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Book Review: *Bridging National Borders in North America: Transnational and Comparative Histories*

Edited by Benjamin H. Johnson and Andrew R. Graybill. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, paperback, 374 pages, USD \$24.95, Cloth USD \$89.95. ISBN 978-0-8223-4699-9

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Bridging National Borders is an edited collection that brings together 10 essays in an attempt to thematically link historical research focussed on the U.S.-Canada and U.S.-Mexico borders. In so doing, the collection suggests an important dialogue between border scholars from the continental north and south. Themes explored include state-building, national expansion, territoriality and migration. The collection is separated into four sections; firstly, 'Peoples in Between', which examines the various ways mixed-race groups of the nineteenth century interacted with borders. In Chapter 1, Miguel Ángel González-Quiroga looks at the conflict and cooperation in the making of the Texas-Mexico border society from 1840-1880, suggesting that, despite the epistemological disruption created by an imposed border between nation states, the border "modified, but did not eliminate, the social, economic and cultural bonds" established between Hispanic people on either side of the Rio Grande. Here then is the theme of resilience. Likewise, Michael Hogue in Chapter 2 discusses the resilience of indigenous peoples' conceptions of space and history in relation to Métis (erroneously defined as "the offspring of European fathers and Aboriginal Women" [p. 18]). Underpinning Hogue's thesis is the idea that the ambiguous nature of Métis both racially and geographically disrupted the colonial method of population surveillance complicating for instance "federal efforts to secure the territorial sovereignty of the nation" (p. 61).

The second section looks at borders through what I see as a loosely titled 'Environmental Control and State-Making'. In Chapter 3, Jennifer Seltz demonstrates the biopolitical nature of borders, showing how in the Nineteenth Century Pacific Northwest paranoia about 'contagious Indians' going about their annual transnational movements affected the first concerted effort to assert the Canadian-U.S. border as a barrier to movement. Here, the dialectic between itinerant Native immorality and white biopolitical stability or 'groundedness' explains the reification of moral borders. With problematic seamlessness, the next chapter by Rachel St. John looks at similar concerns regarding the movement of livestock and, in particular, cattle disease along the Western Mexican-U.S. border. Disturbingly, the methods used later became models for narcotic and 'illegal' immigrant seizure. Of note in this chapter is that the capitalistic notion of the 'range' also transgressed borders, suggesting that national borders may not be fluid to the poor in search of a better life, yet are permeable to the rich looking for more profit. In Chapter 5, Lissa Wadewitz carries on the discussion of transnational livestock in her discussion of the ineffective transnational attempts to regulate declining salmon populations in the waters between Washington State and British Columbia, demonstrating that avarice can be justified through nationalism.

Section 3 turns from Native, cattle and salmon regulation (in-the-same-breath) to 'Border Enforcement and Contestation'. To start the section, Deborah Kang's chapter on U.S. federal regulation at the Mexico border shows the endemic hypocrisy of borders by outlining the ambiguous inconsistency between the desire for cheap Mexican 'day labour' and the abhorrence held for those Others attempting to enter the land of the free. In one of only two chapters that actually engages with ideas at a trans-border level, Andrea Geiger finds that the earliest "illegal immigrants" (not withstanding the Spanish, British, Portuguese and French colonisers) were Asian and that many sought legal passage into the U.S. by asserting 'transit privilege', a loophole under international law that allowed passage through the U.S., in this instance, to either Mexico or Canada; the provision allowing "migrants to negotiate one border in ways that would not have existed had it not been for the existence of the other" (p. 200).

The final section, 'Border Representation and National Identity', turns to the border as sign/signifier. In the section's first chapter, Catherine Cocks demonstrates the discord between Mexican anti-imperial (U.S.) discourses from 1880-1940, and the U.S. tourist gaze spurred by typical *terra nullius* fantasia: "A land where there were no white folks to draw the color line, and no tenements with rent always due – just mountains and sun and cacti" (p. 225). The other chapter to transnationalise borders is Dominique Brégent-Heald's "Projecting the In-Between: Cinematic Representations of Borderlands and Borders in North America, 1908-1940". The chapter provides an excellent analysis of the 'Golden Age' of Hollywood feature films in relation to borderlands because the author envisages the importance of borders thematically, through ideas such as contact and collision, utopia and dystopia. The transnational thematic approach is notable here because of its absence throughout the majority of the collection. The final instalment by Bethel Saler and Carolyn Podruchny is another excellent chapter. Through the well-known narratives of the fur trade, the authors reflect how North American history itself has helped to construct the nation state and thus reliance on borders in often 'one-sided' accounts of history, which render other voices on the 'other-side' silent. Thus, the typical historical methodology limits dialogical movement and, in turn, produces and re-produces a border logic.

In sum, many of the individual chapters are excellent accounts backed by robust scholarship. Yet in total, while the collection aims to break down the focus on the nation state as the basic unit of historical scholarship and, assumingly, pre-nation state epistemologies (i.e., indigenous spatial and temporal conceptions), to some degree the collection achieves the opposite by centralising and historicising 'borders' and, thus, re-inscribing the nation state. Indeed, the focus of two borders in conjunction with the U.S., may merely serve to reassert the U.S.'s centrality (as the common denominator of both) whilst detracting from the dialectic of a single-border. I also found it ironic that the majority of the editors' introduction provided two separate historiographies of, firstly, U.S.-Mexico 'borderlands' research, and then U.S.-Canada border scholarship. While, from a historian's perspective, the approach is apt as it points to the lack of comparative trans-north/south archival scholarship, it also suggests that even the editors struggled to cross the intellectual spatial divide, for surely the introduction of a collection that hybridises borderlands would focus the majority of that essay on imagining the frontier/*frontera*.

The struggle to imagine may also indicate the futility of such an endeavour, given the extreme differences between the two border contexts. Undoubtedly, the focus on the field's reliance on the U.S.-Mexico border speaks to the incommensurability between the two contexts. That is, the border between two nations founded on colonial white privilege (or as the editors put it "Canada and the United States as advanced liberal capitalist democracies populated mostly by descendents of European settlers" [p. 10]) bears little need for academic intervention in the eyes of the academic progeny of those settlers. As a consequence, I found the collection did not fundamentally address its goal of creating an innovative dialogue across spatial imaginations to de-segregate scholars working at the edges of this hemispheric expanse. For me the collection fails because of its very hazy and inane section thematics, such as 'Peoples in Between', 'Environmental Control and State-Making', 'Border Enforcement and Contestation', and 'Border Representation and National Identity'. Conceptually robust themes such as 'resilience', 'vulnerability', 'border morality', 'biopolitical borderlands' and 'borders as signifiers' would have allowed scholars to begin to think about borders beyond their boundaries.