



National Borders and Social Boundaries: the Case of Friuli and Beyond

WORKSHOP

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National borders and social boundaries: conceptual framework

Alessandro Monsutti

Abstract

The dissolution of the Eastern bloc and the end of the Cold War have led to a rapid multiplication of international borders and the simultaneous (re)activation of old and new forms of circulation. Border studies have emerged as a significant field to assess the magnitude and repercussions of this epochal transformation. Moving away from a state-centric perspective, international borders are not seen anymore as mere lines of demarcation between sovereign entities with discrete territories, but as social processes, producers and products of social representations, discourses and practices. The “small stories” of people living in the vicinity of borders has attracted vivid scholarly attention beyond the “big story” of the construction of the nation-states.

The aim of this research project is to contribute to this debate with a political anthropology of the changing nature of Italy’s northeast borderland, a very contested region and the point of encounter in Europe for speakers of Romance, Slavic and Germanic languages. The project focuses specifically on the region known as *Slavia friulana* (Province of Udine), where the majority of the population speak Slovenian dialects. This choice is justified on three grounds: First, this border has witnessed a dramatic shift in significance over the last decades, from the Cold War, when it was the external frontier of the so-called First World, to the independence of Slovenia in 1991 and finally the country’s accession to the European Union in 2004. Second, it is probably the only segment of the old line of demarcation between the Eastern and Western blocs, which ran from Lübeck to Trieste, that has historical depth dating back to the 15th century. Finally, *Slavia friulana* has been comparatively much less investigated than other parts of the Upper Adriatic (such as Trieste or Istria).

Inspired by the current discussions around the “borderscapes” concept and the anthropological literature on photography and counter-memories, the project investigates whether the local political memories mediated by written testimonies and material artefacts (such as diaries, letters of migrants or family souvenirs), as well as visual documents (family albums and other photographs) conceal forms of resistance that counter and disturb the hegemonic discourse of the central state, long based on Italianization and surveillance.

The project embraces a two-fold audio-visual component. First, a survey of existing visual documents will be conducted in a territory formerly classified as military zone, where the production of images was drastically controlled. Second, the anthropological research will be supported by a series of video-recorded in-depth interviews with our interlocutors, who will be asked to comment on the written testimonies, material artefacts and visual documents they accept to share with us. The end and means of the research merge: collecting hidden images, accessing family archives and making them available becomes the very strategy for approaching people on the ground.

The project will result in a monograph and a documentary film integrating past images and contemporary testimonials to make visible the invisible. It contributes in a novel way to the general field of border studies with an investigation of counter-hegemonic visual representations and paves the way, at the regional level, for a wide-ranging public discussion including the local populations and the authorities.

Biographical note

Alessandro Monsutti is Professor at the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva.

He has been Research Fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies (1999-2000) and Yale University (2008-2010), Grantee of the MacArthur Foundation (2004-2006), and Visiting Professor at the University of Vienna (2012) and Arizona State University (2014). He is also Research Associate at the Refugee Studies Centre (University of Oxford). In addition, he has worked as a consultant for several international and nongovernmental organizations such as UNHCR.

He has carried out extensive field research in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran since the mid-1990s, and more recently in the Western countries among Afghan refugees and migrants. Among his current research interests: the political economy of reconstruction in Afghanistan as an example of emerging forms of sovereignty and global governance; asylum seekers and refugees in Europe; migrants and non-migrants in urban neighbourhoods; the changing nature of borderlands in Europe and South Asia.

His is the author of *War and Migration: Social Networks and Economic Strategies of the Hazaras of Afghanistan* (2005), *Homo itinerans: La planète des Afghans* (2018); and co-editors of several volumes, including *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia* (2007), *Entre ordre et subversion: logiques plurielles, alternatives, écarts, paradoxes* (2007), *Le monde turco-iranien en question* (2008), *Migration et développement, un mariage arrangé / Migration und Entwicklung: eine Zweckallianz* (2008), *Connivences et antagonismes: Enquête sociologique dans six rues de Genève* (2015), *Complicity and Antagonism: Anthropological Views of Geneva* (2017).

National borders and social boundaries in Friuli: first results

Stefano Morandini

Abstract

The first part of the project “National Borders and Social Boundaries in Europe: the Case of Friuli” was dedicated to carrying out qualitative video-interviews representing each valley that is subject matter of the study (Val Resia, Val del Torre, Val del Natisone, Val Judrio) and the neighboring Slovenian valleys close to the former border. The interviewees were selected according to two categories: informants who played an official and acknowledged role within their community (public officials, priests, representatives of cultural associations) and ordinary people whose lives developed at and were directly affected by the border, its resistances and permeabilities.

Hitherto, this project phase has led to the creation of a database containing about 80 video-interviews, each lasting from 3 to 5 hours. Unstructured interviews were preferred over standardized questionnaires as they enable the researcher to adapt their questions depending on the respondent’s answers, thereby probing specific research topics according to the context. Informants were chosen to represent each age group and to include the younger generations. The field research entailed recording community gatherings (e.g. religious or social events, memorial services) or direct observation where the presence of a camera would have been perceived as invasive (e.g. presentation of political programs or debates for municipal elections).

Meeting the informants proved essential for the collection of photographic and documentary material. The interviews will be indexed with a software for quantitative data analysis in order to make data easily shareable and traceable.

Today we will be presenting two stories representing two research studies based on the life experiences of some informants, which will hopefully stimulate discussion. The first one, “Stories from the Borders”, is the story of Emilia, born in Yugoslavia during the fascist regime and fostered by her mother’s Italian relatives at the age of three to escape poverty. At the age of eight, Emilia is returned to her parents. During her childhood and early adolescence, she therefore becomes acquainted with the necessary practice of trafficking and witnesses the violent clashes between police officers and Alpine soldiers controlling the villages, and Yugoslav partisans hidden in the woods. Soon, Emilia decides to leave her village to seek fortune in Italy, crosses the border with the help of a smuggler and is given refuge by her Italian relatives. A few days later, she turns herself in to the authorities, she is granted refugee status and is moved to a reception center in Cremona. Thanks to her knowledge of the Italian language and her natural charisma, the committee grants her the Italian citizenship. Emilia’s story clearly epitomizes our project, which focuses on the border as a grey and permeable area: although relationships were established more easily in the past (the two municipalities of Drenchia and Volce, for example, shared the same cemetery), the border has never been a hard one, as proved by daily practices such as trafficking and the exchange of agricultural products between the populations.

What sometimes emerges from the interviews is thus a sense of disorientation: now that the border no longer exists, it seems as though the identity of these areas, once marked by division and forged by the political exploitations of the 20th century, is the cause of today’s lack of farsightedness.

The second short film, “Symbolic Places”, depicts these symbolic and anthropic places as they changed over time. The film tells the story of Eugenio and Adriana, who purchased a Cold War bunker out of passion and became its custodians and guides, transforming a place which had to remain strategically hidden into a hotspot of a broader ecological network, the European Green Belt. The EGB initiative promotes the conservation and restoration of a high-value natural environment along the former 12,500 km long Iron Curtain running through 8 biogeographical regions in 24 European and Non-European countries.

Biographical note

Stefano Morandini graduated from Udine University in 2003 in anthropology with a thesis on *Il carnevale/Pust nell’area di contatto friulano slovena* (under the supervision of Prof. Gian Paolo Gri). Thanks to a scholarship, he completed a PhD (2008) in History, Culture and Structure of border areas focusing his research on *La dimensione delle relazioni interetniche nella struttura rituale delle comunità di frontiera – Valli del Torre e del Cornappo* (Prof. Glauco Sanga). He attended the specialized school in Demographic, Ethnographic, and Anthropological Assets and wrote a thesis on heritage anthropology published under the title: *Le storie macinate di ‘Sef, il mugnaio* (Prof. Pietro Clemente). Since 2003, Stefano Morandini has been teaching Folk Traditions in Friuli for the Società Filologica Friulana and Cultural Anthropology in the Department of Human Sciences at the University of Udine. Stefano Morandini is specialized in visual anthropology and ethnography of the frontier.

The role of the border in the autonomy of Valleys of Antro and Merso in the Venetian Republic

Ines Beguš

Abstract

In the times of the Venetian Republic (1420-1797), the valleys of Antro and Merso (today Nadiža valley in Venetian Slovenia) had a peculiar administrative and juridical arrangement. In addition, the Republic granted to them a number of privileges for the reason of “indescribable poverty” and the protection of mountain passes against “Germania”. After the War of the League of Cambrai (1508/1516) and the treaty of Worms (1521), the valleys became a border area between the Venetian Republic and the Habsburg lands. The newly defined border meant that the inhabitants of the valleys now protected the border between the two countries. The aim of this paper is to explain what the protection of the border by the inhabitants of the valleys meant for their self-government and privileges and what were the relations between Venetian republic and the valleys.

In the war of the League of Cambrai (1508/1516), the Venetian Republic lost the Upper Soča valley (Bovec, Kobarid, Tolmin) till Idrija but preserved territory of town Cividale and valleys of Landar and Merso. The treaty of Worms in 1521 defined the border between Venetian Republic and the Habsburg lands for the next three centuries.

With the establishment of the new state border, encircling the valleys of Antro and Merso, they became a Venetian borderland towards the Habsburg hereditary lands. The newly defined border meant that the inhabitants of the valleys now protected the border between two countries and not simply the mountain passes as before. This territorial change did not imply any significant changes that would undermine rights of village communities of the valleys of Antro and Merso, just the opposite. Thus, the valleys’ communities were exempted from contributions on timber, hay, straw and in the following decades they were also exempted from the tax on ground grain, brady, meat, wine and other taxes and also recruiting men for army. The privileges thus referred to their local economy and military function, which they performed as part of border security.

There is striking evidence on how the endorsement of old and new privileges and rights – obtained, repeatedly confirmed and enlarged through the decades, was perceived as something of paramount importance by the communities of Venetian Slovenia. The borderland-condition had the effect to strengthen their position in the efforts to preserve and amplify self-government and tax privileges, as well as the willingness by the Venetian Republic to maintain them in such a status, recognizing they were relevant to the Republic. An important role in border control was, for example, a good negotiating position for the valleys’ communities to obtain an official judicial investiture in 1627.

Although the scope of autonomy and privileges held by the communities of valleys of Antro and Merso is a special and extraordinary case, it does not constitute a complete exception in the Alpine region, and especially not within the Venetian Republic. The Republic recognized special privileges and self-governing competences also to other alpine communities as one of the ways of managing borderlands and passes in Alpine areas and ensuring the loyalty of local populations.

After the fall of the Republic of Venice in 1797, the communities of the valleys of Antro and Merso named two representatives with the task of “presenting themselves in front of his Imperial Majesty’s throne or any other authority” with the request to confirm their ancient

privileges. This event clearly illustrates the paramount importance that these communities attached to their self-governing rights and fiscal privileges. In fact, their main concern was not who will be the next sovereign in the future, their sole aim was to preserve their ancient privileges.

Biographical note

Ines Beguš is a curator at the Goriška Regional Museum in Nova Gorica and Assistant Professor at the University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities in Koper. Her research work is focused mainly on Slovenian economic, agrarian and social history in early modern period. Her PhD and further work focuses on autonomy and economy of the village communities in Venetian Slovenia in the Venetian Republic.

Community and memory after the Second World War on the Italian-Yugoslavian border

Marko Klavora

Abstract

The presentation will try to shed light on the dynamics of the period following the end of WWII in the Upper Soča Valley, which was first marked by the Allied military Government and later on the newly established border between Italy and Yugoslavia.

The paper will focus on the manner in which the period has been preserved in the individual and collective memory of the inhabitants of the Upper Soča Valley on the one hand, and on how individuals, perceived as the agents and creators of historic events, dealt with the newly established border between Italy and Yugoslavia, which – non-existent before WWII – became part of their new historical reality, on the other.

Key words: Upper Soča region, Allied military government, 20th century, remembrance, memory, first world war, fascism, second world war, oral history, memory studies.

Biographical note

Marko Klavora was working from 2006 to 2011 as a junior researcher at the Institute for Historical Studies of Science and research centre in Koper. He completed his PhD in history (memory studies) in 2011. To enhance his skills, he studied at Northwestern University in Chicago in 2006 and 2007/2008 at University of Federico II in Naples. From 2012 to 2014, he collaborated with the Slovenian migration institute at Research centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) within the project »Professional migration of Slovenians into the territory of the former Yugoslavia - from emigrants to trans migrants«. He was researching memory and life (his)stories of those who remained in war time in Sarajevo and those who had left the city. In 2013/2014, he coordinated the section dedicated to the period of Yugoslav socialism in the Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia in Ljubljana. In 2014, he engaged with the Faculty of Arts on the University of Ljubljana, where he collaborated as a researcher on the project »Women and the Border«. Since 2014 he is employed as a curator – historian in the Goriški Muzej Nova Gorica and he collaborates with the University of Nova Gorica. In Goriški muzej he had curated the exhibition projects about Slovenian refugees in Great War (2016) and Viktor Ullmann: witness and victim of Apokalypse (2018).

Between Heimat and Piccola Patria: Processes of identity building in Alpine borderland regions

Alessandro Ambrosino

Abstract

My project investigates modalities, times and spaces in which regional and supra-regional actors reshaped the territorial identity of the Alps-Adriatic regions during the Cold War. I intend to examine how political symbols, historical memories and cultural expressions have been exploited for strengthening collective feelings of territorial identities. Employing the concept of “borderscape”, I will scrutinize how the institutionalization of “Alpen-Adria”, both culturally and politically, took form in Friuli, Carinthia and Slovenia, resulting in the best example of regional cooperation in Cold War Europe.

Biographical note

Alessandro Ambrosino is PhD student in International History at the Graduate Institute in Geneva. He obtained a Master's Degree in International Relations (European Affairs) from the University of Bologna in 2017. He completed an internship at the European Committee of the Regions, after working at the Liaison Office of the Autonomous Region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia in Brussels. He has collaborated with the Municipality of Bologna in the design of “Concives 1116-2016”, Celebrations for the IX centenary of the foundation of the Municipality of Bologna, and with the Faculty of Education in the organization of the International Festival of Bologna's History. He regularly collaborates with articles and reviews in “Pandora – Rivista di teoria e politica” published by the Association Pandora, of which he is a member, with the magazine “Europea” and other paper and online magazines. His research interests are focused on the study of territorial identities, borders and regional policies.

Ecological echoes of the Iron Curtain

Miha Kozorog

Abstract

My paper discusses international border as ecological factor. It explores a border as both environmentally managed and environmentally productive entity. The focus is on the border between Slovenia (before Yugoslavia) and Hungary, which went through specific treatments as part of the so-called Iron Curtain. Yet the border was unevenly handled by the two inimical states (and corresponding political systems), which as part of their border management created different border/borderland ecologies on the border's respective sides. The ecological difference, produced and sustained by the border, nowadays echoes in farming ecologies, human-animal relations and environmental protection.

Biographical note

Miha Kozorog is employed at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Ljubljana, and the Institute of Ethnology, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. He has published two ethnographic monographs. The Slovenian Research Agency recognized his work as exceptional scientific achievement in social and cultural anthropology. His fields of interest include: spatial anthropology; landscapes; borders and borderlands; tourism and recreation; rituals and festivals; popular music; agrarian anthropology; economic anthropology; moral anthropology; human-environment relations. He has conducted fieldwork in different parts of Slovenia, Friuli and Bosnia-Herzegovina. He currently runs a project on young entrepreneurs in modern-day Slovenia.

Flows and border crossings: Shifting borders in Albania

Nataša Gregorič Bon

Abstract

This paper explores the ways in which the Albanian-Greek border is defined by flows, passages and crossings of things, people and ideas. It focuses on the remittances which are sporadically sent across this polity border by female migrants originating from the southern Albanian village Dhërmi/Drimades of Himara area. These flows were especially pertinent in the period between 2005 and 2010 when due to the massive out-country migrations, remittances presented a large percent of the Albanian gross domestic product. Because remittances conjoin financial sources with material goods and ideas, I use the term material flows for both. Material flows differ from remittances in that they reflect temporality, materialise movements and relations between female migrants living in Greece and their husbands who stay behind in Dhërmi/Drimades. What are the roles and meanings of these flows in migration processes and border crossings? If and how these flows shift the meaning of the social as well as geopolitical borders? Material flows are reciprocal and maintain the relations between people and places which continuously redefine borders (and vice versa). The continuous flows, usually asymmetric, sometimes in both directions, eradicate the social and geographical distance and reconstitute the meaning of the Albanian-Greek border. The continuous passages of material flows as well as female migrants' seasonal returns merge different 'time-spaces'. Thus border is no longer seen only as a geopolitical line but as a knot of stories and flows of people, things and ideas which instigate structuration of past memories, present experiences and future aspirations.

Biographical note

Nataša Gregorič Bon is a social anthropologist with many years of research experience in Albania. The area of her research interest includes spatial anthropology, (non)movements and (im)mobility, border dynamic, Europeanisation, anthropology of future, anthropology of water. She is the author of the monograph entitled *Spaces of Discordance* which was translated into Albanian language and published by the Morava Publishing House, Tirana, Albania in 2015. She is also the co-author of the monograph *(Non)movement and Place-Making* and co-editor of the volume *Moving Places*. For the latter she and her colleague/co-editor Jaka Repič received the Slovenian Research Agency's award Excellent in Science. Since 2008 she is a book review editor of the journal *Anthropological Notebooks* and since 2013 she is co-editor of the *Series Space, Place, Time* at the ZRC Publishing House. She was a Departmental Visitor at the University of Canberra (Australia), Visiting Fellow at the SSEES, UCL (UK) and Centre of South Eastern and European Studies (CSEES), University of Graz (Austria) and Visiting Lecturer at the Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki (Finland), University of Nagoya (Japan).

Resisting state hegemony and exclusion: social practices and negotiations in the former border enclaves of Bangladesh and India

Anuradha Sen Mookerjee

Abstract

Hegemonic discourses of nation-states frequently involve the setting up of massive security regimes at borders, political narratives against “foreigners” who are identified as national enemies and the undertaking of homogenizing processes of certain forms of citizen-making within the state territory which do not take account of the patterns of everyday life of the borderland people. This is particularly the case where new borders have been drawn on historically shared political territory. This paper discusses aspects of individual and collective struggles of the newly documented Muslim minority citizens of India in the recently exchanged border enclaves along the heavily securitized India-Bangladesh border, that had come into existence in 1947 as a result of the decolonization of British India. “Muslims” living in the former Bangladeshi enclaves in Cooch Behar, India, had for long borne the brunt of social boundaries on account of their religion, as they were frequently harassed and criminalized as “foreigners” on Indian territory, even though they spoke the same Bengali language spoken by other Indians in Cooch Behar. This paper based on long term ethnographic research, looks at the experience of negotiations by the new Indian Muslim citizens of the former enclaves with political parties and state agents as minority citizens, after their acquisition of citizenship status in August 2015 and in exploring their trajectories of Indianization, outlines their innovative countering of state hegemony.

Biographical note

Anuradha Sen Mookerjee recently completed her PhD from The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva. The PhD thesis titled, *Boundaries of Citizenship: Social Practices and Negotiations in the Former Border Enclaves of Bangladesh and India*, is an ethnography of the new citizens of the India-Bangladesh border enclaves. It looks into the processes of boundary-making by the Indian state and the negotiations by the marginal borderland actors. Her PhD fieldwork was supported by the Flash Programme of the Cooperation and Development Centre, CODEV, EPFL, Lausanne, Switzerland. Between 2000-2004, she worked as Research Associate on gender equality and feminized poverty at the Centre for Women’s Development Studies, New Delhi, India. Between 2004-2005, she worked with the United Nations Development Programme, India, where she set up the Knowledge Management Partnership Initiative’s Gender Community under the brand name Solution Exchange. Between 2005-2010, she worked on gender equality and human rights with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), South Asia Sub Regional Office. She is interested in the political anthropology of borders, borderlands, social and cultural boundaries, transnational migration and anthropology of the state.