It comes as no surprise that Andrea Komlosy has produced a monograph on the subject of borders in a global perspective. With a number of publications on global history already to her name, the economic historian from the University of Vienna has been researching borders across the world for a number of years.\(^1\) In her introduction, Komlosy observes that the declaration that boundaries and borders would disappear has not, in fact, come to pass. European borders have not been lifted; they have simply been transferred to the external borders of the EU. The author demonstrates how we might look, on the one hand, to an ideal image of boundaries and yet we are confronted, on the other hand, by the concept of the enemy in the border. The paradox, however, lies in the fact that hopes are projected into both concepts – hopes that the borders can never fulfil. As a consequence, Komlosy establishes, “Borders are not an exceptional situation, but a constant feature of people living together and of the community (…). The questions that everyone asks concern the demarcation of borders and the transgression of borders. Without borders, nothing can be preserved and nothing can be traversed” (P. 9). Komlosy clearly emphasises the fact that she opposes any stylisation of the border – whether it be as an idealised concept or a concept of the enemy. She points out the development of borders and their changing level of significance over the course of history. Consequently, Komlosy’s book offers the reader a wide-ranging discussion of the phenomenon of the border.

The book consists of three chapters. The first chapter, “Chronology of Territoriality” deals with the border as a physical entity and the phenomenon of ‘bordering’. National awakenings play a significant role in the emergence of borders. Komlosy presents the examples of the French nation and, in particular, the uprisings of Polish citizens against the country’s division and annexation to explore these concepts. She highlights the role of national myths and legendary tales in each of these countries, given that they did not actually exist as a recognised political territory. These myths and tales served to underpin the expectations, concepts and claims of statehood. In her representation of the post-war order, Komlosy covers Eastern and East-Central Europe in particular, as these areas of Europe were confronted with tremendous and sweeping changes of borders. Cultural system boundaries led to the formation of military and economic blocs in the course of the bi-polar post-war order. After the period of the global economy, beginning in the 1980s and continuing through and following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the return of the nation state became clearly apparent in the course of the 2007/2008 global economic crisis. Komlosy analyses the implications and effects of the refugee movement on territorial regimes. Like numerous other researchers, the economic historian identifies how the EU’s welcoming culture underwent an about-face within barely a year. The selection process as part of immigration and dealing with asylum, and the allocation of asylum seekers among the member states, as well as the realities of expulsion and deportation can each be seen as being inherent in this new sense of territoriality. The desire for an authoritarian supra-state is steadily growing, which is

reflected, for instance, in the efforts to seal off the external borders. However, in the final sub-section, the author also describes a contrary dynamic. Virtual spaces within social media are also contributing to the demise of borders. The future will show how the pattern of territorially will ultimately shape the nature of national and local spaces.

The aim of the second chapter, “Typology of Borders”, is to bring some clarity into the vast array of borders and boundaries. Fundamental boundaries, political borders, military borders, colonial boundaries, fronts, phantom borders, cultural boundaries, as well as economic and social borders, are analysed using examples taken primarily from European history.

The third chapter, “Border Regimes and the Politics of Borders”, presents how the politics of borders is expressed in the dealings of various stakeholders with borders and border regimes. The sub-sections are organised according to the aspects of conflicts of interest, mechanisms, places, documents and executive authorities. Once again, Komlosy takes up the subject of the refugee movement in this chapter. The author presents the initial welcoming phase (September 2015 to February 2016) and the subsequent period, which she describes as “migration management for the fortification of Europe” (P. 200). Being strictly realistic, she establishes that there is no immediate prospect of a stabilisation of the situation. According to Komlosy, the collapse of the external border during the 2015/2016 crisis acted as a catalyst that is now strengthening the fortification (P. 204).

In the final chapter, “Application of Borders: Review and Outlook”, Komlosy comes to the conclusion that particular difficulties with respect to political demarcations are likely to arise when social, economic and cultural spaces do not completely match or correspond with one another, leading to the development of a respective potentially explosive force for border conflicts. In the last sentence of the book, Komlosy emphasises how, in times when borders are being intensively haggled over, the critical factor is who is actually pursuing the border politics, in order that a socially just world order might arise.

Andrea Komlosy has written a very well informed and extremely stimulating book, which can be confidently recommended for the general public, as well as for the specialist professional audience. Even though the border phenomenon encompasses many further aspects that would certainly benefit from further research and representation, Komlosy has undoubtedly made a very important contribution to this complex issue with her book.

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