© The Author(s), 2026
Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research. 2026. 18(1):80–102
DOI: 10.66184/2078-1938-2026-18-1-80-102

(RE)PRODUCTION OF BORDER PROXIMITY: BORDERING COMMUNITIES OF POST-SOVIET ARMENIA

Harutyun Vermishyan, Mariam Mirzoyan

Harutyun Vermishyan, Faculty of Sociology; Territorial Studies and Development Lab, Yerevan State University, Armenia. harutyunvermishyan@ysu.am.

Mariam Mirzoyan, Territorial Studies and Development Lab, Yerevan State University, Armenia. mariam.mirzoyan7@edu.ysu.am.

The research has been supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (project grant no. 286678). Support by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation does not constitute endorsement of any specific opinion, perspective, or approach expressed or utilized in this publication. This work was also supported by the Higher Education and Science Committee of the Republic of Armenia, research project no. 24RL-5D038.

This article examines how residents of Armenia's border communities in Tavush and Syunik provinces narrate, experience, and reshape life near contested borders in the aftermath of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts (1988–2020). Drawing on 20 narrative interviews conducted in 2023, the study analyzes how local perceptions of space, identity, and security are transformed under shifting geopolitical conditions. While Tavush residents actively shaped vernacular borders through grassroots defense and memory, Syunik communities faced sudden external impositions following the 2020 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, leading to disempowerment and spatial disruption. Using the concepts of heterotopia and vernacular bordering, the study shows how borders are not fixed lines but lived, affective spaces, simultaneously sites of vulnerability and identity construction. It also further highlights how border proximity reorganizes everyday routines, mobility, and moral geographies, revealing uneven configurations of local agency and externally imposed governance. This narrative-based approach contributes to broader borderland studies by offering a grounded, comparative perspective on post-Soviet bordering and the enduring agency of marginalized communities.

Keywords: Border Proximity; Bordering Communities; (Re)Production of Space; Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict; Local and External Agency

The 2020 Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, with military support from Turkey to Azerbaijan, significantly altered the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus, resulting in the return of several formerly Armenian-controlled regions to Azerbaijani administration, under a Russian-brokered ceasefire. For many communities in the Syunik and Tavush marzes (two of Armenia's ten administrative provinces), the war disrupted not only the existing security balance but also the symbolic and

spatial order of life near the border.[1] In Syunik, Armenia's southern marz bordering Azerbaijan and Iran, areas that had benefitted from a security buffer established after the 1994 ceasefire that ended the First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1991–1994) suddenly faced renewed proximity to Azerbaijani military positions. In Tavush, Armenia's northeastern marz bordering Azerbaijan and Georgia, where military threat had been a persistent feature since the early 1990s, the 2020 war reanimated latent anxieties and altered residents' relationships with borderland space. The outcome was a transformation in how borders were experienced, narrated, and lived, no longer as distant lines of demarcation but as dynamic zones of uncertainty and meaning-making.

While border studies have long examined how geopolitical changes affect everyday life (Nash and Reid 2016; Prokkola 2009; Strüver 2020), research on borderland residents' own interpretations and symbolic (re)shaping of space remains limited, particularly in post-Soviet cases like Armenia. To fill this gap, we examine narrative interviews conducted with residents of border communities in the Syunik and Tavush regions and explore how they interpret, remember, and make sense of changing border conditions and how these changes reshape their lives in terms of insecurity, mobility, and relationships with place.

We conceptualize this condition through the notion of border proximity: the lived closeness to contested and militarized border zones that reshapes daily practices, perceptions of identity, and social interactions. In contrast to the term "borderlands," which is used to describe the territory adjacent to state borders, we would like to introduce "border proximity" as an experiential/affective term to describe the experience of the border as an immediately present reality. Here border refers to the militarized state boundary, while frontline refers to the military line of contact/positions. This conceptual approach is supplemented with two other lenses used throughout the article—namely, heterotopia, to address the presence of different spatial logics in border areas, and vernacular borders, to emphasize the presence of locally generated processes of demarcation, defense, or adjustment (the theoretical framework section elaborates on all these concepts and their relationship to the existing scholarship).

Tavush and Syunik offer two distinct yet interconnected cases through which to examine these processes. In Tavush, which borders Azerbaijan and Georgia, 47 of its 62 settlements are directly affected by the long-standing conflict. Historically strategic during the Soviet era—hosting the North Caucasian gas pipeline and Yerevan–Tbilisi railway—Tavush became increasingly militarized and socially fragmented after 1990, as the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over disputed Nagorno-Karabakh escalated and violence spread to the interstate border. The First Nagorno-Karabakh War left fertile lands unsafe and communities isolated, transforming local practices of cooperation into strategies of defense and adaptation (ANI Armenian Research Center 2015). Residents learned to define and defend their borders autonomously, embedding the presence of the border into the texture of everyday life.

---

[1] In the Soviet period, Armenia and Azerbaijan were part of the USSR as republics, and the border between them was an administrative boundary within the country rather than an international state line.

In contrast, Syunik experienced relative postwar stability due to the buffer zone established in the 1990s. Residents farmed and moved within these quasi-integrated spaces, blurring the distinction between internal and external territories (see Martínez 1994). This situation was upended in 2020, when Azerbaijani forces regained control of adjacent areas, reducing the distance between border villages and frontlines to mere meters. The displacement of residents, loss of infrastructure—including the 22-kilometer stretch of the Goris–Kapan highway—and the redrawing of mobility routes all contributed to a new spatial and psychological bordering process (Statistical Committee of RA 2023; Syunik Marz Administration 2023). The urgency of these shifts deepened further in 2023 when Azerbaijan's military offensive led to the full depopulation of Nagorno-Karabakh and the severing of its connection to Armenia. Today Syunik remains the only conduit linking Armenia to Iran, making it a geopolitical linchpin under increasing strain (see figure 1).

Across both regions, periods of war and peace have alternated, producing a constant state of liminality. Residents do not simply live next to a border—they live through it. Their practices of adaptation, mobility, and meaning-making are conditioned by the symbolic and material uncertainty of space. In these contexts, borders do not merely frame actions or roles; they structure routines, shape expectations, and encode hierarchies of visibility and security (Scott 2020; Smbatyan 2021; Smith 2022; Vigh 2008). The social life of the border thus unfolds not only in institutional terms but through the lived and narrated experience of those who inhabit its edge.

The aim of this article is to explore how border spaces in Syunik and Tavush are reconfigured and produced in the aftermath of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. We ask: How do residents' everyday practices and narrative accounts interact with and respond to the new geopolitical realities on the ground? In doing so, the article seeks to contribute to the theoretical literature on border proximity and heterotopic space and to the empirical understanding of post-Soviet Armenian borderlands.

Figure 1. Map illustrating the borders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno-Karabakh (Bhandari and Antidze 2020; modified by author)

The article is structured as follows: First, it presents the theoretical framework, discussing key concepts from border studies and narrative theory. Second, it outlines the methodological design, emphasizing the use of narrative interviews. The empirical sections examine the cases of Tavush and Syunik, exploring how local populations respond to physical reconfigurations on the ground and participate in producing the border spaces they inhabit. Finally, the article synthesizes these insights to advance a grounded understanding of border proximity as a lived condition, contributing to border studies by revealing how Armenian communities in Syunik and Tavush actively produce border space through practices of adaptation, memory, and everyday territoriality.

BORDER PROXIMITY AS LIVED EXPERIENCE: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Border studies emphasize border regions as politically distinctive spaces shaped by proximity to neighboring states and relative marginalization within the nation-state (Newman 2016). This scholarship also shows how geopolitical and security regimes (Kolosov and Więckowski 2018; Scott 2020), cultural diversity (Mohanty 2019; Saldívar 2023), conflict and peacebuilding processes (Brunet-Jailly 2022; Plonski and Walton 2018), and migration- and rights-based frameworks (Costello and Mann 2020; Cuttitta 2018; Shachar 2019) structure everyday life in borderlands (Mohanty 2023).

The literature on South Caucasus borders reveals significant gaps in understanding how border regimes shape everyday life in communities like those in Armenia. While political geographer Shannon O'Lear (2011) provides a broad geopolitical analysis of South Caucasus borders, including Armenia-Turkey relations and the Karabakh conflict, the focus remains on state-level dynamics rather than lived experiences of border residents. Vladimir Kolosov and Maria Zotova (2020) examine Nagorno-Karabakh's multiple borders through a bordering lens, analyzing de-bordering processes and adaptation strategies, but primarily address geopolitical rather than sociological dimensions. Peace and conflict scholars Marko Lehti and Vadim Romashov (2022) offer a rare glimpse into everyday border interactions through their study of the Sadakhlo bazaar, demonstrating how local communities can maintain agonistic encounters despite broader conflicts. However, this study focuses on Georgia-Armenia borders rather than Armenia's militarized borders. Sociologists Libora Oates-Indruchová and Muriel Blaive (2014) emphasize the importance of microstudies examining everyday life in border communities, noting how borders simultaneously separate and connect while serving as sites where difference is negotiated by multiple actors.

Studies such as by Christopher Markosian and coauthors (2021) highlight the impact of conflict on mental health in Armenia's border communities, revealing how geopolitical conditions shape psychosocial realities. Similarly, Lale Yalçın-Heckmann (2016) explores how memory and narrative practices reflect shifting border regimes in the South Caucasus, underlining the need to study border life beyond geopolitical frames. The existing scholarship has mainly concentrated on the macro-level approaches, but there is a growing trend to study individual experiences and local

agency in the context of border dynamics (Andersen et al. 2016; Johnson and Jones 2016; Meena 2020; Nash and Reid 2016; Strüver 2020; von Löwis et al. 2022). The Armenian example is largely understudied in this respect.

Rather than treating space as a neutral backdrop, we consider borders as socially constructed and lived spaces, whose meanings are produced through everyday practices, memories, and relations of security and belonging. This approach encourages an analytical position similar to "border anthropology," which is an approach that emphasizes multiple, often contradictory layers of meaning, perception, and agency through which borders are lived and negotiated in everyday life (Alvarez 1995; Clifford and Marcus 2023; Paasi 2011; Şenoğuz 2018). Research on conflictual border areas, such as Cyprus (Strüver 2020), Ireland (Nash and Reid 2010), Georgia (von Löwis et al. 2022), and South Asian border areas (Mohanty 2023), also underlines that border identities and spaces are produced through the everyday practices and stories of the residents.

We explicitly introduce and define the concept of border proximity to describe how residents living near contested borders engage with these spaces as immediate and emotionally charged parts of their daily lives. Rather than viewing the border as a distant line or fixed boundary, residents experience it as something that directly shapes their routines, relationships, and sense of identity through its physical presence, social meaning, and historical symbolism. Border proximity thus transforms borders into dynamic lived realities shaped by local agency (Newman 2016; Prokkola 2009; Strüver 2020). In contrast to "borderlands," which is often employed as a geographical term to refer to regions near state borders, border proximity emphasizes the experiential and affective quality of "nearness" to the border as a social relation. This is especially helpful in the Armenian case, where military threat, historical separation, and infrastructural transformation come together in border life.

Understanding borderlands as social spaces requires examining how border regimes interact with human agency and everyday spatial practice (Iossifova 2020). Research on border communities demonstrates that people actively negotiate and "live" the border through their daily practices, shaping their spatial realities in ways that extend beyond state-imposed territorial control (Kaisto et al. 2022). To more directly engage with this spatial production, we also rely on Henri Lefebvre's (2013) triadic model of conceived, perceived, and lived space. This model understands space as a social product in continuous transformation due to political, economic, and everyday factors. As far as this article is concerned, by "border space" we mean the border as a socially produced and lived-in space, rather than the area adjacent to the border and the state boundary.

While the concept of heterotopia is most commonly associated with Michel Foucault (1986), who defined it as spaces that are simultaneously real and imagined, existing both within and outside dominant spatial orders, Lefebvre's (2013) own use of the term describes spaces marked by contradictions, where traditional spatial and social norms are disrupted. We adopt this Lefebvrian reading of heterotopia as a lens for interpreting borderlands where multiple logics—security, memory, displacement, routine—collide in the same physical and symbolic space. This is especially relevant

in post-Soviet Armenian contexts, where built environments are repeatedly reworked as mechanisms through which power is enacted and negotiated (Vartikyan et al. 2024). In border regions, heterotopic spaces emerge where contrasting elements coexist, producing complex social fabrics that shape residents' lived experiences.

Finally, we employ the term "vernacular borders" to refer to borders shaped and maintained by residents' everyday practices and knowledge, and defended and adapted by residents themselves, rather than by states alone (Mohanty 2023; Perkins and Rumford 2013). By combining these frameworks, we show that our research contributes to comparative and empirical knowledge on borderland studies in two ways: first, by introducing the underexamined case of Armenian bordering practices into the literature on conflictual borderlands; second, by empirically demonstrating how border proximity as a lived condition generates heterotopic spaces of ambiguity, adaptation, and resignification. Our study builds upon and dialogues with research on conflictual borderlands by highlighting how residents not only endure borders but narratively and spatially (re)produce them, often in ways that challenge state logics and geopolitical cartographies.

METHOD DESCRIPTION: ANALYZING BORDERS THROUGH PERSONAL NARRATIVES

To effectively understand the lived experiences of individuals in these contested areas, we employed semistructured narrative interviews (Clandinin and Rosiek 2019). As a qualitative research technique, semistructured narrative interviews involve open-ended conversations guided by thematic prompts that allow participants to share their stories in their own words, while maintaining comparability across interviews. This approach enables a profound exploration of personal experiences and social realities, revealing how borders shape both individual and collective meanings attributed to the border spaces. Eeva-Kaisa Prokkola (2014) advocates for narrative methodology as a valuable tool in border studies, emphasizing its ability to capture contradictory experiences and identity negotiations in complex settings. Similarly, previous research has demonstrated the suitability of semistructured narrative interviewing in researching symbolic/spatial bordering, temporal-spatial ambivalences in displacement, and governance-related precarities in unstable border settings (Groff and Mattar 2022; Khan and Shameem 2024; Warriner 2013).

Given the narrative nature of the data, we used narrative thematic analysis, attending to both what participants said and how they structured their accounts in relation to a sequence of events in the borderlands and broader social and cultural contexts (Braun and Clarke 2006; Riessman 2008).

While our analytical focus primarily addresses how residents produce and negotiate border spaces through everyday practices, identity inevitably emerges as a relevant theme since experiences of border proximity directly shape how residents perceive themselves and their communities. Thus, while identity is not the sole analytical focus, it naturally emerges as part of residents' narratives, warranting explicit mention here.

Between May and July 2023, we conducted 20 narrative interviews with residents of border communities. To ensure that the interviews captured experiences within the historical context of the Nagorno-Karabakh movement (the mass mobilization for the reunification of the region with Armenia that began in 1988 and preceded the First Nagorno-Karabakh War) and subsequent border adjustments, participants were selected based on their birth year, with all individuals born before 1970. This criterion ensured that the informants had lived through pivotal historical periods, including the late Soviet era, the collapse of the USSR, which made Armenia and Azerbaijan independent states, and the major conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Participants were selected from villages located in two border marzes of Armenia—Tavush in the northeast, bordering Azerbaijan and Georgia, and Syunik in the south, bordering Azerbaijan and Iran (see figure 1).

In Tavush, interviews were conducted in Voskepar and Berdavan within the Noyemberyan administrative unit, as well as Aygepar, Chinari, and Paravaqar in the Berd administrative unit. These villages, located along the northern border with Azerbaijan, have experienced periodic skirmishes and security challenges, profoundly impacting residents' daily lives. In some villages additional participants were included, such as in Berdavan, where the variety of socioeconomic roles necessitated broader representation. While our fieldwork preceded the 2024 Armenia-Azerbaijan border delimitation process, we note here that this process, particularly the Armenian government's unilateral decision to withdraw from areas adjacent to Tavush villages, has further intensified public debate over territorial integrity and local security. Although these territories were not formally retroceded, the delimitation initiative added to residents' concerns about the evolving and contested nature of the border. This issue was not raised by participants during the interviews but is acknowledged here as part of the broader geopolitical context.

In Syunik, participants were selected from Vorotan, Nerqin Khndzoresk, and Kornidzor in the Goris administrative unit, as well as Davit Bek and Kaghnut (Moghes) in the Kapan administrative unit. These villages lie in the southern border regions and are significant due to their proximity to key transportation routes and their strategic importance in regional geopolitics.

We conducted 10 interviews in each marz. Gender representation was also balanced, with each marz represented by five males and five females. While the initial plan was to include one male and one female participant per village, adjustments were made to reflect the socioeconomic dynamics of certain locations. In some villages, additional participants were included to represent diverse community roles and experiences. The participants were primarily long-term residents, deeply embedded in their communities, with roles ranging from farmers to educators to healthcare workers. Notably, the sample also included retirees who had dedicated decades to their professions, both during the Soviet era and in the post-Soviet period. The interviews were conducted over multiple sessions, with an average of two meetings per participant, each lasting approximately two hours. This approach facilitated deeper engagement and allowed participants to reflect on their experiences over time. Topics explored included life during the Soviet era, the challenges faced during the fall of the USSR, wartime experiences, and life in the postwar period.

All interviews were conducted in Armenian. Ethical procedures were followed throughout, including informed consent, anonymization, and confidentiality. Interviews were conducted in an open-ended narrative format that prioritized participants' own accounts. We analyzed the material through narrative thematic analysis, comparing patterns across interviews and between Tavush and Syunik to interpret how border proximity was experienced and narrated.

We acknowledge that our chosen generational criterion (individuals born before 1970) limits generalizability across generations. Younger residents, who have not directly experienced the first war or Soviet-era relations, may possess differing perspectives regarding borders and their proximity.

Positionality is also explicitly acknowledged here. The research team consists of scholars who have long-standing academic and personal engagement with Armenian society, including direct professional and personal ties to the studied regions. This positionality likely facilitated trust-building during interviews but required reflexivity to avoid uncritical alignment with interviewees' narratives. To mitigate bias, interview data were cross-checked by the research team collectively during analysis, critically reflecting on how the authors' embeddedness influenced data interpretation.

MAIN FINDINGS

Building on the narrative thematic analysis described above, the findings are organized around two core themes: (1) community agency in Tavush marz and (2) external agency and the reconfiguration of border realities in Syunik marz. In the end we bring together commonalities between the two regions.

COMMUNITY AGENCY IN TAVUSH MARZ: A VERNACULAR BORDER CONSTRUCTION

As outlined earlier, Tavush marz has experienced profound transformations resulting from the First Nagorno-Karabakh War and ongoing insecurity thereafter. Under these conditions, particularly following the indefinite ceasefire agreement in 1994, it became dangerous for villagers in Tavush to cultivate the land, as they remained targets of Azerbaijani military forces across the border. Consequently, thousands of hectares of fertile land, previously used extensively during the Soviet era for wheat, orchards, and other crops, became unsafe and inaccessible. In border villages like Paravakar and Berkaber, approximately 800–1,400 hectares of farmland remain uncultivated due to persistent security risks (ANI Armenian Research Center 2015:8).

The transition to a militarized border zone, initially following the First Nagorno-Karabakh War and later deepened after the 2020 escalation, significantly reshaped both the physical landscape and the symbolic perception of the border. In residents' narratives, this militarization also contributed to an increased rigidity in the boundaries of identity, replacing more fluid forms of interaction in Soviet times with stories of distance, threat, and separation, a phenomenon also noted in other conflict-affected border regions where insecurity can enhance symbolic boundaries beyond the physical one (Prokkola 2009; Strüver 2020).

Against this backdrop, Tavush illustrates how local agency shaped bordering practices in the early 1990s, when residents themselves organized defense and improvised territorial protection, often with support from fedayeen squads (volunteer military units). Interviewees first explain this agency not through abstract "bordermaking" but through the everyday mechanics of recruitment, shifts, and communal labor:

> When the tension and war began, we had 110–120 young men in the village, all of whom were on duty at the village border. Their fighting spirit was so high that they did not shy away. The adults also contributed in any way they could. They dug trenches and improvised with available materials. . . . They took their positions and stood guard, but despite their efforts, the border's strength was still questioned as we had only shotguns or machine guns at our disposal. . . . There was no fear. We didn't even know what fear was. We just knew the village had to be protected. Even if we didn't have weapons, we took turns guarding the border. (Tavush, Aygepar, male, 76 years old)

> Each neighborhood had a guard shift. We knew which side was most dangerous and organized our defenses accordingly. Even women took part in supporting roles. (Tavush, Voskepar, female, 65 years old)

Moving on from these practical descriptions, residents are invited to consider how the border itself developed during wartime, no longer as a border so much as a shifting strategic geography of posts, heights, and defensive positions. A resident of Aygepar, now 76 years old, reflected on how the border evolved over his lifetime, highlighting the shift from an open, unmarked space to a militarized border:

> Back in the 1980s, we would cross freely; there was no real border. When the war started, we had to put up our own posts because there were no clear lines. After the ceasefire, those posts remained, but now we see trenches and military positions everywhere. The way we see the border has changed: Before, it was just a road; now it's a danger zone. (Tavush, Aygepar, male, 76 years old)

Similarly, a resident of Voskepar described the improvisational nature of bordermaking during wartime, where strategic necessity dictated territorial demarcation rather than formal agreements:

> What kind of demarcation? Our main borders are from the Soviet era. We set up our posts. During wartime, there is no "border"—you take a strategic position, you move where you must, and that's the border. . . . We nearly never crossed into each other's spaces, maybe just one hill was disputed, but mostly we held to that line. You don't argue borders during war; you move to strategic heights, dig in, and that's it. (Tavush, Voskepar, male, 70 years old)

These narratives indicate that, in residents' recollections, the "border" was initially created not through formal demarcation but rather through "improvised" defense: "posts," "shifts," and "occupation" of "heights" function as "markers" of con-

trol. What is also important to note is that this does not imply a complete absence of the state. Rather, it suggests an early stage in which the state's capacity and coordination were perceived as incomplete, making "mobilization" the most salient form of defense. However, as time progressed, especially in the post-1994 ceasefire, these "posts" established by people did not simply disappear. Rather, they began to be formalized and integrated into a more routinized understanding of security, and the border began to be understood as more institutionalized and militarized. As such, it is also important to note that the "vernacular" bordering process discussed here has a temporal dimension: It is created during wartime, persists in the ceasefire, and is later formalized as a process of border control. The narratives of Aygepar and Voskepar residents further emphasize the strong sense of community agency in Tavush, where local initiative, readiness, and resilience played a defining role in defense and border maintenance. Residents recalled:

> After the war, borders were not drawn; whoever put up a post has remained in place until now. . . . It wasn't a matter of being assigned a border. Everyone found a spot and fortified it. We fought back from the heights. The land we held then, we still do today. (Tavush, Aygepar, male, 76 years old)

> What's the point of demarcating borders during wartime? You make a strategic move from a high place, you go and sit down, and that's the border. (Tavush, Voskepar, male, 70 years old)

> In the beginning, it was the villagers who defended the border. Men volunteered and stood guard with what weapons they had. It wasn't a military order. It was our own. (Tavush, Voskepar, female, 66 years old)

Taken together, these excerpts situate "border-making" in a particular time frame, in the conflict during the early 1990s, when borders are understood as functional and not legalistic and negotiated. Moreover, in discussing "our own" borders, there is an implicit understanding of the relationship to the state in terms of distance and delayed presence. The state is not absent in any way, but in terms of protection, it was insufficient in the moment when border lines were being lived into existence. This is precisely the way in which residents later understand legitimacy in terms of posts being "ours" not only because they are built by us, but because they are built when we had no other choice.

The Soviet-era administrative borders played a significant role in shaping contemporary spatial dynamics. Initially designed for internal governance, these boundaries remained embedded in local memory and spatial orientation. During the conflict, residents drew upon these familiar territorial references, such as old kolkhoz divisions, village boundaries, and district lines, to reinterpret and assert spatial claims. In this sense, Soviet spatial knowledge does not "remain in the background" but is instead a ready-made cognitive map through which residents could justify where a post "should" be and which land was "ours." These preexisting mental frameworks, rooted in everyday knowledge of Soviet territorial organization, became in-

strumental in guiding residents' perceptions and actions, effectively turning historical demarcations into tools for contemporary border-making.

The ethnic boundaries also play a crucial role. Although all narratives were collected after the 2020 war, participants regularly contrasted their present experiences with retrospective accounts of prewar coexistence. Despite significant cultural, religious, and linguistic differences between the residents and the Azerbaijanis on the other side of the border, the emotional and psychological connections to these territories are profound. These narratives about prewar coexistence often emphasize friendship, familiarity, and peaceful interaction:

> The *dost*[2] kept his Armenian friend close to his teeth. (Tavush, Chinari, male, 80 years old)
>
> We were in such relations as an Armenian with an Armenian. (Tavush, Paravakar, female, 52 years old)
>
> We knew they [Azerbaijanis] were Turks, but we respected each other, there was no hostility. There was a man who was closer to a Turk [Azerbaijani] than to his neighbor [in the village]. (Tavush, Voskepar, male, 70 years old)

However, the narratives also reflect how these earlier forms of interethnic familiarity have been retrospectively reinterpreted in light of wartime experiences and prolonged insecurity. These shifts are not the result of directly observed changes over time but rather a discursive reconstruction that projects current threat perceptions onto remembered pasts. In Armenian discourse, Azerbaijanis are often referred to as "Turks," reflecting historical associations, shared ethnic and linguistic roots, and the influence of the Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Azerbaijani conflicts on collective memory and identity (Marutyan 2014).

> Well, we already [by starting the war] gave ourselves momentum, even though we have lived with the Turks [Azerbaijanis] for so long, but we have not forgotten that the "Turk remains a Turk"; you have to protect yourself with whatever you want. (Tavush, Voskepar, male, 70 years old)
>
> They say make friendship with the Turk [Azerbaijani], but don't take the stick out of your hand. They will never change, no matter how good friends they are. (Tavush, Aygepar, male, 58 years old)
>
> When a Turk [Azerbaijani] is born, hatred and enmity are born in the heart. (Tavush, Chinari, male, 80 years old)

These contrasting narratives signal a hardening of identity boundaries that have been shaped not only by historical trauma but also by the spatial and psychological conditions of prolonged border proximity and militarization. The result is a

---

[2] *Dost* is a borrowed Turkish word meaning a trusted friend or companion. In Tavush, this term was commonly used to describe Azerbaijani neighbors before the conflict.

socially reinforced sense of ethnic distance, which redefines earlier memories through a lens of conflict.

Residents narrated a significant shift in their perceptions of interethnic boundaries, comparing Soviet-era coexistence to wartime antagonism. During the Soviet era, administrative boundaries were permeable and characterized by daily interactions and peaceful coexistence. However, the escalation of armed conflict, especially during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, transformed these boundaries into militarized zones requiring active local defense and vigilant protection. Since then, residents have continually adapted to a reality defined by restricted movement, economic hardships, and heightened daily insecurity, embedding these tensions into their everyday practices and perceptions. The renewed escalation of conflict in 2020 has further reinforced residents' narratives of hostility and insecurity, intensifying historical antagonisms and deepening the lived experience of the border as a site of threat rather than interaction.

These lived experiences and actions contributed to the development of vernacular borders, which refer to boundaries developed through the perceptions and actions of residents, as opposed to the formal boundaries developed by the state (Mohanty 2023; Perkins and Rumford 2013). Thus, the vernacular border is not a fixed entity but one that is constantly being perceived and reinterpreted with respect to the changing security mechanisms and governance structures. Since our research was carried out in 2023, the interviews did not account for the developments related to the delimitation process in 2024, and thus our arguments are restricted to what is evident from the interviews, in other words, how residents perceive geopolitical boundaries as realities that impact their mobility, land use, and overall sense of security and identity.

SYUNIK MARZ: EXTERNAL AGENCY AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF BORDER REALITIES

The border dynamics in Syunik marz differ considerably with those in Tavush, as external forces played a more dominant role in shaping territorial realities. Following the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, Syunik's settlements operated within a "quasi-border" state, where Armenian forces controlled adjacent Azerbaijani territories, creating a buffer zone that allowed local residents to continue farming and moving relatively freely. However, the 2020 war marked a turning point, bringing Azerbaijani forces directly to the region's doorstep and fundamentally altering how residents perceived and interacted with the border. Historian Oscar Martínez's typology of integrated borderlands (1994:329) is particularly relevant here, as it describes border regions where economic and social life remains closely tied to adjacent contested territories. Before 2020, Syunik's residents perceived these lands as extensions of their villages rather than militarized borderlands. However, the sudden loss of this informal integration led to a disrupted border reality, where external actors now dictate movement, security, and land access.

A resident of Kornidzor, now 73 years old, described how the war reshaped his relationship with the land:

> For 30 years, we treated those lands as our own—our cattle roamed there; we farmed there; we lived without fear. But after 2020, everything changed overnight. Now the border is not a distant thing; it is right outside our village. The places we once worked have become inaccessible, and every movement is watched. After the victory in the first war, the border moved 100 kilometers away—we finally breathed. We cultivated hundreds of hectares, kept large herds. Life became active again. But now, we've lost everything. Those lands felt like ours. (Syunik, Kornidzor, male, 73 years old)

Similarly, a resident of Davit Bek reflected on the shift from a stable buffer zone to an uncertain border:

> Before the war, we had no border patrols here; we moved freely. Now, my house stands right on the new line, and I wake up looking at Azerbaijani flags from my window. We are no longer on the edge of Armenia—we are in the middle of something we cannot control. I see both our soldiers and their [Azerbaijan's] flags every morning; it's no longer a border, it's a pressure. (Syunik, Davit Bek, female, 60 years old)

These testimonies illustrate how Syunik's residents transitioned from viewing the border as a distant, manageable space to an immediate and restrictive presence in their daily lives. Unlike Tavush, where local agency played a central role in shaping border realities, the post-2020 situation in Syunik shifted power away from residents, reinforcing state- and military-controlled border processes.

A resident of Nerqin Khndzoresk captured this new reality, describing how the proximity of Azerbaijani positions has created constant uncertainty:

> Now they [Russian peacekeepers] are drawing [the border] with GPS. My own lands fall into Azerbaijan territory. They use Soviet-era maps; our real land boundaries are ignored. One day it's ours, the next it's theirs. Even without gunfire, the fear is constant. We worry about diversions, about our children. I wake up three times a night to check the windows. Still, we say: Let's live here. (Syunik, Nerqin Khndzoresk, male, 60 years old)

Such accounts reflect what Prokkola (2009) terms the "governing of proximity," where remote institutional decisions (e.g., GPS-based maps, delimitation policies) clash with local spatial memory and usage, creating affective disorientation and feelings of dispossession. Likewise, another resident from Kornidzor emphasized the psychological toll of this transformation: "Every morning when you get up, you say I lived today; there is always fear in your heart. But let's live here; this is our home, this is our everyday life" (Syunik, Kornidzor, female, 60 years old). These accounts further illustrate how the sudden shift from a buffer zone to an active border has not only affected land use but deeply altered the emotional and psychological experience of border proximity. The border, once perceived as an abstract geopolitical division, has now become a daily source of restriction, surveillance, and anxiety.

Residents often referred to these lands as "our pastures" and "our fields," expressing a continued emotional and historical attachment to spaces they had long

used for agricultural and pastoral activities. However, this attachment exists in tension with their acknowledgment that these lands are now under Azerbaijani control, reflecting an unresolved sense of belonging and dispossession:

> Our pastures belong to the Turks [Azerbaijanis]. We used to take our cattle there; now even the grass is off-limits. We don't know what land is ours anymore. (Syunik, Nerqin Khndzoresk, female, 60 years old)

> After the movement [referring to the 1988 Karabakh movement], for many years the pastures were open [accessible], and our cattle were going to our pastures. We had neighbors from other villages using those areas too. Life was better then; there was pasture, freedom, and peace. (Syunik, Vorotan, male, 47 years old)

These tensions highlight the spatial and emotional ambiguity that defines life in Syunik's border areas. While residents recall a time when legal and practical access to these lands was relatively unrestricted during the Soviet period, the post-2020 geopolitical shifts and tightening border controls have redefined the status and accessibility of these areas. The symbolic and affective attachments, however, remain, revealing a more fluid and layered understanding of identity. Residents speak of these spaces as simultaneously theirs and not theirs—spaces inhabited, abandoned, and remembered. This duality echoes a deeper tension between de jure sovereignty and lived territorial belonging.

Furthermore, the continuity of pastoral practices and movement in the past, especially the routine crossing into what were informally treated as "our lands," reflects how local livelihoods once transcended rigid national distinctions. These embodied, historically rooted practices continue to shape how residents think about place and identity, even as the geopolitical reality has turned hostile. After the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, Armenian-controlled territories beyond the official border created a sense of spatial buffer and security for many residents in Syunik, a point already captured in Kornidzor residents' narratives above ("the border moved . . . we finally breathed"). Another resident from Nerqin Khndzoresk echoed this retrospective sense of distance from danger, recalling that "the border was far from us; we didn't see Turks [Azerbaijanis] either, and we didn't think they would ever be there. They were distant, invisible; we never imagined they'd be on our doorstep" (Syunik, Nerqin Khndzoresk, female, 60 years old).

The situation dramatically changed following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, when the de facto border came into close proximity. The new border now intersects with some settlements, leading to a dramatic shift in residents' lived experiences:

> Our Armenian military positions are now in the garden of our house. They're building posts, reinforcing the area, but danger is still near. We used to feel secure; now we feel exposed. (Syunik, Davit Bek, female, 60 years old)

> I open my bedroom window, and I see their position, the flag of Azerbaijan. Even during drills, the sound makes me jump. Fear has entered our bones. (Syunik, Kaghnut, female, 80 years old)

> As soon as they were shooting, we knew we were entering the shelter like before. Old instincts returned, we knew what to do, but it didn't make it easier. (Syunik, Davit Bek, male, 72 years old)

The proximity of Armenian and Azerbaijani military positions to the settlements, combined with the lack of a formally recognized neutral zone, highlights the substantial influence of external agencies in the process of border formation. However, while external forces play a dominant role in post-2020 Syunik, residents previously engaged with these borderlands in ways that mirrored local agency seen in Tavush—using lands for agriculture, livestock grazing, and economic activity under Armenian control. Just as Tavush communities took active roles in shaping their borders during the first war, Syunik residents' pre-2020 engagement with adjacent areas, some of which are now under Azerbaijani control, reflected embodied practices and spatial familiarity, even if they did not claim ownership in a formal sense.

Yet in contrast to Tavush's hardened ethnic distinctions, residents in Syunik often speak from within a landscape of ambiguity, recalling areas across the current border that were once accessible through daily life and livelihood practices but are now politically reclassified and off-limits. While these spaces are not described in terms of formal ownership, they are remembered as familiar and integral to past routines. This disjuncture between memory and current political status produces a lived identity marked by tension, ambivalence, and emotional complexity.

Unlike Tavush, where localized forms of border-making persisted beyond wartime, the 2020 war marked a turning point in Syunik by drastically reducing this local agency, reinforcing state- and military-controlled border processes. This shift has resulted in infrastructure loss and the blockage of historically important roads, such as the 22-kilometer section of the Goris–Kapan highway now within Azerbaijani territory.

> We imagine that they could harm a civilian, now they are very close to us, you can't imagine 500 meters in a straight line, we are stuck in their territory. They have 14 posts around us, we are surrounded. (Syunik, Nerqin Khndzoresk, male, 60 years old)

> Every morning when you get up, you say I lived today; there is always fear in your heart. But let's live here; this is our home, this is our everyday life. Even in quiet times the fear lingers, because no one knows what the next day will bring. (Syunik, Nerqin Khndzoresk, female, 60 years old)

> A peasant goes to the field with anxiety in his heart; he doesn't know if he will come today or not—that's everyday life. We carry special passes to enter our own lands. I think they're not to protect us, they're to prove we were there, in case something happens. (Syunik, Kornidzor, male, 73 years old)

> Is this the life we live, one day we are lying in bed with our clothes on, the next day we don't know what to do. . . Back then [before the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020] we didn't even lock the door of the house; now my husband, who takes food to the border posts, locks the door at 6 in the morning and only [then] leaves. (Syunik, Kornidzor, male, 63 years old)

In Syunik, the border formation process highlights the dominance of external factors over local agency. Unlike Tavush, where local residents played a central role in defining borders, the border dynamics in Syunik are shaped by military and political decisions beyond community control. Residents express a sense of disempowerment and detachment from these changes, as decisions about demarcation and access are made externally, often without local input. This perceived marginalization contrasts with earlier periods when community members engaged more directly with nearby lands and infrastructure.

At the same time, the Syunik case suggests that even under conditions of external control, spatial identity and local meaning-making persist. Rather than disappearing, they are reconfigured through memory, emotional attachment, and disrupted spatial routines. Residents continue to relate to places not solely through present access but also through remembrance and affective claims, complicating any clear binary between "ours" and "theirs."

BORDER ECHOES: COMMON NARRATIVES IN SYUNIK AND TAVUSH

Despite their distinct characteristics, Syunik and Tavush marzes exhibit several overarching themes that emerge uniquely in their border contexts: the continuous shaping of community and identity through proximity to contested borders, the heightened role of national security as an immediate and lived reality rather than an abstract geopolitical concern, and the normalization of border-related uncertainty and restrictions as part of everyday life.

In both regions, residents experience the border not as a clear and static demarcation but as a shifting and emotionally charged zone that simultaneously includes and excludes. While the formation of the border in Tavush was closely tied to local acts of defense and ethnic hardening, Syunik's experience reflects a more ambiguous spatial relation with the Other—where the same land is remembered as both familiar and foreign, owned and lost, inhabited and observed. These parallel yet diverging experiences underscore how bordering practices produce multiple modes of attachment, separation, and identity within a shared national frame.

In both regions, residents actively negotiate their identities in relation to the shifting border dynamics, embedding security concerns into their daily routines and adapting to an environment where movement, economic activity, and even agricultural practices are dictated by border proximity and conflict histories. This continuous reworking of social identity is not solely a function of national allegiance but of embodied proximity to danger, disruption, and surveillance—conditions that turn the border into a deeply personal and affective reality.

The analysis reveals the profound impact of borders on residents' sense of community and identity. The collected narratives illustrate how proximity to the border affects residents' perceptions of their own community and social interactions. Residents frequently describe their border settlements as isolated from both Armenia and Azerbaijan. For instance, a resident from Voskepar emphasizes this separation by noting their village's "absence" from maps, which highlights its identity shaped by isolation:

> I told a teacher, Oktemberyan, that our village is not on the map of Armenia, nor is it on the map of Azerbaijan. "Have you ever heard of Voskepar? You are a teacher." She said no. I said that's why we are not on the map; we live cut off from the world, who knows how to sew. . . . If this village were not here. . . even back in the 1990s, the Azerbaijanis could have taken Armenia. Our village was the gate. We live cut off from the world. We loved our land, that's what matters. (Tavush, Voskepar, female, 66 years old)

This narrative illustrates how the village's "exclusion" from maps symbolizes its distinct borderland identity, shaped by geographic isolation, historical self-reliance, and direct exposure to security threats. Residents perceive their marginalization within the national landscape—both politically and economically—while simultaneously constructing a strong local identity rooted in resilience and territorial belonging.

The perception of marginalization or insignificance is often contrasted with a narrative of heightened national importance. In the Armenian post-conflict context, border communities articulate their identity in terms of sacrifice, vigilance, and frontline patriotism. Border life is thus narrated as both neglected and heroic—outside the state's view, yet central to its survival:

> Motherland begins at the border; our village is the gate of Armenia. (Syunik, Davit Bek, male, 72 years old)

> Our village is stuck on the border with Turks [Azerbaijanis]. It is the border of our homeland; Armenia starts right here. If this village were not here, the Azerbaijanis would advance and take over the area. (Syunik, Nerqin Khndzoresk, female, 60 years old)

> If this village did not exist, the Azerbaijanis could conquer [the city of] Vanadzor in one day. (Tavush, Voskepar, female, 66 years old)

> Our village marks the first line of defense for the homeland—Armenia begins here. If this village were gone, the Turks [Azerbaijanis] would take control of this territory immediately. . . You can't imagine. . . if this village falls, they'll close the road to [the village of] Tatev. There's nothing to stop them. (Syunik, Vorotan, male, 63 years old)

These juxtaposed sentiments of marginality and centrality reflect the heterotopic nature of border life, spaces that are both inside and outside, symbolic and material, intimate and watched. Residents inhabit border zones as everyday environments of uncertainty and belonging, where proximity to the Other transforms both the risks and meanings of national identity.

Residents frequently view their entire border area as a cohesive entity rather than focusing only on their local communities. This shared experience of border-related challenges fosters a strong sense of solidarity among the settlements. One resident from Kornidzor encapsulates this collective sentiment with a local saying:

> Only the person who shakes salt knows the weight of salt. We too have carried that salt on our backs. We know the weight. That's why I understand the people of Tavush—we've lived that life too. (Syunik, Kornidzor, male, 73 years old)

> Today we are neglected. Is it the city dweller who thinks about us? Chinari is abandoned. The villagers have no one. Look at these fields—no one cultivates them anymore. (Tavush, Chinari, male, 80 years old)

These quotes highlight how boundaries not only divide but also connect communities through shared histories of marginalization, fear, and endurance. The normalization of fear in daily life, echoed across multiple interviews, blends into a broader narrative of uncertainty and anxiety about unresolved border demarcation and future safety. Residents express concerns about the lack of clearly defined borders and its consequences for their daily lives and long-term stability:

> Well, what can I say, what will the future hold, I can't imagine. I would also like very much for there to be a clear demarcation so that we recognize our borders and feel safe. . . . I'd like us to define our borders, not just the soldiers guarding [them], but us knowing where our homeland ends. Only then we'll feel safe. (Syunik, Nerqin Khndzoresk, male, 60 years old)

> What will happen tomorrow, we will live to see. There is uncertainty about the future. (Syunik, Kornidzor, male, 73 years old)

> At the moment we are living in doubt; we do not know what our fate will be; one day they may come and say, "Give this to the Turks too.". . . Even high-ranking officials don't know what will happen. If both sides don't pull back, and people can't safely go to their fields, what future is there? (Syunik, Kornidzor, female, 58 years old)

These sentiments reflect the heterotopic quality of borders as spaces where daily routine and existential uncertainty coexist. Residents experience the border not as a dividing line but as a fluctuating field of meaning and anxiety, embedded in memory, emotion, and spatial practice.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study has explored how residents of Armenia's border communities in Syunik and Tavush marzes narrate, inhabit, and reshape their proximity to contested borders in the aftermath of renewed conflict. Through the lens of border proximity and heterotopia, we demonstrate that borders are not simply geopolitical lines but dynamic, affective spaces shaped by memory, insecurity, and locally grounded practices.

Rather than offering a descriptive account, our analysis contributes to two key bodies of scholarship. First, it extends borderland studies by foregrounding the narrative production of borders in a post-Soviet context that remains underexamined. Armenia's border communities have received comparatively little attention within

this field. By tracing the locally narrated transformations of space and identity in Tavush and Syunik, this article addresses that gap.

Second, it contributes to Armenian studies and post-Soviet spatial sociology by highlighting how bordering is experienced not through state making alone but through grassroots responses to state absence, prolonged insecurity, and territorial ambiguity. Building on literature that has examined the symbolic power of place in Armenian memory (Ishkanian 2008; Marutyan 2014), we show that border communities are not merely victims of geopolitical shifts but are also agents of spatial meaning-making. This expands existing narratives of state fragility and post-Soviet transformation by showing how vernacular bordering takes root through everyday life, affect, and embodied memory.

The Tavush case reveals a form of spatial agency rooted in the historical absence of the state during the 1990s, leading residents to defend, demarcate, and narrate their own borders. The Syunik case, in contrast, exposes the psychological rupture caused by sudden border reconfigurations in 2020, where formerly accessible lands were rendered off-limits and border proximity became defined by external surveillance and fear. Together, these cases reveal two distinct modes of vernacular bordering: one grounded in collective defense and stabilization, the other marked by dispossession and disorientation.

Crucially, both cases illustrate the heterotopic nature of the border, not only as a space of danger and marginalization but also as a site where national identity is reinforced through daily sacrifice and imagined centrality. These findings align with studies of other borderlands shaped by conflict (Nash and Reid 2016; Strüver 2020), but the Armenian case adds a unique temporal and emotional layering: Here border narratives are shaped not only by violence and memory but also by interethnic familiarity retroactively recoded through conflict.

This article also introduces "border proximity" as a conceptual tool to theorize how people internalize spatial uncertainty and navigate the emotional terrain of marginal life under partial statehood. Rather than treating borders as settled reference points, we show how residents reinterpret them daily in ways that are informed by past coexistence, disrupted routines, and anticipation of future change. In so doing, this article seeks to trouble binary understandings of center/periphery, peace/war, and state/community. Rather than consider borderlands as passive "margins" of action, the border narratives from Syunik and Tavush demonstrate bordering as an everyday social process in which safety, movement, and belonging are continually negotiated.

The material will also be clear about the boundaries of what can be argued in this piece. The interviews do not "measure" border lives; instead, they disclose how border lives are made "talkable"—that is, what is made narratable and what is left unsaid or lived out as habitual rather than thought about. This is precisely the value of the narratives: they demonstrate the ways in which geopolitics can become intimate, entering everyday lives.

A telling quote from Syunik: "Every morning when you get up, you say I lived today; there is always fear in your heart. But let's live here; this is our home, this is

our everyday life." What is being conveyed in such a statement is not only the sense of insecurity but also the ability to cope, as border proximity is constantly being negotiated in a daily struggle between insecurity and a sense of belonging, where being present is a form of spatial negotiation itself. Further research could be done on the subject by looking at the long-term negotiations of border proximity, as infrastructures, security, and mobility routes change.

REFERENCES

Alvarez, Robert R. 1995. "The Mexican-US Border: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24:447–470. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.24.100195.002311.

Andersen, Dorte Jagetic, Martin Klatt, and Marie Sandberg. 2016. *The Border Multiple: The Practicing of Borders Between Public Policy and Everyday Life in a Re-Scaling Europe*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

ANI Armenian Research Center. 2015. *Armenian Border: Tavush. Strategic Importance and Geographical Location*. Yerevan. http://www.aniarc.am/wpcontent/uploads/2015/02/Report-first-draft.pdf.

Bhandari, Aditi, and Margarita Antidze. 2020. "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict." Reuters Graphics, October 23. https://www.reuters.com/graphics/ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN/jbyprxxqbpe/.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2):77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Brunet-Jailly, Emmanuel. 2022. "Cross-Border Cooperation: A Global Overview." *Alternatives* 47(1):3–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/03043754211073463.

Clandinin, D. Jean, and Jerry Rosiek. 2019. "Mapping a Landscape of Narrative Inquiry: Borderland Spaces and Tensions." Pp. 228–264 in *Journeys in Narrative Inquiry*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus. 2023. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Costello, Cathryn, and Itamar Mann. 2020. "Border Justice: Migration and Accountability for Human Rights Violations." *German Law Journal* 21(3):311–334. https://doi.org/10.1017/glj.2020.27.

Cuttitta, Paolo. 2018. "Delocalization, Humanitarianism, and Human Rights: The Mediterranean Border Between Exclusion and Inclusion." *Antipode* 50(3):783–803. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12337.

Foucault, Michel. 1986. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16(1):22–27.

Groff, Cynthia, and Daniela Vicherat Mattar. 2022. "'I Think I Belong Over There': Spatial, Social, and Linguistic (Un)Bordering by US Citizens in Mexico." *Language, Culture and Society* 4(1):68–91. https://doi.org/10.1075/lcs.21006.gro.

Iossifova, Deljana. 2020. "Reading Borders in the Everyday: Bordering as Practice." Pp. 91–108 in *A Research Agenda for Border Studies*, edited by James W. Scott. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Ishkanian, Armine. 2008. *Democracy Building and Civil Society in Post-Soviet Armenia*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Johnson, Corey, and Reece Jones. 2016. "Where Is the Border?" Pp. 1–12 in *Placing the Border in Everyday Life*, edited by Reece Jones and Corey Johnson. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Kaisto, Virpi, Olga Brednikova, and Kristiina Korjonen-Kuusipuro. 2022. "Switching Cars with the Militsiya and Other Ways the Finnish-Russian Borderland Is 'Lived' by People in Their Everyday Lives." *Borders in Globalization Review* 4(1):8–20. https://doi.org/10.18357/bigr41202220598.

Khan, Samim Ahmad, and Anjum Ara Shameem. 2024. "Borders at the Margins: Lived Experiences and Governance Challenges of Border Communities in Jammu and Kashmir." *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts* 5(5):955–961. https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i5.2024.2569.

Kolosov, Vladimir, and Marek Więckowski. 2018. "Border Changes in Central and Eastern Europe: An Introduction." *Geographia Polonica* 91(1):5–16. https://doi.org/10.7163/GPol.0106.

Kolosov, Vladimir A., and Maria V. Zotova. 2020. "Multiple Borders of Nagorno-Karabakh." *Geography, Environment, Sustainability* 13(1):84–91. https://doi.org/10.24057/2071-9388-2020-04.

Lefebvre, Henri. 2013. *The Production of Space*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Lehti, Marko, and Vadim Romashov. 2022. "Suspending the Antagonism: Situated Agonistic Peace in a Border Bazaar." *Third World Quarterly* 43(6):1288–1306. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1962274.

Markosian, Christopher, Vahe Khachadourian, and Cheryl A. Kennedy. 2021. "Frozen Conflict in the Midst of a Global Pandemic: Potential Impact on Mental Health in Armenian Border Communities." *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 56(3):513–517. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-020-01996-5.

Martínez, Oscar J. 1994. *Border People: Life and Society in the US-Mexico Borderlands*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Marutyan, Harutyun. 2014. "Trauma and Identity: On Structural Particularities of Armenian Genocide and Jewish Holocaust." *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 1(1):52–69.

Meena, Krishnendra. 2020. "Borders and Bordering Practices: A Case Study of Jaisalmer District on India-Pakistan Border." *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 35(2):183–194. https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2019.1646148.

Mohanty, Biswajit. 2019. "'Ecologic' Border and Deterritorialisation." Pp. 113–131 in *Deterritorialised Identity and Transborder Movement in South Asia*, edited by Nasir Uddin and Nasreen Chowdhory. Singapore: Springer.

Mohanty, Biswajit. 2023. "Border, Development and Dispossessed Agency." *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 38(4):563–584. https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2022.2101139.

Nash, Catherine, and Bryonie Reid. 2010. "Border Crossings: New Approaches to the Irish Border." *Irish Studies Review* 18(3):265–284. https://doi.org/10.1080/09670882.2010.493019.

Nash, Catherine, and Bryonie Reid. 2016. *Partitioned Lives: The Irish Borderlands*. London: Routledge.

Newman, David. 2016. "Contemporary Research Agendas in Border Studies: An Overview." Pp. 55–70 in *The Routledge Research Companion to Border Studies*, edited by Doris Wastl-Walter. London: Routledge.

Oates-Indruchová, Libora, and Muriel Blaive. 2014. "Introduction. Border Communities: Microstudies on Everyday Life, Politics and Memory in European Societies from 1945 to the Present." *Nationalities Papers* 42(2):195–198. https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.891339.

O'Lear, Shannon. 2011. "Borders in the South Caucasus." *Defense & Security Analysis* 27(3):267–276. https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2011.604486.

Paasi, Anssi. 2011. "A *Border Theory*: An Unattainable Dream or a Realistic Aim for Border Scholars?" Pp. 11–31 in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*, edited by Doris Wastl-Walter. Surrey, UK: Ashgate.

Perkins, Chris, and Chris Rumford. 2013. "The Politics of (Un)Fixity and the Vernacularisation of Borders." *Global Society* 27(3):267–282. https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2013.790784.

Plonski, Sharri, and Oliver Walton. 2018. "Conflict and Peace in Borderlands." Pp. 5–11 in *Borderlands and Peacebuilding: A View from the Margins*, edited by Sharri Plonski and Zahbia Yousuf. London: Conciliation Resources.

Prokkola, Eeva-Kaisa. 2009. "Unfixing Borderland Identity: Border Performances and Narratives in the Construction of Self." *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 24(3):21–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2009.9695737.

Prokkola, Eeva-Kaisa. 2014. "Using Narrativity as Methodological Tool." *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 13(3):442–449. https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v13i3.1018.

Riessman, Catherine Kohler. 2008. *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Saldívar, José David. 2023. *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Scott, James W. 2020. "Introduction to a Research Agenda for Border Studies." Pp. 3–24 in *A Research Agenda for Border Studies*, edited by James W. Scott. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
Şenoğuz, H. 2018. *Community, Change and Border Towns*. London: Routledge.
Shachar, Ayelet. 2019. "Bordering Migration / Migrating Borders." *Berkeley Journal of International Law* 37(1):93–147. https://doi.org/10.15779/Z38696ZZ3M.
Smbatyan, Hayk. 2021. "Civilian Participation in Interstate War: Unfolding Voluntary Collective Action in Nagorno-Karabakh War." *Pax et Bellum Journal* 8:57–69.
Smith, Kendall Elizabeth. 2022. "The Border Phenomenon: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on Contemporary Borders & Sovereignty." MA thesis, American University of Paris.
Statistical Committee of RA. 2023. "Syunik Marz: Socio-Economic Characteristics of Marzes and Yerevan City of the RA." Pp. 367–376 in *Marzes of the Republic of Armenia and Yerevan City in Figures*. https://armstat.am/file/article/marzer_2023_28.pdf.
Strüver, Anke. 2020. "Europeanization in Cypriot Borderscapes: Experiencing the Green Line in Everyday Life." *Geopolitics* 25(3):609–632. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1550390.
Syunik Marz Administration. 2023. "General Information: Historical Overview." http://syunik.mtad.am/history/.
Vartikyan, Aram, Harutyun Vermishyan, and Maria Gunko. 2024. "Yerevan 'Unarchitected': A Power Dispositif." *Regional Research of Russia* 14(Supplement 2):S197–S208. https://doi.org/10.1134/S2079970524600781.
Vigh, Henrik. 2008. "Crisis and Chronicity: Anthropological Perspectives on Continuous Conflict and Decline." *Ethnos* 73(1):5–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/00141840801927509.
Von Löwis, Sabine, Beate Eschment, and Ketevan Khutsishvili. 2022. "Dynamics of Bordering in the Post-Soviet Space over the Last 30 Years." Chap. 1 in *Post-Soviet Borders: A Kaleidoscope of Shifting Lives and Lands*, edited by Sabine von Löwis and Beate Eschment. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
Warriner, Doris S. 2013. "'It's Better Life Here than There': Elasticity and Ambivalence in Narratives of Personal Experience." *International Multilingual Research Journal* 7(1):15–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2013.747421.
Yalçın-Heckmann, Lale. 2016. "Remembering and Living on the Borderlands in the South Caucasus." Pp. 133–158 in *Eurasian Borderlands: Spatializing Borders in the Aftermath of State Collapse*, edited by Tone Bringa and Hege Toje. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

(ВОС)ПРОИЗВОДСТВО ПРИГРАНИЧНОСТИ: ПРИГРАНИЧНЫЕ СООБЩЕСТВА ПОСТСОВЕТСКОЙ АРМЕНИИ

Арутюн Вермишян, Мариам Мирзоян

Арутюн Вермишян, кафедра теории и истории социологии; лаборатория территориальных исследований и развития, Ереванский государственный университет, Армения. harutyunvermishyan@ysu.am.

Мариам Мирзоян, лаборатория территориальных исследований и развития, Ереванский государственный университет, Армения. mariam.mirzoyan7@edu.ysu.am.

Исследование было поддержано Фондом Галуста Гюльбенкяна (проектный грант № 286678). Финансирование Фондом Гюльбенкяна не подразумевает поддержку какого-либо конкретного мнения, точки зрения или подхода, выраженных или использованных в данной публикации. Данная работа также была поддержана Комитетом по высшему образованию и науке Республики Армения (исследовательский проект № 24RL-5D038).

В данной статье исследуется, как жители приграничных сообществ Армении в Тавушском и Сюникском марзах рассказывают, проживают и перестраивают жизнь вблизи спорных границ после эскалации конфликта в Нагорном Карабахе (1988–2020). Основываясь на двадцати нарративных интервью, проведенных в 2023 году, исследование анализирует, как местные представления о пространстве, идентичности и безопасности трансформируются в условиях меняющейся геополитической обстановки. В то время как жители Тавуша активно формировали вернакулярные границы посредством низовой обороны и исторической памяти, общины Сюника столкнулись с внезапным внешним давлением после войны 2020 года, что привело к лишению прав и пространственной дезорганизации. Используя понятия гетеротопии и вернакулярного районирования, исследование показывает, что границы – это не неизменные линии на карте, а живые, аффективные пространства, одновременно являющиеся местами уязвимости и формирования идентичности. Результаты также высвечивают то, как близость к границе реорганизует повседневные рутины, мобильность и моральные географии, выявляя неравномерные конфигурации локальной агентности и навязанного извне управления. Такой нарративный подход вносит вклад в более широкие исследования приграничных территорий, предлагая обоснованную сравнительную перспективу на постсоветское разграничивание и сохраняющуюся агентность маргинализированных сообществ.

Ключевые слова: приграничность; приграничные сообщества; (вос)производство пространства; Карабахский конфликт; локальная и внешняя агентность