the role the state continued to play in the everyday lives of its and other states’ citizens. We recognized that the institutions and personnel of the nation and the state had been increasingly excluded from much anthropology (and also to some extent in cognate disciplines), but we concluded as well that the nation-state had been rather more successful in weathering the storms of postsocialism, postcolonialism, and globalization than many scholars had credited. As we moved into border studies, with an interest in what the lives of borderland peoples were like at the end of the twentieth century, we wondered why there were so few scholars, in our and in other disciplines, who were equally interested in investigating how the state sustained its historically dominant role as an arbiter of control, violence, order and organization for those whose identities were being transformed by world forces. We realized we were not alone in our interests in theorizing the intersections of borders, place, power, identity and the state, and that such interests had been pioneered before us by scholars in geography, history, politics, sociology and anthropology. But we were

also aware that the end of the Cold War and the new globalization scholarship seemed to distract so many more scholars away from the political economy of territory.

It was our contention then, and it remains so today, that a globalized and deterritorialized world of identity politics is a world too of many more and, in some cases, stronger states, where the new politics of identity is in large part determined by the old structures of the state. The politics of representation and resistance, whether couched in national electoral terms or those of new social movements, need the state as their principal contextual opponent. In our view it has always been the intention of political anthropology to position symbolic politics alongside all other sorts of politics, to enforce the proposition that all politics is by definition about the use of power to achieve individual or group public goals. The symbolic of culture and identity is the symbolic of power, whether that power is found in interpersonal relations or in the hands of agents of the government. The physical structures of territory, government and state have not withered away in the face of the scholarly onslaught that asserts that people are now freer to slip the constraints of territorially based politics. Border studies in anthropology in the 1990s as we saw it needed to focus on the visible borders between states, on the symbolic boundaries of identity and culture which make nations and states two very different entities, and on the politics of the liminal and interstitial that rested both easily and uneasily between nation and state.

Many things have made an anthropology of borders distinctive. Anthropological ethnography focuses on local communities at international borders in order to examine the material and symbolic processes of culture. This focus on cultural constructions of everyday life which give meaning to the boundaries between communities and between nations was often absent in the perspectives to be found in other social sciences at the time. The anthropology of borders helped to remind social scientists in and outside of anthropology that nations and states are composed of people who should not be reduced to the images that are constructed of them by representatives of the state, the media and academics. We argued that the anthropological study of the everyday lives of border cultures was simultaneously the study of the daily life of the state, particularly through the implementation of economic and security policy in borderlands. When ethnographers study borderlanders, they narrate the experiences of people who are tied culturally to many other people in neighboring states. Thus, the anthropology of borders simultaneously explored the permeability and permanence of borders by focusing on the adaptability and rigidity of border peoples and states in their efforts to control the social, political, economic and cultural fields which transcend their borders. We cannot review the field comprehensively here or rehearse again the history of the anthropology of border studies. Substantial reviews exist elsewhere (Alvarez 1995; Donnan and Haller 2000; Donnan and Wilson 1999). But it is nevertheless important for our argument in this introduction that we sketch the broad parameters of approach, first in the anthropology of borders and subsequently in the other social science disciplines.

Early work in the anthropology of borders owed much to Fredrik Barth (1969), whose paradigmatic ideas on ethnic boundaries stressed their relational nature as socially constructed boundaries marking affective and identificatory as well as structural, organizational and sometimes territorial disjunctures. It was informed too by the historical anthropologists and ethnologists who examined how cultural landscapes

transcend social and political divides (e.g., Bohannan and Plog 1967; Cohen 1965). But perhaps the first major milestone to focus explicitly on state borders was Cole and Wolf (1974). Their field site in the Italian Tyrol was specifically chosen because its successive historical partitions allowed them to explore the transformation of local political loyalties in relation to nation-building and thus to widen disciplinary perspectives by demonstrating the need to situate local communities within the larger polities of which they are a part. The anthropology of borders was transformed as a result and later anthropologists explored this relationship in various ways. Some studied border areas as a way of examining how proximity to an international border could influence local culture. Others focused on the voluntary and involuntary movement of people across borders as traders, migrants and refugees. And yet others concentrated on the symbols and meanings which encode border life. Regardless of theoretical orientation or locale, however, most of these border studies in anthropology focused on how social relations, defined in part by the state, transcend the territorial limits of the state and, in so doing, transform the structure of the state at home and in its relations with its neighbors. Such work demonstrated the growing importance of a border perspective in which the dialectical relations between border areas and their nations and states took precedence over local culture viewed with the state as a backdrop.

Despite such novel developments, a “localism” continued to influence the border anthropology of this early period so that the state and the nation and even the border were sometimes underplayed in the ethnographers’ efforts to bound their “community” study. So too and for similar reasons comparison was often underutilized, in spite of its rhetorical centrality to the discipline more generally. A good example of this is early ethnographic research at the Mexico–US border, which was subject to the same limitations, although this was the one border at the time to have generated a systematic and sustained body of work. While many of the studies carried out there used the border to frame their focus, the border itself was rarely a variable in the analysis, nor was it compared to borders elsewhere. However, this did not preclude the Mexico–US border from becoming the touchstone for analyses of other borders, as a kind of “hyperborder” that epitomized processes that other borders seemed to share (Romero 2008). As the anthropology of borders began to grow (especially in Europe in response to post–Cold War EU expansion), border scholars looked to research on the Mexico–US border for theoretical and conceptual stimulation to such an extent that this border took on – and to a considerable degree still occupies – iconic status as *the* template for border studies in whatever part of the globe border research is carried out. A brief look at the number of entries for the Mexico–US border in the index to *Borders* (Donnan and Wilson 1999) will quickly bear this out. Yet the comparisons rarely flowed in the other direction and insights from European border studies, for instance, have only belatedly begun to inform systematically those conducted by anthropologists – as well as other social scientists – at the Mexico–US border, as Roberto Alvarez suggests in this *Companion*.

It was probably the early 1990s before the wider political and economic contexts of international borders featured in analyses of the Mexico–US border, where the issues of underdevelopment, transnationalism and the globalization of power and capital, among other aspects of culture, increasingly occupied the growing number

of historically informed and wide-ranging ethnographic accounts (see Heyman in this volume). Much of this research focused on the implications of the economic asymmetry between the United States and Mexico, whose wage differentials continue today to draw labor migrants northwards and ensure the profitability of locating unskilled occupations on the Mexican side. Migration across and increasing urbanization along this border have both been major topics of study, particularly within applied anthropology, and have generated research on a broad range of related issues such as local labor markets, health, pollution, and the environment (Alvarez 1995: 454–456). Nevertheless, discussion frequently lapsed into straightforward description of the region and how it might develop economically, with researchers “constantly pulled toward the specific, the unique (sometimes the folkloric), and the problematic” (Fagan 1984: 271) and thus continuing to eschew comparison for a focus on more local and immediate concerns (Alvarez 1995: 463).

First generation studies in the anthropology of borders thus largely centered on a localized, particularistic and territorially focused notion of borders. This was in keeping with anthropology’s hallmark emphasis on culture in its ethnographic study of society through long-term residential research. All of the work alluded to above emphasized the local setting and cultural context, stressing the meaning and experience of borders in the lives of those who lived and worked there. Above all else perhaps, anthropologists brought to the study of borders a sensitivity to the role of borders in daily life and to people’s narratives of these meanings and the ways in which borders were marked in and through their everyday practice. It is in this emphasis on how borders are constructed, negotiated and viewed from “below” that the value and distinctiveness of an anthropology of borders arguably initially relied. It is not that these characteristics were wholly absent in the other social sciences – disciplinary boundaries have always been much less clear-cut than sometimes implied – but they were arguably less prominent there than other core themes, concepts and questions that animated research on borders in these disciplines, as we outline next. Not surprisingly, like anthropology the other social sciences largely concentrated on their particular disciplinary concerns and interests. And like anthropology, they too looked most often to the body of research on the Mexico–US border as their template and stimulus.

Geography, for instance, has been drawn to the study of the spatial dimension to borders and to the ways in which territory and the physical environment interrelate with the social, economic, political and cultural conditions of nations and states. Geographical research initially focused on the classification and function of different kinds of borders and on clarifying concepts such as “boundaries” and “frontiers” which were seen to separate territories that are subject to different sovereignty (see Prescott 1987). The analysis of “border landscapes” was one way in which geographers sought to move beyond simple description and categorization of borders to grapple with the complex relations between boundaries and the physical and human environments which shape them and which in turn are shaped by them. The concept of border landscapes – those areas contiguous to the state boundary which are molded by the human and physical environment, including the boundary itself, and which in turn shape the environment – spawned a range of different kinds of case study (Prescott 1987: 161–173). Although this generated an impressive set of themes, it did

not lead to a major breakthrough in the role and importance of geographical border studies within the discipline of geography more generally, nor had it much influence beyond the discipline. The case study approach in political geography tended to fall into set categories, such as the study of disputed areas, boundary changes, the evolution of boundaries, boundary delimitation and demarcation, exclaves and tiny states, maritime boundaries, disputes over natural resources and internal boundaries (Minghi 1969). It remained descriptive and was not interested in understanding social and political process or in developing border landscape theory (Rumley and Minghi 1991: 1–4). By the 1990s a new border geography argued for a reorientation by border landscape geographers to wider comparative and theoretical issues, recognizing that “too little concern [had] been given to conceptual developments in the other social sciences which might have some relevance to an understanding of border landscapes” (Rumley and Minghi 1991: 4). This call for a reorientation has been answered by many scholars who have recentered border studies in geography and who continue to foster interdisciplinary approaches through their calls to modify their ways of “graphing the geo” (Sparke 2005; see also Amoores 2011).

While geographers wrangled with the spatial dimension to the definitions of borders and their roles in nation and state relations, in part in an effort to construct the beginnings of a comparative study of boundaries and frontiers, historical studies pursued similar objectives from a temporal perspective. Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1920 essay on “The significance of the frontier in American history” (Turner 1977) is clearly a landmark in border studies, but it was not until much later that historians began to question how to mold the unique case studies that result from frontier histories into a framework for comparison, generalization and theory building. Here once again the Mexico–US border played a major part. Between 1930 and 1974 historians of this border had viewed it as a frontier and concentrated on its explorers, economic development, missionary activity, armies and fortifications, administrative structures and role in international relations (Almaráz 1976: 10). But like the geographers and anthropologists, by the 1990s historians were looking for ways to develop models of borderlands to facilitate regional and global comparison. Oscar Martínez (1994) was at the forefront of such scholars and his insightful history of the Mexico–US border recognizes how borders share functional commonalities with other borders worldwide because they are there to regulate, prevent and control the economic, political and social interactions between people in both states. Through his concept of the “borderlands” milieu, Martínez constructed a typology that distinguished four kinds of interaction at borders to facilitate comparison: alienated borderlands, coexistent borderlands, interdependent borderlands, and integrated borderlands (1994: 6–10).

Borderlands were understood here as the region bisected by the boundary line between states, which in comparative perspective is presumed to encapsulate a variety of identities, social networks and formal and informal, legal and illegal relationships which tie together people in the areas contiguous to the borderline on both of its sides. Analogous to geographers’ border landscapes, this concept of borderlands provided a similar function in history as landscape did in geography, which was to focus on the border region and its people as active participants in their state and as important forces in their nation’s and state’s relationship to their territories (as

McDougall and Philips show here for the historical emergence of the US-British border).

As a tool to facilitate cross-cultural and international comparison, borderlands began to occupy a central place in the historical study of borders and to open up novel lines of inquiry. Other scholars, for example, pointed out that while much had been written on how states deal with their borderlands, “historians have paid much less attention to how borderlands have dealt with their states” (Baud and van Schendel 1997: 235). Some thus argued in favor of a new view of borders from the perspective of a state’s periphery, a view which recognizes the active historical role and agency of borderlands and the ways in which they play a part in the formation and consolidation of the nation and the state (Sahlins 1989). By the 1990s these evolving relations between territory, identity and sovereignty emphasized by historians had also become the concern of political science.

Culture has not been a principal focus in political science analyses of power, territory and politics at international borders, although culture’s role in facilitating cross-border political and economic cooperation, as well as its place in the definition, recognition and behavior of ethnic groups, have become important parts of recent political scholarship. This reflects the evolution of political science as a discipline, and in particular a turn toward a concern with history, locality, ethnicity and regionalism. At the Mexico–US border, the politics of international boundaries initially focused on political culture – the attitudes and values that enable individuals and groups to be socialized into the ways of their political system – while in Europe greater attention has always been paid to the policy implications of boundary making. Yet here too culture was recognized as a factor in transfrontier collaboration, even if it was regarded as subsidiary to the politics and institutional frameworks which allowed orderly and predictable forms of international cooperation (see Anderson 1982).

Since the 1970s these interests have coalesced around the notion of “border regions,” a concept with evident similarities to both geography’s border landscapes and history’s borderlands. Case studies of border regions explored a range of cross-border policies, with studies on the environment, transportation and communication, immigration and border controls, policing crime and terrorism, and regional development. Border regions were recognized by political scientists as places and processes of identity and policy, including their making and meaning and, like geographers and historians, political scientists have become part of the wider theorizing about what culture can tell us about the role of borders in the shifting relationships among identity, territory and sovereignty. Although Anderson’s *Frontiers* (1996) ranges far and wide in comparative and empirical scope, it is significant that it highlights the role of identities in understanding international borders, as well as the role borders play in shaping identities such as ethnic, local, class, religious and linguistic. This emphasis reflects intellectual processes in political science that have parallels in the other social sciences, where the precise correspondence between nation, state and territory that was once assumed is being challenged through concepts such as border regions, borderlands and border landscapes. Like other scholars, political scientists, often through consideration of new theories of constructivism, are having to grapple with the proliferation of identities in a postindustrial and globalizing world, one in which the meanings of national and ethnic identity and their relations to territory

and sovereignty are no longer the self-evident givens that they were once taken to be. As part of these new initiatives, political scientists and political sociologists have turned to the consideration of multi- and interdisciplinarity (Brunet-Jailly 2005; Newman 2006a).

Sociologists have been subject to the same pressures to conform to the methods, theories and professional interests of their subject as have the proponents of the other social sciences. The study of social groups, institutions and movements has been the hallmark of international boundary studies in sociology. These studies are often framed as analyses of minority groups at and across state and subnational borderlines. This attention to minorities was due in part to the resurgence in ethnic identities in the 1960s and 1970s, and continues today as one of the major themes in the sociology of borders, although the ways in which minorities have been contextualized have changed. Earlier studies of assimilation, nation-building, migration, and ethnic conflict and accommodation have given way to studies of ethnic and national identity, the politics of identity, regionalism, the role of local social groups and institutions in cross-border cooperation, and border communities which straddle borderlines (for a review of perspectives in the sociology of international borders at this time, see Strassoldo 1989). The ambivalence of border life has been regarded by some sociologists as a defining feature of border societies (Strassoldo 1982: 152). Border people may demonstrate ambiguous identities because economic, cultural and linguistic factors pull them in two directions. This ambivalent border identity affects the role that border communities play in international cooperation and conflict.

Like other social scientists, sociologists have increasingly had to accommodate the fact that old definitions of sovereignty, which were dependent on the twin bases of state and territory, have given way to new ones which incorporate various versions of territory, statecraft, culture and identity (O'Dowd 2010). And as in the other disciplines so too in sociology, culture and identity have come to occupy a new prominence in the latest wave of border studies, reflecting their centrality in contemporary social research more generally (as may be seen in the work of Vila 2000, 2003, 2005 and Salzinger 2003; and in calls such as that of Turner 2007 to study the sociology of immobility in enclave societies; and of Burawoy 2003 to revisit ethnography). In fact, sociology has adopted ethnography as one of its principal methodologies to a degree that the boundaries between sociology and social anthropology across a wide range of interests are blurred, as may be witnessed in a review article on global ethnography in the *Annual Review of Sociology*, wherein much of the ethnography cited, especially in regard to borders, was done by anthropologists (Gille and Ó Riain 2002).

Disciplinary differences and similarities are not our prime focus here, however, because in our view the comparative study of borders need not concentrate on academic disciplines if the goal of research is to chronicle and understand how borders, and border cultures, societies, politics and economies, are not only changing due to major transformations in the global political economy, but also how borders often play key roles in these changes. We have focused so far in this introduction on the evolution of the anthropology of borders and the other social sciences over the last generation of scholarship as an example of how all of our scholarly disciplines have moved from a concentration on the discipline's major concerns, which often excluded

the theories, methods and results of other academic disciplines, and on individual, sometimes iconic, case studies, to what we argue here is the current state of affairs in border studies. In border studies today there has been a convergence in theoretical and methodological interests on a more interdisciplinary pursuit of comparative border studies, whether these are explicit or implicit. In these ways border studies may provide a productive way forward in how the social sciences and humanities may truly build the synergy in research and practical application of academic work which now seems to be so important in policy and university circles.

We still hold that, when in 1994 (Donnan and Wilson 1994) and in 1998 (Wilson and Donnan 1998) we asserted that an anthropology of borders was distinctive in a number of ways, we were both correct and prescient. But our conclusions then must now be weighed against what was also happening in our cognate disciplines, most notably among sociologists and geographers, who were drawing closer to anthropology through the widespread adoption of ethnographic methods. But we also want to acknowledge that our claim for distinctiveness of an anthropology of borders was as much directed at anthropologists, many of whom in our view were moving away from studies of the political economy of nation, state and territory, as it was directed at other social scientists, in order to draw their attention away from their own disciplinary concerns to recognize what anthropologists were doing.

Our aim then as it is now was to stress that in the study of borders multiple perspectives are invaluable, if not essential. These perspectives require flexibility and adaptability, to respond better to the needs and concerns of multiple populations who live and work at and across borders, but also to those of many academic disciplines and scholarly approaches. Thus the multiple perspectives we invoke and which are represented in this volume often involve one or more of the following: an ethnographic sensibility that is simultaneously sensitive to political economic context; ethnographic and other methodological approaches that are holistic insofar as they can draw out the interconnections among border phenomena while remaining problem oriented; micro- and macro-comparisons, both narrow and broad, across space and through time; and a recognition of the limitations of a perspective whose starting point is a Euro-American understanding of borders and states. This multiplicity in approach is now largely taken for granted in much contemporary writing in border studies, but it was not always so. The dynamism of life and work at borders and among border peoples, and the changing dimensions of global political economy, have pushed border studies to challenge disciplinary compartmentalization. As a result, border studies today offer a heady mix of disciplinary concerns with multiple disciplinary perspectives, in a provocative fusion of theories, methods and comparison.

BORDER STUDIES TODAY

Up to and including the 1990s, while the other disciplines each in their way looked at borderlands, border regions and border landscapes in much the same way as anthropology focused on border identities and cultural contact and mixing, the social sciences had all adopted approaches to international borders which predominantly