

Euroregions have allowed for the creation of local and regional ‘neighbourhood’ contexts that have helped break down intercultural resentment and mental barriers to interaction. Nevertheless, as Popescu points out, these cooperation projects are often overshadowed by national political interests and geopolitical concerns.

This analyses offered by Popescu are supported and documented by numerous examples gleaned from historical sources, the author’s own observations as well as by a carefully crafted synthesis of recent research on border-related issues. The book also provides provocative food for thought; for example, in outlining border-making dilemmas that characterize the contemporary world. Many of these dilemmas have to do with the contradictions between state territoriality and sovereignty and the global reach of financial flows, information and ideas and environmental challenges and threats. Gabriel Popescu’s book is very much a product of contemporary scientific and political reflection on the significance of the border function as a manifes-

tation of political/social/cultural power. All in all, this book is a timely selective contribution to a widening international debate on the societal significance and impact of state borders.

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Border studies and the risk of ossification

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Books and their titles. An interesting and sometimes puzzling relationship. This holds as well for this new addition to the mushroomed field of border studies. ‘*Bordering and Ordering the Twenty-first Century*’. That is some title indeed. Does it really say ‘the 21st Century’? Is it possible to order and border a whole century that has just begun? Is it desirable? Is the goal of this work to promote bordering and ordering or is it a caution against the forms of disciplining stemming from these processes? Is it a pessimistic forecast of an unstoppable trend or an exhortation to challenge and resist it? Or might it

simply be that the author forgot the word ‘in’ before the words ‘*the Twenty-first Century*’?

In any case, it is clear that this piece does not wish to become just another cover on the rapidly expanding bookshelf on border theories and cases. This book of the US-based Romanian scholar Gabriel Popescu wants to go beyond that by providing an overview of the field’s unfoldment so far. It wishes to be a textbook for (beginning) students of border studies. In doing so, it offers a rich account of the development of border studies in an accurate and most elegant condensation of its main concepts and turns throughout its relatively short history. The book presents a very useful and concise set of notions familiar to the field of border studies. After a general introduction (chapter 1), the author introduces the reader to the history of borders (chapter 2), borders in the era of globalization (chapter 3), the production of global border spaces (chapter 4), controlling mobility (chapter 5) and bridging borders (chapter 6). It furnishes definitions such as

those of borderland and the Ratzelian idea of state; distinctions between territory and territoriality, boundary and frontier, antecedent, subsequent and superimposed boundaries as well as an account on the shift towards bordering and ordering (van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002).

Useful as this overview might be, we would like to raise a concern with the ambition the book brings forward that we would like to open up for debate. Our open question is that proffering a sort of guide for the field of border studies promotes authority, but does it not also carry the dangers of narrowing the focus of study as well as of losing perspective of related fields and critical discussions? For, by offering general definitions and manual-like descriptions, one runs the risk of putting a straitjacket around border thinking. Some of the main concerns of much of the critical theory inspiring border studies in the last decades go exactly against the authoritative making of neutral definitions and descriptions of social (b)ordering processes. Instead, if anything can be said about the field of border studies is that it has been driven by the constant critical encouragement to create new languages, offer alternative representations, symbols and narratives and new ways of thinking about bordering and its consequences.

This critique is directed to the sometimes schoolbook-like definitions of concepts, but also to other commonplaces found in the book. The idea of the Peace of Westphalia as the basis for modern interstate relations, for example, is affirmed in chapter 2 (p. 34) despite much recent evidence against the validity of this claim (Beaulac, 2004; Osiander, 2001; Teschke, 2003). The book thereby runs the risk of falling into a territorial trap of a continental dimension by affirming that modern interstate borders are 'an essentially European affair' (p. 38). And that is a debatable viewpoint. Wouldn't it be more accurate to say that they are a particularly Spanish and Portuguese – even an Iberian – affair since their empires started to promote them across the globe? After all, the Italian and German nation-states, for example, emerged almost 50 years later than most of their counterparts in the American continent. What is more, the book repeats the idea that national borders in former European colonies were imposed by colonial rulers (p. 39), while missing the

transcultural interpretation that local populations had a bigger say in the bordering of their territories than what has been acknowledged so far (Brambilla, 2007). This raises the question of whether the borders of nation-states in Europe respected the patterns of social life in the lands they delimit. Wouldn't this mean that, unlike colonial borders, the borders of the colonizing nation-states are 'natural'? Doesn't this then run against the very idea that the nation-state is for the most part a social construct promoted by political elites (Anderson, 2006; Hobsbawm, 1990) – which is recognized by the author elsewhere in the text anyhow? The nation-state is arguably better understood as a political technology and its propagation may owe more to its powerful appeal than to certain cultural or continental specificities. Further in the text, when speaking about today's transnational terrorism, the troublesome generalization is made about its networks being 'grounded in large part in religious fundamentalist ideology and ... different from early terrorist organizations that relied mainly on political ideology or separatism' (p. 59). Although Islamic terrorism has an evident religious dimension, it is questionable whether it is not also deeply – even predominantly – political and, in this sense, whether it is so different from other kinds of terrorism, especially considering the profoundly political causes fuelling it – such as military invasions and bombings that have been routinely killing an appalling amount of civilians on a regular basis for decades. A related criticism is that the book focuses perhaps too much on borders as the expression of power and ordering and too little on borders as the expression of an anthropological tendency (Simmel, 1997, p. 142). Yet, this latter critique could also be a reflection on the bias of the field itself. Is it only power who borders people and places or do individuals also border themselves from each other by creating all kinds of distinctions? If so, what explains this drive in people? And, most importantly, on what moral grounds do we border ourselves and thereby others? When and why do border distinctions become violent? Difference may be a natural occurrence and its recognition an unavoidably tendency but segregation and violence do not have to be (Stichweh, 2004).

These examples may help to illustrate our argument here. It is clear that this work makes an extraordinary contribution to border studies by allowing the inexperienced reader to get a foothold on some of the main debates revolving around this field. As such, this work will be most useful for (novice) scholars of border studies in its character as a serious and well-written attempt to make a snapshot of the progress in border studies. Yet, if the field is to retain the valuable critical inspiration that thrives on opposing the views of the powerful to advocate the origins of the oppressed and voiceless then we, as border scholars, need to be very careful not to start uncritically setting down a liturgy of names and publications. In the last few years, we have seen the emergence of several of such over-viewing compendia. Maybe this is a telling trend pointing to a gradual formalization of the field of border studies. But it is, at the same time, a warning to ourselves because any kind of formalization entails the risk of intellectual ossification. This does not mean that there are no scholars who deserve recognition for their contributions to this field but rather that we should beware of the adverse effects that authority exerts upon creativity by discouraging free thinking and repressing the subversiveness that is crucial to the promotion of emancipation. In other words, the field of border studies should be wary of bordering itself, for it can only remain a bulwark against the excesses, immorality and oppression of power if it stays liable to innovation and open to disturbance. The feeling that somehow there has to be an unavoidable synopsis of border studies or a 'summary' of its findings that would serve or be seen as a threshold one must cross before entering the field must be prevented. Such ambition would imply a completeness and a certainty that are incompatible with the incommensurability of the human experience that renders borders so problematic and fascinating at the same time. To keep at bay the most pernicious practices of borders we need to accept incompleteness (van Houtum and Pijpers, 2007), which is a more truthful conceptualization of both human experience and the never-ending metamorphosis borders undergo as a consequence of their dependence on relentless human interaction.

The unintended yet pernicious consequence that anthologizing endeavours of this kind cannot avoid to produce – despite their unquestionable quality – is placing the heavy gravestone of authority over a field that has derived much of its strength from its disregard for authority itself. Taking this textbook seriously should not prevent us from considering what it is and could not avoid to be, a most helpful tool to establish a dialogue with the debates informing this field yet, as the field itself, an unfinished work in progress. This then brings us back to the title. The 21st century is not bordered and ordered yet. How could it be?

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