13

The Social Lives of Borders: Political Economy at the Edge of the European Union

André Simonyi and Jessica Pisano

In the myriad stories about the border that circulate in communities near and connected to the outer eastern edge of the European Union (EU), one narrative resurfaces repeatedly. According to this narrative, a ruse brings would-be immigrants from their home countries to a spot in the forest in the west of Ukraine, where a fake border has been constructed. Hidden by their guides, they cross over the barbed wire or other artifice and believe they have arrived in the EU. Shortly thereafter, by prior arrangement with the coyotes who have arranged the travelers’ passage, Ukrainian law enforcement officials arrest the travelers and detain them for lack of proper documentation or authorization to be in Ukraine.

For these would-be immigrants – whether they are mythological expressions of social beliefs about foreigners, borders, and law enforcement officials or players in real-life dramas – the state border is far more than a line to cross. In this story, it might be imagined that in the moments that elapse between crossing and arrest, the border represents freedom, possibility, and a new life in a land of opportunity. The would-be immigrants believe they have crossed into the EU, and their brief, illusion of success is the product of the border as it exists in their minds and shared experience. It is only once representatives of state authority arrive, and they learn that the border is not where they had thought, that they discover the flaws in their previous knowledge of power arrangements along the demarcation.

The Ukrainian state meets the eastern edge of the EU at precisely the same place where, for the second half of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union abutted the states of the Warsaw Pact. In the early twenty-first century, the border between the EU and Ukraine may be said to demarcate not only the territory of states, but also the limits of political and economic worlds. However, for the people who live in the EU borderlands, the meaning of the border, as well as its physical demarcation, follows neither a straight line nor the contours of mountains or rivers. Beyond the physical demarcation...
separating the 'East' and the 'West,' people define and redefine the social meaning of bounded national communities through transborder exchanges of commodities and ideas. Those exchanges, in turn, order social relations in ways that transcend state boundaries (Harvey 2009, 88).

Even as borders territorially inscribe national communities, the instruments of border control and surveillance encourage individual human contact. The result is the development of a particular set of transnational social relations in which economic and social exchange engender both more permanent transnational communities and cloakroom communities (Bauman 2000). This chapter argues that, paradoxically, in the context of a hardened border, the apparatus of state security itself contributes to the formation of local and transnational networks, ultimately rendering the border in its cognitive form more porous.

This chapter advances its argument through a set of narratives that reflect upon the paradoxes of strong surveillance at the demarcated line and, as the story of would-be immigrants to the EU suggests, the contours of national imagination that extend beyond it. It observes that beyond the internationally recognized boundary, there is a transborder space shaped by the daily interactions of people on either side—a world that may not be legible (Scott 1998) from the perspective of Brussels or Kyiv, or to the casual tourist or visitor. This chapter embarks on a micro-level foray into how people experience and understand space and time in the EU borderlands, seeking to observe and understand the fluid, rather than the permanent, meanings of the border (Harvey 2009, 43)—meanings that in turn reconfigure, from the grassroots, the political realities of a transnational Europe.

The state of the border

How do contemporary accounts ordinarily describe the outer EU border zone? A central preoccupation of the literature about the EU border is the metaphor of an impermeable wall—Festung Europa ('Fortress Europe')—in reference to European mid-twentieth-century nationalism. This recurring trope emphasizes border-crossing restrictions and the causal relationship between the softening of internal borders and the hardening of external ones (Snyder 2005). Related accounts highlight contradictions between EU border regimes and broader trends of economic and political change. For example, Blank (2004, 352) observes the current impermeability of international borders in towns such as Chelnovshsk (‘city of shuttle traders’) as the obverse of globalization.

Other work focuses on the structural bases of inequality in and around the border zone. As Bigo and Guild suggest (2003), this border is both instrument and object of the creation of value differentiation of individuals: visa regimes allow citizens of EU member states to cross eastward freely while most Ukrainian citizens must obtain visas to make the same passage.
westward. Because of sometimes dramatic differences in economic opportunity between the two sides of the border, the borderlands are also a site of social and economic arbitrage (Zelei 1997), embodying, reflecting, and reproducing overall contours of East-West inequality – even as the border offers opportunities to and constrains individuals on both sides.

Finally, authors analyzing the EU border often focus on the relationship between the border and nation-making in adjoining states, where transnational contact may foment (Sahlins 1991), extend (Allina-Pisano 2009a), or soften nationalist preoccupations, as Szmagalska-Follis argues in this volume. Such accounts are primarily concerned with borders delimiting the contours of national or supranational projects, shaping and reshaping the meaning of units such as ‘Europe’ or ‘Ukraine.’ Borders, in this sense, give meaning to what lies within them.

This chapter conceptualizes borders differently. It acknowledges the hardening of eastern borders as states accede to the EU, as well as the economic inequality that prompts exchange in the borderlands and the institutional rules that structure passage for different categories of people in different ways. However, while recognizing the very real limits imposed on movement from east to west by international and national institutions, it is interested primarily in individuals’ reinvention and renegotiation of rules, institutions, and infrastructure in the interstices (Szmagalska-Follis 2008). Additionally, it explores the ways in which communication and acquisition of local knowledge frustrate the divisive intentions of international border making and erode reified notions of impermeability in ‘Fortress Europe.’

Finally, in analyzing the social meaning of the EU-Ukraine border, it shifts away from the emphasis in the literature on the relationship between the border and nation making and focuses instead on how the border contributes to transnational community.

This chapter suggests that instruments of border control and transborder commodity exchange together prompt the formation of social ties and the creation of shared knowledge and practices in border zones. The relationships between surveillance, exchange, and social ties are conditioned by three characteristics of the EU border, as viewed from the east: segmentation, multiplicity, and porosity. The border is segmented; portions of the line of demarcation may be differentiated and isolated from one another. It is multisited, existing not only in official international boundaries but reaching far into the interior of states. And it is porous to a certain degree, even where it is not meant to be. Each element shapes the nature of the international border as a zone of engagement and contributes to the specific ways in which transnational exchange conditions the social meaning of the border.

Although the physical terrain observed in this chapter extends along the border between Ukraine and three other states, the field of vision and analysis in this chapter include territories outside the demarcated border.
and drive deep into different regions of the countries observed. As in the narrative of disappointed would-be immigrants presented in the introduction, the idea of borderlands extends well beyond arrangements in physical space. Above and beyond geographical expanses, the border engages the realm of the virtual: where the mind may be dislocated from the body, crossing borders in the imagination without physically moving, and where the mind, through contact with ideas from across the border, brings a part of that other world to the place where the body resides.

Epistemology and method

In conducting the research for this chapter, we endeavored, insofar as possible, not to constrain our observations by prior rigid theoretical commitments. Although no observation is theory-neutral, the following narratives follow from a research approach in which we remained agnostic on the question of what the border is for as long as possible. We adopted an interpretive stance, starting from the idea that the border is a concept that takes many different shapes and forms. Without establishing narrow guidelines, we observed movement in, through, and near the official line of demarcation: people, their actions, and the symbols that give meaning to the idea of the border.

We thus take seriously the notion of ethnography as a ‘liminal, visceral practice (art?)’ (Ries 2002, 725). Our approach is intersubjective (Burawoy 1998, 14) and we regard reflexive participation in the practices being studied as a crucial component of research. In studying the border, the ‘uncontaminating distance’ required by some epistemic approaches and critiqued by practitioners of reflexive ethnography (Yanow 2006; Pachirat 2009) would have obscured precisely the processes we sought to uncover.

The border represents more than the site of the creation of an inside-outside relationship. It is a translation of a Foucauldian conceptualization of biopouvoir and requires an understanding of both the political institutional apparatus and social interaction. We use the understanding of the structural aspects of the border to analyze practices; from this latter analysis emerges the possibility of theorization (Bourdieu, 1972, 256). The observations and fieldwork-based vignettes presented here were accumulated in a long series of cross-border passages by train, car, foot, and bicycle, moving from the EU to Ukraine and vice versa. We gathered observations from within Ukraine and in visits to all border-crossing points between Ukraine and Slovakia and between Ukraine and Hungary. We also include in this chapter illustrations drawn from our visits to the border and border crossings between Ukraine and Romania. Finally, statistical data, legislation, and press materials in Ukrainian, Hungarian, Russian, and other languages likewise form a part of the evidentiary base that has informed the interpretations presented here.
We communicated with others in three languages spoken in the region – Hungarian, Ukrainian, and Russian (each language is spoken fluently by one member of the team, and both authors are able communicate in both Hungarian and one or two of the Slavic languages) – with some communication in Slovak (understood by one of the authors). We allowed the choice of language to be dictated by our interlocutors, with code switching depending on who participated in the conversation.

Segmentation: Compartmentalized space

Segmentation – the conscious or unconscious isolation of portions of the border zone for the purpose of controlling the flow of people and goods – fosters communication and contact in the border zone. For train passengers travelling from Chop, Ukraine, to Záhony, the nearest city in Hungary, the international crossing begins at a small door in a corner of the cavernous main hall of the railway station. It continues, segmented and compartmentalized like a Taylorist production line, until the passengers arrive on the territory of the Hungarian state. Passengers cannot see from one stage of the passage to another; like schoolchildren in a Soviet museum, once they embark upon the crossing they must inexorably move forward.

Here, the human experience of border crossing is not a mere step across a line. In Chop, people with their baggage bid farewell to those accompanying them as they queue to step through a door into a large room. Their passports are checked and their luggage hoisted onto low counters and thoroughly inspected for cigarettes, alcohol, and any other controlled goods. The lines for passport and visa control follow, after which passengers are funneled into a waiting hall where half a dozen seats accommodate the most elderly, infirm, or defiantly entitled young. Everyone else stands or sits on their suitcases as the long wait for the train begins. There is no real queue for the train: it pulls up alongside the doors, and people walk from the waiting room out onto a short stretch of asphalt to board it. Once aboard, the trip is short and slow, as the train inches across the border into Hungary.

At the demarcated territorial border, the lone train wagon from Chop joins a longer train bound for the Hungarian interior. There is sometimes confusion, because customs control procedures do not always end at the train station: some passengers know the Ukrainian train will be inspected, while others suggest it is Ukrainians themselves who will be searched and, Hungarian passports in hand, move to another car. A few minutes later, customs officials on the Hungarian side board the train car that has come from Chop. They search the seats and the floor, bringing on board mirrors, a ladder, and a power screwdriver. While passengers watch, they dismantle the interior ceiling panels, visually inspecting every crevice of the train car for contraband cigarettes, which are cheaper and taxed at a lower rate in Ukraine than in EU countries. Ukrainian-speaking passengers sometimes
wonder aloud if this is an exercise meant primarily to humiliate them. When the customs officials are satisfied that today there are no cigarettes in the car from Chop, they reassemble the interior and depart. A few minutes later, passengers debark in Záhony.

In the case of a train crossing, agents of the state exercise power at every closely guarded and controlled stage of the passage. But for those who move from Ukraine into Hungary in a car, the dynamic of power can be reversed. At another border crossing along the southern edge of Zakarpattia, the region of Ukraine that borders Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania, the man’s land is structured differently. There, travelers – provided they are well embedded in local social networks and familiar with the use of small premiums that are insufficient to legally qualify their recipient as corrupt but nonetheless smooth the passage – are able to operate beyond the gaze of state officials. A covered parking lot in the no man’s land between the Hungarian and Ukrainian sides allows drivers to exchange passengers and goods: trunks may be opened and objects of commerce hidden, or passengers may be picked up who can be used to account for goods that exceed the legal allowance one person may bring back.

The contours of control in the passage from one state to another thus depend in large part on the arrangement of infrastructure within the border crossing itself and on the method of transportation people use to move from one state to another.

However, even where the infrastructure of surveillance is less developed, the particular organization of space around the border nonetheless permits or encourages control of human movement. For example, in eastern Zakarpattia, a border crossing near a village called Kistarna in Hungarian (Khyzha in Ukrainian) leads to Romania. Approaching the border crossing proves arduous: there are few road signs indicating the passage, and arrival at the border requires not only skillful knowledge of map reading but also the willingness of village residents to tell inquirers where to find it. Once near the border, approaching on foot, one sees on the right a high observation tower staffed by an officer observing the surroundings. At first intimidated, one tries to act inconspicuously, not to draw the gaze of the man in the tower. After a period of time has passed, if one stays long enough, one realizes the uniformed soldier many meters above is not a human being, but a mannequin – a scarecrow protecting a field not from birds, but from humans. Although recent maps show the border crossing as active, the passage at Kistarna has been closed for some time. Local residents walk about all the way to the wired fence, busying themselves with their crops. However, without the knowledge that it is a mannequin that staffs the watchtower, one might be deterred from undertaking any action, illegal or not, in this border zone.

Spatial arrangements and surveillance along the border between the EU and Ukraine thus vary from the Soviet-era train station at Chop, recently
built automobile passages, and the mannequin in the tower in the hills overlooking Romania. All are compartmentalized, and all involve a degree of explicit or implicit surveillance by state or social actors: arrival at the point of passage is impossible without first passing through a series of spaces where human interactions occur. To negotiate these compartments adequately, and to at least feel somewhat at ease, one needs knowledge of the spatial arrangement. More importantly, one needs to be aware of the power structure in place and its repartition in the spatial arrangement in order to go through the border at all. In Aristotelian terms, passage across the border requires both *phronesis*, a normative knowledge of context, and *tecnne*, an understanding of how to perform certain actions that can be acquired only through practice. Acquisition of both varieties of knowledge requires extensive social interaction and communication: states construct the infrastructure of the demarcated border, but people often determine the contours of its control.

Power is thus structured in multiple, varying ways in the interstices between states. The border regime establishes a social and economic system that allows for the movement of humans and goods. Whether it is a Ukrainian merchant moving goods from car trunk to car trunk in a covered parking lot between the two countries, the Romanian day tourist buying a quicker passage back home after purchasing mineral water and laundry detergent in Ukraine, or money changers walking alongside border guards while selling their services to waiting cars, the socioeconomic construct of the border is built around well-defined space and power arrangements, where local, unwritten knowledge is crucial, even if one simply needs to go through.

**Multiplicity in space and time**

Even as the border may be fixed in space – and done so at great expense and with the efforts of a cast of thousands in government and international organizations – there are important dimensions of the demarcation that are nonlinear in people’s everyday experiences. The border exists in multiple locations, both in material terms and in local imaginaries, which may be observed along the dimensional definitions of length, depth, and time. These three dimensions have specific implications for the social life of the border in its two manifestations – the meaning people give to the border and the character of the human interactions the border fosters.

This first dimension, length, represents the demarcated border along which the apparent continuity and permanence of the ‘line’ gives way, upon closer examination, to uneven and shifting social meanings: although the demarcated border itself may remain static, the social and economic meanings along the line vary. The meanings of the border fluctuate between a political boundary across which travel occurs, and a line dividing one
currency regime from another, signifying economic opportunity. At the EU’s edge, several new border crossings have been opened since the implementation of the Shengen visa regimes in 2004. Each time a new border crossing is opened, trade gravitates toward it. In the summer of 2008, the village of Nevetlenfalú on the Ukraine–Romania border attracted lines of cars more than a hundred deep, as Hungarian-speaking Romanians traveled to Ukraine to purchase washing powder, soda, and other commodities they would return to Romania to sell. But on the Ukraine–Hungary border a few hours’ drive away, commercial establishments outside the village of Asztély had been nearly abandoned. What once had been a vibrant border crossing became a near-deserted road at the end of a street. In the village, virtually the only signs of trade were lone jars of raspberries atop the single stools set outside village houses. One of the only remaining commercial merchants, selling ice cream and beer to the occasional traveler, bemoaned the fact that ‘it’s not the border it used to be. ... Before we ate sausage; now it’s bread and butter. In two months it’ll be just people coming to visit family and friends’ (field notes, June 25, 2008).

The policing of borders occurs in the interior as well as at the edges of states (Balbar 2005), and the depth of this policing helps determine the nature, shape, and extent of exchange across and along the border. Physically perpendicular to the border at any given point, the dimension of depth carries the socioeconomic meaning of Ukraine and the EU deep into the other territory. One clear depiction of this dimension is the multiple-visa regime that regulates the movements of Ukrainians well within Hungary. In the context of the EU’s eastern outer boundary, Hungarian document and customs checks occur both at the crossing itself, a few hundred meters into Hungary, and in Nyíregyháza, a city approximately 60 kilometers in the interior that is the western limit of movement for Ukrainian citizens with local traffic visas for Hungary (field notes, July 28, 2008). In practice, such checks in the interior are performed on automobiles only; for those on bicycles or on foot, the border is also multisited, but Nyíregyháza is not a place where the border exists. Thus, on the Hungary–Ukraine border, people’s common experiences of passage are conditioned not only by citizenship or visa categories, but also by mode of transportation.8

And so, when Zsófia sets off to visit her relatives in Nyíregyháza, she brings her visa, which allows her to go no farther into the Hungarian interior. Almost every time Zoltán drives from Beregszász (Berehove in Ukrainian) to Budapest, his bright yellow car is subject to an inspection by customs officers well past a few hundred meters from the official border. For Sándor, depth means opportunity, even if he has to deal with all the red tape related to acquiring a visa. He learns the ropes to make it as efficient as possible; the important thing for this former construction worker, who leaves the country regularly and for long periods of time to make a living, is to pick up his
clients in Budapest and to drive them deep into the Carpathian Mountains. For him, the border is a welcome friction: the time spent acquiring the permission is well worth the ‘rich’ clients from the west coming to explore the beautiful edges of Europe.

The multiplicity of border locations refers not only to borders’ physical demarcations, but also to their social meaning. László, a resident of the southwestern Ukrainian city of Berehove, who speaks Hungarian and self-identifies as Magyar, has a visa permitting travel to Hungary. He sends his child to a school where the language of instruction is Hungarian, buys Hungarian goods, watches television broadcasts from Hungary, and takes his family to a cinema in Hungary on Saturday evenings. For him, crossing the international border between Ukraine and Hungary may constitute no more than a simple administrative hassle and mark no appreciable change in his personal cultural or linguistic landscape. For László, a more meaningful border may exist in the interior of Ukraine, on the road to Mukacheve, where Magyar cultural space begins to fade into a more predominantly Slavic political and linguistic landscape.

Because the border is nonlinear in space, its relationship to time is not constant in people’s experiences. Time – the third dimension of multiplicity treated here – is particularly elastic in the borderlands, where state surveillance, more than distance, is meant to obstruct movement, disrupting modern, rationalized expectations of the relationship between space and time. In the village of Kisszelmenc, for example, an international border crossing currently allows EU and Ukrainian citizens to walk into Slovakia (see Allina-Pisano 2009a). However, residents of Kisszelmenc wishing to visit their relatives on the other side must first travel to Uzhhorod to obtain a passport for foreign travel and then apply for special permission to visit Slovakia. The distance from Marika’s house to the cemetery in Slovakia where her family is buried is less than a kilometer and 20 minutes travel on foot. The total actual distance and time she must travel in order to arrive there to lay flowers on a grave, however, is closer to 100 kilometers by bus and several days or weeks of paperwork and waiting.

The elasticity of time in the borderlands takes on another form along the Ukraine–EU border. In parts of southwestern Ukraine, time plays a particular role in delimiting national space in the practice of everyday life. There, two different time zones – and their associated geopolitical imaginaries – operate within the same space. In the borderlands town of Berehove (Beregész in Hungarian), any meeting or transaction must be planned not only with reference to the time of day, but also with an additional specification: local time or Kyiv time. Without this additional information, or without a shared understanding about the time zone in which the two particular individuals in question consider themselves to live, there is risk of confusion and disruption of exchange: local time is Budapest time, one hour earlier than Kyiv time.
Time practices in Berehove are not unique to that municipality. The same discourse exists in surrounding villages, where some people make reference to 'mountain time,' explaining the existence of this time zone by its convenience to farmers, given the movement of the sun across the valleys. However, if one travels just a few dozen kilometers northwest (toward the time zone in which Budapest is located) to the now predominantly Ukrainian city of Uzhhorod, Kyiv time is the standard.

The use of the two time zones within the same space, which dates from the Soviet period (field notes June 16, 2008; see also Stroschein 2009), corresponds roughly to ethno-linguistic identity; establishments catering to a Hungarian-speaking clientele post their hours in local time, while Ukrainian or Russian speakers use Kyiv time (which itself bears a complicated historical relationship to the Moscow time in use in the region for decades). Some businesses announce their hours according to both, in separate signs, and some state institutions post official notices in Kyiv time but operate verbally according to local time. The practice of attaching separate time systems to different communities itself acts as a border; time itself is a marker distinguishing geographically intermixed ethnic communities from one another. This practice regulates the organization of economic life and contributes to the multiple and overlapping character of social borders – social borders that resemble, but do not mirror, those of the states that claim to enclose particular people and territory.

**Porous material and virtual borders**

In late May 2008, Mykola spent three hours waiting by his aging purple Lada under a sweltering afternoon sun in the no-man's land between northwestern Hungary and Ukraine. The trunk of his car was full of carrots, and he had exceeded the limit for the weight in vegetables that one person can legally bring into Ukraine from the EU. The Ukrainian border guards had been reasonable, if one put aside the heat, inconvenience, and mild humiliation of waiting in a border zone while others passed through unmolested. Rather than confiscating the carrots or turning him away, the guards had suggested he wait for pedestrians looking for a lift. If he could find two passengers, they reasoned, he would have enough people in the car to account for all of his carrots.

Despite heavy state surveillance – not only do guards, watchtowers, and barbed wire characterize the physical geography of the outer EU border, but also soldiers, cameras, mirrors, and dogs – the border is a site of social reproduction. In other words, in this context, human connection is a byproduct of the surveillance that accompanies commodity exchange; informal networks are made in the border. People crossing through official points of passage seem not to fear association with others, readily forming temporary and even more permanent relationships through the negotiation of commodity
exchange at the border. Mykola was thus able to find several passengers to accommodate his vegetables, and everyone finished off the day at his or her intended destination.

Nearly a year earlier, also in the summer heat, Csaba had made one of his frequent trips into Hungary from the town of Chop and was returning home. That voyage had been primarily to buy provisions: those corners of his socialist-era station wagon not already occupied with fishing equipment and blankets were filled with diapers for a nephew with a newborn, as well as Debreceni sausages for himself, his wife, and a number of friends and relatives who lived in the predominantly Hungarian-speaking villages surrounding Chop. To carry the sausages across without trouble, he had picked up four passengers, who each held their allowed portion on their laps for the customs officials to see. The border guards knew him and waved him and his passengers through. The anxious time usually allotted to inching warily through the surveillance process thus was instead devoted to driving and discussing the plans of the driver and passengers.

At Záhony, Csaba's crossing point in Hungary, the border crossing is open only to vehicles. Pedestrians wishing to cross into Ukraine to the town of Chop wait by the side of the road or on a nearby street, where passing cars collect them. They do not pay to be transported – at least not in money. As in the case of Mykola’s carrots, the exchange is quid pro quo: those crossing the border must do so in a car, and drivers transporting their purchases from Hungary into Ukraine frequently require additional people in the vehicle to legitimize the volume of goods they are transporting across the border.

Passage across the border between the EU and Ukraine thus involves goods and people in a mutual relationship, and the transportation of goods helps establish the social structure of the border. However, where goods primarily flow out of, rather than into, Ukraine, the shape of human interaction changes. At one vehicle border crossing between Ukraine and Slovakia, for example, pedestrians are not able to find transportation across except by prior arrangement: drivers from Slovakia may carry most goods into their country without volume restrictions and thus have little incentive for accepting passengers.

Commodity trading and social interaction at the border thus can be mutually reinforcing, or excluding, depending on the circumstance. Day traders, border guards, and pedestrians create a social microcosm that is founded upon a mutually recognized necessity to allow commodities to travel across. And as described above, some human travel, it seems, depends on commodity exchange: where only vehicles are permitted, symbiotic relationships form between pedestrians and transporters of goods requiring warm bodies to make those goods legal.

The virtual porosity of borders, in which ideas, identities, and symbols traverse national spaces, is also itself in part dependent on cross-border material exchange. Mykola’s generously subsidized European carrots, purchased
in Hungary because they were less expensive than carrots grown in Ukraine, carried more than a culinary significance in their journey. For those who boil them in their soup, carrots consumed in Ukraine are vessels for numerous social meanings. They may serve as reminders of geopolitical imbalances of power, of agricultural subsidy regimes that advantage Europeans but put Ukrainian farmers out of business, and of political bickering in Kyiv that holds up distribution of loans for Ukrainian farmers. They are also reminders of the sad fact that Ukrainian carrots are more expensive and yet perceived as less ‘civilized,’ though they are often of higher quality than the orange industrial monoculture brought from the EU.

Csaba’s sausages, likewise, constitute the type of material exchange that contributes to the displacement of virtual borders and the reproduction of ethno-linguistic communities whose boundaries do not match those of states. Traffic by both EU citizens and Ukrainian citizens with local transit visas promotes the exchange and maintenance of kinship and ethno-linguistic networks. Upon arriving in Ukraine, Csaba immediately visits the family members for whom he has purchased Hungarian goods. They are geographically dispersed within a few dozen kilometers, and they are part of the ethno-linguistic community of Magyars that remained outside the borders of the state of Hungary after the Treaty of Versailles (Trianon). The symbolic valence of the goods delivered – the language of the labels, the Hungarian-ness of those particular sausages – brings Hungary to Magyar communities beyond the state border. For some, this is a way of reclaiming their social heritage, of replacing something lost. In physically visiting multiple members of his extended family across different settlements and in greeting each of their neighbors, Csaba participates in the reproduction of a more cohesive sense of Magyar identity.

Between the EU and Ukraine, cross-national inequality amid a shared value of liberal entrepreneurship establishes a social system that is organized around commodity exchange. And through this exchange, ideas travel across the border. Some of those ideas form a basis for national and transnational political action, as policies, rules, and regulations are discussed in cafés and homes and eventually become claims for change and action. And others, as in Csaba’s sausage route or Mykola’s carrot dilemma, assist in the production and reproduction of social circles that are sustained by the very division and inequality created or reified by the border’s presence.

**Conclusion**

On summer weekends, busloads of heritage tourists from Hungary come to the town of Beregszász in Ukraine. They visit local monuments, walking past the old Hungarian state theatre on the way to the town square. There, some of them, perhaps seeing in local faces the imagined shared Hungarian
past narrated by their tour guides, take pictures of the local women who squat next to the church to sell their fruit. For the tourists, time and space may seem to shrink in those brief interactions, as imagined worlds overlap in spaces beyond the barbed wire and surveillance cameras of the official EU border. For the women selling fruit, meanwhile, the foreigners who speak their language not only represent revenue, but also are a reminder of administrative and economic barriers to their own mobility.

The transnational meaning of the border likewise may be found across the town square, in the open markets of Beregszász. There, local shoppers as well as tourists from the EU and Russia enter a world where, as along the demarcated EU border, exchange takes multiple forms. The older part of the post-socialist market, composed of rickety booths selling sundry goods in a riot of colors and odors, is arranged as a labyrinth of alleys in which someone unfamiliar with the market could become easily lost. Directly adjacent to the open market stands a brand new, state-of-the-art building meant to accommodate the ‘new’ market. On the main floor, a sterile ambiance reigns, and the eyes of those who wander through meet expensive stores advertising the latest fashions. Here, the borderland of the EU and Ukraine is, in one of its many iterations, the meeting place of two worlds, a site of both transnational separation and linkage.

This chapter has shown that, paradoxically, instruments meant to control people’s movement and separate nationally defined spaces also prompt communication among people, disrupt notions of homogenous space, and contribute to the formation of transnational linkages. Further, it has suggested that the reconfiguration of social relationships around and by the border may be best understood and analyzed through political ethnography; the broader transnational social dimensions of borders are not always discernible except through participant-observation research.9

The eastern edges of ‘Fortress Europe’ do not resemble high-walled medieval castles, but rather a series of outposts where exchanges happen far from the scrutiny of the center. Under the guise of a well-established system of control, informal human interactions occur daily. To the traveler passing through or to the official from Kyiv or Brussels, the social micro-system in place may be invisible and nonexistent. But when Péter the day trader passes customs, he greets all the guards and discreetly promises not to forget them in his daily business. As this chapter has argued, Péter’s capacity to negotiate his passage is based on his knowledge of the power structure present in one specific border-crossing point – a point that is part of a larger, multidimensional system. Ground-level observation of such outposts illuminates a world of interaction and social meaning in which the demarcated border not only determines sovereignty through inclusion and exclusion, but also provides a venue for social and economic exchange. That exchange reconfigures social relations and supports transnational linkages under the aegis of exclusion and separation.
This paradox, in which the border not only separates but also encourages contact, is reproduced constantly, as people and goods flow over the heavily guarded demarcation line. The border also runs deep into both the EU and Ukraine, and it takes on a variety of meanings for those who travel through it. The boundary is at once a dividing wall and porous membrane, a fragmented, multilayered space through which the passage of people and commodities redefines social meanings through daily interaction and creates complex webs of human relationships. Further, through exchange and the human interactions that accompany it, the thin line between public and private, formal and informal, becomes difficult, if not impossible to discern. Despite, and at times because of, the vast institutional apparatus that segments and controls the border, unintentionally giving rise to a multiplicity of human relationships, the boundary between Europe and Ukraine is less a line than a vanishing point, more difficult to fix in time and space the closer one approaches.

Historically, the borders that now separate Ukraine from the EU have moved, dislocating kinship groups and reshaping allegiances. More recently, the demarcated border itself has remained relatively stable, but the social and economic transactions that traverse it have undergone dramatic transformations mirroring those of the broader society: the installation of political and economic liberalism and the integration and alteration of that liberalism as a function of existing local knowledge, practices, and traditions. For now it is no longer the border that moves. Instead, people create the flow of movement through exchange, trade, and information (Bauman 1998, 2). This process seems to create as much rupture as unity, and what Bauman (1998, 2) describes as a ‘space-fixing process’ reconfigures traditional understandings of social organization and the ways in which transnationalism is understood.

Finally, as Rumford has noted in this volume, transnational studies, while attending to spatial aspects of transborder activity, has to date paid relatively little attention to borders themselves. As this chapter suggests, borders may be best understood outside the rubrics of national studies, as it may be precisely the concept of transnationalism that is best suited to the study of both demarcation lines and their social lives. Such an analytical lens allows us to see beyond the work borders do for states, permitting nuanced analysis of the ways in which borders make, and are made by, the communities that live in, around, and through them.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank Nancy Ries and Sherrill Stroschein for helpful comments on earlier drafts. Colleagues at the Slavic Research Center and the Center for Applied Ethics and Philosophy at the University of Hokkaido, Fumiki Tahara of the University of Tokyo, as well as colleagues at the Graduate Institute
of Russian Studies at Heilongjiang University in Harbin, provided valuable feedback. We also thank Cédrik and Sarah Simonyi, as well as friends and acquaintances in Zakarpattia whom we cannot mention by name here, for their contributions to the project. The staff of the 'Rossiya' library in Yalta provided a helpful and productive environment in which to write. Marie-Eve Bélanger provided able research assistance. Research for this chapter, and for the broader research project to which it is linked, was supported by the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research and the Social Sciences Research Council of Canada, neither of which are responsible for the views expressed here.

Notes

1. For an exploration of this theme in greater detail, see Simonyi (2009).
2. State boundaries are often cast primarily as lines of rupture (Filler 2008) – walls that keep people out (Snyder 2005) or hold people in (Scott 2009) – which can prompt urban and other development (Buursink 2001). This chapter conceptualizes the border as a zone of engagement, where both exclusion and contact are possible.
3. For a discussion of the fortress metaphor in border studies, see Simonyi (2011).
4. The border between Ukraine and three EU member states examined – Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania – are governed by bilateral agreements between member states and Ukraine, as well as by nationally particular rules and practices. However, EU membership defines the broader contours of economic and social inequalities around the border. Furthermore, the three border areas share a common nineteenth- and twentieth-century history and certain ethno-linguistic characteristics: all were part of Hungary prior to the Treaty of Versailles (Trion). Finally, on the Ukrainian side, local discourse usually describes the border as 'with the EU' rather than with individual member states. For these reasons, and because for our purposes here local variation between individual border-crossing points is more significant than systematic differences between national stretches of the border, we have chosen to treat the three national border zones as a single continuum. Here, we attend more to the specificities of individual border crossings than to the comparison of the national borders as such.
5. For an insightful discussion of this logic applied to another economic production line, and an analysis of the politics of sight, see Pachirat (2009).
7. Dorion (2006, 15) writes, 'Boundaries are everywhere, even in the most trivial situations. You stop at a red light and you experience in a few seconds at least three boundaries: a spatial boundary (the line not to cross); a temporal boundary (the minute that the red light lasts); a boundary between statuses (you stop, you are on this side of the law; you pass, you are outside the law).'
8. Kunth and Thorez (2005) suggest similarly that transnational networks between formerly Soviet states differ according to the mode of transport used: maritime networks function relatively free of national boundaries, while trains are bound by them.
9. For a discussion of the advantages of political analysis of ethnographic research relative to other forms of qualitative research, see Allina-Pisano (2009b).
References


