

Theory, Imagination, Geopolitics

VICTOR KONRAD AND ANNE-LAURE AMILHAT SZARY



ROUTLEDGE BORDERLANDS STUDIES



ROUTLEDGE

“Two of the world’s leading border scholars have produced an important text focusing on the cultural dimension of borders. Unlike most border texts which focus on the political and the security dimensions of the lines which divide us, this book reflects the important cultural and social dimensions of borders as they impact upon us individuals and as groups, and play an important role in the way in which human identity is formed and is perpetuated through varying levels of exclusions and inclusions along a continuum of physical and social separation. The book highlights the fact that any form of border, at whatever social or spatial scale, is much more complex than the simplistic notion of lines on maps, or fences and walls in the landscape. The ways in which borders and their images leave an indelible imprint on our understanding of local spaces and environments enables us to understand the more complex and richer meaning of what actually constitutes a border and how this impacts upon our lives.”

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“In *Border Culture*, Victor Konrad and Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary bridge the gap between cultural theory and border studies, providing an engaging and smart contribution that deepens our understanding of how borders have implications on culture well beyond the borderlands. Highly recommended.”

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“While borders are consubstantial with globalization, border culture is at the heart of geopolitics in this transnational world, and is rooted in border experiences of globalization. The authors thus guide us in the mesh of these processes, at the junction of nations, where the suture is performed between and within border cultures, for they are manifold. An essential book as we may be entering, as the authors state, an era of post-globalization.”

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“With *Border Culture*, Konrad and Amilhat-Szary are inviting us to reflect on the theory, imagination, and geopolitics of borders. A ‘tour de force’ into the border literatures, imaginaries and narratives, it is a superb book. A must read for cultural geographers.”

Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, *Professor, University of Victoria, Canada*

“This book is the first of its kind in the emerging field of Cultural Border Studies, an intriguing study of global border culture. Offering an extensive approach to the multiple intersections of borders and cultures, it will open up a much-needed debate on the roles of borders and the politics of culture.”

Astrid M. Fellner, *Professor, Saarland University,
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“Our world has become more bordered than at any time in human history. This sophisticated interrogation of international borders as culture offers a set of tools to help us understand, interrogate and look beyond the cartographies of our often-dismal age.”

Nick Megoran, *Professor, University of Newcastle,
UK*

“In a completely new perspective, Victor Konrad and Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary explore the relationship between borders and cultures. As creators of culture and cultural diversity, borders are home to new cultural forms, as well as being cultural productions involving particular imaginaries, which in turn are capable of transforming borders.”

Patrick Suter, *Professor, University of Bern,
Switzerland*

“Bridging border and culture studies, the authors of this captivating book invite us to overcome modern oppositions between theories and narratives, and between representations and experiences, by highlighting instead how their interplay can produce new interdisciplinary knowledge capable of reconceiving border cultures as mobile, relational, and multidimensional entities, having different symbolic and material forms, functions, and locations.”

Chiara Brambilla, *Professor, University of
Bergamo, Italy*

“To understand borders, you need to understand their cultural dimension. This indispensable book gives pressing arguments for including culture in any study of borders in geopolitics and everyday life, along with a thorough and insightful overview of ongoing research in the field.”

Johan Schimanski, *Professor, University of
Oslo, Norway*

BORDER CULTURE

This book introduces readers to the cultural imaginings of borders: the in-between spaces in which transnationalism collides with geopolitical cooperation and contestation.

Recent debates about the “refugee crisis” and the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic have politicized culture at and of borders like never before. Border culture is no longer culture at the margins but rather culture at the heart of geopolitics, flows, and experience of the transnational world. Increasingly, culture and borders are everywhere yet nowhere. In border spaces, national narratives and counter-narratives are tested and evaluated, coming up against transnational culture. This book provides an extensive and critical vision of border culture on the move, drawing on numerous examples worldwide and a growing international literature across border and cultural studies. It shows how border culture develops in the human imagination and manifests in human constructs of “nation” and “state”, as well as in transnationalism. By analyzing this new and expanding cultural geography of border landscapes, the book shows the way to a fresh, broader dialogue.

Exploring the nature and meaning of the intersection of border and culture, this book will be an essential read for students and researchers across border studies, geopolitics, geography, and cultural studies.

Victor Konrad is Adjunct Research Professor at Carleton University, Canada, and formerly Director of the Canadian-American Center at the University of Maine, USA, and founding Director, Canada-U.S. Fulbright Program.

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Routledge Borderlands Studies

Borderlands are spaces of transition between cultures, societies and states. Often, like in the case of the US and Mexico, they are understood as static territorial lines and buffer zones, subservient to the development of states and state territories. However, borderlands can also be fluid and ambiguous spaces, moulded by processes of economic and political integration or shifting geopolitical dividing lines. Moreover, borderlands cultures can be found far from borders, in cities, multicultural neighbourhoods and diasporic communities. They also exist as both future-oriented geographical imaginations and imaginaries with profound historical roots. Today, globalisation, integration and new transnational forms of communication change the complex interrelationships between state, society, space and borders. Consequently, borderlands become more and more places in their own right, reflecting broader supranational patterns of political, economic and social change.

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Border Culture

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Victor Konrad and Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary

BORDER CULTURE

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Designed cover image: “Nouvelles frontières” by Dominique Taleghani:
dominiquetaleghani.com

First published 2023
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-032-29410-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-29411-7 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-30148-6 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003301486

Typeset in Bembo
by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

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FOREWORD

The study of borders has undergone dramatic transformations in recent years. This has broadened our understanding of where borders are found, how they are made, what purposes they serve, and why they function as powerful cultural artefacts. Border studies thus reflect the centrality of borders and border-making to everyday life. The now widely used bordering and borderscapes approaches reflect profound transformations of social, political, and territorial relationships since the end of the Cold War as well as the often disruptive impacts of globalization on national societies. Within this context the present volume is a highly salient and timely addition to the Routledge Borderlands Studies Series. In their book, Victor Konrad and Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary seek to “decode the meaning of border culture” as a means to better understand and appreciate border complexity.

Today, Russian aggression and the brutal war in Ukraine understandably tend to direct the attention of researchers, politicians, media, and ordinary people to the security function of borders. It is, however, important to remember that even in this situation it is not just the armed defense of state sovereignty and territorial integrity that are at the core of the crisis. Questions of ethnicity, language, identity, historical legacies, memory politics, and culture in broad terms are fundamental elements of the conflict—and in the longer perspective are also its solution. In this situation, the book of Konrad and Amilhat Szary is a vital reminder of the multi-layered complexity of borders and how culture and its artistic manifestations are constantly embedded in processes of bordering at times of both conflict and cooperation— and not just on the level of every-day human interaction but within political relations as well.

The authors write (in Chapter 6) that “border culture is culture imagined and produced at boundaries, and in an increasing array of sites where visions, values, identities and other facets of human distinction meet and increasingly collide”. To illustrate this idea, Konrad and Amilhat Szary guide us across nations, regions,

cities, and places where the cultural dimensions of borders are reflected in imaginaries, border-crossing narratives, multiple identities, and allegiances and a multi-dimensional sense of “in-betweenness”. Suggesting that cultures and borders are closely linked might meet with some suspicion and even trepidation, given an increasing propensity worldwide to exploit cultural difference in the struggle for political power. The bounding of culture, for example as part of a geopolitical strategy, is often appropriated as a political project of control as it reflects everyday needs for orientation and a sense of stability in the world. Moreover, the idea of “culture” often evokes exclusively bounded spaces and communities. Bordered culture can indeed be something highly constraining, and following Amartya Sen, violent if we insist on a singularity of culture in terms of something unambiguous and defined according to immutable categories of identity, values, and belonging.

As the authors point out, culture is a battlefield. But they also indicate that culture is not of necessity an exclusive process of bounding, it can also involve cooperation, dialogue, and evolutionary and non-finalizable processes of becoming something new. Consequently, the authors call for moving away from what they see as a “border culture trap”, where culture is reduced to something that expresses otherness vis à vis mainstream, majority and/or ruling societies. As they argue, one alternative to essentializing cultural difference is to recognize and engage with borderland spaces which defy unambiguous definition or categorization. Consequently, the authors’ central objective is to exemplify the significance of culture in contemporary border studies by linking political understandings of borders to socio-cultural processes, states of being, political discourses, and everyday practices.

The research upon which this book is based is also significant as a “post-disciplinary” perspective on border-related issues facing society, and it encourages greater interaction and exchange between individual disciplines themselves. The approach elaborated by Konrad and Amilhat Szary brings diverse forms of social, cultural, and political life into more holistic frames of analysis, indicating that while borders can be semi-permanent and formal in nature, they are also products of continuous border-making practices. These practices are made visible and legible through different forms of cultural appropriation and social contestation. Furthermore, with their approach, the authors also connect the realm of high (geo)politics to the situations of communities and individuals who are affected by and negotiate borders. Linking together social science and humanities traditions of border research with an appreciation for the relevance of other research fields, such as cultural psychology, Victor Konrad and Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary provide a rich cross-section of culture at borders. Among the examples developed in the book are those of border cultures expressed by place-making practices of Lhotsampa refugees in Halifax, Canada, separations and intersections of Afghanistan’s many ethno-linguistic areas, cultural expression and art at border cities, mental maps of borderlanders, the performance of border guards at the Wagah border where India and Pakistan meet, and the complex border-transcending geographies of the Akwesasne Mohawk Territory.

In addition to these concrete illustrations the book also invites us to embrace the complexity of cultural, social, and political borders. As part of their theoretical considerations Konrad and Amilhat Szary explore the concept of “border thinking” as a way of seeing the world and social reality from the vantage point of being at *and amidst* social, cultural, and political borders; here, diversity, the co-existence of many different social worlds, and the daily negotiation of border-crossing rituals are the norm. Being at the border can also mean having very different places simultaneously as central reference points in everyday life. Alternatively, border thinking promotes an understanding of social borders as central to “being in the world” and the fact that we are all creating and crossing borders in one way or another. Border thinking counters the fiction of immutable border realities, meanings, and identities that is a source of misunderstandings of borders but also populist appropriations of them in terms of “taking back control”. Understood in this way, border thinking completely breaks with monological obsessions and suggests that we can undertake a move from a thought-stopping to a thought-propelling consideration of borders as spaces of possibility.

Ilkka Liikanen and James W. Scott,
Editors of the Routledge Borderlands Studies Book Series

PREFACE

The Prevailing Engagement of Cultures and Borders

Borders today remain as important as ever in both differentiating and integrating nation-states, and the cultures that reside within these states and also extend across their boundaries. What border culture is, where it lives, how it works, and why it changes are all important considerations in comprehending borders, and why they continue to prevail, and loom even larger in the increasing number of walls and fences in our ostensibly borderless world. Like the walls and fences, border culture is a manifestation of the engagement of peoples at the border. Border culture, however, is more than a construction; it is an ongoing process replete with imaginaries of the border, narratives of barriers and crossings, multiple identities and states of being, and expressions of plural belongingness and multi-dimensional in-betweenness. Border culture may be difficult to compartmentalize, because by its nature, border culture is something both beyond and in-between in time and space. Yet, it emerges as something that is embraced across boundaries, and border culture is often portrayed with artistic flourish to convey the essence of cross-border engagement. Also, border culture conveys the despair of conflict and violence at borders and in borderlands.

The current reminder that cultures collide and clash in borderlands is found in the battle for Ukraine. Whereas the Ukraine emerged as a small nation-state only in the seventeenth century, it has grown substantially next to Russia since then. The Russian empire and the following Soviet Union dominated it, and, assured of this domination, the Soviets added to the Ukraine parts of Eastern European countries annexed during WWII, and then, in 1954, attached the Crimea. In 2014, Russia's President Putin re-claimed Crimea and backed Russian-leaning separatists in Ukraine's eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. In late February 2022, a full invasion of the Ukraine began with incursions along

all of the Ukraine's northern, southern, and eastern boundaries. The war, now in its seventh month, grinds on with thousands of casualties among Ukraine's civilian population and its armed forces, thousands of Russian military dead or wounded, and massive devastation throughout the Ukraine, particularly in border regions adjacent to Russia. No resolution or end to the conflict is in sight.

The entire Ukraine has become a borderland: a political space in-between East and West, a nation-state between Russia and the NATO allies, a confrontation zone between ideologies, and a social and cultural entity stranded in a global chess match. Here, the resolve of Ukrainian nationalism and identity stands firm in its attempt to resist the Russian invasion. Also, it is in this space in-between where Ukrainian culture, in all of its facets, has become emboldened and expressed in multiple symbolic actions and manifestations to forge a united front against Russian aggression, and engage the recognition and support of most of the world. The Ukraine portrays at once a heroic and demonstrative culture of a beleaguered nation fighting to sustain its territory, and a border culture rising to prominence in a global context. All "Western" nations, with NATO members of this strengthened coalition at the core, are "fighting" for the Ukraine with donations of all kinds ranging from weapons to relief aid. Whereas Russia remains intent on erasing the border with the Ukraine, the Ukrainian resistance has re-established the boundary between the nation-states, and enhanced the gulf between Ukrainian and Russian cultures. In this conflict, a virile border culture has infected Russians convinced that they are fighting "Nazism" at the edge of their country and repatriating the "Little Russians". Meanwhile, Ukrainians, with the attention and substantial support of many countries around the globe, have enlivened and bolstered the image of a border between democracy and autocracy at Ukraine's boundary with Russia. Will this border become the renewed dividing line in a new "Cold War" between Russia and Europe and its allies? Are we witnessing the formation of the ultimate wall in global relations, one that may extend to encircle China, North Korea, and former Soviet republics in the East? What kind of border culture may evolve in this scenario? How can an understanding of border culture help us to comprehend what is happening in the Ukraine, and, more broadly, to recognize the meaning of cultural engagement at borders?

In this book, we explore the substance and meaning of border culture. In order to achieve this goal, we examine, critically, the essence of both the concept of border and the concept of culture. This seemingly straightforward approach is immediately complicated by the recognition that "border" and "culture" do not reside intuitively or naturally in the same space. This recognition leads us to unpack the concepts of border and culture before we link them in our extensive discussion of border culture theory. Building on a more comprehensive and detailed examination of border culture theory than in previous studies, we approach four main themes encountered in the study of border culture. Our first consideration is focused on imaginaries of the border, and how these imaginaries inform human ideas, perceptions, attitudes, and actions related to

borders. The purpose is to reveal the imaginaries of the border that help to form border culture. Next, we proceed to the narratives of the border that contribute to or result from imaginaries and discourse. These narratives are primarily nationalist although in some cases they originate from sub-national or separatist groups. Invariably, these narratives contribute to border culture, and help to shape the border milieu. From well-illustrated considerations of imaginaries and narratives, the discussion of border culture moves to a detailed assessment of how borders activate culture. This extensive examination of border culture production and border crossings draws from our border research between China and Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam, Finland and Russia, Canada and the U.S., Peru and Chile, Korea, Israel, Cyprus, and, of course, the iconic Mexico–U.S. border. The discussion of border culture production and border crossings also encompasses the insights of many other border scholars to provide an inclusive and diverse appreciation of border culture manifestations and meanings. The concluding focus of the book is on borders with/in transnational culture. This outlook addresses border culture in the era of globalization, and the current period of post-globalization. Border culture is at the heart of geopolitics in this transnational world, epitomized by plural cultures of diasporas, and the flows and objects of culture in transnational space. A profusion of border culture experience is evident in “transcultural placemaking” which results in border culture that is at once imaginary and manifested.

How do we resolve border culture in post-globalization times, and in a world where new borders are now produced by nature’s re-alignments in a post-humanistic environment? Several imperatives are evident and compelling. The dynamics of border separation and integration in transnationalism have shifted, and the shifts have impacted border cultures and created new ones. Feminization of the border is evident on a global scale, and specifically in the transnational border cultures of migrant domestic workers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, and the human migrations and dislocations of the early twenty-first century, the imperative to find and stay home is evident everywhere. Border culture becomes scaled-down and personal for many with homes, but for many others without a home migration is often aligned with dispossession. The border cultures of dispossession are usually associated with violence as we see daily in the news reports from the war in Ukraine. The devastating conflict in the Ukraine is a compelling and resounding call for the need to resolve and reinstate a positive and productive border culture, not only between Russia and Europe, but in numerous other instances where territorial aggression is imminent. Ideally, cultural landscapes in transnational space, as well as in the borderlands between states, convey the mutual engagement of cultures and the resolution of border culture. Accomplishment of this goal appears elusive, certainly as we view the violence, desperation, and death in Ukraine, yet, as we have shown in this book, border culture does work, as it needs to, in our world that sways between transnationalism and definitively bordered national spaces.

Westport, Ontario, Canada, and Grenoble, France

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has emerged, albeit slowly, from decades of reflection about what border culture means and how it works. In 2011, at the Border Regions in Transition conference in Grenoble and Geneva, we decided to embark on a project to situate border culture within the broader context of border theory, and to explore the extensive geopolitics of border culture. Not realizing the magnitude of what we had undertaken, we were naive about goals and timelines for research and writing. Also, other more immediate and compelling research and writing would intervene and conspire to constantly shift our attention elsewhere. Both of us had projects and commitments demanding our time, and of course the responsibilities of teaching and administration captured most of our moments. During the last two years, however, some circumstances have changed, and we have found the large blocks of time to commit to completing this project. Also, we have become aware of the growing interest in border culture and the need to address the topic in a critical and comprehensive way. This imperative has guided our efforts to complete the book.

Another incentive has come from our colleagues and students who have urged us on with this work. Foremost among them have been James W. Scott and Ilkka Liikanen, the editors for the Border Studies Series published by Routledge. They have encouraged us from the outset. We would also like to acknowledge the support of the following people who have helped and responded in many ways including reading the manuscript, offering illustrations, supporting our research, commenting on text, providing advice, and sharing insights: Don Alper, Pierre-Alexandre Beylier, Chiara Brambilla, Alessandro Brasile, Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, Stan Brunn, Anna Casaglia, Jean Cristofol, Michael Darroch, Astrid Fellner, Matti Fritsch, Anne Gillo, Frederic Giraut, Todd Hataley, Lucy Hinton, Zhiding Hu, Norma Iglesias Prieto, Reece Jones, Melissa Kelly, Joel Konrad, Tuulikki Kurki, Aili Kurtis, Jussi Laine, Justin Langlois, Yuli Liu, Evelyn Mayer,

Andrea Masala, Nick Megoran, Srimoyee Mitra, David Newman, Eva Nossem, Jopi Nyman, Cedric Parizot, Ignacio Pereyra, Guillaume Poirer, Tom Ptak, Lee Rodney, Laetitia Rouvière, Johan Schimanski, Gianluca Simi, Patrick Suter, Laurie Trautman, Dhananjay Tripathi, Elisabeth Vallet, Martin van der Velde, Randy Widdis, and Brenda Yeoh. Also, we would like to acknowledge the helpful insights and comments of two anonymous reviewers. Their suggestions have helped us to focus and strengthen the book.

An overview and critical assessment of border culture requires the perspectives of experts in various disciplines and fields. We have drawn extensively on the expertise and insights of graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and faculty at universities worldwide. Furthermore, we have engaged the perspectives of contributors in curatorial, cultural policy, and heritage management fields. Our intention has been to integrate the perspectives on border culture from Hispanic and Francophone literatures as well as the extensive scholarship published in English. Also, we have accessed research on border culture originating in other areas such as China and Turkey. A comprehensive global approach to conveying border culture remains a formidable and daunting task. Yet, our aim has not been to document all border culture, but to develop a better and more inclusive overview of the meaning of border culture and its geopolitical impact. This aim has led us to appreciate the incredible diversity and amazing contribution of border culture research emerging from all parts of the world. We would like to acknowledge the innovative and significant contributions of scholars who have enlivened border studies with their often unique and always compelling discoveries.

This book is also a tribute to the scholars in many fields of inquiry whose formative work laid the foundations for understanding border culture. We will not name them all here, but rather refer the reader to Chapter 2, in which we examine critically the basis for understanding border culture, and how this basis has shifted during the nineteenth through the twenty-first centuries. The early thinkers about border culture populate the “who’s who” of formative anthropology, geography, political science, and sociology, among other disciplines. More recent contributors to shaping our emerging understanding of border culture are scholars in the generations immediately before us, including many of our teachers. Again, we identify them and their contributions throughout the book. We do, however, wish to identify and honour two prominent scholars who contributed to the conceptualization of border culture. First, is Jean Gottmann whose immense contributions transcended the borders of the Francophone and Anglophone worlds and far beyond. Second, is David Lowenthal, who passed away recently, in his nineties, after a career spanning more than seventy years as a leading scholar in geography, history, and heritage studies. We honour their work, and cherish the interactions we have had with them.

We acknowledge the support of the funding agencies and institutions that have supported our research in the field of border culture. Foremost among the granting agencies is the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of

Canada (SSHRC) through its Partnership Grant Program (Grant 895-2012-1022). The SSHRC grant, *Borders in Globalization*, was directed by Dr Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly (University of Victoria, Canada). Dr Victor Konrad (Carleton University) was co-director and lead for the culture theme. Dr Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary (Université Grenoble-Alpes) was lead for the France international partnership. For seven years (2013–2020), the SSHRC grant and matching funding from our home institutions, and other host institutions worldwide, enabled our border culture research and the work of colleagues and students. Carleton University also provided funding for Victor Konrad's work in China, Canada, the U.S., and Europe. This research was supported as well through visiting professorships for Konrad at the Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland, Radboud University in the Netherlands, and Yunnan Normal University and Eastern China Normal University, in Kunming and Shanghai, respectively. At Grenoble-Alpes University, the funding of the Performance Lab (<https://performance.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/>) dedicated to structuring practice-based research in France was decisive in many ways. Last, but not least, the companionship with the 'antiAtlas of borders' collective (www.antiatlas.net/en/), a science-art project founded the year this book project was launched, was decisive in helping us frame and discuss this book's structure and contents.

Finally, we are honoured as well that we have had an opportunity to work with the exceptional publication team at Routledge. Helena Hurd expressed her enthusiasm for our project in 2019, after she read early drafts of several chapters. Her colleague Alexandra de Brauw has taken over stewardship of our manuscript while Helena is on maternity leave. Our editorial assistant, Rosie Anderson, has worked closely with us during the manuscript preparation and production phases. We would also like to acknowledge the efforts of Shanmugapriya Rajaram of Deanta Global who handled the copy-editing and proofs, and the others in the Routledge team who worked behind the scene on this project. It has been our privilege to work with the Routledge team to publish *Border Culture: Theory, Imagination, Geopolitics*.

Victor Konrad, Westport, Ontario, Canada
Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary, Grenoble, France

1

INTRODUCTION

Border culture on the move: Bridging border studies and culture theory

Culture shifts its shape at borders by sneaking across the line, healing division, and revealing the value of difference.

Border culture can't stop; it is always becoming.

Theories of the border and culture need a bridge to connect obvious yet elusive alignments.

Border culture theory emerges from the convergence of imagination and politics.

Border culture is culture at the edge of being and on the bridge to meaning.

1.1 Border culture on the move

In Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, recent immigrant families were awarded community gardens in 2014 (CBC 2014). This piece of news could appear as a mere sign of a new trend of urban nature management at the turn of the twenty-first century, or a more significant acknowledgement of human constraints in nature, allowing inhabitants to collectively redesign a role for non-built areas within our expanding cities, if it were not for one specific characteristic that binds the people concerned with these Halifax gardens together. The people are Lhotsampa refugees displaced from Bhutan, and encouraging them to grow their own seeds in their new place of life is not only about providing themselves with cheaper and sustainable food (Figure 1.1). Also, it is about enabling maintenance of traditional diets and culture through the reconstruction of past “gardenscapes” and solidifying identities as gardeners. Mainly, it is about connecting the Lhotsampa to the soil of their new haven and planting them there. Moreover, it is about the feeling of being at home. This is about healthy adaptation and nourishing traditions in Canada. The gardens are a hub for building and strengthening different forms of social capital and easing transition into life in Canada. Gardening allows these women, men, and children to enact their possible re-rooting in a different country, and could be the basis for activating their new citizenship (Hinton and Schnurr 2021).



FIGURE 1.1 Lhotsampa Glen Garden, Halifax, Canada. Photo reproduced with permission from Lucy Hinton, Wilfrid Laurier University.

At the world's busiest border, between the United States and Mexico, volunteers from San Diego regularly cross the line to provide care to the other, poorer side, notably by helping to grow food in the segregated *colonias* of Tijuana that spread out at the foot of the infamous wall (Solamani 2013). One of the main obstacles to launching this initiative without external support is that the land of these neighbourhoods is highly contaminated by previous industrial use and lack of waste management. This initiative therefore relies on a certain know-how about the techniques of hydroponic urban agriculture, but mostly the initiative depends on land—ground—availability. So, the activists involved in the projects have for a few years crossed the border with bags full of soil, a gesture that would be illegal if it were operated in reverse, because the United States of America prohibits the entry of all agricultural material into its territory. Should this be qualified as smuggling when the soil is heading south? Nearby, the San Diego–Tijuana Friendship Garden was located on both sides adjacent to the border wall, and served as a bi-national garden sanctuary for native plants (Casey and Watkins 2021 [2014]) (Figure 1.2). In January, 2020, the garden was bulldozed on the American side by the U.S. Border Patrol citing security concerns (YouTube 2020). After considerable local criticism, the Border Patrol apologized and allowed a re-planting of the garden destroyed on U.S. soil, but the garden is now lopsided with well-established native plants on the Mexican side and seedlings on the American side. Also, whereas the American side is bordered in a steel



FIGURE 1.2 San Diego–Tijuana Friendship Garden. The View from the United States. Photo reproduced with permission from Norma Iglesias Prieto, San Diego State University.

cage, the Mexican side is freely accessible to the public. The paradox is enticing, and revealing about culture at the border.

At first glance, these little stories both deal with agriculture and boundary crossing but they reveal much more and may help to advance our reflections on culture and borders. The stories at once enlarge our comprehension of the nature and attributes of border culture, illustrate how culture works in dividing and connecting human political space, provide clues to explain patterns of border culture, and, yet, sustain the ever-changing, shape-shifting, and quixotic aura of culture in border contexts.

Border writing is the trace of the coyote/shaman...[in which] the writer... [is] a shaman who writes in order to cure the reader—If the border is a machine, then one of its elements is the *bicultural smuggler*, and to read is to cross over into another side where capital has not yet reduced the object to a commodity, to a place where *psychic healing* can occur.

(Hicks 1991)

At a time when cultural studies have made it clear that culture is much more than lifestyles linked to regional specificities, how do we build tools to understand the spatiality of culture? If we agree upon understanding culture as a process, as “something which both differentiates the world and provides a concept for understanding that differentiation” (Mitchell 1995, 103), then it may appear intriguing to understand how this process interplays with the major dividing lines of the globe, the international

borders and other boundaries that humans construct to stripe our planet. How are cultures bordered? How are borders cultured? These are two unusual questions to which this book seeks answers. One of the common points between the two terms is that they are commonly defined through binaries, culture being opposed to nature, border being considered as partaking territories into exclusive realms of sovereignty. In this book we build on recent scholarship that seeks to characterize the processual dimension of social facts, and to acknowledge the fluid spatialities that help fight the “crisping” of identity and the clashing of civilizations.

1.2 Culture and politics

Appreciating this point implies going beyond two facts: first, that borders are defined as arbitrary political lines that separate distinct yet connected social environments; second, that if culture goes beyond identity (Leresche and Saez 2002), it should be considered as more than a territorial construct, constituting a “geopolitical unconscious that helps to enframe and inform foreign policy debate” (Tuathail and Dalby 1998, 10). Although the legal definition of borders presents them as very stable institutions, they constitute in fact representations and imaginaries (and practices that these sustain) that have evolved in unacknowledged ways (Schimanski and Wolfe 2010, Rodney 2017, Amilhat Szary 2020). The recent renewal of border studies has shown that international dyads are not merely linear projections of political intentions, but also areas that open and close at the same time, through simultaneous and sometimes contradictory debordering and rebordering processes (Newman 1999, Popescu 2011, Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2014, Van Houtum et al., 2005, Wastl-Walter 2012, Wilson and Donnan 2012, Amilhat Szary and Giraut 2015, Casaglia and Laine 2017). Also, recent scholarship has indicated that borders are socio-political realities which proceed from a constant reshuffling of the link between an abstract idea of power and its contingent materiality (De Genova 2012, Diener and Hagen 2009, Walters 2002). We offer here to focus on the interaction between a certain type of place (understood in its plural spatialities), the political border, and cultural processes. We build on the hypothesis that assessing what borders are doing to contemporary cultural transformations could not only contribute an “understanding of geopolitics as a broad social and cultural phenomenon” (Tuathail and Dalby 1998, 4), but also establish the complex political role of culture in contemporary societies. Borders and culture offer two ways of gaining a sense of human spatiality, and in this book we witness their rapid and complex transformations in recent times.

1.3 Centres, peripheries, and the “turns” of power

This choice of analyzing borders is by no means a casual selection, because in wishing to deepen our understanding of culture as a collective component of social structures, it is generally understood that traditional identities, and notably ethnic identities, are built on spatial extensions that reside on a centre–periphery

dynamic (Barth 1969). Whereas cultural groups are defined traditionally by the central common grounds which make their identity, the question of their boundaries is usually both taken for granted (groups do exist within specific territorial extensions), and left aside for reasons of clarity (cultural boundaries do not necessarily need to be demarcated). This notion of common “grounds” also needs to be considered literally. From the point of view of traditional sedentary communities, the soil is not something to be shared and the earth is what soldiers die for. This may not have been the case in all eras, but since the Renaissance, thought in modern times has reinforced considerably the interpretation of an Earth as a grid of contiguous entities, yet entities exclusive to one of the other (Elden 2013, Migdal 2004). In the framework of the nation-state, borders have acted as containers of identities, acknowledging prior identities that they contributed to and essentialized (Agnew 1994).

However, at the turn of the twenty-first century, in a globalizing world “fixist lenses” (Lapid 2001), that is conceptual tools that make us focus on social phenomena as if they were stable and bounded, are slowly left aside to acknowledge a generalized “mobility turn” (Sheller and Urry 2006). What becomes of our links to the land? And, do we reformulate these links to the land? What is the cultural sinew? Geographers and anthropologists have helped to illustrate how producing places was essential for enacting identities. These scholars have established that agriculture was the first economic mode of production and place building, inducing territorial identifications that have carved the basis for the imposed norm of territorial identities that were to be melted into the national mould during the modern era. Yet, we also realize now that globalization has allowed for the multiple identities of human beings to be expressed again, and that these multiple identities more or less intersect across a variety of borders, and are hybridized. Not only does this suggest a “cultural turn” in international relations, but also it forwards analysis of the border identity, and it offers directions for a renewed understanding of cultural spatialities. This contradicts the current thought that “Studies of transnationalism and globalization emphasize the diminishing importance of territoriality, and, consequently, posit the detachment of culture, politics and economy from any fixed borders. Borders and borderlands feature, if at all, as zones of displacement and deterritorialization” (Hoehne and Feyissa 2013). Borders, and territoriality, have in fact not diminished in importance (Agnew 2008, Paasi 2003) in transnationalism and globalization, and they may indeed be contributing to a “border turn” acknowledging their renewed visibility and significance, and perhaps their symbolic power (Konrad 2021).

Our focus on borders is thus based on a comprehensive contextualization of the bordering and de-/rebordering processes, both in time and space; it aims at reconstructing a narrative of border studies that escapes the common discourse on the “lost and found” line, considering that borders are manifest of the modern nation-state which, after having vacillated because of globalization, are now reconsolidated for security reasons. Considering borders as economical tools of

the capitalist system as much as political technologies (Amilhat Szary 2020), we are able to envision a theory of border culture that goes well beyond what happens on the site of the boundary line itself.

1.4 Beyond organic culture and out of the border culture trap

Locating culture today (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2006) appears as a complex challenge, implying more-than-territorial approaches that question the methods and concepts of all social sciences. In this context, the notion of border may appear as problematic because cultural studies in a postcolonial context have used the “border” in many metaphorical ways, calling for a widened “border thinking” (Anzaldúa, 1987, Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006) defined as an “epistemology of the exteriority; that is, of the outside created from the inside” (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006, 206). We acknowledge this widened border thinking, and we will link with it in the continuum of border thought and epistemology, but we will focus on examining culture at political borders. This focus is based on the hypothesis that these political borders, at all scales, constitute a kind of space that allows very well for grasping tensions and links through both their symbolic and material existence.

Concerning both borders and culture, we will be attentive to not build upon Western conceptions of culture, notably by trying to overcome the nature/culture divide that, after having played a fundamental role in the structuring of rational occidental knowledge (Descola 2004), is profoundly questioned today, notably through the notion of the agency of the non-human (Latour 2005). Our perspective is informed by, and builds on, the notion of the post-humanistic border (Nail 2019). In this respect, our work takes into account as well the renewal of culture theory. This theory has recently moved beyond its original opposition between ordinary and extra-ordinary (notably artistic) cultural practices (Schimanski and Wolfe 2017), which used to consider that the notion of culture encompassed all that gave meaning to human lives (Cosgrove and Jackson 1987). This traditional approach often implicitly involved a degree of differentiation between the occidental world where the theorization originated and was taking place, and the rest of the world. This opposition not only was grounded on racial prejudices, but also derived from the opposition between arts and craftsmanship that arose with modernity. Throughout the book, we will work with a notion of culture that is embedded in everyday life. In so doing, we meet border studies at a point in their development which assesses how much of their existence is due to mundane border work (Rumford 2008, Cooper et al. 2014, Jagetic-Andersen et al. 2012, Jones and Johnson 2014) as much as to the performative action of the state. Accordingly, we acknowledge that when the political borders of the nation-state are drawn, if they are meant to circumscribe a set commonality of identities within a territorial frame, they also actively contribute to hardening this differentiation. As places where control is enacted and flows

are monitored, they can be made to express split identities. As regions of connection and exchange, they can be taken reversely as examples of cultural continuums. This duality is never simple to handle simultaneously, and, for those who live on the border, this perpetual process of “differance” (Derrida 1972) bears considerable violence (Amilhat Szary 2013).

Cultural analysis is always taken within the contradiction of the singular and the plural, working its way between two pitfalls: culture is not an overarching notion as such, but neither can it be defined as an addition to multiple cultures which globalization ostensibly melts together. To navigate between cultural relativism and absolutism, one can choose to look at cultural production more than examining cultures *per se*. Arjun Appadurai (1996) highlights processes to explain the evolution of cultural relationships, better known as “culturation” or acculturation trends. By examining expressions of cultural identity, Appadurai contradicts the idea of a global culture and demonstrates how global trends are spatially anchored and then reformulated by flows. Cultural theorist Mieke Bal (1999, 11) stresses how the spatial component of culture is essential to understand the concept dynamically, and she programmatically expresses that she “would like to make a more important place for the spatial coordinates that define culture not as a collection of things but as a process”.

If we base ourselves in geographical and multiscalar analysis to deconstruct the link between culture and power, we understand the international divide as a nexus of international and transnational, territorial and extraterritorial, political and socio-cultural (Fein 2003). In so doing, we call for moving away from the “border culture trap” which is inevitable when “‘culture’ is a representation of ‘others’ which solidifies” (Mitchell 1995, 108) and sterilizes the “self” in the same process. In order to avoid the pitfalls of essentializing cultural differences that have led to the very powerful idea of the “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1993), and to learn from opposed works like those of Edward Said (1978), works that have taught us how much the framing of otherness expresses relations of power, we propose a renewed framework for thinking about power and its representations.

Hence, culture was a concept deployed to stop flux in its tracks, creating stability and ‘ways of life’ where before there had been change and contest. The idea of culture demanded a mapping of boundaries and edges, the specification of a morphology: culture had to become a bounded object that ultimately differentiated the world.

(Mitchell 1995, 107)

As we move towards a proposal to analyze the politics of culture, we leave aside what the field of cultural politics (Darnovsky et al. 1995) had established, and the necessary acknowledgement of cultural multiplicity. Culture is not a luxury, but of shared interest to all, rich and poor, and culture is found in the growing crossings of cultural forms and productions (Becker and Horowitz 2017). Even the dispossessed cannot be dispossessed of all of their culture.

Whereas we may assume and accept this diversity of culture, we need to acknowledge and stress that one should by no means forget how much culture is a battlefield, made of domination processes and resistance initiatives. Cultural expressions may be very powerful tools of oppression and we must not forget that if culture is often associated with the idea of mutual respect, as well as with products that escape the market economy, these common ideas have been proven false by Antonio Gramsci's (2012) analysis. Gramsci demonstrates how much the capitalist system imposes its norms through the dissemination of cultural products that make it very difficult to resist and oppose the system. In essence, the oppressed are induced into internationalization by the means of the hegemony that is imposed upon them (Houssay-Holzschuch 2020).

1.5 Bringing together theories of border and culture

In the Gramscian perspective, culture is a means of representation of power relations. It performs domination but also it underlines the possibilities of emancipating processes. There is no summary culture, no neatly aggregated and contained assemblage, but multiple representations becoming in everyday life, engaged in nature and replete with complexities and paradoxes. Throughout this book, we will be looking at material and immaterial expressions of the border, considering both practices and representations, and how these bring people together and set them apart. We seek to appreciate culture in a perspective that takes into account the post-representational turn of geography, meaning that we do not only take cultural expressions as elements that express a given reality of the border, but rather we aim to understand them as actively performing the de-/rebordering processes. In this sense, for example, border art works, either from the visual or living arts, or from literature or poetry, do not slow political situations, they contribute to transforming them. Paradoxically, these may alternatively convey a view from the dominating actors and alternative visions of borders.

Moving out of the nationalist cultural trap also implies that border culture may be everywhere, yet nowhere: it certainly contributes to questioning strongly the centre-periphery dynamics of political space. If we consider that borders are the limits of national containers, then they ostensibly form a space of confrontation between two cultural entities. This is very often summarized and simplified by the idea that national identities conflict at the border. Concurrently, since most borders are not considered as impermeable, it is often acknowledged that some kind of mingling may appear and open the space to a cross-boundary relationship. The hybridity that ensues depends on different factors that characterize the degree of openness of the border as well as on the fact that the border regions' history and languages are older than that of the state authority which divides them (Brunet-Jailly 2005). Whether this mingling is the expression and imposition of centre-based identities, or the place of negotiation of hybridity, the interaction would imply that the culture of the borders can only be expressed and perceived on site, thus condemning border culture to a marginal position. Yet,

this is not borne out by the evidence. The intersections that are induced at the border travel, either because the women and men who carry them are mobile, or because artifacts and constructs are transported by a diversity of means, including a rapidly growing digital dissemination, and also because we work with an idea of the everywhere border. Cultural expressions and processes appear essential to the borderscapes—“a wider understanding of the contemporary spatiality of politics—based on a multi-sited approach at different levels”—of places and regions (Brambilla 2015, Brambilla et al. 2015, 2). Also, culture could constitute an important component within the individualization of contemporary regimes and borderities—being in an intermediate position or state (Amilhat Szary and Giraut 2015). With so much of the world caught in-between and becoming, this is what makes the analysis of border culture so important today.

Borders are spatial signifiers and culture is a process of semantization of human environments: border culture is a site where the perception of meaning is made spatially available. Border culture is an evolving framework for encoding the meaning of border (Konrad and Nicol 2008). Our aim in this book is to decode the meaning of border culture. Analyzing border culture could therefore be a way of revisiting our understanding of how cultural meaning relates to activate the boundaries of being for everyone of us (Shweder et al. 1984). Border culture both underlines the power of dominating representations and relations that encapsulate us into hegemonic frameworks, which strongly restrict our political clout, and, yet, border culture hints at tracks to follow that allow for the renegotiation of meaning through place. This direction calls for a theoretical re-engagement of border studies and cultural psychology (Muscarà 2020, Konrad 2020).

Throughout our book, the discussion between border theory and culture theory tackles the border as a specific type of place, but the discourse also extends to consideration of the border as a metaphor (Schimanski and Wolfe 2007). Gender, race, or ability/disability barriers, for example, are other kinds of barriers (and everywhere borders) that challenge and allow for cultural renewal. Although these metaphorical borders are not the central focus of this book, we acknowledge the intersectionality of evolving border thinking. Intersectional approaches, therefore, are mobilized throughout our reasoning and writing because our project is a step in the direction of stepping out of a nationalist mould of thinking, and the methodologies that accompany this constrained thought. In effect, we tell a story of “competing universalities” (Butler 2004), and we offer ways of thinking about emancipatory frameworks to deal with the dehumanization processes that are currently evident at our countries’ borders.

1.6 Border culture: Theory, imaginaries and production, national narratives and counter-narratives, border crossings, and transnational border culture

Our engagement with theory in this book is not only fundamental to establishing a framework for our study, and positioning our thinking within the

epistemologies of border studies and cultural studies, but also to relate theories of border and culture that do not necessarily reside comfortably in the same space. Accordingly, we begin Chapter 2 with a detailed assessment of the foundations of thought about border culture. The challenge is to situate border culture in border theory, an incomplete and unresolved theoretical framework of logical, ethical, and metaphysical components of justified beliefs and knowledge about borders (Konrad 2021). Epistemological advances in understanding “dissensus” versus consensus at borders, power, belongingness, borderscapes, and a-territoriality (or more-than-territoriality) are “ridges of knowledge” in a topographic understanding which remains incomplete for explaining interstitial components of borders and bordering.

At best, linked approaches employing multiple perspectives, engaging with borderlands, portraying borderscapes, and articulating agency and mobility have set the stage for a recalibration of borders in globalization, and an approximation of post-globalization borders. In a post-humanistic era, in which we have encountered the limitations of nature and sparred with natural laws, states have propped up borders and emphasized boundaries. The “border turn” is reactionary, and antithetical, a time when we need to be mindful of the branded border and anxious of our belongingness both within and beyond borders.

(Konrad 2021, 1)

Within this framework, and acknowledging new directions at the post-globalization border, we step back in time to review and examine critically the foundations of border culture theory. This retrospective involves tracing the thought of Friedrich Ratzel, Franz Boas, and Fredrik Barth, among other pioneers who explored the relationship between borders and culture. Although their research and thought built a foundation for successive theory construction, the thought about borders was relegated to political geography whereas culture was assumed the domain of anthropology. This bifurcation of attention devoted to borders and culture was to prevail until Fredrik Barth (1969) re-engaged *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*.

The re-engagement of borders and culture emerged in a time of intellectual anti-disciplinarity during which scholars sought bridges across the divides between evolved paradigms of thought within silos of disciplines, particularly in the social sciences. Echoes of this crossing of disciplinary boundaries continue within academe and a sustained disciplinary framework which operates to structure and institutionalize research and instruction while allowing and even applauding interdisciplinarity. The point of this digression is to describe the preconditions and to emphasize the importance of the “Barth moment” in situating border culture in border theory. Yet, the integration of thought about borders and culture would require more moments of realization to form a corpus of thought to inform the theory of border culture. Chapter 2 examines these

momentous steps to reveal how and why border culture operates at borders and in borderlands. Among these steps are the acknowledgements that borders are socially constructed, and that culture is political. But many less-heralded realizations have contributed to advancing our thinking about borders and culture, and these are examined in detail in Chapter 2. One of the most significant setbacks in border theory was that border theory had not addressed the border *per se*, but rather focused on the nation-state container, and, consequently, theorizing border culture remained incomplete. To address this problem, as defined earlier in the introduction, is one of the reasons that we are writing this book.

Another reason is to explore the potential for understanding border culture through imaginaries of the border. Imaginaries are “unceasing and essentially undetermined creation of figures, forms and images” (Castoriadis 1997, 3) and they become the basis of something that is expressed as reality and rationality. In our reasoning, imaginaries of all kinds combine with identities to construct border culture. Border imaginaries are spatial, social, and inherently cultural thoughts and ideas (Rodney 2017, Schimanski and Nyman 2021). They may be supposed, insubstantial, and even unreal, but these border imaginaries are often powerful thoughts and ideas that influence border interaction, governance, and policy. Border imaginaries may be unfulfilled manifestations of culture, yet they may become framed thought and expressions of cultural production. In Chapter 3, we examine how border imaginaries are formed and revealed through maps, bodies, and everyday cultural production. Border culture imaginaries are evaluated according to their thresholds of development, the nature and extent of hybridity, and the states of transition. Following Randy Widdis (2015), we consider the parallelism, parallax, and paradox of border imaginaries in order to characterize how imaginaries produce border culture. We explore some expressions of border imaginaries—life securing, life sustaining, life enriching—in order to convey how these forms of border culture impact human activity at the border and in the borderlands. Border imaginaries offer a springboard to realization and understanding of borders in globalization because they expand the discourse of possibilities and populate this discourse with figures, forms, and images of border culture. Border imaginaries take us from unresolved forms to essentialized and materialized borders, and back again to more unresolved figures and images in the production and reproduction of borders. Border imaginaries are the circulatory systems and the connective tissue generated at the border, and generating the border. Imaginaries of the border also perform the border to create and align with national narratives and counter-narratives at the border.

Stories of the border tell us who we are and confirm where we are, as well as inducing us to define precisely who “we” is and what “us” means (Schimanski and Nyman 2021). In this way, national narratives help to create and shore up the border. One could visualize national narratives building momentum within their territory, and feeding on the edge of territory to make it conform, and characterize it as different than the borderland it has become. We may know that we live in borderlands and meshed territories, but national narratives create the boundaries