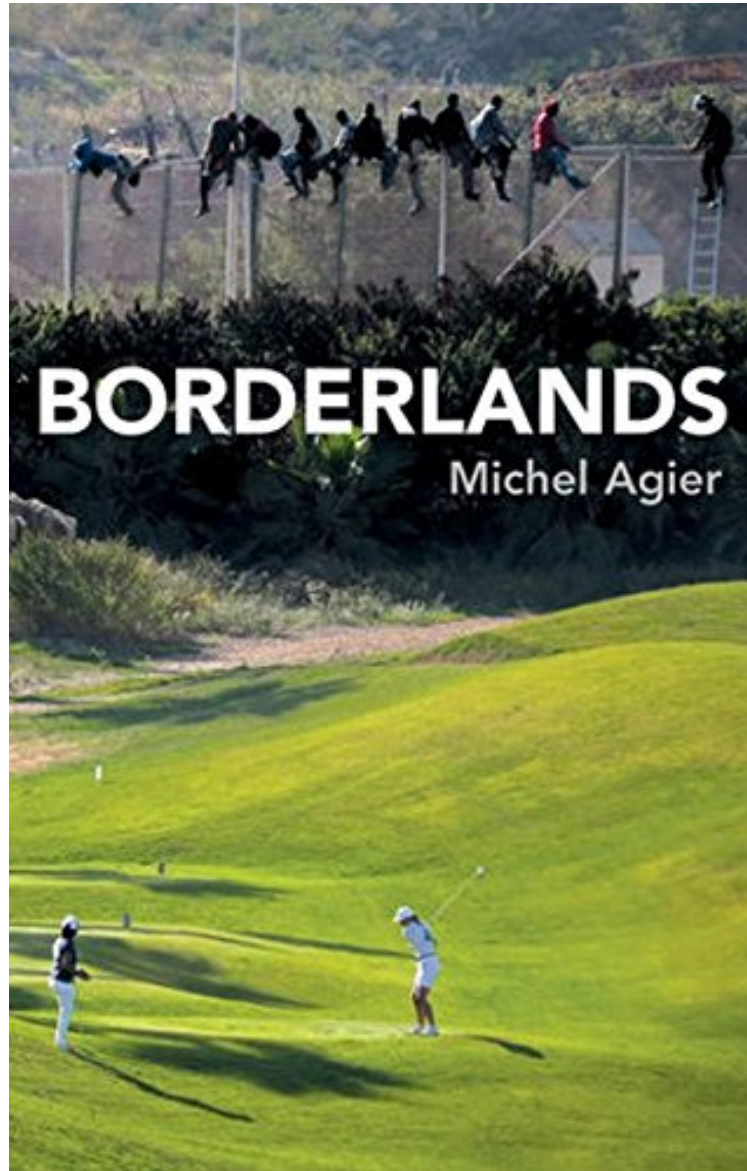


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Borderlands: Towards an Anthropology of the Cosmopolitan Condition

Michel Agier

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Michel Agier : Borderlands: Towards an Anthropology of the Cosmopolitan Condition before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Borderlands: Towards an Anthropology of the Cosmopolitan Condition:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. For anthropologists only
By Phelps Gates
In spite of its seductive and surprising cover picture, this is a scholarly treatise aimed at an audience of professional anthropologists who are familiar with current developments in the field and its jargon. The general reader will probably find it baffling. Typical chapter heading: "Identity-based essentialisms and ontologies." If this doesn't faze you, you may get something out of the book. Hardly any of the content actually deals directly with the anthropological situation of people blocked at borders or in other liminal situations. It's mostly theoretical. The concept of other-ness (now renamed "alienity") seems to be the principal subject, and the book examines the directions that anthropology might (or should?) take in dealing with it. Since I'm required to rate this, I averaged the 5 stars due the author, who seems to be a well-read and well-respected scholar in the field with 1 star describing what I got from it. For lay readers interested in works analyzing the current refugee crisis, I'd recommend *Violent Borders*, by Reece Jones.
2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Clumsy translation, could be rewarding material otherwise
By J. Loscheider
I am reviewing a copy of "Borderlands: Towards an Anthropology of the Cosmopolitan Condition" by Michel Agier. I think this could be an important book but I'll be up-front that the translation is clumsy and does get in the way of understanding the material. This was originally written in French for, I assume, French-speaking sociologists and anthropologists. The translation is definitely not by a native English speaker - you will read words that may make sense if you didn't know they didn't exist in English. For example, things that are "interstitial" may logically be called "interstites" but that's a neologism to most Americans (and perhaps other English speakers). The work is also heavily philosophical - a theory and an abstraction of migration and the relation of the person to the state or to their own geography. This came as a surprise to me, I expected a text on displaced peoples and their condition, the politics that keep them displaced and the impact upon generations growing up without a homeland. This is a component of the work but it is couched within a more abstract understanding of the self as respects one's perspective as a member of a polity.
Two stars for a work that would be challenging - perhaps even rewarding - if the translation didn't so often get in the way
1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Insightful ideas buried in fuzzy translation
By Dr. Cathy Goodwin
I usually like books that are theoretical, intellectual and scholarly - all words other reviewers use to describe the book. While I was expecting a book specifically about displaced people and their challenges, I was equally intrigued by a book about identity as influenced by living near the border. Everyone's identity is challenged - migrants, people living in border towns, police, and anyone who passes through. Having lived near a border in New Mexico I was curious to see how the author dealt with these issues. As other reviewers noted, the author focuses more on identity than on the way people navigate border territories. It's more of an abstract, philosophical treatise. There's little talk of political realities or typical anthropological issues, such as liminality or transition. The biggest challenge of reading this book is the translation. The words are awkward and it's necessary to read each sentence two or three times. At a certain point, you have to ask, Is this worth digging through? If you're a scholar who can't afford to miss critical insights, then the answer is yes. But for casual readers who want insight into a timely topic, the book will be extremely frustrating.

The images of migrants and refugees arriving in precarious boats on the shores of southern Europe, and of the makeshift camps that have sprung up in Lesbos, Lampedusa, Calais and elsewhere, have become familiar sights on television screens around the world. But what do we know about the border places these liminal zones between countries and continents that have become the focus of so much attention and anxiety today, and what do we know about the individuals who occupy these places? In this timely book, anthropologist Michel Agier addresses these questions and examines the character of the borderlands that emerge on the margins of nation-states. Drawing on his ethnographic fieldwork, he shows that borders, far from disappearing, have acquired a new kind of centrality in our societies, becoming reference points for the growing numbers of people who do not find a place in the countries they wish to reach. They have become the site for a new kind of subject, the border dweller, who is both inside and outside, enclosed on the one hand and excluded on the other, and who is obliged to learn, under harsh conditions, the ways of the world and of other people. In this respect, the lives of migrants, even in the uncertainties or dangers of the borderlands, tell us something about the condition in which everyone is increasingly living today, a cosmopolitan condition in which the experience of the unfamiliar is more common and the relation between self and other is in constant renewal.

In *Borderlands*, Michel Agier epitomizes what makes his standing unique in contemporary research: nothing less than the creation of a whole disciplinary field, empirical and theoretical, of urgent importance for our tragic present, the general anthropology of the displaced human in its multiple figures and locations, reversing traditional assessments of mobility and settlement, identity and strangeness, borders and neighbourhoods. He provides the missing link between the cosmopolitanisms of yesterday and those we need for tomorrow. Etienne Balibar, Université de Paris X Nanterre
About the Author
Michel Agier is Director of the French Institute of Development Research and a Director of Studies at the cole des Hautes études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Paris