

**Borders**  
**Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State**

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## Borders and Boundaries in Anthropology

The new frontier is no longer distinguished by space alone. The people on it no longer merely face one another in a struggle for a common culture for their interactions. Rather, the frontier is marked by the cultural selectivity of peoples and interest groups in a world in which variety is rapidly swelling, not ebbing. The frontier is all around us.

Bohannan, 'Introduction' in *Beyond the Frontier*

This chapter examines the growing body of literature on the anthropology of 'borders' and 'boundaries'. It identifies the different approaches which anthropologists have taken to each of these concepts, and points out that while they have sometimes conflated them, at other times they have been careful to draw a distinction.<sup>1</sup> Some anthropologists have been primarily interested in the social boundaries which order social relations and mark membership in collectivities, others in the cultural boundaries which separate different worlds of meaning, and yet others in boundaries whose principal characteristic is that they are marked in geopolitical space. Of course, these three elements – the social, the cultural and the territorial – are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They may distinguish different types of boundary but they need not; they may, in fact, be aspects of a single boundary. In this chapter, we identify three dominant patterns of usage or emphasis in recent anthropological research on borders and boundaries, each of which is marked to some extent by an associated body of literature. An obvious danger of any such categorisation is that it risks over-emphasising the differences and separation between the categories. As we shall see, some of the work we consider seeks to

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'Border' has ranked high among the major buzzwords of the 1990s. Part of its power has been the many contexts of use to which it lends itself. Borders can be identified almost everywhere and at every level of society and culture. But this is also a potential disadvantage, for it risks, of course, losing its focus. We do not pretend to be arbiters of terminological usage, but we do think that some sorting out is long overdue, of approach and focus of study if not of terminology. It is almost a quarter of a century since the potential confusion generated by different usages of 'border' and associated terms was first remarked upon (see Blacking 1975; Hannerz 1975). In this chapter, we retain the terminology of the literature and case studies discussed, but only in order to avoid entanglement in repeated terminological clarifications. Nevertheless, we should be clear that these usages do not always match our own definitional prejudices, which we have set out in chapter one.

problematise the relationship between social and cultural boundaries.<sup>2</sup> Some also seeks to problematise the relationship between the social, the cultural and the territorial.

Anthropologists were not always interested in boundaries, or at least not in the sense used in recent years. Early anthropological concern with society as a functioning organic whole meant that anthropologists were interested in boundaries chiefly as a device to define and delimit the 'edges' of their subject matter. Several generations of British social anthropologists in particular sought to isolate for study populations which could in some sense be regarded as socially and culturally discrete. 'Boundaries' were of interest only in so far as they enabled 'closure' of the research population; what was of real interest was not the boundary itself or relations across it, but the practices, beliefs and institutions of those it encompassed. It was believed that cultural diversity could be explained by geographical or social isolation and that the best way to analyse such diversity was to study the separate cultural worlds of which it was composed. The result was a body of influential work produced by the structural-functionalists on, for instance, the 'Tallensi' and the 'Tiv', studies which, together with work on a few dozen other 'tribes', have become the classics of the discipline. Even as recently as the 1970s, 'bounding' one's study area in this way was a pressing concern for many intending fieldworkers, though ways were being sought to transcend its limitations (cf. Gluckman 1964).

Of course, there were theoretical perspectives which potentially threatened to subvert this approach by directing attention to relations across rather than within these culturally bounded wholes. The diffusionists, for instance, were interested in how certain traits had apparently transcended cultural barriers and had been communicated from one culture area to another (cf. Rosaldo 1989: 228n). Acculturation theory similarly sought to address relations across cultural boundaries (see Bohannan and Plog 1967). But by mid-century the diffusionists were all but discredited, and by and large it was the structural-functional approach, and subsequently its offspring, the 'community study', which dominated research. By the late 1960s this had slowly begun to change, partly in response to the increasing mobility of peoples whom anthropologists had hitherto studied as cultural isolates, and who were now gradually being released from the colonial grip and were experiencing industrialisation and urbanisation. The boundaries of the study group could now no longer or so easily be traced in geographical space, but had shifted to the cities of the rapidly decolonising world, where members of different groups were increasingly being thrown together. A new set of perspectives emerged, necessarily more conscious of and sensitive to a world where people of varied

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The emphasis on 'social organisation' is evident in the titles of some of the chief exemplars of this pattern: Barth's *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* and Cohen's *Belonging: Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures*.

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backgrounds and experiences came into contact. The boundaries between these people thus themselves became of interest.

The history of the theoretical development of British social anthropology and American cultural anthropology could therefore be characterised as marked by a

discernible shift of focus: from an interest in what a boundary encompasses to an interest in the boundary itself. No one has perhaps done more to put boundaries on the anthropological map than Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth, and it is to his work, and to that stimulated by his insights, that we now turn.

### **Social and Symbolic Boundaries**

In 1969 Barth published *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, an edited collection of essays which set out to address ‘the problems of poly-ethnic organization’ (1969: vii), or what happens when different cultural groups come into contact. In his introduction to this collection, Barth questions the value of a view that sees the world as divided up into social collectivities which correlate neatly with discrete and discontinuous cultures. Instead, for Barth, ethnic groups are socially constructed, made up of individuals who strategically manipulate their cultural identity by emphasising or underplaying it according to context. People may cross the boundaries between groups should they find it advantageous to do so, and may maintain regular relations across them, but this does not affect the durability and stability of the boundaries themselves. Cultural emblems and differences are thus significant only in so far as they are socially effective, as an organisational device for articulating social relations.

We do not intend to elucidate here the many different insights generated by Barth and his colleagues in their short collection of essays, but it will be useful to summarise some of the salient points they make about ethnic boundaries. Above all, Barth argues that ethnic groups cannot be understood in terms of long lists of ‘objectively’ identified cultural attributes. People may stress some cultural traits in their dealings with other groups but ignore others, and we cannot predict these in advance. Instead, it is much more productive to view ethnic groups as an ‘organizational type’; as categories in which membership is based on self-ascription and ascription by others. As long as individuals themselves claim membership in a particular ethnic category, and are willing to be treated as such by others, they express their allegiance to the shared culture of this category however that shared culture might be signalled. From this perspective, the boundary between categories becomes the critical focus for investigation: how and why are such boundaries maintained in the face of personnel flows and systematic relations across them? What sorts of rules structure behaviour at and across boundaries in such a way as to allow those boundaries to endure? Ethnic groups are not simply the automatic by-product of pre-existing cultural differences, but are the consequences of

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organisational work undertaken by their members who, for whatever reason, are marked off and mark themselves off from other collectivities in a process of inclusion and exclusion which differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’. The pressing question as far as Barth is concerned, therefore, is why inter-group boundaries are sharply marked even as people cross them and even as the cultural differences between the groups change.

Barth's observations clearly challenged existing wisdoms and his suggestion, in a phrase which has been widely cited since, that the critical focus of investigation

should be ‘the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses’ (Barth 1969: 15, emphasis in original) set the agenda for much subsequent research. Judith Okely (1983), for example, explicitly employs Barth's insights to illustrate how Traveller-Gypsies in Britain maintain a distinct identity in the face of continuing and regular contact with the non-Gypsy, or Gorgio, population. Some Gypsy cultural traits, such as pollution beliefs, are employed as symbols of identity, while others are not, and important traits may change over time and be replaced by others. Moreover, Okely argues, even though some aspects of Gypsy culture resemble aspects of the wider society, this cultural overlap with the Gorgio population does not necessarily weaken Gypsy identity, nor the Gypsy–Gorgio boundary. Indeed, Gypsy beliefs should not be seen independently of the wider society, ‘mainly because they create and express symbolic boundaries between the minority and majority’ (1983: 78). Okely thus directs our attention to the importance of viewing any boundary from both sides, from both within and without, a point developed by Sandra Wallman (1978), who considers several possible analogies for describing how social boundaries are always the outcome of a two-sided process. Following Yehudi Cohen (1969), a boundary might be seen as a balloon which responds to changes in internal and external air pressure. While this is helpful in so far as it emphasises how the size, quality and significance of a boundary can vary through time, it does not allow for the possibility, to which Barth initially alerted us, that boundaries may be crossed without threatening their existence. The more permeable teabag, Wallman (1978: 205) suggests, might therefore be a better if more prosaic image with which to visualise the relationship. Wallman's point here in invoking such analogies is that we must never forget that a boundary occurs only as a reaction of one system to another, and is thus necessarily oppositional, having two sides.

But according to Wallman, boundaries also have two kinds of meaning. The first is structural or organisational, by which she means that a social boundary ‘marks the edge of a social system, the *interface* between that system and one of those contiguous upon it’ (Wallman 1978: 206, emphasis in original). This interface is between two systems of activity, of organisation, or of meaning and, following Douglas (1970), is liable to be characterised by ambiguity and danger. At the same time a boundary also has significance for the members of these systems. Its second meaning, therefore, refers to how it marks members off from non-members and

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acts as the basis by which each can be identified. For Wallman, all social boundaries thus do not just have two sides, but are characterised by an interface line between inside and outside, as well as by an identity line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (cf. Ross 1975). ‘The *interface element*’, she continues, ‘marks a change in what goes on. The *identity element* marks the significance given to that change and expresses the participants’ relation to it’ (Wallman 1978: 207, emphases in original). These elements are arranged by Wallman across a four-part matrix, as illustrated in [Figure 2.1](#).

Although Wallman is chiefly interested in elucidating processes of ‘race’ and ethnicity in England, she identifies a number of potentially productive lines of inquiry for the study of social boundaries more generally. Any social boundary, she argues, must be seen as a consequence of the various possible relationships between identity

and interface on both sides of itself. Because so many different factors can influence the social meaning of difference, and can shift the point of interface between one system and another, a range of questions must be asked of each element:

What *kind* of resource is this boundary? What is it used *for*? In which (and how many) contexts is it relevant? What is its status in historical or situational time? For whom is it an asset, for whom a liability? With what other differences is it congruent or associated? What meaning does it have on the other (outer) side? (Wallman 1978: 208, emphases in original).

All of these questions draw attention to the relational nature of social boundaries and to the way in which they, and the manner in which they are marked, may alter through time. This issue of the marking of boundaries and their meaning has been subject to systematic investigation by Anthony Cohen in an influential series of

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## Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State

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books (1982a, 1985, 1986a, 1987). Cohen was led to a focus on boundaries by his dissatisfaction with the analytical inadequacy of classical sociological and anthropological notions of 'community' which stressed structure or morphology as its defining feature. A community exists, Cohen insists, only by virtue of its opposition to another community. The notion is thus relational, implying both similarity and difference, and the best place to study the everyday practices of exclusion and inclusion is at a community's boundary. The debt to Barth is both obvious and openly acknowledged.

Cohen is interested in understanding the importance of community in people's experience. He is consequently interested in what the boundary means to people or, as he puts it, with 'the meanings they give to it' (A. P. Cohen 1985: 12). These boundaries are constructed by people in their interactions with others from whom they wish to distinguish themselves but, unlike the markers of national boundaries, we cannot objectively determine in advance what the distinguishing features of these symbolic boundaries will be, nor exactly where the boundaries will be drawn. Moreover, they may mean different things to different individuals, both to those on opposite sides of a boundary as well as to those within it. In fact, boundaries recognised by some may be invisible to others (A. P. Cohen 1985: 13). The task of the researcher, therefore, is to uncover these boundaries and the meanings they are given, for only in this way can we grasp what 'belonging' to a community involves. With this emphasis on people's own experiences of boundaries and their perceptions of them, Cohen would seem to be principally concerned with what Wallman earlier called the 'identity element' of a boundary.

In Britain at least, which is the focus for Cohen and the contributors to his two edited collections (1982a, 1986a), the symbolic marking of community boundaries has become increasingly important as the significance of the structural parameters of community have weakened or disappeared. Cohen argues that ties of locality, kinship and class have all been transformed as technological advances in communication have swept local diversity under a carpet of cultural homogeneity and as local communities have become ever more tightly bound to the wider political and administrative structures of the state. What remains distinctive about locality and community, therefore, is not their structural differentiation from other similar entities, which is both difficult to discern and has slowly been eroded, but their *sense* of difference and distinctiveness. Community difference and identity now reside less in the structures which once seemed to underpin them than in the minds of the people who express them. Consequently, it is in symbolism, rather than in structure, that we must 'seek the boundaries of their worlds of identity and diversity' (A. P. Cohen 1986b: 2). This insight that structural boundaries have given way to symbolic boundaries is shown by contributors to be applicable whatever the scale of boundary in question, from the boundaries inside households (Bouquet 1986) to the boundaries between different ethnic collectivities (McFarlane 1986). Cohen's

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framework thus claims to be all-encompassing, applicable to boundaries at whatever level of social organisation is being studied.

At the same time, however, Cohen indicates that structure does matter. He recognises that it is insufficient to focus only on the intricacies of relations within a local boundary, and argues that any local collectivity must be viewed in context of the wider societal relationships and entities of which it forms a part. He thus endeavours to show how experience of one can mediate the meaning of the other: how wider political and economic forces impinge upon locality and vice versa (see A. P. Cohen 1982a: 12). However, what this often comes down to, as Banks (1996) and others have pointed out, is an argument about the ways in which external forces can be manipulated to symbolic advantage at the local level: how a harbour blockade as an 'extra-local' event is used by Shetland fishermen to articulate local difference and

solidarity (A. P. Cohen 1982b) or how centrally formulated government policy can be made ‘grist to the symbolic mill of cultural distance’ and boundary marking (A. P. Cohen 1986b: 17). This tendency to focus on the ‘inside’ is exacerbated by the fact that much of the ethnography presented by Cohen and his contributors draws upon research among peripheral minorities. The result is, as several critics have remarked, that one side of the boundary between localities and the structures beyond has tended to receive rather more attention than the other (see, for example, Banks 1996: 148). ‘[E]conomic, political and informational ties to the complex state systems of the British Isles’ are recognised as ‘present[ing] powerful constraints’ on the articulation of local identities (A. P. Cohen 1982a: 12), and thus on the way in which boundaries are drawn, but it is the manner in which the former are absorbed by the latter that is the principal subject of analysis.

Similar criticisms have been levelled at Barth. As we have seen, Barth, too, emphasises that boundary making involves both self-ascription and ascription by others. But he too tends to focus on one side rather than the other, emphasising internal identification rather than external constraint and the shaping influence of wider structures, such as those of class and the state (see, for instance, Asad 1972). However, as Jenkins points out, it is important to distinguish ‘between two analytically distinct processes of ascription: *group identification* and *social categorization*. The first occurs *inside* the ... boundary, the second *outside* and across it’ (1997: 23, emphases in original). Jenkins argues that Barth and Wallman (and, one might add, Cohen) elide this distinction in their assertions that ‘ethnicity depends on ascription from *both* sides of the group boundary’. As a result, they minimise the relative power relations upon which ‘categorisation’ especially depends, underplaying the fact that members of one group may be able to impose their categorisations on the members of another group. By recognising that some groups may be better able than others to make their categorisations stick we give greater theoretical centrality to relationships of domination and subordination, as Jenkins

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(1997: 23) notes. We shall see that some of those who focus on state boundaries attempt to build this dimension into their analyses.

### **Geopolitical and State Boundaries**

State boundaries obviously entail a mapping out in geographic space and recognition in international law. They mark the limits of sovereignty and of state control over citizens and subjects, limits which may be upheld by force or by the threat of force. Because of this, they have a tangible and visible quality less evident of symbolic boundaries. They are ‘objective’, or at least have an objective dimension to them, rather than ‘subjective’ (cf. A. P. Cohen 1985: 12). Some scholars therefore refer to them as *real* borders in a shorthand attempt to distinguish them from symbolic boundaries which have no necessary territorial equivalent. This can be misleading, for whatever else state boundaries might be they are obviously also cultural and symbolic. Moreover, symbolic boundaries are no less ‘real’ for not being physically marked, since they are clearly real in their consequences. Nevertheless, while geopolitical territorial boundaries are necessarily always also cultural and symbolic, it

is worth recalling that the reverse is not true, and that cultural and symbolic boundaries do not always have a spatial dimension.

State boundaries have not been subject to systematic scrutiny by anthropologists to the same extent as have symbolic boundaries. They have therefore not been so heavily theorised by them. By and large, this has been left to other disciplines, such as political science and political geography, as we examine in chapter three. This is not because anthropologists have failed to conduct field research at international boundaries. Nor is it because anthropologists have been wholly unaware of or uninterested in the ways in which state boundaries can impinge upon their subject matter. Rather, it is because their questions have, until recently, led them in other directions. Even where a state border has figured in the lives of those studied by anthropologists, it has rarely been problematised as a primary focus for empirical investigation or theoretical reflection. Although Needham, for instance, considered it sufficiently important to contextualise his analyses of Purum society by mentioning its proximity to the Indo–Burma border, he remained thoroughly preoccupied by other considerations (see, for example, Needham 1958, 1962). Goody (1970) too, driven by the pressing issues of the day, focused on the ‘inheritance frontier’ between matrilineal and patrilineal groupings rather than on the border between Ghana and Upper Volta near which he worked. And where ‘frontier’, ‘state’ and ‘border’ are more explicitly considered, as in Leach’s (1960) ‘The frontiers of “Burma”’, it is to show how such European concepts do not always straightforwardly apply elsewhere.

In much of the literature we consider in this section, the borders themselves appear chiefly as a backdrop to some other line of inquiry. They are often no more

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than an analytically distant presence with a vague influence on whatever the topic in hand; at worst, they are merely part of the obligatory ‘scene-setting’, their study relinquished to political scientists and geographers. As a result, we are compelled to approach them obliquely, by stealth and subterfuge rather than directly. From the perspective of this book, then, the history of the anthropological study of state boundaries might be said to be a history of missed opportunities.<sup>3</sup> It has certainly been unsystematised, with few of those who have worked and written about state and sub-state or regional borders citing the work of others who have made similar studies. In this respect, the study of these borders is in marked contrast to the clear intellectual genealogising and cross-referencing characteristic of the study of symbolic boundaries outlined in the previous section and typical, as we shall see later, of a ‘postmodern’ reading of borders.

This omission is particularly striking in the case of the first four authors we consider. All four were associated in one way or another with the University of Manchester. One called his book ‘Frontiertown’, the other three published books which mention ‘borders’ in their titles.<sup>4</sup> Three of them carried out their field research within five years of each other in the 1950s, two of these – Abner Cohen and Ronald Frankenberg – while based in the Department of Social Anthropology at Manchester whose Head, Professor Max Gluckman, wrote introductions to their monographs, and the third – Rosemary Harris – while a student at the Queen’s University of Belfast (but who, with Gluckman’s encouragement, published her book with Manchester University Press<sup>5</sup>).

The fourth – Myron Aronoff – carried out his research in the 1960s, again while based at the University of Manchester and again under Gluckman's patronage and supervision. Given these connections, we might seem here, in hindsight, to have an embryonic 'school' of border studies. But it does not appear to have been recognised as such at the time, since none of these authors cross-references the work of the others, nor does Gluckman draw

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In his review of anthropology's overall contribution to the scholarship of the US–Mexico border, which was then and still is the most studied state border, Ellwyn Stoddard concluded that while anthropology, of all the social sciences, has the methods and skills most appropriate to borderlands research, it nonetheless had done little to support contemporary comparative study of that border and, perhaps because of its biases, had actually impeded the 'scientific research of Mexican-Americans' there (1975: 52).

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*Village on the Border: A Social Study of Religion, Politics and Football in a North Wales Community* (Frankenberg 1957); *Arab Border-Villages in Israel: A Study of Continuity and Change in Social Organization* (A. Cohen 1965); *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ulster: A Study of Neighbours and 'Strangers' in a Border Community* (Harris 1972).

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Gluckman was general editor of the series in which Harris's book appeared and is mentioned by Harris (1972: vi) in her acknowledgements as having 'steadily insisted that I must publish an account of Ballybeg'. It is interesting to note that Anthony Cohen was also connected with Manchester University, although his contribution came much later: he was lecturer in sociology and in anthropology there, and also published much of his work with Manchester University Press.

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any connections between them in his introductory essays. The pressing theoretical concerns of the period clearly led in other directions, and it is the cross-cutting ties which constrain conflict that provide a unifying theme for these monographs. The potential theoretical interest of a common focus on state and regional borders is thus left hanging, as a loose theoretical thread that needs tying.

Despite the title, Frankenberg (1957) actually makes curiously little mention of the border in his *Village on the Border*. It is not even listed in the index. None the less, he does note how social relations in the Welsh village in which he worked bear the imprint of the nearby English–Welsh border, both historically and in the present. Local relations in the village of 'Pentrediwaith' are insidiously inflected by the border, whose historical legacy can be traced in the divisions among villagers which Frankenberg recorded during his fieldwork. Although more complex in practice, the inhabitants of 'Pentre' are categorised locally as 'insiders' (Pentre people) or 'outsiders'. These two categories map crudely onto a number of other oppositions, such that insiders are generally associated with the Parish Council and are generally wage-earners, Welsh-speaking and Nonconformist ('Chapel'). In contrast, outsiders are associated with the Bench, and are self-employed, Englishspeaking and Anglican

(‘Church’). This twofold divide has the further overtones of, respectively, the distinction between tenant/labour on the one hand and landlord/ capital on the other, a distinction which itself derives from and recalls the historic border between England and Wales (Frankenberg 1957: 11–12). Local conflict thus always threatens to escalate into a question of nationality. Only cross-cutting linkages (of kinship, common residence and common social and economic interests) help to keep this threat in check: ‘open and continuous breach is not possible. If it did occur it would place in conflict not only friends but different members of the same family. Thus “national” divisions are at village level modified by the face-to-face character of village society’ (Frankenberg 1957: 18). In short, the divisions to which the nearby regional border draws attention and which it underscores are domesticated by the exigencies of the daily round at the local level. Such is the reality of everyday life for Frankenberg’s residents in the ‘village on the border’. Frankenberg thus does tell us that the border is significant, but not perhaps to the extent that the book’s title might lead us to expect.

Not surprisingly, Frankenberg looked for inspiration to some of the compelling studies of his day: to studies of tribal Africa carried out by the generation of British social anthropologists of the time, and particularly to the work of those from his own institution, the University of Manchester. Indeed, the chief interest of Frankenberg’s book as far as Gluckman is concerned, and as he remarks in his introduction, ‘lies in its application of ideas developed in the study of tribal society to a community in Britain’ (Gluckman 1957: 7). Frankenberg’s juxtapositions are indeed interesting and insightful, and might still be read with benefit by those with an interest in British rural society. But at the same time his selection of comparative

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theoretical work is revealing: might one not have supposed that a work nominally interested in a ‘border village’ would make at least passing reference to, for example, Frederick Jackson Turner’s (1977 [1920]) frontier thesis and the subsequent elaboration of this thesis by a succession of critics, to Kroeber’s (1953) reflections on boundaries and frontiers in his introduction to *North American culture areas*, to Lattimore’s (1968 [1956]) article on the ‘frontier in history’, or even to the Chicago School’s discussion of city boundaries and urban zoning (for instance, Park, Burgess and McKenzie 1967 [1925])? Given what we said earlier about the ‘bounding’ of tribal studies in the British social anthropological tradition, the importing to Britain of insights from tribal ethnography was hardly likely to encourage the inclusion of such work.

Harris’s study of an Irish border village, ‘Ballybeg’, fares only slightly better on these measures. There are a couple of entries under ‘border’ in the index, but still no mention of Turner, Lattimore or Park nor any sustained attempt to include mention of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic as any more than a backdrop to the analysis. Nevertheless, it is a backdrop which Harris stresses is highly significant:

the border certainly exerted a definite influence on the pattern of social relationships in the area. Most vitally, perhaps, it crystallised the opposition to each other of Catholic and Protestant ... The border, close physically and omnipresent

psychologically, brought into sharp contrast not only those actually separated by it but those separated because their opinions about it were opposed (Harris 1972: 20).

Harris thus makes it abundantly clear that Ballybeg's proximity to the border can intensify local feelings of prejudice and antagonism. Indeed, because of the border's impact on Ballybeg the reader is advised to be wary of assuming that what was true of it was also true of other areas in Northern Ireland (1972: vii); the influence of the border may have made it unrepresentative. But though Harris thereby identifies the border's pivotal significance for Ballybeg, her analytical objectives lie less in elaborating this point than, like Frankenberg, in showing how conflict in a polarised society – this time divided between Catholic and Protestant – is restrained by cross-cutting personal relationships and the norms which apply to them. As a result, the border itself remains largely just off the theoretical stage, impinging on the play of life in Ballybeg but external to it, and thus taken for granted rather than made the subject of a generalising or comparative analysis. In our experience and research, however, it is clear that the border in Northern Ireland today is never taken for granted in communities situated near it, precisely because it functions as a structure and symbol of differentials in status, power and politics.

Abner Cohen (1965) is less content to leave the border as a backdrop to his study of social change and continuity in the Arab villages of 'The Triangle' between

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Israel and Jordan. Cohen sets out to explain why an indigenous and ancient form of political organisation based on patrilineal descent – the *hamula* – should suddenly re-emerge as a significant political force in the late 1950s when its importance had been steadily declining over the previous hundred years. The *hamula* had been the dominant form of political organisation in the early nineteenth century, its solidarity underwritten by the maintenance of a joint estate and by a high proportion of endogamous marriages. At the end of the British Mandate in Palestine in 1948 this system had all but broken down and had been replaced by 'class' divisions based on socio-economic status. These cut across historical allegiances to *hamulas*, greatly weakening their political efficacy. After the establishment of the Israeli state, and by the time of Cohen's fieldwork in 1959, the situation had changed again. The wealthy families which for much of the century had dominated village life by forging a cross-*hamula* 'alliance' no longer found it so easy to exercise their power. As their opponents consolidated in patrilineages to challenge them, so their own agnates rallied round, resulting in a renewed emphasis on patriliney as the basis of political action. It is Cohen's contention that the Israel–Jordan border is the key to understanding the dynamics of this historical cycle.

Cohen argues that this revival of an old, indigenous political form in response to contemporary circumstances is a consequence of a constellation of economic and political conditions which he refers to as 'The Border Situation'. The border situation which emerged at the end of the 1948–9 Palestinian war was to change life dramatically for the Arab villagers of the Triangle. According to Cohen (1965: 9–18), four main components characterised the border situation after the armistice boundaries had been drawn up in 1949: (i) some families were cut off from their land and kin in what were their parent villages only a few miles away in Jordan and with

which, prior to 1949, relations had been intense; (ii) Triangle villages were now suddenly isolated from Arab national organisation which had emerged during the Mandate; (iii) villagers became increasingly incorporated within the framework of Israeli society from which they derived economic advantage; and (iv) the area now became of great strategic importance. In short, though these Arab villages were not of the Israeli state they were, nevertheless, clearly in many ways a part of it, 'caught between ... two opposing fronts, because they happen to be near the border' (A. Cohen 1965: 16).

Much of Cohen's book is concerned with documenting how the resurrection of *hamula* politics was a reaction to these border-specific conditions: for instance, the hold of the 'class'-based cross-*hamula* elite was weakened as rich families were cut off from some of their land and as the Israeli economy opened up new sources of income for all villagers. For Cohen, the border is thus more than a backdrop; it creates the very conditions of everyday life for these Arab villagers and as such is at the heart of his explanation. Cohen is quite explicit about the analytical centrality of the border: 'The reality of the border is thus thrust upon the

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Triangle villages ... [Hostility at the border] ... has become a major factor underlying the social organization of these villages, and cannot therefore be treated as a temporary, or abnormal, phenomenon any longer, nor can it be regarded as just an "intruding factor" in village society' (A. Cohen 1965: 17).

While its theoretical foundation has been radically critiqued (Asad 1975), of the four Manchester border monographs Cohen's is perhaps the most stimulating for the modern border scholar. Although writing about the same country – Israel – and out of the same theoretical stable – Manchester – Myron Aronoff (1974) does little to advance Cohen's reflections on borders, and surprisingly does not even cite them. In *Frontiertown*, his monograph on the politics of community building in a new town in the Negev Desert, Aronoff has two main concerns: the first of these, which once again explicitly acknowledges the intellectual debt to Gluckman (Aronoff 1974: xiii, 12), is to examine the role of political strife and cross-cutting loyalties in the creation of community cohesion; and the second is to explore the links between local and national political organisation. Although *Frontiertown* is 'close to the Jordanian border' (Aronoff 1974: 41), the border itself is rarely mentioned. Instead, the focus is firmly on the relationships between local-level political organisation in this border community and the ministries, organs and agencies of the Israeli state. Aronoff does not make it clear if the Jordanian border's proximity gives any specific inflection to these relations other than to impart to them a sense of urgency and strategic significance. Nevertheless, while the presence of the border itself at times seems almost incidental, Aronoff's emphasis on the state does usefully alert us to the interdependency between local-level politics and wider political structures. In this particular case, as Aronoff (1974: 17) tells us, the outcome of this relationship for *Frontiertown* provides a striking example of 'the primacy of national over local interests'. As we shall see later, this need not always be the outcome where border politics are involved.

In fairness, we note that none of these four anthropologists sets out to examine border life specifically. Rather, their aim was to demonstrate the value of Gluckman's insight that community cohesion can be generated, and radical cleavage prevented, by cross-cutting conflicts of loyalty and allegiance. In this they were no different from a number of other ethnographers trained in Manchester at the time. It is not even clear from their work if they selected a border area for study because they thought it a potentially rich location for researching competing loyalties. Yet by selecting such a field site these ethnographers could be said to have laid the foundation for current border studies. All of them noted the significance of proximity to a border for the communities they studied, and while only Cohen was to explore this influence systematically, each recognised it to varying degrees. Although not specifically focused on culture, nation and state at international borders, their work nevertheless showed the value of localised studies for the understanding of how cultural landscapes are superimposed across social and political divides.

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Almost a decade after Cohen's book, John Cole and Eric Wolf (1974), two American anthropologists, published *The Hidden Frontier*, a study of 'ecology and ethnicity' in the Italian Tyrol. This time the field site had been explicitly chosen because of the fact that, historically, it had been partitioned and repartitioned, and had been left, in the 1960s when the study was carried out, with a population whose ethnic attachments allowed Wolf to pursue the issues which interested him: such as, why ethnic and nationalist loyalties so often seem to transcend class loyalties and ties of formal citizenship (Cole and Wolf 1974: 4). Abner Cohen, of course, had raised similar questions. In fact, the two studies share a number of interests in common. Like Cohen, Cole and Wolf set out to explore how what happens at the local level can challenge or confirm developments in the 'larger system'; as in *Arab Border-Villages*, they were thus 'interested in the transformations of local ... political alignments in relation to the promptings of market and nation-building' (Cole and Wolf 1974: 4). Furthermore, in both studies these transformations take on their particular urgency because they occur at the politically sensitive margins of the state; and (again in both studies) among ethnic minorities incompletely incorporated into the national body or resistant to it. It is puzzling, then, that Cole and Wolf do not refer to *Arab Border-Villages* or build explicitly upon its insights, especially when they were obviously aware of Cohen's other work (they cite his later book, *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa*, published in 1969). Again this seems to be an example of the apparently non-cumulative nature of border studies during this period and, indeed, of its lack of any real theoretical or methodological core.

The main focus of *The Hidden Frontier* is on two villages in northern Italy, only a mile or two apart but located in the separate Italian Provinces of Alto Adige and Trentino. Before the First World War these provinces, and the two villages, had been integral parts of the Austrian 'Tyrol', but were transferred to Italy by the peace settlement in 1919. Alto Adige, which was German-speaking, was cut off from the German-speaking Tyrolese who remained a part of Austria to the north, and to whom there remained a strong allegiance. The residents of Alto Adige now became an ethnic minority within Italy, and resisted attempts at incorporation by the Italian state under whose control they now found themselves.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Trentino, which was Romance-speaking and which even when under Austrian domination had been seen as

part of Italy, was welcomed back into the fold and quickly integrated into the Italian nation. Although briefly reunited under the Third

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The border region of Friuli in north-eastern Italy – Holmes (1989) – bears some potentially interesting similarities to the Italian Tyrol: before the First World War both had been under Habsburg control and both had their borders extended at the end of the war, resulting in the incorporation into Italy of a large German-speaking minority. Consideration of the issues raised, however, are subordinated to Holmes's main aim of elaborating the concept of peasant-worker society.

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Reich, the Tyrol was again partitioned at the end of the Second World War. This dashed any hopes of future reunification for the German-speakers of Alto Adige, who now sought some form of accommodation to the new Italian Republic at the same time as they continued to defend themselves against social and cultural encroachment by the Italians (see Cole and Wolf 1974: 270–1, 272). This remained the situation at the time of fieldwork.

Cole and Wolf trace the impress of these dramatic events on life in the villages of St Felix (German-speaking) and Tret (Romance-speaking). What particularly interested them about the South Tyrol was the durability of this cultural frontier long after the political borders of state and empire had shifted. National boundaries had clearly survived the demise of state boundaries, and remained important to everyday routine. Despite the many similarities between these villages, especially those arising from living in a shared mountain environment, each had followed a different political and cultural course since the settlement of 1919. Distinguished, among other things, by their rules of inheritance and the political and ideological consequences of these rules, villagers played down their differences from one another in everyday encounters, yet once in company of their own were quick to resort to ethnic stereotypes to explain the actions of the others. Cole and Wolf (1974: 281) thus reiterate Barth's (1969) observation that ethnic boundaries may be maintained despite relations across them. Their major contribution, however, and of principal interest to the present discussion, was in showing how we must move beyond purely local influences to understand and explain this process.

Here, then, we have an example of where ethnic boundaries arise as a result of, and are sensitive to, the rise and demise of state boundaries. One can only be understood with reference to the other. In this respect Cole and Wolf could be said to represent the coming together of a symbolic boundary focus with a political economy perspective which attempts to situate local boundary making within wider historical and political processes. *The Hidden Frontier* was innovative in combining these perspectives, and as such stands as an early exemplar of what a border study can be like, offering a sophisticated mix of ethnographic fieldwork, historical documentation and political–economic approach. By introducing a political economy perspective to Barth's emphasis on symbolic boundaries, Cole and Wolf effectively marked an important transition in the anthropological study of boundaries and heralded the beginning of a new form of inquiry. However, since much of the more recent

literature forms the basis of our book, and is discussed in detail later, we do no more here than provide a brief sketch of how the field subsequently developed (see also Donnan and Wilson 1994b).

From the 1970s onwards, anthropologists began to use their field research at international or interstate borders as a means of widening perspectives in political anthropology to encompass the formal and informal ties between local communities and the larger polities of which they are a part. We have already seen how Aronoff

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(1974) used a border field site as a means of focusing on nation and state building in Israel, and other anthropologists did likewise for other regions of the globe (on Africa and India see, respectively, Kopytoff 1987; Pettigrew 1994). Some studied border areas as a way of examining how proximity to an international border could influence local culture (Douglass 1977; Heyman 1991; Kavanagh 1994) or could create the conditions which shape new rural and urban communities (Alvarez 1991; Price 1973, 1974). Others focused on the voluntary and involuntary movement of people across borders as traders, migrants and refugees (Alvarez 1994; Alvarez and Collier 1994; Hann and Hann 1992; Hansen 1994; Malkki 1992). Yet others concentrated on the symbols and meanings which encode border life (James 1979, 1988; Lask 1994; Lavie 1990; Shanks 1994; Stokes 1994). Regardless of theoretical orientation or locale, however, most of these studies have 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 neighbours.

This new anthropological interest in how local developments can have an impact on national centres of power and hegemony was partly influenced by historical analyses of localities and the construction of national identities (see, for example, Sahlins 1989), and recalls Cole and Wolf's insistence on the need to view the anthropology of borders as historical anthropology. As the South Tyrol case so clearly shows, borders are spatial and temporal records of relationships between local communities and between states. Ethnographic explorations of the intersection of symbolic and state boundaries have salience beyond anthropology because of what they may tell us of the history of cultural practices as well as the role of border cultures and communities in policy-making and diplomacy. We shall see some examples of this later. But for the moment it is enough to note the growing importance of a border perspective in political anthropology, a perspective in which the dialectical relations between border areas and their nations and states take precedence over local culture viewed with the state as a backdrop. What we must do now is examine the last of the three main ways in which we suggest that 'border' has recently been used by anthropologists: as a metaphor for the cultural borders of the contemporary cosmopolitan world.

It is important to note that this last pattern of use partly grew out of experience of the US–Mexico border and to which, therefore, it is in a sense organically linked. The US–Mexico border is the only state border to have generated a sizeable body of scholarly work from many different disciplinary perspectives. Anthropologists too have made their contribution, though in the 1950s and 1960s much of their work, like that outlined above, used the border to frame the study rather than integrating it as a variable in the analysis. As elsewhere, it is only more recently that the wider political

and economic context has featured in analyses of the US– Mexico border, where the issues of underdevelopment, transnationalism, and the

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globalisation of power and capital, among other aspects of culture, increasingly concern the growing number of historically informed and wide-ranging ethnographic accounts (for an overview, see Alvarez 1995). Some of this work has followed broadly in the tradition of Cole and Wolf and, as we shall see later, has examined the historical and contemporary intersections of state and symbolic boundaries in, for instance, the creation of a proletarianised and disenfranchised labour force (see, for example, Heyman 1991; Kearney 1998a; chapters five and six, this volume). But much of it has taken a somewhat different course, and has pursued instead a line of inquiry which recruits the ‘border’ as an image for what happens when two or more cultures meet. It is to this latter work that we now turn.

### **Cultural and Postmodern Borderlands**

We have indicated that the use of the term ‘border’ as an image for the juxtaposition of cultures is closely tied to anthropological and other social scientific research at the US–Mexico state border. But the ubiquity of the term as a metaphor in current academic discourse has many other sources too. Debates about the intellectual common ground across the disciplinary boundaries of subjects such as literature, anthropology and political science, discussions initiated by previously marginalised intellectuals such as women, and debates about ethnic, class and gendered identities and about sexual orientation have, for instance, all found the border metaphor helpful (cf. Lugo 1997: 44) and have contributed to its visibility by using it in the titles of books and conferences. The current fascination with borders and border crossings thus extends far beyond anthropology into literary theory, cultural studies, media studies and beyond (see, for example, S. Gupta 1993; Pratt 1992). The borders concerned exist at many different levels, and may be cultural, social, territorial, political, sexual, racial or psychological, while the notion of ‘border crossings’ is similarly varied and is just as likely to be used to refer to cross-dressing or the synthesising of cinematic genres as it is to refer to traversing state lines.

The border-as-image entered into anthropology largely through the work of those dissatisfied with the classic anthropological view of culture which emphasised patterns of meaning that are shared and consensual. Such a view, it is suggested, barely countenances the possibility of change, inconsistency and contradiction. Advocates of attempts to rethink this conventional view of culture were sometimes those who had had direct experience of cultural inconsistency and contradiction in their own lives, such as those who questioned prevailing norms of sex and gender and those who belonged to ethnic or other minorities. The American anthropologist Renato Rosaldo grew up as a Chicano in the United States. Speaking Spanish to his father and English to his mother, Rosaldo was acutely aware of the ‘mundane disturbances that so often erupt during border crossings’ (Rosaldo 1989: 29). Yet the cultural perplexities of his everyday life were not easily accommodated by the

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conventional anthropological concept of culture, an inadequacy which propelled him and the many others who similarly sought to understand cultural disjuncture to devise new strategies for studying both the interstices between cultures and the differences within them. For Rosaldo, the notion of 'borderlands' is central to this project:

For social analysis, cultural borderlands have moved from a marginal to a central place. In certain cases, such borders are literal. Cities throughout the world today increasingly include minorities defined by race, ethnicity, language, class, religion, and sexual orientation. Encounters with 'difference' now pervade modern everyday life in urban settings ... Borderlands surface not only at the boundaries of officially recognized cultural units, but also at less formal intersections, such as those of gender, age, status, and distinctive life experiences (Rosaldo 1989: 28–9).

According to Rosaldo, social analysis must reorient itself to the study of such borderlands, which 'should be regarded not as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production that require investigation' (1989: 207– 8, 1988: 87).

In his review of the literature on the anthropology of 'borderlands', Alvarez (1995: 448) is careful to point out that the term refers not just to the region adjacent to a state border, but also to the 'multiple conceptual boundaries involved – the borderlands of social practices and cultural beliefs in a contemporary global context'. In this new formulation, Alvarez stresses, borderlands evoke the geopolitical and the metaphorical, the literal and the conceptual. As we shall see later, some scholars are concerned about the loss of focus this would seem to involve, and though Alvarez's review does not say as much itself, it too communicates an ambivalence about such extended usage.

Nevertheless, in a paper on Mexican long-haul trucking, written with George Collier, Alvarez broadly follows this extended conceptualisation of 'borderlands'. For Alvarez and Collier (1994), 'borderlands'

refer not just to the physical spaces at the conjunction of national frontiers, but to the sites that can potentially be found anywhere where distinct cultures come together in interaction without losing their differences. In our analysis of northern Mexican trucking, the Los Angeles wholesale markets are as much a 'borderland', for the way they juxtapose and confront Anglo and Mexican ways of doing business, as the actual U.S.-Mexico frontier that Mexican truckers cross through Tijuana (1994: 607).

Alvarez and Collier compare northern and southern Mexican truckers to show how participation in alien markets stimulated by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) will be as much driven by cultural styles of doing business as by economic motives. There are clear differences in entrepreneurial style between

the two groups of truckers. The northern truckers develop inter-personal networks of patronage, trust and reciprocal obligation while the highland Maya truckers in the south rely on a more corporatist organisation and ideology. In both cases, however, the goal is the same: to develop new opportunities for trade by reconfiguring foreign

markets along ethnic lines (cf. Strating 1997). This both enables the truckers to gain a foothold where alien cultural styles predominate and opens the market to other kinds of commerce for the truckers' compatriots. This is precisely what Alvarez and Collier (1994: 624) tell us happened in Los Angeles, where Mexican traders took over the Seventh Street Market as existing traders moved out to alternative market facilities elsewhere in the city. In this analysis, then, the 'borderlands' extend far beyond the national boundary, and refer to cultural encounters in California's wholesale trade.

As Heyman (1994) has pointed out, Alvarez and Collier's account of borderlands in Los Angeles draws directly on an understanding of social and economic relations at the state border between the United States and Mexico. The borderlands which they describe in the wholesale markets seem to share some of the socio-political processes characteristic of borders between states; namely, both involve 'differential access to formal channels of power' (Heyman 1994: 50). It is this, according to Heyman, which makes the extended image of borders seem apt in this instance. We learn something only 'when we extend fairly specific analytical insights from one "border" denotation to another' (Heyman 1994: 50). Scholars critical of applying a metaphorical notion of borders to all forms of cultural encounter thus hesitantly concede that there is potentially something to be gained by such a comparison, but only as long as the 'borders' compared share processes that transcend the similarity of image. However, this is not always the case.

Roger Rouse's (1991) analysis of the Mexican wage labourers who migrate from Aguililla in southwest Michoacán to Redwood City in the San Francisco Bay region of California provides a good example of a study where 'border' is used as an image with little or no analytical reference to the US–Mexico border itself. Most of Rouse's migrants find work as dishwashers, gardeners, hotel workers or child minders. However long they stay in California, most of them retain strong ties with Michoacán, and there is much movement of people and goods back and forth between the two locations. As a result, Rouse (1991: 14) suggests, Aguilillans now constitute a single community across a variety of sites, each with its own history, language, political system and cultural code. They inhabit a world which shows few signs of synthesis or homogenisation and where competing cultural forms can be managed only by developing skills of 'cultural bifocality'. Such a world is usefully conceptualised, Rouse argues, as a 'border zone', for it bears striking similarities to the sense of cultural fracture and confrontation which often colours life at state borders like that between the United States and Mexico. It is '[t]ies such as those between Aguililla and Redwood City, places two thousand miles

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apart, [that] prompt us to ask how wide this [U.S.-Mexico] border has become and how peculiar we should consider its characteristics' (Rouse 1991: 15). Cyclical migration, Rouse (1991: 17) proposes, has resulted in a proliferation of such border zones right across the United States and these zones are a good example of what, following Rosaldo (1988: 85, 1989: 212), he refers to as the 'implosion of the Third World into the First'.

Heyman is very critical of Rouse's use of the border image, chiefly because Rouse does not attempt to identify any strong analytical connection to state border processes.

For Rouse, the image is apposite simply because the migrants he studied crossed the international state line, and because they must manage two worldviews in their lives. As with Rosaldo (1989: 207), borderlands and border zones exist everywhere for Rouse because cultures are not homogeneous. Such images can be seductive, and Heyman cautions vigilance against being carried away by the rhetoric. By falling for this metonymic usage, he suggests, our understanding of the border becomes reductive, and risks leaving power out of the picture (Heyman 1994: 46).<sup>7</sup>

Heyman is certainly right to point to how the ‘cultural’ has been so strongly emphasised by those who find the ‘borderlands’ image a powerful device for evoking the postmodern condition. Gupta and Ferguson, for example, see the borderlands as a place of ‘incommensurable contradictions’, a zone of cultural overlap characterised by a mixing of cultural styles:

The term does not indicate a fixed topographical site between two other fixed locales (nations, societies, cultures), but an interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialization that shapes the identity of the hybridized subject. Rather than dismissing them as insignificant, as marginal zones, thin slivers of land between stable places, we want to contend that the notion of borderlands is a more adequate conceptualization of the ‘normal’ locale of the postmodern subject (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 18).

From this perspective, the borderlands become the crucible within which a new politics of identity is being forged. Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera* is one of the most widely cited examples of this process and potential. Anzaldúa's borderlands are at once physical, psychological, sexual, class and racial, and are firmly rooted in conditions at the state border between the United States and Mexico where, she says, the ‘lifeblood of two worlds [merge] to form a third country – a border culture’ (1987: 3). Her project is to cross the conceptual lines of class, gender and ethnicity and thereby to challenge the traditional hegemonies

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Such arguments recall earlier exchanges between Asad and Barth, as well as some of the concerns expressed by Cole and Wolf. They clearly echo in the field of ‘border studies’ wider theoretical concerns in anthropology over the relative prominence to be given to ‘culture’ and ‘power’.

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of patriarchy and subordination by the US nation-state. ‘Caught between Mexican tradition and Chicana existence, Spanish and English, sexual domination and choice, the United States and Mexico, Anzaldúa remakes the border and the conceptual understanding of the boundaries of life’ (Alvarez 1995: 460). Much recent writing by natives of this border region has similarly attempted to expose the ‘multiple subjectivities’ of borderland life by describing how those who live there draw strategically on multiple repertoires of identity (for instance, see Behar 1993; see also Hicks 1991; and the essays in Welchman 1996).

Many others too have used these notions of the border zone and borderland to address contemporary processes of diaspora and displacement. In 'Blow-Ups in the Borderzones' Smadar Lavie (1992) has analysed the agonising and relentless search for identity which typifies the work and lives of two categories of intellectual in Israel – the 'Palestinian citizens of Israel' and the 'Arab-Jews' or Mizrahim – categories which, following Shohat (1989) and in an effort to reflect the region's particular history of colonisation, Lavie collectively refers to as 'Third World Israelis'. These intellectuals find themselves in exile among the Ashkenazi (the 'First World') elite of Haifa and Tel Aviv, yet equally perceive their return 'home' to their natal villages as an exile from exile. As one of them put it: 'I'm living on a fence – one foot here, one foot there, always trying to close my legs' (Na'im 'Araidi, cited in Lavie' 1992: 84). By referring to *blow-ups* Lavie draws attention to the *explosion* of identities which characterises postmodern borderlands – explosion in the sense both of proliferating and fragmenting identities – as well as to how the dilemma of negotiating identity is *magnified* there. As with Anzaldúa, the borderlands Lavie has in mind are those between 'Nation' and 'Empire'; her intellectuals must continually strive 'to articulate the locus and the process of the intersections where Arab and European, Palestinian and Israeli, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi, clash and merge' (Lavie 1992: 90).

From the perspective of these scholars the borderland is simultaneously a zone of cultural play and experimentation as well as of domination and control. The 'borderzone is not just a dangerous space, but a festive one, because of the creative energy liberated by the common struggle of resistance' (Lavie 1992: 93). It is a liminal space, an 'experimental region of culture' (Turner 1982: 28), whose appeal is 'the access artists have to many languages (discourses) from different communities' (McMaster 1995: 82). This fusion of registers in the border-crossing, which Hannerz (1997) has referred to as 'culture+culture', is ultimately empowering, at least for Anzaldúa and apparently also for Lavie's intellectuals. But it need not always be so. Contrary to Gupta and Ferguson's optimistic prediction of hybridity, it is not in fact clear that a hybrid identity or subjectivity is the happy result of meetings at the border. At least some evidence indicates otherwise. Many Mexican migrants, for example, are caught in a world where cultural play is the least of their worries and where their subjectivity remains strongly Mexican (Heyman 1994:

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47). Rabinowitz (1994) has similarly argued that borderland encounters in Israel have deepened the rifts between Israeli and Palestinian identities rather than produced a synthesis, and the same is arguably true of Catholic and Protestant identities at the Irish border (see also Feldman 1995: 241).

In this section we have briefly considered the work of those who suggest that 'border' be metaphorically extended to all situations characterised by contradiction and contest in the light of critics who challenge this metaphorical approach for distracting attention from the 'real' problems of state borders and from issues of power. In a sense, of course, borders are always metaphors, since they are arbitrary constructions based on cultural convention. Yet, 'far from being mere abstractions of a concrete reality, metaphors are part of the discursive materiality of power relations' and as such 'can serve as powerful inscriptions of the effects of political borders' (Brah 1996: 198). Although 'border positionality does not *in itself* assure a vantage point of

privileged insight into and understanding of relations of power’, despite what some of the writers considered above might imply, it does ‘create a space in which experiential mediations may intersect in ways that render such understandings more readily accessible’ (Brah 1996: 207, emphasis in original). The two approaches need not, therefore, be as far apart as their advocates sometimes imply. In fact, they often influence each other, a productive coming together upon which we seek to draw throughout this book.<sup>8</sup>

### **The ‘Borderlands Genre’**

In this chapter we have suggested that three reasonably distinct but mutually interacting streams characterise the anthropological study of borders and boundaries. In such an account there is perhaps a tendency to over-systematise, and to succumb to the temptation to reconstruct rival intellectual genealogies with the possibly misleading benefit of hindsight.<sup>9</sup> Differences may have been stressed at the expense of similarities, edges emphasised rather than overlap. Yet as we have tried to show, it is this very overlap that has been so thoroughly exploited by those writing in what Alvarez has called the ‘borderlands genre’, whose borderlands lie not just

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Although we draw on both bodies of literature, we should be clear that research which uses the borderland metaphor to clarify the deterritorialised identities of postmodern life is not our main concern here. Only when these identities are linked in concrete ways to the experiences of living at or crossing state borders, and of managing the various structures of the state which establish microborders throughout the state's domain – such as in airports, floating customs and immigration checks, post and passport offices, armed service installations and internal revenue institutions – do we incorporate them into the discussion.

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This may be particularly true of our account of anthropological research on geopolitical borders, the ethnography of which, as we noted, has been patchy, under-theorised, and so far largely unsynthesised.

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between different classes, genders or ethnicities but between academic disciplines and between different perspectives within a single discipline. Developments in this theoretical borderland have been rich and stimulating. The work done there has captivated our imaginations. At the same time, the terms of its discussion have become ‘blurred in popular [academic] usage’ (Alvarez 1995: 448), the potential overlap between different ‘borders’ sometimes being used as a stylistic device to imply resonances and connections not always demonstrated or warranted. However engaging these explorations are, therefore, we must be careful that style does not succeed over substance, and that analysis is not sacrificed to image.

In our view, then, all three approaches considered here are valuable components of an anthropology of international borders, but only as long as we keep sight of the ways in which they differ and of how some minimise the role of the state and the nation, and

even the geopolitical border, in their efforts to be fashionable or persuasive. Indeed, in this book we specifically draw attention to the confluence of symbolic and politico-jural boundaries between nations and states, showing how the juxtaposition of competing perspectives in an anthropology of borders can be analytically rewarding. In this sense our book might be read as a modest attempt to integrate seemingly divergent trends in the anthropological study of power and culture, trends which sometimes seem to be at loggerheads. Such trends are also to be found in our sibling disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, the subject of the next chapter.