Borders from the Cultural Point of View:
An Introduction to *Writing at Borders*

By Tuulikki Kurki

Abstract

This introductory article to the special issue *Writing at Borders* suggests that cultural studies and the humanist point of view have significant explanatory potential concerning various borders and border crossings in multidisciplinary border studies. Cultural and human understandings of borders and border crossings grow from the research of ethnographic particularities on one hand, and of universal and culturally expressed human experiences of borders and border crossings (however culturally expressed) on the other. In this article, this explanatory potential is made visible by examining the history of cultural anthropology, where borders and border crossings have been recognized in research since the late 19th century. The aim of this concise introductory article is to outline through selected examples how territorial, social, and cultural borders and border crossings have been acknowledged and understood conceptually in the history of Anglo-American and European anthropology. The selected examples illustrate the gradual evolution of the conceptualization of the border from a territorially placed boundary and filter, to a semantically constructed, ritualized and performed symbolic border, and finally to a discursive (textual) construction.

Keywords: Border, border crossing, diffusionism, symbolic anthropology, postmodern anthropology

Introduction

Border studies reclaimed its visibility in geography and created "a new generation of border studies" in the 1990s (Newman & Paasi 1998; Newman 2007: 30). This new generation made borders a widespread research theme, not only in geography but also in social sciences and cultural research globally. The reasons for the re-emergence of border studies can be found in geopolitical changes that initiated in Europe (e.g. the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of the EU), in the US-Mexico borderlands, and in the global context of strengthening migration movements (Heyman 1994; Alvaréz 1995; Vila 2003a; Schimanski & Wolfe 2007; Sadowski-Smith 2008). In addition, the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States made border related security concerns a prominent theme worldwide (Sadowski-Smith 2002b: 2, 8; Wastl-Walter 2011: 2).

In the multidisciplinary field of border studies, many disciplines share some ideas about the characteristics of studied borders and their functions. According to the political geographer David Newman (2007: 33), one of the shared ideas of the border is that "borders determine the nature of group (in some cases defined territorially) belonging, affiliation, and membership, and the way in which the processes of inclusion and exclusion are institutionalized". The question of power relations that are closely connected with the processes of inclusion and exclusion and with defining borderland cultures and identities, has also become a very central and widely utilized question (Newman & Paasi 1998: 188; Sadowski-Smith 2002a; Vila 2003b; Aldama et al. 2012). However, depending on the conceptual, methodological and theoretical choices in each discipline, the representations and therefore the understandings of borders also vary.[1]

According to political scientist Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly (2011: 3), in contemporary geopolitically and geographically oriented research, "borders are no longer only about territorially bounded authorities*" and "*they are not just sea and air ports of entry, or border crossing*", but *"... also increasingly virtual or simply impalpable".[2] Therefore, Brunet-Jailly (ibid.) suggests that such understandings of borders need to be developed to go "beyond our territorialist and geopolitical intellectual and policy traditions". Some scholars (most notably Brunet-Jailly, Victor Konrad, Heather N. Nicol, and David Newman) have noted the gradually growing importance of the cultural and humanist point of view in understanding and conceptualizing borders in geopolitically and geographically oriented border studies (Brunet-Jailly 2005; Konrad & Nicol 2011: 74–75). Geographers Victor Konrad and Heather N. Nicol even suggest that culture and power are "the key variables for explaining how borders and borderlands originate, are sustained, and evolve" (Konrad & Nicol 2011: 75). Culturally oriented border research has been recently published in the fields of geography and social sciences (Wilson & Donnan 2012). However, what the concept culture stands for in research varies greatly. When the concept of "culture" is defined in geopolitically and geographically

oriented border research, it is understood for example as "a specific culture of borderland communities" (Brunet-Jailly 2005), "the way of life", and also as a social construction, i.e. as a "representation of that life" (Konrad & Nicol 2011: 72, 74), although the later authors have suggested that the concept of culture should be explained more thoroughly in border studies (Konrad & Nicol 2011: 84).

Simultaneously, when social sciences and geography have noted the cultural aspect of borders, a rapidly growing amount of cultural research has been published on various levels of culture forms, as well as on sub-cultures, minority cultures, resistance and counter cultures, in and outside the territorial borderlands that construct, maintain, and deconstruct the dominating representations, ideas and meanings of borders and borderlands. These studies focus e.g. on forms of literary and visual culture (literature, poetry, art, photography) produced by writers and artists ranging from amateurs to professionals, oral narration (oral tradition and oral history), media, as well as aspects of every-day life (Donnan & Haller 2000b; Aldama et al. 2012; Kurki & Laurén 2012). This article agrees with Konrad's & Nicols' (2011: 84) claim that the concept of culture should be explained more thoroughly in border studies. At the same time, this article suggests that cultural studies and the humanist point of view has significant explanatory potential concerning various borders and border crossings in multidisciplinary border studies, since "drawing borders is the key to human cognition" and humans' "identity and sense of difference from others is completely dependent on the existence of borders" (Donnan & Haller 2000a: 8). Cultural and human understandings of borders and border crossings grow on one hand from the research of ethnographic particularities, and on the other, from universal human experiences of borders and border crossings (however culturally expressed). In this article, this explanatory potential is made visible by examining the history of cultural anthropology, where borders and border crossings have been recognized in research since the late 19th century.

The aim of this introductory article is to outline through selected examples, how territorial, social, and cultural borders and border crossings have been acknowledged and understood conceptually in the history of Anglo-American and European anthropology. This is achieved by examining selected research examples which conceptualize the different ways that the idea of borders and border crossing is conceptualised in relation to the underlying ideas of culture and culture change. The studied research examples represent the diffusionist culture theory of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the symbolic anthropology of the mid-20th century, and the postmodern anthropology of the late 20th century. These examples have been selected because they illustrate the gradual evolution of the conceptualization of the border from being a territorially placed boundary and filter, to a semantically constructed, ritualized and performed symbolic border, and finally to a discursive (textual) construction. Each of these conceptualizations contributes to the understandings of borders and border crossings as research objects

of today. In a way, this article is an exercise where classical works of anthropology are read from the viewpoint of borders and border crossings.

Diffusionism and Geographically Influenced Viewpoint: Border as a Boundary and a Filter

Territorial cultural areas, their borders and border crossings became acknowledged in European and Anglo-American cultural anthropology in the late 19th century and early 20th century when the concept of diffusionism was introduced in a refined form. Diffusionism was formulated as a theory of cultural change, where migration, cultural contacts and border crossings became the central factors in explaining the development of cultures worldwide. However, it was not a new idea in European anthropology, but rather one of "the major traditional paradigmatic alternatives structuring speculation about human differences, which were characteristically seen as products of change in time" (Stocking 1999: 180).[3] Diffusionist ideas developed and diversified (such as in neo-diffusionism) over the early decades of the 20th century (Stocking 1999: 211–220). However, diffusionism lost its appeal in the 1930s–1940s when acculturation theories and other more differentiated sub-fields in anthropology started to develop (Voget 1975: 339, 346, 546–548).

In the general framework of diffusionism, anthropologists and ethnographers started to map cultural traits globally and draw cultural borders according to the distribution of cultural traits, including e.g. technologies, ideas, customs, and beliefs, first in Europe and later in the US (Voget 1975: 317–319; Eriksen & Nielsen 2001: 27).[4] The diffusionists developed a research method which compared the cultural traits of various cultural areas systematically to each other (Boas 1966: 251–252). The aim of the systematic comparison was to make the distribution of the routes of some cultural traits globally more visible, by recognizing similarities and subtle changes between traits seen in different cultural regions. Recognized similarities revealed the cultural, linguistic and physical contacts between the cultural regions and their populations, and thus exposed the routes of diffusion of cultural traits from one area to another. In addition, the aim was to trace the geographical and temporal origins of some dominating cultural features (ibid.). As a final result, the aim was to reveal the global historical construction of different cultural-geographical areas (Stocking 1999: 211–220). Cartographically, cultures became represented as "patch work quilts" of culture areas with various origins and histories, which nonetheless, did not necessarily form any unified or coherent whole (Stocking 1999: 218; Eriksen & Nielsen 2001: 27).

The diffusionist theory represented borders only implicitly. In the diffusionist model, borders can be understood as instruments denoting regional and temporal differences between cultures, and at the same time enabling the contacts between them. The territorially placed border is seen as a zone of cultural, linguistic or

physical contact, which enables the diffusion of cultural traits from one cultural area to another. However, during this diffusion, the cultural traits change. Thus, the diffusionist theory implicitly represented the border as a boundary and a filter which caused a change in cultural traits. The border allowed some cultural traits to pass through, but in doing so, the trait became either a more developed version of the original trait, or it decayed from its original form when some of its features were filtered out.

> From a cultural center in which complex forms have developed, elements may radiate and impress themselves upon neighboring tribes, or the more complex forms may develop on an old, less differentiated basis.[…] the study of geographical distribution of cultural phenomena offers a means of determining their diffusion. (Boas 1966: 252)

The diffusionist model also established a relationship between the center and the margin – the borderlands of the cultural areas. According to the diffusionist model, the borderlands of the cultural areas represented more archaic and less developed forms of cultural traits, while the centers represented the sources of innovation from which novelty and developments travelled towards the margins. Furthermore, according to the model, cultural traits survived in more authentic forms in the margins than in the centers. Therefore, researchers looked for remnants of past culture forms in the national margins (Hautala 1954: 174–197). This was in accordance with the socio-spatial construction of borderlands in geography during the early 20th century, where the borderlands represented areas that "were to be tamed, settled and civilized and hence brought under the hegemony of the white dominion" (Newman & Paasi 1998: 189).

   Although the diffusionist ideas of border, its functions as a boundary and a filter, as well as, the cartographic representation of cultures as "patch work quilts" was influenced by geography (Voget 1975: 319–320), a metaphorical border was conceptualized as it became visible through recognized cultural differences. Therefore the border denoted cultural "situations characterized by contradiction and contest", which is one of the extended usages of the border concept in contemporary border research (Donnan & Wilson 2001: 40). The diffusionist idea of border as a boundary and filter may still influence the representations of borders today, however, the idea of the borderland as an archaic wasteland of novelties has had competing representations and conceptualizations raised in border studies. With the emergence of the new generation of border studies, the border areas also became understood as hybrid spaces where several cultural features fuse, and form a hybrid culture which cannot be returned to any previously existing forms (García Canclini 1995; Bhabha 2007: 54–56). From this perspective, border areas and margins appear as areas of new, emerging cultural forms.

Symbolic Anthropology: Border as a Ritual and Performance

During the early 20th century, the development of anthropology took different directions in the US and in Europe, as it started to diverge into studies of cultural anthropology in the US, and social anthropology in the Great Britain (Eriksen & Nielsen 2001: 39). Furthermore, several sub-fields started to develop which later evolved for example into medical anthropology, cognitive anthropology, and ecological anthropology amongst others (Voget 1975: 541–546). Some of these sub-fields recognized symbolic borders and border crossings in their research. One of these trends was symbolic anthropology which developed in the 1950s and 1960s in Great Britain. It studied culture as a system of meanings expressed in the symbols, rituals, and performances which maintain social order, and organize cultural thinking and classification systems (Eriksen & Nielsen 2001: 98–99). The symbolic borders and border crossings, expressed through various rituals and performances, became visible when the dominating social order or cultural thinking models became breached. One of the first researchers to study symbolic border crossings in anthropology was French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957). His theoretical formulations became further applied by anthropologists Victor Turner (1920–1983) and Mary Douglas (1921–2007) in representing symbolic anthropology in Great Britain.

The idea of ritualized border crossing can be traced to van Gennep's study *The Rites of Passage* (1909), where he examined the changes of the individual's social position in a society during the individual's course of life. Van Gennep defined these changes in social position as ritualized border crossings, and used the terms "separation", "margin" and "aggregation" to describe the move from the old position to the new one. According to van Gennep's model, in the first phase, the individual crosses the social border as she or he leaves her or his old social position. In the second phase, the individual shifts into the margin of the social order, and in the third phase re-joins the social order, albeit, in a new position. During a life course, this ritualized three phase movement shifts, for example, from a child to a youth, from a youth to an adult, and so forth (van Gennep 1909/1977.)

Victor Turner developed van Gennep's three stage model further. In his study, *Ritual Process* (1969/1977), Turner examined social order in an African society with the concepts of "structure", "antistructure", and "liminality". Turner claims that in a society, a member moves from one social position to another through liminality which forms a ritual process. Those who move to a socially higher position, for example, are first separated from the social and institutional structures and placed in the liminal space socially, institutionally and spatially. In this liminal space, no ordinary rules prevail but the candidates for the new social position must bare various trials and tribulations, even humiliation. After these liminal experiences, the candidates can become members of the social structure and gain a new higher social position (Turner 1977: 95–97; 102–106.).

In Turner's study, candidates for the new social position have crossed the borders of social order, and they are betwixt and between of the positions defined by the laws, customs and ceremonies in the society (Turner 1977: 95). Therefore, liminality means a withdrawal from the ordinary forms of social interaction, ambivalence, and being in a state of transition (Turner 1977: 167). Border-crossings and liminality are represented in many symbolic and ritualized performances, and Turner claims that liminality and marginality are themselves conditions which regularly create art, myths, and symbols (Turner 1977: 95–97; 102–106; 128). Therefore, it can be claimed that social borders, which are otherwise invisible in the society, become perceivable and understandable only through rituals, symbols and performances. For example, Turner describes young men's border crossings and entering a liminal space in the African Ndembu circumcision rite, as a ritual where "the novices are "stripped" of their secular clothing when they are passed beneath a symbolic gateway; they are "leveled" in that their former names are discarded and all are assigned the common designator mwadyi or "novice", and treated alike" (Turner 1977: 108). Removing secular clothing from the novices, and discarding their former names denote crossing the border and entering the liminal space. According to Turner (1977: 108), entering into the liminal space is also ritualized and symbolized in similar ways in other societies and institutions, such as monasteries. However, the liminal state gives the candidates ritualistic power. With the aid of their liminal, and betwixt and between positions, these individuals can question the dominating power structures of the society, and criticize those who have power in the social structure. Therefore, it can be claimed that the border and border crossing also function as "leverage" and source of empowerment for those who cross the border of social order.

Turner's concepts of "structure", "antistructure" and "liminality", and their relation to the use of power have had some applicability in contemporary border studies regarding national borders and border crossings, cultural production across the national border, experiencing the betwixt and between position, as well as in questioning the dominating social order and dominating power structures through the liminal position (Gilsenan Nordin & Holmsten 2009; Wilkinson 2010; Andrews & Roberts 2012; Cocker 2012). Crossing national borders can be described as a ritualized process which moves the border crossers to a liminal space in the new society before they are able to join its societal structures. According to Turner (1977: 108–111), the betwixt and between position can develop into a more permanent position in some individuals. Therefore, Turner's concepts could be applied to analyse those individuals who have crossed the national border more permanently, but have not yet become full members of the new society. These individuals can remain in liminal spaces for long periods of time that may both humiliate and empower them. Therefore, the liminality concepts such as the "culturally dangerous" and "culturally creative middle stage" also include a strong idea of potential cultural criticism (Weber 1995). Though its frequent usage and

popularity especially in the 1970s and 1980s, Turner's liminality concept has been criticized for representing cultural change through rites as consensual, and omitting for example the identity politics of those liminal persons who may resist incorporation into the prevailing social order (Weber 1995: 530) and these arguments have been stressed in recent cultural studies on borders (Vila 2003a; Aldama et al. 2012).

The other well-known representative of symbolic anthropology, Mary Douglas studied classification systems and cultural order in an African society in her classic study *Purity and Danger* (1966). The study pays attention also to symbolic borders, especially cognitive and psychological borders, and border crossings that are defined by cultural thinking. To analyse these borders and border crossings, Douglas uses the terms "classification", "ordering", "ambiguity", and "anomaly" which are particularly interesting from the point of view of border studies. Douglas regards the ambiguity and anomaly as "rejected elements of ordered system", and "systematic by-products of ordering in a culture and society" (Douglas 1966: 35). Therefore, border crossing makes the border crosser appear as alien and unsuitable, even dangerous, dirty and polluting. What is important in Douglas' definition of anomaly and ambiguity is that they exist only in relation to the dominating order and cultural thinking models. As such, border crossing phenomena are not necessarily ambiguous or polluting: "food is not dirty in itself but its dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing" (Douglas 1966: 35–36). In this example, the context of cultural thinking, categorization, and violating these categorizations, define an item as "dirt".

Although Douglas focused mostly on cognitive and psychological categorizations and the borders of culturally defined order, her conceptual models also have the potential to analyse the cultural, cognitive and psychological layers attached to territorial and national borders, border crossings, and bordering (inclusion and exclusion) processes which create the differences between "us" and "them". The cultural and social aspects of territorial and national borders (Donnan & Wilson 2001: 26–35) and the theme of "symbolization and (discursive) institutionalisation of differences in space" have become central themes in border and mobility research during the past ten to fifteen years (van Houtum & van Naerssen 2001: 125).

Simultaneous to Turner and Douglas, and the flourishing of symbolic anthropology in Great Britain, American anthropology started to focus more on its own territorial and symbolic borders. In the 1950s and 60s, the US-Mexico border and questions of migration became visible research themes in American Anthropology (Alvaréz 1995: 452–453). Gradually, questions concerning identity formation in the territorial and metaphorical borderlands and transnational spaces came to the fore. The cultural research of borders that began at the U.S.-Mexico border, significantly influenced the development of cultural research on borders and borderlands in the rest of the Anglo-American and European world. Some of the most

influential works in this area have been Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands: The New Mestiza=La Frontera* (1987) which focused on the multiply marginalized question of constructing feminine borderland identity in writing in the U.S.-Mexico borderland, Nestor García Canclini's *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (1995), and Renato Rosaldo's *Culture and Truth* (1989) which were among the first works to articulate the theoretical ideas of "border culture" (Heyman 2012: 49).

After the Cultural Turn: Border as a Text

The next interesting point in time in regard to border studies is the cultural turn which meant major epistemological changes for cultural studies and other humanistic fields of research in the 1980s (Bonnell & Hunt 1999). This turn emphasized social reality as a linguistic and social construction, and in cultural studies, various cultural and social phenomena became studied as texts and as discursively (e.g. narratively, rhetorically, visually) constructed phenomena (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Bonnell & Hunt 1999; Jameson 2009). At the same time, the global migration movements started to strengthen. The centrality of nationalistic discourses on territorial borders and borderlands lessened and they became objects of critical scrutiny (Anderson 1991; Newman & Paasi 1998). In anthropology, dissatisfaction grew against those classic anthropological views of culture "which emphasized patterns of meaning that are shared and consensual", and which practically deny the possibility of cultural change, inconsistency and contradiction (Donnan & Wilson 2001: 35).

After this cultural turn, several other turns emerged which have subsequently affected the ways of studying borders in cultural research. These have been termed as the co-called spatial turn and the emergence of the motion paradigm. There is no single definition of what the spatial turn is. However, there is agreement on some of the conceptual and theoretical preferences that can be used to characterize the spatial turn in cultural research. These include for example, the visible position detailed in the works of Henry Lefebvre, Edward Soja and Homi Bhabha, as well as a keen interest in spaces, places, borders, mobility and identity (Gupta & Ferguson 2001; Weigel 2009; Berensmeyer & Ehland 2013). On the other hand, the motion paradigm "questioned the naturalized relations between bounded spaces and certain groups of people" (Paasi 2011: 20). As these topics emerged, borders were able to be newly conceived as a research object in cultural studies. In this context, borders and borderlands became seen as formations that are constructed against the idea of territorially bounded culture areas and identities, and against the concept of the so-called territorial trap (Newman & Paasi 1998: 192; Paasi 2011: 20). In anthropology, borderlands became seen not only as the meeting places of various cultures, and ethnic and linguistic groups, but as hybrid spaces, spaces of flows – borderland cultures in their own right (Gupta &

Ferguson 1992: 18; García Canclini 1995; Bhabha 2007). Furthermore, "diasporic notions of cultural identities and citizenship" as well as identities not bounded to places or territories became the focus of related research (Sadowski-Smith 2002b: 2, 10–17).

Since the 1990s, anthropological and cultural research on borders has exploded in terms of the number of publications and the diversity of approaches adopted. Whilst it is not the purpose of this introductory article to list all of the research that has been published, two main approaches to studying borders can be isolated in the published research: one studies borders, border crossings and bordering processes in connection with national and territorial borders, while the other focuses on metaphorical borders, border crossings, and bordering processes which may have no territorial dimension (Donnan & Wilson 2001; Wilson & Donnan 2012). Thus, borders and border crossings may be, for example "cultural, social, territorial, political, sexual, racial or psychological", however, they are not necessarily seen as entirely different categories (Donnan & Wilson 2001: 19–20, 35). What unites most contemporary approaches in border studies are the post-structuralist works of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and their formulations about discourse, power, and the construction of difference (Sarup 1988: 34) which have visibly influenced contemporary border studies (van Houtum & van Naesser 2001). It can be claimed that the concepts of discourse, power and difference are elementary parts of the common pool of intellectual means used in border studies today, regardless of discipline. For example, contemporary cultural research seeks to recognize the various levels of discourse and the power hierarchies between them, that influence the construction of identities, social reality and cultures in the borderlands (Donnan & Wilson 2001; Sadowski-Smith 2002a; Schimanski & Wolfe 2007).

These influences can be seen in the following example of cultural research: Since the 1990s and early 2000s, cultural studies did not focus only on issues of migration or identity formation that took place in national borderlands, but also on the literature and art relating to borders, borderlands, and border crossings (Alvaréz 1995; Sadowski-Smith 2002b: 2; Wilkinson 2010). As mentioned previously, as early as the 1960s Victor Turner suggested that liminal spaces create poetry, myths, and art. Now these aspects became keys by which to understand the experiences at borders and border crossings. It can be claimed that borders and border crossings include such understandings, experiences and emotions that contribute to the construction of borderland identities, that cannot be expressed precisely in everyday language, but rather through artistic genres. Indeed, art may even become the only forum by which these understandings, experiences and emotions can be expressed. The following example highlights the power of artistic language in expressing the ambiguous phenomena and anomalies that are related to border crossings between an individual and solid or liquid substances, and the way these contribute to one's identity formation. Taken from Jean Paul Sartre's *Being and*

Nothingness (1966: 777), the example describes the border crossing through individual's physical sensations when he plunges his hand into a "slimy" substance and finds it difficult to differentiate between himself and the substance:

> But at the same time the slimy is *myself*, by the very fact that I outline an appropriation of the slimy substance. That sucking of the slimy which I feel on my hands outlines a kind of continuity of the slimy substance in myself. These long soft strings of substance which fall from me to the slimy body (when, for example, I plunge my hand into it and then pull it out again) symbolize a rolling off of myself in the slime. And the hysteresis which I establish in the fusion of the ends of these strings with the larger body symbolizes the resistance of my being to absorption into the In-itself. If I dive into the water, if I plunge into it, if I let myself sink in it, I experience no discomfort, for I do not have any fear whatsoever that I may dissolve in it; I remain a solid in its liquidity. […] In the very apprehension of the slimy there is a gluey substance, compromising and without equilibrium, like the haunting memory of *metamorphosis*. (Sartre 1966: 777)

The experience of plunging his hand into slimy matter reminds the narrator of metamorphosis; a change of the body's form and characteristics that could aptly reflect the experience of the hybridization of identity, the experience of the third space, and of being in-between. The artistic and poetic expressions of Sartre's text exemplify well the effectiveness of artistic genres in expressing human experiences of borders and border crossings. It is important to recognize these fundamental experiences and meanings given to borders as objects of research. Borders do not exist without humans (as Sartre (1966) points out – the world is human), and therefore, when discussing the meanings, functions and possible consequences of establishing various borders, the human perspective and understanding of borders should be stressed, in addition to the political, economic, or social understandings.

This article proposes that recognizing individual and human aspects of borders and borderlands, expressed for example in borderland literature and art but not necessarily in everyday life, can be used as a means for cultural criticism, and criticism of the colonializing and homogenizing "gazes" which are directed towards borderlands. These "gazes" refer to Jean-Paul Sartre's idea of "becoming the object of look" and "a mode of being when it apprehends itself as having become an object for another consciousness" (Macey 2001: 154). Furthermore, "being the object of the other's look or gaze is often accompanied by a feeling of shame" (ibid.). Therefore, the idea of gaze includes a power relationship between the looker and the object of the look, where the looker seeks to create unifying and homogeneous representations of the object, such as the people and cultures which feature in territorial and metaphorical borderlands. Recognizing borderland literature and art as a critical voice against the homogenizing "gaze" is an important, empowering act. Good examples of studies of borderland cultures and identities that are used as a means for cultural criticism are the recent studies of the U.S.-Mexico border. Since the late 1980s, the people living in the U.S.-Mexico national borderland have become authors of border ethnographies, so making the voice of so-called "*indigenous scholars*" audible, and thus they have

become analyzing subjects in their own right (Alvaréz 1995: 459; Vila 2003b). The emergence of these indigenous scholars has been due to conscious acting against the "intellectual colonialism" that the borderland people have experienced at the U.S.-Mexico national border (Weber 1995: 532; Castillo & Córdoba 2002: 4). Later, this development led to the founding of so-called "borderlands performance studies"; in other words "de-colonizing performatics" that focus on the Latin population of the U.S.-Mexico national border (Sandoval et al. 2012: 3–4). Decolonizing performatics studies the various forms of Latina/o art as a decolonizing performative process which aims to achieve individual or collective empowerment, and to generate a pause in the colonial activities (Aldama et al. 2012; Sandoval et al. 2012: 2–3).

Conclusions

What can cultural studies convey or contribute to the multidisciplinary field of border studies, and how can the cultural point of view increase the understanding of borders? It seems self-evident that cultural studies have the potential to convey individual and micro-level perspectives and understandings to several of the research perspectives applied in border studies. When the concept of culture is defined more thoroughly in border studies, cultural research can reveal the wide spectrum of meanings that is attached to the borders from the human perspective, starting from micro-level perspectives and ethnographic particularities, and leading to the perspectives maintained by the dominating political and ideological discourses that are reflected in the dominating cultural forms.

   One of the key areas in which cultural research seems to have great explanatory potential is studying borders through art, literature, symbols and borderland culture forms where individual experiences are paramount. Defying classifications, being betwixt and between positions, as well as the emotions, fears and wishes that are projected onto the border and the "Other" on the other side of the border, all belong to the sphere of human experiences. By further investigation of poetry, art, and literature, cultural studies can gain a deeper understanding about hybrid and diasporic identities, cultures, and the experiences of liminality and third space that are part of the global human understandings about the border in various territorial and metaphoric borderlands. However, these understandings and conceptualizations are not necessarily recognized in the dominating border discourses maintained by the groups in power, and the experience based narratives and discourses of migrants or various minority groups may be silenced for political reasons. On the other hand, border discourses that are generated by dominating economic or political interests may represent borders as being completely different (e.g. as open and problem free) from the borders that appear in people's observations and experiences at the regional level (see the articles in this special issue). Therefore micro-level perspectives, ethnographies of specific borderland

cultures, and border art forms have the potential for providing cultural criticism and deconstructing the dominating discourses which are directed towards both territorial and metaphorical borderlands, and their people and cultures (see: Abu-Lughog 1991: 147–150). Focusing on micro-level and individual cases is a means to critically study institutionalized and dominating ideas of borders, and the colonizing gazes which often result in marginalizing and homogenizing conceptualizations of borderland cultures and identities.

The second concluding note of this article concerns the scholarly conceptualization and terminology used in border studies. Some researchers have suggested of writing a shared glossary of the terminology used within border studies (Newman 2007), and successful crossings across the associated disciplinary boundaries have been made. However, it is important to also maintain a connection between the concepts of each discipline and the core discussions of these disciplines. If the concepts are detached from the disciplinary core, they risk losing their efficiency as analytical tools. Thus, both the disciplines studying borders and the overall field of multidisciplinary border studies would benefit when analytical concepts are developed in a close relation to the disciplinary core of each discipline, and at the same time, maintaining shared dialog with the relevant questions within the border studies field. In this way, the multifaceted and sometimes even enigmatic borders may be understood in intellectually diversified and more profound ways.

Tuulikki Kurki is a Senior Researcher in Cultural Studies at the Karelian Institute of the University of Eastern Finland and a Docent in Folklore research. Her research interests include Finnish language literature in Russian Karelia, writing cultures in borderlands, and amateur writers in Finland. E-mail: tuulikki.kurki@uef.fi

Notes

[1] In this context, representation means the various conceptualizations and representations provided through different media that are at the same time historically constructed entities (Knuuttila & Lehtinen 2010: 25).

[2] As examples of these borders, Brunet-Jailly (2011: 3) mentions "electronic borders, non-visible borders – biometric identification & control, or electronic devices set to track flows of goods or people such as tracking financial transactions, spywares of all kinds".

[3] The other major explanatory paradigm was evolutionism.

4   One of the earliest anthropologists to do so was Franz Boas (1858–1942) whose aim was to study "regional distribution of folklore elements", and to "reconstruct the original myths of each people, and to trace the migration of myths" in the North-West Coast America (Stocking 1999: 12).

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