

## INTRODUCTION

### Border communities: microstudies on everyday life, politics and memory in European Societies from 1945 to the present

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The 1989/1991 demise of European communist regimes created a powerful impulse for the investigation of memory cultures at Cold War borders and, subsequently, for reflections on the creation of new European border regimes. The four studies included in this special section investigate these two processes on a micro level of their dynamics in new and old borderlands from the perspectives of history, anthropology and political science. At the same time, they explore the relations between the everyday life experience of borderland communities and larger historical and political processes, sometimes going back to the re-drawing of European borders in the aftermath of the First World War.

It is the hybrid nature of borders as at the same time separating and connecting (Anzaldúa 1987; Gupta and Fergusson 1997), as the place where “a transition between two worlds is most pronounced” (Van Gennep 1960 paraphrased in Berdahl 1999, 12) that makes them such an attractive and interdisciplinary site of research. It is of interest to geographers, historians, anthropologists, sociologists and other social scientists (e.g. Donnan and Wilson 1994; Anderson 1997; Ganster et al. 1997; Breysach, Paszek, and Tölle 2003; Wastl-Walter 2010). Daphne Berdahl sees boundaries as “symbols through which states, nations, and localities define themselves. They define at once territorial limits and sociocultural space” (Berdahl 1999, 3). Border research distinguishes between “border,” “bordering,” and “borderland” or “frontier” (the term first defined by Turner 1921). While borders connote a dividing line, borderlands connote an area, and bordering refers to the process of border- and borderland-creation. Borders are established through a three-stage process of allocation, delimitation and demarcation: a territory is first placed (*allocated*) under the jurisdiction of a government, then an imaginary line is drawn (*delimited*) on a map, and finally the boundary is marked with physical markers (*demarcated*) in the terrain (Sahlins 1989, 2). Borderlands or frontier zones are “privileged sites for the articulation of national distinctions” (Sahlins 1989, 271), and as such are places where difference is produced and institutionalized through territorial sovereignty, but also constantly renegotiated by multiple actors.

Peter Sahlins, in his account of the history of the French–Spanish border, introduced an approach that was innovative at that time, of the frontier as a bridge between the national and the local. He illustrated how a national identity is brought from the state to the border region, but at the same time how the local identity from a frontier village co-shapes the national identity (Sahlins 1989). This by-definition dualistic view has been since challenged

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by approaches viewing the frontier as a flexible concept, as a place where the clashes between various actors are the most prominent (e.g. Berdahl 1999; Zielonka 2002; Eigmüller and Votruba 2006; Zhurzenko 2010; Armbruster and Meinhof 2011; Sheffer 2011). The involvement of the multiple actors, however, makes borderlands also a place of opportunities, whether in the material sense of cross-border cooperation (e.g. Perkmann and Sum 2002; Weitzel et al. 2009) or symbolic meaning-making (e.g. Donnan and Wilson 1999; Hurd 2006).

The four articles from four independent larger projects presented here are a result of a series of workshops held at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for European History and Public Spheres in Vienna between 2010 and 2012 within the institute's long-term project on Cold War borders, everyday life and the politics of memory.<sup>1</sup> One of the initiators of the idea of a group project was the late Mark Pittaway, to whom we dedicate this special section. The articles all deal in different combinations with the issues mentioned above while posing new questions on continuities from prewar to Cold War in the local context of borderlands (Kind-Kovács), on Cold War politics of nationalization of the borderlands in both East and West (Venken), on the formation of borderland "communities of memory" (Zhurzenko) and on the subjective formation of borderland identities (Pfoser). In all cases the politics of memory in terms of the local and the national is closely connected with population exchanges (for the most part, deportations).

Friederike Kind-Kovács interviewed Germans deported from the Czech borderlands after the Second World War and now mostly living not far from the Czech border in Bavaria and presents a balanced account of the rupture between the two borderland communities, of which the post-war deportations were a consequence with lasting effects, but not its beginning. She sketches a vivid picture of the downward progress from multi-ethnic, if not always harmonious, cohabitation to the destruction of both the Czech and the German communities and their cultures, first, through the ideology of nationalization of the borderlands and, second, through the communist ideology. She complements and contrasts this historical perspective with the personal trauma of the loss of home and homeland that perpetuates that rupture and even carries it over to the next generation.

Machteld Venken chose an unorthodox comparative approach to the study of the nationalization of the borderlands, including population transfers, at the Belgian–German and Polish–German borders after the Second World War. She argues for the prime ideological importance of children's education in the politics of nationalization, evidenced, for example, by the different internal educational and personnel policies applied by the central governments in the interior and in the borderlands with Germany. Venken's unorthodox approach lies in her decision to compare a West/West to an East/West border. Her detailed archival research revealed that what was previously noted by Muriel Blaive as the communist policy of creating a politically reliable population in the borderlands (Blaive in Blaive and Molden 2009), was, after all, not a unique communist phenomenon, but was practised also by Belgian educational authorities.

If the population transfers in the previous two cases resulted in disruptions in both the material and symbolic existences of the indigenous borderlands communities, then Tatiana Zhurzenko documents a case of "successful" nationalization of Polish–Ukrainian borderlands through population transfers that had begun already before the end of the Second World War. Stalin's transfers resulted in ethnic homogenization of the borderlands on both sides. Thus, both borderlands become populated by "communities of memory" rather than by physical ethnic minority populations in the post-Cold War rise of national memorialization. Zhurzenko chooses monuments to fighters for the "homeland" at military cemeteries as locations to which these symbolic communities gravitate. Unlike in

the case of the other three articles, here the national symbolism of the borderlands is actualized at the state, rather than the local, level – because there is no indigenous borderland population to make the claim.

Finally, Alena Pfoser's article takes us to the territory of a new post-Cold War border. She conducted her anthropological research in the Estonian and now an EU-member-state town Narva, in other words, in a location that used to lie on the internal USSR border and now is not only on an international, but also a Schengen border. Similarly to Kind-Kovács' approach, she is also interested in the construction of a place through personal narratives. Also in this case, the borderland population is mostly a result of a population transfer linked to the end of the Second World War and the early post-war. The interviewees, Russian speakers in the Estonian town, however, include mainly inhabitants who moved to Narva in the later Soviet periods, which has a major effect on how they negotiate their relationship with the physical territory. They see themselves at the same time as Soviet (but not necessarily Russian) and Estonian, perceiving themselves as "Estonianized" and viewing Russia as "other," thus reconciling two usually opposite identifications. They are also the opposite of the "communities of memories" identified by Zhurzenko: their need for negotiation has a perceptibly material base.

All four microstudies of everyday life at the border challenge the discursive dominance of the communist/totalitarian versus capitalist/democratic rivalry in Cold War bordering: borders were instrumentalized for national constructions by all political regimes throughout the twentieth century. The nation-state ideology asserted in Europe since 1918 set in motion a century-long process of creating ethnically homogenous, politically reliable, and ideologically pure borderlands. As these studies show, the political, cultural, and psychological consequences of this process at state, community and individual levels have not only outlived the end of the Cold War, but have been mobilized anew by a variety of actors into the twenty-first century.

## Note

1. The institute was active between 2005 and 2013. The project on Cold War borders was conducted with the institutional support of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for European History and Public Spheres. It was led by Berthold Molden between 2005 and 2010 and by Libora Oates-Indruchová between 2010 and 2012. For more information, see <http://ehp.lbg.ac.at/>.

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