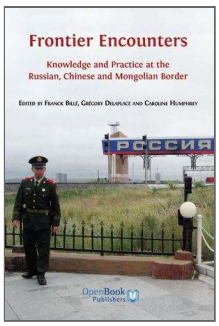

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Frontier Encounters
Knowledge and Practice at the Russian, Chinese and Mongolian Border

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1. A Slightly Complicated Door: The Ethnography and Conceptualisation of North Asian Borders

Grégory Delaplace

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1. A Slightly Complicated Door: The Ethnography and Conceptualisation of North Asian Borders

Grégory Delaplace

This book presents a collection of ethnographic essays on the border region, in North Asia, where the territories of China, Russia and Mongolia meet across the contrasted landscapes of the Siberian taiga, in the northwest, and the Manchurian plains, in the south and the east.[1] The aim of the present volume is two-fold. On the one hand, it seeks to provide fresh material to a field of research still heavily dominated by studies of the United States and Mexico border. On the other, it intends to challenge a tendency in anthropological research to frame analysis in terms of "culture" and "identity" when dealing with issues relating to social life in the borderland areas. Drawing on the material provided throughout the eleven chapters of this volume, this introduction proposes an alternative, and underlines the benefits of a *technological approach* to the study of borders.

1 This introduction is the outcome of a collective reflection carried out with Caroline Humphrey and Franck Billé during the process of editing this volume. It greatly benefited from the insightful suggestions of two anonymous reviewers, and from repeated discussions on border studies with Morten Pedersen while we were both doing fieldwork in Ulaanbaatar during the summer of 2009.

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International borders have attracted an increasing amount of interest in the social sciences over the past three decades, resulting in the creation of research centres (e.g. the Centre for International Borders in Belfast or the Nijmegen Centre for Border Research in the Netherlands), academic networks (e.g. the Association for Border Studies, which edits the *Journal of Borderlands Studies*), and in countless publications in the fields of Geography, Political Sciences, Economy, and History, to name only a few (for a useful yet now outdated overview, see Donnan and Wilson 1999, chapter 3). While it has not been a trailblazer in this domain, Social and Cultural Anthropology has not lagged behind either. Although the anthropology of borders has not yet been recognised as one of the discipline's "big topics" (it is rarely mentioned in specialised encyclopedias, e.g. Barnard and Spencer 2010), anthropologists have contributed to this field of research in numerous and important ways. Highlighting the processes by which borders are "socially" or "culturally" constructed, some have insisted on the growing number of challenges posed by globalisation to the notion (e.g. Migdal 2004), while others have emphasised the enduring significance of borders at a local level in a context of global political and economic transformations (e.g. Donnan and Wilson 1998; Martinez 1994).

Overall, and at least since Renato Rosaldo's early and seminal contribution to the field (1988), the idea has been that the specific expertise anthropologists could provide in relation to borders concerned "culture", "identity" or "ethnicity" in borderland areas. Is there an "identity" specific to the "borderlands milieu" (Martinez 1994: 10), stemming from the simultaneous distance from political centres and the daily immersion in transnational flows that characterises these areas? How is "ethnicity" used as a border marker between neighbouring peoples, in borderlands (Vila 2005) or elsewhere (Bretell 2007)? What kind of "culture" does the presence of an international border produce, and what kind of cultural practices, in turn, constitute borders between territories and people? These, roughly, have been the questions on which the anthropology of borders has thrived.

One could hardly fail to notice, however, that a particular subfield of anthropology has remained remarkably absent from this debate: material culture, or *technology*, that is the study of techniques spearheaded by Mauss' seminal essay (1979 [1934]), "the particular domain of human activity immediately aimed at action on matter" (Lemmonier 2010: 684–85). Of course, recent technological developments in border control processes, in particular the introduction of biometric identification devices, have not escaped the researchers' attention: philosophers of sciences, jurists, and

criminologists have provided valuable expertise on the implications of this technology in terms of conceptions of the body, conditions of international migrations and notions of citizenship (van der Ploeg 1999; Pickering and Weber 2006; Dijstelbloem and Meijer 2011).

Nevertheless, when scholars have considered the question of technology in relation to the border, they have limited themselves to the study of how it was *involved* in the process of crossing a particular border (often the one delimitating Schengen space). The concern of these authors lies in the way technology is becoming *constitutive* of European borders, indeed in ways that cannot but call to mind Agamben's famous warning on exceptions becoming the rule.[2] While these developments are certainly cause for concern, and one can only encourage research into the political implications of borders' technological turn, it seems possible to conceive of a more comprehensive understanding of technology in relation to the border.

So far, indeed, it seems that anthropologists, just like other social scientists, have neglected the analytical benefits of considering the border *itself* as a technique. Yet, it seems hardly possible to overlook that a border is first and foremost a technical object: in fact, what is a border but a *slightly complicated door*?

Doors and the (unsuspected) relations between office colleagues, cats, and gulls

In the opening essay of a small book entitled *Petites leçons de sociologie des sciences* Bruno Latour (1993: 14–24) finds an unlikely ally in Gaston Lagaffe, a Belgian comic strip character created by Franquin, to introduce his notion of a technical "programme".[3] Gaston Lagaffe is famous for the sympathetic blend of naive humanism and laziness that constitute his personality, as well as for the simultaneous taste for DIY methods and perennial clumsiness that characterise his daily activity (his surname means "the blunder" in French). The setting of Gaston's adventures is an office, actually the editorial offices of *Spirou*, the very magazine in which the comic strips were originally

2 The reader will find in the volume edited by Sharon Pickering and Leanne Weber (2006) several chapters developing Agamben's concept of "exception" in relation to border control (see, for example, the one by Pickering herself, and the one by Dean Wilson).

3 *Petites leçons de sociologie des sciences* was originally published under the title *La Clef de Berlin, et autres leçons d'un amateur de sciences.*

published. Gaston appears in many situations as the modern-time, office version of a trickster, and the particular example chosen as an illustration by Bruno Latour for his essay is a case in point.

Gaston keeps a cat in the office, to the dismay of several of his colleagues who have to endure the animal's every whim. In this particular scene, Gaston's immediate superior, Prunelle, is upset about constantly having to open the door for the cat that keeps meowing in front of it when it is closed. When Gaston naively suggests to leave the door open for the cat, Prunelle becomes even angrier, saying he refuses to be exposed to draughts while working. Seizing this opportunity to avoid doing actual office work, Gaston takes it upon himself to improve the door and solve the problematic situation. Cutting out a rectangle in the lower part of the door, he reattaches it with hinges to create a cat-flap. Prunelle is concerned with Gaston's tampering with office equipment, but there is nothing he can say: as a result of this technical improvement, the door can now both keep cold air out, and let the cat through. Of course, Gaston being Gaston, the story does not end there – Gaston *also* happens to own a sea-gull that he likes to keep in the office too... The gull, of course, is jealous of the cat's newly (re) acquired freedom, and is now eager to go through doors as well. No sooner said than done, Gaston readily cuts out an opening for the gull in the upper part of the door – the gull is happy, Prunelle has a heart attack.

Thus, concludes Latour, with Gaston's cunning invention, the "programme" of the door, its purpose as a technical object, has changed. Originally the door, like most doors, was a rather simple device allowing humans to go through – since they are able to depress the handle (or turn the knob) that commands the opening of the door – while keeping cold air and animals out – at least those who cannot depress handles (we all know cats who can). Following Gaston's intervention, the door has evolved into a more complicated mechanism, one that can, in addition to humans, let two kinds of animals through, yet two kinds only: those that are small enough to crawl through the lower opening, and those that are able to fly through the upper one. It continues to keep all other kinds of animals out: Gaston's horse, had he had one, would still be unable to proceed through, as well as draughts, if we assume cold air will not flow through the upper opening.

Hopefully the reader will see by now the relevance of this lengthy prologue to the question of borders. Like a door, and most of all, like Gaston's door, a border is a device whose "programme" is *to let certain people and things through, while keeping others out*. Borders, of course, are slightly more complicated than doors – even Gaston's – and it is precisely

the purpose of this volume to show *how.* What are the specific devices regulating border crossings (we will see that identification technology is not the main one in the region), and how might these be challenged, or circumvented, by local populations? The starting point of this volume is thus a technical one: what, exactly, is the programme of a border? Or rather, more modestly, what are the programmes of North Asian borders, in the area where China, Russia, and Mongolia meet? How, and how successfully, are they implemented?

North Asian borders: where empires meet

This volume and the chapters that compose it emerged from two conferences held at the University of Cambridge as part of a research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.[4] The motivation for this research project was that the geophysical dividing line where the Siberian taiga abuts the steppes of Manchuria is also the place where the territories of two of the world's largest countries, Russia and China, meet along a common border extending over a thousand miles. What is interesting here is that these two gigantic political formations, which are also major players in the world economy – two empires, as it were – meet *at their confines*: one of the most sensitive areas of their territory, where their land meets that of their rival, is actually located far away from their political centres. And while a great amount of information is available on each country taken separately, far less is known about the practicalities of their interactions locally, on the border they share.

Lodged in between these two giants, Mongolia is of crucial strategic importance to both of them: in recent history, Mongolia has served as a frontier area both to the Qing Empire (1644–1912) against Russia, and to the Soviet Union (1922–1991) against China. While more modest in both size (yet still more than six times larger than the United Kingdom) and economic stature, Mongolia is also heir to one of the largest empires that ever existed. Given this geopolitical context, the regional history is rich with dramatic displacements of population, with peoples pushed and

4 The project, entitled Where Empires Meet: The Border Economies of Russia, China and Mongolia (RES-075–25_0022), ran from 28 January 2010 to 27 January 2011. The first conference held in Cambridge on 6 July 2010, was entitled "Trading, Smuggling and Migrating across the Border between China, Russia and Mongolia". The second event, "Politics, Concepts and Practicalities at the Chinese Russian Border", was held on 17–18 November 2010, in Cambridge as well.

pulled from one side of the border to another, as wars broke out and the balance of power changed between these empires.

The Buryats, in this respect, are a case in point. The recent history of this Mongol group bears the mark of most of the twentieth-century upheavals that affected the region. Victims of exactions during the Russian Civil war (1917–1923) following the Bolshevik revolution, they fled to neighbouring areas in North Mongolia and North-East China, where they lived as exiles throughout the hardships that struck these regions during the Japanese invasion, and the Chinese Cultural Revolution (see Sayana Namsaraeva's chapter in this volume). As described by Marina Baldano (chapter 10), post-socialist attempts of repatriation to Russia for some Buryat groups were often a mixed success as the returnees strove to find a place on either side of the border. Ivan Peshkov (chapter 9), tells a similar story for the "Cossack" (Guran) population that migrated to China and Mongolia as a result of the Soviet regime's hostile "decossackization" policy after the revolution. Contrary to those who stayed in Russia, and who remained attached to the defence of Russian territory, as shown by Caroline Humphrey in her own contribution (chapter 4), these exiled Cossacks have become, through acculturation and intermarriage with other local groups, peoples who belong to the borderland rather than to a particular political formation.

Several contributions to this volume thus broach the well-researched topic of "identity" and "ethnicity" of borderland peoples. However, instead of taking notions such as "identity", "ethnicity" or "culture" as a point of departure and a frame of analysis, as anthropologists working on borders are wont to do,[5] this book considers them only as one possible component of the border apparatus. Adopting a technological approach, this volume starts off with very simple questions: what are North Asian borders made of? What are they supposed to do? What, and how do they actually perform on the ground? Although "culture" and "identity" might be *part* of the answers to these questions, a concern shared by the following

5 The introductory chapter in the book by Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson is perhaps the most elaborate, and the most often quoted, theorisation of this approach. The authors contend that major changes have affected border areas in the face of the "twin threats of supranationalism from above, and ethnonationalism and regionalism from below" (1999: 1). Anthropologists can contribute to the understanding of these tremendous changes with their expertise on "the role which culture plays in the social construction and negotiation of these borders" (ibid.: 3). "Anthropologists provide the data to explore the cultural bases to ethnic, racial and national conflict at international borders, a task made all the more urgent by the resurgence of ethnic and nationalist violence at many of the world's borders" (ibid.: 12).

chapters is really to avoid *framing* these answers in terms of "culture" and "identity" from the outset.

On this basis, and as mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, this book intends to provide fresh material in a field still heavily dominated by research on the border between the United States and Mexico. Of course, this is not the first attempt at doing so: in addition to European ones, borders of northern India have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention (e.g. van Schendel 2005 and Gellner Forthcoming), as have those of Africa (Asiwaju and Adenyi 1989), and even Amazonia (Goulard 2005).

Undoubdtedly, phenomena observed in other regions also concern this border, or have concerned it in recent history: forced migrations (Baldano, Namsaraeva, Peshkov), transnational trade (Lacaze), anxieties over illegal immigration (Billé, Dyatlov), and attempts to limit the latter while fostering the former. Some issues, however, such as the development of informal networks of transnational poachers (Ryzhova) and smugglers (Namsaraeva), might appear more clearly here than in other border areas.[6] In addition, the states that meet in this region see themselves not only as nations, but also as "civilisations" (Humphrey, Billé), whose encounter on the ground cannot be as simple, if it ever can be (see Williams 2006 and Ettinger 2009), as drawing a line between them.

How (slightly) different a border is from a door: overview of the volume's content

In this context, surely, a border can only be more complicated than a door. But how exactly? This is precisely what the following chapters demonstrate. Each contribution, in its own particular perspective, provides us with ethnographic evidence on how the border works, as a device of *passage*.[7] Which elements is a border composed of, what programme is it supposed to perform, and how is it able to do it in practice? These are some of the questions the following chapters could help to answer and which I propose

6 This does not mean that smuggling is absent from other borderland areas: for a detailed study of cross-border informal trade in South-Asia at the turn of the twentieth century, see Tagliacozzo 2005.

7 The relevance of Arnold Van Gennep's theory of "Rites of Passage" (1909 [1991]) to the study of border crossing has been noted by several authors (see, for example, Rösler and Wendl 1999: 2). This is especially relevant here given Van Gennep's heavy reliance on the metaphor of doors and thresholds to illustrate his theory.

to develop in the rest of this introduction, in order to give an overview of the volume's content.

The fuzzy materiality of the border

First of all, and from a material point of view, a border is obviously made of far *more elements* than a door. It is a well established idea in the literature that a border is not just a line. Donnan and Wilson (1999: 15), for example, list three constitutive elements to a border: it is composed, according to them, of a "juridical borderline which simultaneously separates and joins states", but also of "the agents and institutions of the state, who demarcate and sustain the border" as well as "frontiers, territorial zones of varying width" stretching away from the borderline itself. If several chapters in the present volume confirm the relevance of these three components to North Asian borders as well, some contributions also show that the materiality of the borderline – the infrastructure marking the "juridical borderline" – is itself composite.

A survey of the border crossing infrastructures between Russia and Mongolia, compiled by Valentin Batomunkuev, is presented in an appendix to this volume. In addition to the border checkpoints themselves, we see that the technological apparatus that ensures border control is made of custom buildings and warehouses, roads and a railway network surrounding and crossing the border, as well as various installations ensuring water and electricity supply. Robin Grayson and Chimed-Erdene Baatar (2009), using satellite images available on Google Earth, had already inventoried the infrastructures that constituted the border between China and Mongolia. Grayson and Baatar showed that not only crossing points, but also the line of separation itself was of a composite nature: on the one hand, satellite images reveal a multitude of ancient border vestiges in the form of wall ruins, which leave in the landscape the mark of previous territorial delimitations (what Prescott, quoted in Franck Billé's chapter, called a "relict boundary"); also, and more significantly, newly erected fences on the Chinese side are doubled with a large ploughed area, of 40 to 100 metres wide, running along the border with Mongolia over more than 1,300 kilometres.

The border, from a material point of view, resembles a double-door system more than a single one: rather than just a fence, it often takes the form of an assemblage of walls and spaces (the no man's land being only one type of border space), that constitutes a *zone of separation* between two

different territories.[8] Yet, walls are not the only way by which the border zone is delimitated: the list of its constitutive elements also includes the "regulations" that frame the legal regime specific to the border area (Billé, Batomunkuev). In chapter 4, Humphrey reveals that this strip of land is managed directly by the FSB, Russia's Federal Security Service, which regulates access to this zone.

Other material components in this border assemblage might be located at a distance from the actual borderline. Thus cities might be an essential factor in connecting or keeping apart neighbouring states: Manzhouli, located near the border between China and Russia, is as much part of the border device as the actual checkpoint, and more of a zone of encounter between the two sides than an instrument of demarcation (see Manzhouli city map in the appendix section).[9] In chapter 7, Gaëlle Lacaze looks at the city of Ereen, on the Chinese side of the border with Mongolia: comparable to a modern caravanserai, where Mongols stop and trade, the city is the place where cross-border relationships involving all sorts of business, including sex work, actually occur. Chapter 12 provides further examples of elements in the Mongolian border apparatus that are actually located outside of the frontier area: I show in this chapter that memories attached to material and immaterial vestiges of foreign presence in Mongolia – abandoned Russian towns, resilient Chinese ghosts – are used by Mongolian people to qualify and manage their relationship with their neighbours.

Finally, Uradyn Bulag, in chapter 3, reminds us that populations have often been deemed more efficient than walls to protect the border from unwanted intrusions. Thus the Qing dynasty, in China, has relied on the presence of the Mongols to protect their Northern confines from the expanding Russian empire. Likewise, entire ethnic groups have been put in charge of border control by centralised political formations: the Cossacks, famously, were tasked by the Tsar to guard the Russian border. Caroline Humphrey (chapter 4) describes the central place that the border continues to hold in contemporary Cossack identity: although no longer officially in charge of its defence, Cossacks continue to patrol the border and create rituals to celebrate their involvement in the protection of the "integrity" and the "purity" of Russian land.

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8 Moreover, as was already noted by Weber (2006) for the Australian border, the borders between China, Russia and Mongolia often lack precise localisation: satellite images clearly show in certain places a succession of different lines of demarcations in space, none of which seem to be more prominent than the others.

9 For a similar perspective, see Vila's ethnography of the cities of Juárez and El Paso, respectively on the Mexican and on the American side of the border (Vila 2005).

Material and immaterial components in border assemblages

Yet, clearly, border assemblages are not only composed of material elements. In some cases the border between populations may be of a "psychological" nature, and may not even need to be marked in the landscape. Uradyn Bulag, in chapter 3, shows that such is the case between Mongolian and Chinese populations in Inner Mongolia. Although they have been part of the same political formation for the past three centuries at least, their antagonism is the result of a divide-and-rule strategy carried out by Manchu emperors during the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). Having themselves conquered China thanks to alliances with Mongol groups, Manchu rulers made sure a similar alliance would never arise against them: in addition to erecting a willow palisade between Chinese and Mongolian territories, as an extension of the Great Wall, they made sure through strict legal regulations that Mongol and Chinese people would not intermarry, and that they would engage in as little interaction as possible, even actively fostering hostility between them. As a result, while the willow palisade no longer exists in a material form, it lives on locally as a psychological barrier between these populations.

Borders, or rather certain components of the border assemblage, might thus be invisible. This point is particularly well illustrated in chapter 11, in which Ross Anthony takes the reader to the Altai mountain range, in Xinjiang province, where China borders Kazakhstan. Building on ethnographic "episodes" taken from his fieldwork, Anthony shows that the way the border is envisioned by the local population is as important as its materiality to understand local practices in relation to it. Thus, a bear hunter has to imagine the invisible line demarcating the international border through the Altai range, in order to avoid trespassing and getting into trouble with the border guards. His hunting expeditions, and the path he follows to chase his preys are therefore modelled on an approximate idea of where the "line" actually lies. Meanwhile, for the Uygur youth in the border town of Jimunai, the border is pictured as a wall obstructing their dreams of self-accomplishment in Kazakhstan, and one that needs to be overcome. Anthony argues that borders are suffused with "technologies of imagination", a term he borrows from David Sneath: pictured as single lines, borders thus become part of a broader imaginary whereby the territory of the nation-state is enclosed within clear-cut demarcations.

Racial stereotypes could also be seen as a technology of imagination which extends and reinforces the border between two countries. In chapter 5, Viktor Dyatlov retraces the history of anti-Chinese sentiments

in Russia. Whereas the rhetoric of the "Yellow Peril", at the turn of the twentieth century, pictured Chinese people as parasites ("locusts", "midges") emerging from a political void, fears of Chinese expansion nowadays envision them as the tentacles of a threateningly powerful and imperialist state. Yet, stereotypes do not only concern interethnic relationship: Ivan Peshkov (chapter 9) and Marina Baldano (chapter 10) show respectively for the "Cossacks" (Guran) and the Shenehen Buryats, that such prejudices also emerge within ethnic groups that have been kept separate as a result of forced migration. The repatriation campaigns carried out in Russia to encourage the return of these populations is rendered difficult by the cultural distance that has accrued, in the space of a few generations, between them and those that stayed behind. Echoing a well established idea in the anthropological literature (Donnan and Wilson 1998: 5), Baldano thus contends that the border "represents the interrelations between individuals, groups of people and states".[10] This idea finds an unexpected, yet undeniable echo in Lacaze's contribution, which looks into a characteristic component of border interrelations: prostitution.[11] Through a detailed description of the life of Mongolian sex workers at the Chinese border, Lacaze shows that prostitution is not only an important aspect of cross-border trade, but also a regime of relationship suited to the characteristic liminality of borderland areas.

Borders and regimes of openness

Another reason why borders are more complicated than doors is because contrary to the latter, the former are *always open and closed at the same time*. In a philosophical essay on bridges and doors, Georg Simmel reflects on the contrast these technical objects offer, as visualisations in space of human

10 The idea that "borders are spatial and temporal records of relationships between local communities and between states" (Donnan and Wilson 1998: 5) also finds an echo in Janet Carsten's point, mentioned by Franck Billé in his chapter, namely that states were defined on "ties of fealty between persons, not on the unambiguous mapping out of space" (Carsten 1998: 218) before becoming delineated by international borders. Of course, several authors (e.g. Anderson 1983: 170–78) have stressed that the conceptualisation of states as territorial units delimitated by lines, emerged with specific and relatively recent mapping techniques.

11 In his ethnography of the Mexican border-city of Juárez, Vila analyses the narratives portraying it as a "city of vice" bustling with prostitution, and excessive alcohol consumption (2005: 113 *et passim*). According to Vila, the pervasiveness of this idea in the imaginary about borders plays on an intuitive association of the limit of "social systems" with the limits of the body (ibid.: 114).

fundamental ability and urge, to "separate the connected or connect the separate" (1903 [1997]: 66).[12] Whereas the bridge, argues Simmel, is the perfect instance of permanent connectedness between two points that were initially kept apart by nature, the door always carries both possibilities: it can *either* be closed, thus separating an inside from an outside, *or* open, thus allowing passage and communication between the two spaces. In Simmel's own words:

> Whereas in the correlation of separateness and unity, the bridge always allows the accent to fall on the latter […], the door represents in a more decisive manner how separating and connecting are only two sides of the same act (67).

Yet, although the door might offer both possibilities simultaneously to intellectual contemplation, its "open" and "closed" modes never occur at the same time in practice. This stands in sharp contrast with borders: while a door is *either* open *or* closed, a border is *always both at the same time* – it is closed to certain people and things, while remaining open to others. In this respect, borders are more akin to Gaston's door than to ordinary ones. Following Gaston's intervention, as we saw earlier, the door became permanently open to animals, while remaining closed to draughts: the door's new conformation transformed it into a *discriminating device of passage*, which is what, fundamentally, international borders are meant to be.

Borders look different depending on who you are, and crucially, where you come from: while to some migrants they are a mere administrative formality (a procedure only slightly more time-consuming than depressing a door handle), to others they will never be anything else than fortress walls, the crossing of which is made at the risk of one's life. This contrast is particularly striking in the case of European borders (see the contributions to the volume edited by Dijstelbloem and Meijer in 2011), but it is also true of others: Leanne Weber (2006: 24), drawing on Daniele Joly, has aptly compared the border to a "porous dam", "expected to allow a steady and lucrative flow of welcome visitors, while holding back the floods of unwanted Others".[13]

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12 For another use of the same reference in relation to borders, cf. van Houtum and Strüver (2002).

13 Peter Andreas, meanwhile, stressed the performative dimension of border management: showing the border as both open to legal flows of people and goods and closed to illegal ones is a matter of political "face work". The US and Mexico, as well as the

Borders, however, not only discriminate between different kinds of people, they also impose certain conditions to their crossing: borders are not open to everybody, and *not to everybody on the same conditions*. Some nationals will need specific authorisations, in the form of visas, or even specific forms of monitoring (such as the biometric database established for asylum seekers, van der Ploeg and Sprenkels 2011), while others will only need their passport, or even their national ID. Meanwhile, borders are not open to any commodity under any circumstances: the particular goods, as well as their quantities, that an individual can take across the border is often subject to limitations, and such limitations, of course, do not apply in the same way to imports on a national scale.

The particular conditions set to border crossing for individuals and goods vary from one country, even from one border, to the other. Therefore, rather than the opposition between a "closed" and an "open" mode, like ordinary doors, what characterises a border is a specific *regime of openness* – i.e. a set of conditions under which it is open to certain people and to certain things, while closed to others. The modulation of this regime according to economic needs, anxieties about migration, and international political agendas, is of crucial importance in a state's "governmentality", as shown by Michel Foucault in his famous 1978 lecture series on "Security, Territory, Population". With the advent of mercantilism in the eighteenth century, the "problem of population" – its management and its discipline – became a central concern (*the* central concern) for the sovereign. However, Foucault continues,

> The population can only be the basis of the state's wealth and power in this way on condition, of course, that it is framed by a regulatory apparatus (*appareil*) that prevents emigration, calls for immigrants, and promotes the birth rate, a regulatory apparatus that also defines useful and exportable products […] (2007: 69).

Borders, as the main device of migration control, cannot but have a central role in this "regulatory apparatus". Of course, the situation has changed since the eighteenth century, and the concern now, at least in Euro-American countries, is not so much to prevent emigration than to control immigration.

European Union, take the border as a stage where image management, rather than the actual deterring of illegal crossings, is at stake: "What makes the border a particularly challenging stage is that the actors are involved in a double performance, having to assure some of the audience that the border is being opened (to legal flows) while reassuring the rest of the audience that the border is being sufficiently closed (to illegal flows)" (2000: 10).

Yet, the border has kept its role as part of the regulatory apparatus by which a sovereign state seeks to ensure *security* and manage its *population*, through an "efficient" administration of its *territory*. This is also true of North Asian regions: the data presented in appendix A shows that Russia produces a huge amount of statistics (one of the main tools in the art of governement, says Foucault, 2007: 104) concerning borders, in order to evaluate the way these perform as a device that fosters economic exchanges while regulating migration.

In this respect, contrary to doors, and against a widespread rhetoric in Europe and Anglo-American countries, there is no such thing as a "closed" border: there are only varying degrees of openness. Indeed, it would be unheard of for a state to choose to close its borders to *all* incoming migrants; would it decide to do so, it would probably not wish to close its boundaries to the circulation of its *own* population – even North Korea, to a certain extent, receives some visitors, and sends some of its population abroad.[14] "Closing borders down" is thus a political fiction, which really means an increasingly discriminatory migration policy – a particularly restricted regime of openness. In other words, the border is never closed, it might just be open to a smaller proportion of migrants – to those who are "chosen", as well as to "deserving" refugees.[15] "Closed border" policies are nothing but a smoke-screen for a dryly utilitarian migration policy taking economic efficiency, centrally and unilaterally engineered, as the only possible justification for incoming migration. Moreover, rather than closing the border this kind of policy only makes it more difficult, and more dangerous, for refugees to cross it (Fassin 2005; Weber 2006), for it is a well known fact that candidates for migration will *always* find ways to circumvent the official programme of a border that restricts their access.

Subverting the border

This brings us to the final point of this introduction, the third main reason for which a border is more complicated than usual doors: while, in the absence of cats and gulls, everybody more or less agrees on how to use a door, *borders might be simultaneously defined in a number of different*

14 Mongolia, actually, is one of the countries with which North Korea maintains student exchange programmes: Mongolians, moreover, are allowed to enter North Korean territory, for short visits, without a visa.

15 For an analysis of the shift in French immigration policy, from a legal framing of migration control to the rhetoric of "chosen immigration", see Fassin 2005.

ways. Of course, when cats and gulls come into play, like in the comic strip described earlier, the use of doors too starts to be at the centre of diverging conceptions: Bruno Latour, to this end, proposes to add to his concept of "programme" the notion of "anti-programme" (1993: 19). An "anti-programme" is simply a programme that contradicts or impedes the realisation of a given programme. Thus according to Prunelle, Gaston's cold-sensitive superior, the door's initial programme is challenged by the cat's anti-programme. Thanks to the cat-flap, however, Prunelle and the cat can share a single programme for the door, while the sea-gull still has its own anti-programme, etc. In a similar way, the following chapters show how border programmes may be subverted by all sorts of anti-programmes. Of course, given the multiplicity of actors meeting at the border, and given also the different levels at which the border might be considered, the situation is never as simple as a binary opposition between a programme and its contradiction.

First of all, at an international level there are often disagreements about what the border is, and about the tasks it is supposed to perform. Even when the exact location of the border is not in question – there are no major border disputes between China, Russia and Mongolia – there may still be discrepancies between two states' understanding of what a border actually *is*. The next chapter, by Franck Billé, shows through a comparative analysis of the terminology that ideas of the border in China and Russia are expressed in drastically different ways. While Chinese terms tend to describe the border as a "frontier" – a zone radiating from the centre – Russian vocabulary conveys the idea of a definite line. The contrast is appealing, and yet Billé warns us that this opposition is somewhat misleading: understandings of the border as a frontier also exist in Russian, and the Great Wall is here to testify that Chinese imperial formations, at times, have also conceived of the limits of their territory as firm lines. Interestingly, Billé shows that the way Chinese people are believed to think of the border causes a great deal of anxiety in Russia. Fears of "Chinese expansion", also considered by Dyatlov in chapter 5, are based precisely on this idea that Chinese allegedly conceptualise borders as concentric circles radiating outwards, rather than as an unambiguous single line.

What Billé highlights, therefore, is an anxiety about the "enemy's point of view" (Viveiros de Castro 1992) on the border: *what if my neighbour had a completely different border than mine*? What if our practices at the border could never match, and what if *her* conception of the border actually included *my* territory? The main reason why a border is different from a door, perhaps,

is that while the latter separates an inside from an outside, the former, in a way, delimitates *two competing "insides"* – the "outside", or the "beyond" of a border, is often if not always, someone else's inside.

Most contributions, however, tackle less dramatic misunderstandings about the border, whereby the official programme enacted through state regulations and central ideology enters in contradiction with the multitude of anti-programmes that underlie daily practices in borderland areas. Caroline Humphrey (chapter 4) thus shows that Russian ideology of "civilisation", based on an idea of purity and permanence of the border, is shared both by Moscow's intellectuals and by local Cossack populations of Buryat and Evenki descent, in spite of starkly diverging notions of what actually constitutes the border's "purity". In a way, the rituals performed by Cossacks at the border to celebrate its purity fly in the face of the nationalist discourse – which is combined with pragmatic realpolitik and interaction with China – produced in the metropolis.

In chapter 6, Natalia Ryzhova provides an unprecedented account of informal networks of salmon poachers and smugglers. After a close examination of the legal framework of fishing rights and cross-border trade, Ryzhova illustrates the multiciplicity of tactics – among which bribing is only one example – whereby informal associations of local fishermen with Russian and Chinese traders manage to circumvent official regulations. Highlighting that both sides are actually involved in these illegal activities, Ryzhova proceeds to propose solutions to improve the way these "Common Pool Resources" might be managed across the border.

In chapter 8, Sayana Namsaraeva shows how Buryat exiles who settled in Mongolia and China following the Russian civil war challenged officially closed borders in order to visit their kin and what they still see as their "homeland" on the other side. Namsaraeva reviews with a wealth of details the imaginative ways in which split families were able to maintain contact despite separation on two sides of a "sealed off" border. Wearing deer hooves on their soles to leave only animal prints behind, or adjusting their boots backwards to convey the impression that they were actually walking away from the border, some could trick border patrols, crossing through and back again. Even when it proved impossible to physically cross the border, Buryat migrants found ways to subvert it in other ways: if nothing else, a shaman could still let her spirit run through, in an animal form, and deliver a message to a distant and longing kin.

There is little doubt that the wealth of fresh material provided in this book will foster reflection within the emerging field of border studies. Although this introduction might have appeared to try to tie the following chapters into a single approach, through the idiom of techniques and the metaphor of the door, the reader should not assume that this is the sole contribution the papers bring to the theorisation of borders. On the contrary, scholars working on borders or not, whether they are specialists of North Asia or work in other regions, will certainly welcome the refreshing diversity of perspectives proposed by the contributors to this volume.