

Workshop 44

Living in Border Zones

(Invited Workshop)

Convenors:

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Are borders joining and separating states the locus of maximum constraint, where global and national forces most limit human agency? Or are they the playground of the imagination, where individuals and groups exercise great freedom in the negotiation of hybrid cultures and identities? The proposed symposium would examine this issue through case studies exploring the dynamics of group identity formation and negotiation on and in the vicinity of a number of very different borders, throwing light on both, the structural elements of border political economies and the range of cultural practices that may respond to those constraints and opportunities. Sites considered might include literal and historical border territories, enclaved communities within regions otherwise marked by large-scale cultural homogeneity and mixed cities. In comparatively investigating the ways in which cultural differences are represented and negotiated in border zones the panel as a whole will examine and theorise contemporary forms of identity formation and reformulation in a world in which the forces of globalisation give rise not only to culture sharing and forms of synthesis but also to hostile oppositional positionings of cultural repertoires.

Paper by Yiannis Papadakis, TBA

Repairing the Iron Curtain: Family and Ethnicity Along the Georgian-Turkish Border

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This paper describes and analyses what happened to crossborder family ties and ethnic relations after the border between Georgia and Turkey lost its physical rigidity in the late 1980s. The place of action is the border-village Sarpi, which has been divided since the Soviet-Turkish border was placed in the middle of the village in the early 1920s. The division of the village severed numerous kinship-ties and restrained most forms of communication. However, the Soviet state could not eliminate cross-border loyalties, nor did it prevent villagers from longing to re-establish contact with their relatives and ethnic kin across the border. But when the border was opened and the villagers finally met with their relatives on the other side, the

encountered differences and similarities prompted new attempts to define patterns of belonging and non-belonging; attempts which involved the re-enactment of several dimensions of the Iron Curtain. It was not that differences produced by integration in states with contrasting political, economic, and ideological structures simply spilled over to the present. Rather, the collapse of the Soviet Union sparked incentives to fortify and essentialise the cultural constructions the Soviet state produced. By focusing on the patterns of cross-border contact and contrast, this paper shows that although physical constraints do not necessarily bind the construction of identity, the dynamics that unfold along territorial borders may well provide the means and incentives for grounding and fortifying the state endorsed identities. In the case of Sarpi, the ideological divides created during the socialist period have been reinforced despite the fact that the Soviet state has disappeared.

Dancing at the Border: Secrecy and Revelation

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At the Prespa border region, where Albania, Greece and Macedonia/ FYROM meet over Lake Prespa, subject formation is directly related to national (in)security. The Greek border zone's history is fraught with violence, suspicion and secrecy. This pervades not only the relationship between the nation-state and its border subjects, but also the relations of the different border communities, the everyday practices of their members. These people embody the border and its history in many ways. An endless return of the past haunts these lives, historicizing the border and rendering them "out of place". In some crucial way, the people of Prespa are attached to some other distant or unavailable home. The border seems to create displaced subjects. The dances of the Prespa people reveal these border stories. The desires of the border people however, also become powerfully animated through the practices of their dance.

Being a Spartakoi

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Social identity implies separation and opposition. To say "I am - or feel myself to be - in some way(s) the same as all the other members of group X" is always tantamount to saying that I am in some way(s) distinct and different from the members of some other groups. So much, however, is mere semantic entailment, and to that extent uninteresting. What warrants ethnographic investigation are the conditions under which expressions of identity and opposition are important to actors (and there is no need to assume that they must be), the contexts within which identity and opposition are variously asserted, and the manner in which they are substantiated. This paper takes as its ethnographic

focus the village of Spartokhori, one of three villages on the tiny Greek Ionian island of Meganisi, and explores the various dimensions of the context-sensitive opposition between “dhiki mas” (our people) and “kseni” (foreigners/ guests/ outsiders), for the existence of three separate village communities on the island, immigration from other parts of Greece, periodic economic overseas emigration to the USA, Canada, South Africa and Australia, and finally tourism have placed the villagers of Spartokhori in a continual series of self-defining oppositions between themselves and members of Meganisi’s other two villages, between themselves and Greek in-comers and between themselves and non-Greeks.

Constructing Identities Among a Border Pomak Community in Greece

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In this paper I attempt to examine the process of group identification of the Pomaks of a mountainous community in Xanthi-Greece, in the light of anthropological theories on identity construction and minority identity formation, by exploring how their location in the borders between three different nation states, Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey, affected the Greek state’s policy towards this group. The case of the Pomaks presents great interest in terms of identity formation and identity shift or change. Their Moslem religion, Slavic language, their socioeconomic marginalization over a long period of time, and the fact that ethnically they have been claimed by three different countries (Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey), have created a rather more situational, flexible ethnicity among them, adapted to a variety of inter-group interactions and corresponding to changes in their environment. In my analysis, I try to explore how the sense of identity at its various levels is generated and transmitted, how it persists, shifts and sometimes is transformed or negotiated. The Pomaks constitute the second most numerous Muslim group in Greece after the ethnic Turks and because of the Greek state’s policy toward them remained rather cut off from the rest of the population of the country until the early ’90s. Their practice of endogamy and lack of opportunities for trading and travelling contributed significantly to the creation of a bounded, isolated community. The creation of the Modern Greek nation-state did not mean the opening of a new era for the Pomaks. Being generally unable to deal with the bureaucratic machinery of the state, they have used middlemen for their social and economic deals. This of course is not an unusual phenomenon in Greek society, although within the minority it might have some further significance, stressing even more the “we/ they” dichotomy between this border community and the rest of Greek society, which apparently exists anyway.

Crossing the Border: Greek Cypriot Refugees Returning ‘Home’

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The Larnatsjiotes are the former inhabitants of the small village Larnakas tis Lapithou, located in the now occupied Kyrenia district in Cyprus. As a result of the Turkish invasion of 1974 Cyprus has been divided and a part of the Cypriots became refugees in their own country. Since April 2003 Greek Cypriot refugees have the possibility, for the first time in twenty-eight years, to visit their villages and houses in the north of Cyprus. Since the opening of the Green Line (the border) the present inhabitants of the village, Turkish Cypriots coming from two villages in the south of Cyprus, have to deal with the 'return visits' of the Larnatsjiotes. This new situation obviously necessitates the framing of new research questions. For example, in what ways do both groups construct and reconstruct the notions of 'home' and 'belonging'. Joining the Larnatsjiotes on their numerous return visits gave me an insight in what ways they are recapturing their selves and how they express their need to belong to this particular locality. Through the medium of photography I show how they began now engaging in what can be called religious practices to transform their return to a pilgrimage and how they claim this village by collecting different tokens. I also focus on how the Larnatsjiotes interact with the present inhabitants.

Borders and Boundaries on the Upper Nile

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This paper explores aspects of identity in a place of long-term upheaval, migration and social exclusion. Drawing on field research carried out on both sides of the Sudan/ Uganda border among Acholi and Madi groups during the 1980s and 90s, it explores ways in which boundaries relate to the negotiation of moral spaces and behaviours - such as those associated with ideas about home, lineage, nationality, ethnicity, and accountability. It describes how various notions of identity overlap and are transformed, and how violence is often linked to processes of inclusion and the forging of mutuality. It also comments on the gulf in understandings between local people and outsiders (mainly government officials and aid workers). In addition remarks are made about the ways in which an anthropologist is allocated a moral status through (vicarious) participation in extreme events.

The Tunnel Kids of the US/ Mexico Border: Landscapes of Memory, Fantasy, and Desire

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This paper explores the construction of identity among the members of an adolescent gang that moves through the most liminal of spaces: a drainage tunnel that runs under and across

the US/ Mexico border. Using notions of space and place, the “Tunnel Kids” of El Barrio Libre create not only a sense of social territory, but most crucially, of collective memory. This temporal dimension proves crucial to their negotiation and performance of fragile individual and collective identities on and under the border. This cultural dynamic is examined as a response to a world characterised, paradoxically, by both maximum state constraint and the possibility of dynamic cultural appropriation and invention. Widening our view, we find this paradox also characterises the performance of what might seem more stable identities, including those of nation states.