Borders have been the focus of much conflicting attention in recent decades. Claims are made about their disappearance (Ohmae 1991), their perseverance (Heyman 2004), the hybridity of their environs (Rosaldo 1989), and the forces that prevent hybridity (Vila 2000). This article contributes to the ongoing discussion by offering a case study of the Vermont-Quebec border. The findings indicate that the border has created its own zone of difference that sets itself apart from surrounding areas in both the United States and Canada. This occurs primarily through the existence of “core” borderlanders (Martínez 1994), a group with privileged knowledge of and access to the border. Its members conceive of themselves as separate from other co-nationals outside and within the border region, construct their identities differently (Vila 2000, 2005) and, as I demonstrate here, think about the border in a unique way. Due to forces strengthening the border over the past half-century, opportunities to exercise this difference are shifting and may be in decline. Through its focus on the Vermont-Quebec border region, this article complicates the predominant image of the U.S. border as referring to the U.S.-Mexico border, offers the example of this under-studied area, and proposes the concept of “border event” as an option for considering borders comparatively. As such, it poses an argument for increased attention to areas other than the U.S.-Mexico border region and comparative border studies.
**Theory on the Borders**

Research on borders and boundaries has been a part of anthropological theory since Fredrik Barth’s (1969) seminal work on ethnic groups and boundaries. Since that time, and particularly since the 1980s, scholars have emphasized that nation-states are inter-related and heterogeneous and not isolated, culturally unified, or inherently delineated by geo-political borders (Appadurai 1986, 1988; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Kastoryano 2002; García Canclini 1995). As such, much of the literature focuses on borders and their relationship to diversity within and between nation-states. There has been some slippage in the terminology, with the terms ‘border’ and ‘boundary’ being used interchangeably (Nevins 2002, Phaneuf 2006). These two concepts are interrelated: borders are crosscut by and are a factor in the creation of identity boundaries. For clarity, in this article I use the term border to refer to physical, political borders, and the term boundary to refer to identity boundaries, such as between ethnic or cultural groups.¹

Beyond borders, I follow McKinsey and Konrad in defining a borderland as “a region jointly shared by two nations that houses people with common social characteristics in spite of the political boundary between them” (1989:3-4).

The literature on borders and boundaries emphasizes their role in the maintenance of difference within or between nation states. Within states, migration patterns or the imposition of borders over an ethnic landscape can lead to ethnicities and identities which can solidify and endure due in part to the influences of policy, migration and trade patterns, and economic opportunity (Heyman and Smart 1999; Wolf 2001). These transnational groups maintain contact and further encourage migration across national borders (Massey et al. 1993; Schiller et al. 1992; ¹In this I vary considerably from Nevins (2002). For the purposes of this case study, I find it more important to preserve the concept of boundaries as tied to cultural and ethnic groups and separate from that of borders.
Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). In this way ethnic or cultural boundaries within a nation-state, when maintained, can in turn create a demand for trade and migration.

Borders themselves are also accompanied by zones of difference, though anthropologists do not agree on how this occurs. For some, borders are “endowed with a curious kind of hybrid invisibility . . . they seemed to be a little of this and a little of that, and not quite one or the other” and pass on these characteristics to the residents of border areas (Rosaldo 1989:209; see also Asiwaju 1990; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Other scholars question this notion of hybridity as inherent at borders, finding that there are forces working to maintain groups as separate and to prevent hybridity from occurring (Vila 2000, 2005). Yet border dwellers, despite their diversity, recognize their difference from individuals living deeper within the nation-states and think of themselves as distinct from residents of the heartland (Martínez 1994:18). For these authors, borders are no longer seen as keeping difference outside the nation-state, but as part of the creation and maintenance of that difference.

With their role as markers of difference, borders are also physical entities that separate nations. These material aspects of borders are studied by relatively few scholars. Those who do consider the physical characteristics tend to emphasize how borders also include all of the structures, ideologies, and practices that accompany or serve to maintain that physical mark (Kearney 2004). In these discussions, the border itself is often conflated with these institutions and the borderlands in both countries into a single concept. The presence of borders is intended to serve a number of purposes, namely to: classify objects/people/phenomena, keep out those which are not desirable, and facilitate the entry of those that are desirable (Morehouse 1996; Kearney 2004; Heyman 2004). They also allow unequal passage of value and its accumulation
These functions exist through negotiation, making borders “spatial and temporal records of relationships between local communities and between states” (Wilson and Donnan 1998:5). This situation at borders serves to create “a unique human environment shaped by physical distance from central areas and constant exposure to transnational practices” that in turn influences possible human interactions in the area (Martínez 1994:xvii-xviii). The relationship between borders, the ruling governments, and local residents, therefore, is an iterative one that is projected on the landscape and influences the way people can move through that landscape.

Both the literature on borders as creators of difference and that on borders as physical places tend to fall into one of two categories: those who find borders to be at the periphery, or “the edges of socially constructed spaces” (Morehouse 1996:68) and those who understand them as centers, either of international processes and the institutions that attempt to regulate them or of hybrid or alternative lifeways (Kearney 2004; Rosaldo 1989; Martínez 1994). Both of these outlooks serve particular purposes by directing attention to a set of phenomena, though both have risks. Approaches that focus on borders as centers, while attentive to local creativity and trans-border contact, can assign borderlanders undue influence and ignore the structures and practices that regulate and separate populations (Vila 2000; Wilson and Donnan 1998). It is regularly noted that negotiations surrounding official practices at borders are not equal, and residents of the border region are the most affected by policy change but have little or no say in creating these policies (Richardson 1999; Papademetriou and Meyers 2001). On the other hand, those who see borders as peripheral have a place in showing inequity and exposing problems with political processes, for example, through top-down and policy or economics based studies.
However, this kind of study can ignore the agency of the borderlanders and the ways in which they are critical actors in nation building (Wilson and Donnan 1998). The same can be true of those who focus solely on the border for its economic influence. I argue that borders are simultaneously centers and peripheries, depending on the phenomena under consideration.

The United States’ borders are among the most studied in the world, with almost all the research focused on U.S. – Mexico border. As the only land border between a developed nation and a developing nation, it offers opportunities for research on the diverse social, economic, and political effects of the situation, the variety of which is too great to enumerate here (for a more thorough discussion, see: Nevins 2002; Lorey 1999; Alvarez 1995). The border is also a focus in debates on free-trade and is the site of high rates of undocumented immigration, violence, and drug and weapons trafficking. Governmental and public attention on the area increase the region’s attractiveness to social science researchers – particularly socially active ones – who can develop theory, criticize the political situation, make policy recommendations, or all of the above.

The scholarly focus on the U.S.-Mexico border, in combination with the fact that border scholars tend not to produce much theory that is comparative or generalizable (Wilson and Donnan 1998; Brunet-Jailly 2004), this presents challenges for researchers wishing to study other areas. This is because there is neither generally applicable theory nor the volume of diverse case-studies necessary to create such theory. Luckily, some scholars have created theory that is applicable to the Vermont case. For one, Oscar Martínez (1994) develops a typology of border residents. Martínez demonstrates that border residents have their own core and periphery. For him, the core represents: “not who holds political or economic power but rather who functions
best in the binational, bicultural environment found in the borderlands” (Martínez 1994:62). Core borderlanders have extensive contact, ties, and competences across the border and tend to think of borders and opportunities to intensify relations between groups. Peripheral residents usually speak only one language, have less contact across the border, and see borders as separating groups. This typology is particularly interesting because it offers a framework that takes into account variation in individuals’ relationships with the border.

Pablo Vila (2000, 2005), also offers theory applicable to the Vermont border. Identities are always constructed discursively, in part through the construction of identity narratives which give both temporal and moral coherence to life by offering directionality and meaning to events (Appiah 1994; Taylor 1994; Vila 2000). Vila emphasizes that this process is complicated at borders where there is access to multiple populations with their own sets of possible identities which are constantly placed in opposition, superimposed, supplanted, and altered (2000). This can serve to both create hybridity and to solidify and further entrench differences between identity groups. Vila’s work is particularly suited to unpacking differing explanations and behaviors in relation to the border, because he shows that they result, in part, from differing logics and understandings of the events at hand. As I argue below, this concept is key to understanding relations at the Vermont – Québec border.

Many border scholars mention in passing twin concepts that I term “border as opportunity” and “border as impediment” (Phaneuf 2006; e.g. Heyman 1991; Staudt 1998; Spener and Staudt 1998; Vila 2005) without studying them systematically. Julia Clancy-Smith’s (2005) work on pre-colonial Tunisia offers one such attempt. She assesses claims that between 1815 and 1870 the Tunisian-Mediterranean border offered increased opportunities to women
migrants. Clancy-Smith concludes that while pre-colonial migration appeared to offer women more freedom than did life in their states of origin, the consular authorities served to replicate the patriarchy of those societies and limit those potential freedoms. She emphasizes that border crossings are all unique and offer both opportunities and impediments to actions, often in complex and apparently contradictory ways.

The work of Martínez (1994), Vila (2000, 2005), and Clancy-Smith (1994) is particularly applicable to the Vermont case because it offers the possibility of comparison. While placing their research in comparative terms, these authors remind researchers that borders are distinct, both from the surrounding regions and from each other. Martínez and Vila add that the distinctiveness of a border is internalized in varying ways by residents who incorporate their close relationship with the border into their identities.

Unlike the United States’ southern border, far less attention has been paid to the U.S.-Canadian border. In general, authors tend to emphasize cross-border similarities, ignore the Quebec border where these similarities are not so evident, and, with the exception of some Canadian scholars, pay little to no attention to the forces that serve to separate and distinguish the populations of these two nations. The majority of the literature on this area in the social sciences considers the Anglophone segments of the border with a focus on politics, policy, or economics (Beard et al. 1997; Holmes 1998; Knutson et al 1997; McCallum 1995; Meyers and Papademetriou 2001; Alper 2004; Whitaker 1991; Thompson and Weinfled 1995; Buttrick 1992; Beach, Green and Reitz 2003; Folson 2004). A few compare the U.S.-Canadian and U.S.-Mexican borders (Lee 2002; McKinsey and Konrad 1989). Similarities between the US and Canada, their languages, and their peoples are widely emphasized (e.g. Meyers and
Papademetriou 2001; Gibbins 1989), and the openness of the border is much touted, though primarily from an economic perspective (e.g. Brunet-Jailly 2004). Some Canadian authors emphasize the role of the border in Canadian society and its function as protecting Canadian national identity from U.S. cultural encroachment (New 1998; Blaise 1990).

The U.S.-Quebec segment of this border is even more devoid of attention. Those authors who do treat the Quebec border region focus overwhelmingly on French-Canadians migration to central and southern New England as industrial laborers (Hudson 1976; Massey et al. 1994; Lachapelle 1984; Ramirez 1992, 2000, 2001a, 2001b; Takai 2001; Ferland 2002) and not on the border itself. There are very few works on Anglo-Canadian immigration (Ramirez 2001:59; 2002), human or regional geography (Slowe 1991; Griswold 1939), and Canadian cultural influence on American culture (Chartier 1984). Authors working primarily in Canada focus on the importance of language identity in Quebec, underlining the difference of the Quebecois French speakers in opposition to English speakers on both sides of the border (Hero and Balthazar 1988; Chartier 1984; Lamonde 1984; Lachapelle 1984). These discussions were often tied to the independence movement in Quebec and subsided concurrently. The explicit focus of this literature is nationalism and language politics and the border itself is occluded.

In general the literature on borders has been overwhelmingly focused on the U.S.-Mexico border, producing very few comparative pieces. Those few works that exist on the U.S.-Canadian border tend to emphasize cross-border similarities. As such, they ignore the Quebec zone of difference and its border. In the sections below I provide background on the Vermont border region, detail the case study, and use this information to suggest further additions to comparative border theory.
Identity on the Vermont-Quebec Border: The Case of the Northeast Kingdom

Vermont and the Northeast Kingdom

The Northeast Kingdom, where this research is located, is a region in northern Vermont on the Quebec border. Colloquially called “the Kingdom” by locals, it is situated – as the name suggests – in the northeastern corner of Vermont, between the Canadian and New Hampshire borders. Today the area is composed of Orleans, Essex, and Caledonia Counties. It is located between the major population centers of Boston and Montreal and is cross-cut by two interstate highways, I-91 and I-93, both important for regional trade and transport.

Vermont’s history, and the history of the Kingdom, has been largely ignored by all but local historians (Morrissey 1981) and a large part of what has been written was authored around the bicentennials of the U.S. and Vermont. The region, along with the better part of the state, saw European settlement late in the history of New England because it was a zone of conflict in British-French hostilities and a passageway for Abenaqui raiding parties and the combatants in the French and Indian Wars (Hay and Hay 1967; Swift 1977; Haviland and Power 1981). Following the end of the French and Indian Wars, the northern border was first surveyed by the British between 1771 and 1774 and has been relatively stable since (Slowe 1991). The border disputes with New York, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts were much longer lasting, and the last active disagreement with New Hampshire was settled in the U.S. Supreme Court in 1933 (McGrory Klyza and Trombulak 1999).

With Vermont’s entry into the United States in 1791, settlement in the Kingdom expanded, and many local towns were chartered or incorporated between the 1780s and the early
1800s. Cross-border ties and interactions with Canada have never been lacking in this region. To cite one of many examples, Derby Line, Vermont opened its first post office in 1829, only a few doors down from the Canadian post office across the border. The two postmasters filled in for each other for years until their duty-sharing practices were curbed by regulatory changes of both governments (Swift 1977). Today, unlike the New Hampshire and Maine borderlands, the Vermont and New York border regions are inhabited and see daily interaction, including shopping, trade, and tourism (Slowe 1991). The Vermont-Quebec border itself is a swath through a forest about as wide as a power line cut, a line of buoys through a lake, or a fence along a road.

Today, farming and tourism are among the Northeast Kingdom’s primary economic activities. Tourists come to the area for ski areas, lakes, snowmobile trails, and hunting. Lake Memphremagog is particularly important for trans-border interactions because it is divided by the border with the majority of its 25 mile length in Canada. In 2000 the Northeast Kingdom was home to 62,438 individuals or 10.26% of the state’s population (U.S. Census Bureau 2002: 10). At the time of this research the largest town had only around 7 thousand inhabitants, and most towns only numbered in the 100s. In Vermont, these counties are among the most rural, with the lowest population densities. In addition, they are the poorest and have some of the lowest educational levels. They also have among the highest populations of foreign-born residents (U.S. Census Bureau 2002). Due in part to these differences, the region has a very well developed common identity and feeling of community, both at the local level and across the Northeast Kingdom as a whole.

*The Project and its Methodology*

In order to record some of the region’s uniqueness in relation to the U.S. – Mexico
border, I spent the summer of 2006 interviewing 22 residents of the Northeast Kingdom over 16 oral history interviews. These interviews were semi-structured, focusing on the informants’ experiences living close to the international border with Canada. Though I was prepared with topics and questions, informants were encouraged to run the discussion and share whatever stories they felt were relevant. This follows the methodology of Arksey and Knight (1999), Rubin and Rubin (1995) and Baum (1977). The interviews varied in composition and length, with individual, couple, and family interviews averaging around 45 minutes long. Interviewees were selected using snowball sampling. My informants range in age from 18 to their late 80s and include Canadian citizens and U.S. citizens of French-Canadian, English-Canadian and non-Canadian descent. They are employed in a variety of fields and range in educational level from not having completed high-school to holding a PhD. Due to the availability of individuals the majority of informants are retired. These interviews are the basis of this consideration, supported by my personal knowledge of the area as a part-time resident since the early 1990s.

Identity on the Border: The Case Study

Kingdom residents often have a multiplicity of cross-border ties in addition to strong communal and regional identities, as mentioned above. This can take many forms. In such a rural area, where facilities are limited, a wide range of day-to-day activities take place across the border. These cross border relationships are central to the viability of local businesses and institutions. For example, many local fire departments share equipment and manpower with their Canadian neighbors, since none of the departments are large enough to own all of the more specialized equipment themselves (Hardy, Personal Communication 7/26/06). Businesses routinely trade across the border when items or demand are more interesting than in their own
country (Joyce Croteau, Personal Communication 6/2/06; Jackson Allen, Personal Communication 7/9/06). In addition, some residents are connected to the border in more intimate ways. Within the memories of my informants, residents of both countries have routinely immigrated across the border, at times more than once in a generation, for marriage, work, or pleasure. Today the region is populated with families and communities that are a mix of nationalities and have affective ties on both sides of the border.

Though the Kingdom is economically and socially linked in a myriad of ways with and across the border, individual practices and identification are far more diverse. For instance, cross border practices vary with physical access of individuals to Canada. At one extreme, Derby Line, Vermont and Rock Island, Quebec are one community where the international border is represented by a white line painted across roads and buildings. The local library is also international: it straddles the boundary line with books in French and English. In contrast, areas to the south of the region are far more physically removed from Canada and direct contact is more difficult and limited. The small rural roads that serve much of the region increase travel time considerably. Individuals with similar social, family, or religious ties to Canada living in Derby Line are more likely than those living in Danville, for example, to visit on a daily or weekly basis. Employment also determines individual access to the border. Some local residents are employed with border patrol, others cross regularly for work, and yet others work in the U.S. and cross only for personal reasons. Proximity to the border and border-related employment increases individuals’ access and knowledge of the border and the Canadian borderland.

Geography and employment certainly influence individuals’ ability and inclination to interact with the border, but do not explain the variation in border crossings and border related
identities. Even within counties, villages, and families, not everyone has the same kind of interaction with the border. Some from the south cross frequently and easily while some from the north are rarely or never involved with their Canadian neighbors. Martínez’ (1994) concepts of core and peripheral borderlanders help shed some light on these differences. In the interviews, residents of the Northeast Kingdom clearly identify themselves and others as core or peripheral borderlanders, though not in those terms. June Elliott, a woman from Derby Line, noted:

> It just strikes me that living on the border, it wasn’t that much of a deal. If we had visitors from somewhere else in the country and they’d come here [they’d say] ‘Well, you’re right on the edge of a foreign country!’ and I’d say ‘Foreign country – that’s no foreign country!’ It didn’t seem as though it were any more significant than going into New Hampshire. ... It was one community, essentially. (Elliott, Personal Communication 6/28/06)

By offering this statement on cross-border relations within a story about an uncomprehending outsider she is explicitly acknowledging her difference from Americans not from the border region and identifying with individuals who live in the border “community” because of her cross-border ties. The international border, in fact, is reduced in importance to that of an intranational border, and the co-national guests are cast as foreigners who are uninitiated into local life. In this case, Elliott is clearly positioning herself as a core borderlander.

During the 1930s, when Elliott grew up in Derby Line, there was a greater integration of the two border communities than there is today. At that time and place, borderlanders’ internal differences were less marked than the differentiation between borderlanders and outsiders. Today, core borderlanders also emphasize their difference from local peripheral borderlanders. For example, a percentage of borderlanders – even in towns located on the international line – have never crossed into Canada. This is not always a question of economics or opportunity, and some parents will not let their children cross the border for school trips even at no cost to
themselves. Core borderlanders meet these stories, and ones like them, with incomprehension. This can be explained, as Vila (2000, 2005) suggests, through the creation and use of identity narratives. The identity of core borderlander is supported with identity narratives that supply examples of accepted behavior and a logic for why that behavior should be adopted. While the speakers acknowledge that not everyone acts as they do, they express consternation as to why. Core borderlanders’ use of identity narratives will be discussed in more detail below.

Another way in which differences between core and peripheral borderlanders are clearly expressed is through the core borderlanders’ privileges when crossing the border. In the past, locals would often use small roads without border patrol installations when visiting Canada and did not have to report to the officials. Later, when reporting was required, a simple wave to the border guards would suffice. At times their relationships with those guards allowed them particular advantages. In one example Robert Darby, from Derby Line, remembers that in the 1930s and 1940s:

we knew all the officers. I remember my mother said she bought a wristwatch in Canada that had twelve jewels in it. She got up to the customs, went to pay duty on it, she said she had a twelve jewel watch, the officer said ‘No you don’t, it’s only eight. You don’t have to pay duty on eight jewels so go ahead.’ Today I’m sure it would be different. (Robert Darby, Personal Communication 7/27/06)

This family’s ties with the border guards put them in a uniquely favorable situation in regards to border regulations. Robert Darby acknowledges that this kind of relationship is less likely today, but still identifies as someone who has a special affiliation with the border. Despite increased security, this long history of privilege at the border has not been forgotten and is intimately tied to the construction of identity as core borderlander, as I will discuss in more detail below.

Core borderlanders also use their particular knowledge of the border to find and exploit
economic opportunities. As mentioned above, borders are places where commodities gain or lose value (Heyman 2004, Kearny 2004). Some borderlanders can and do capitalize on their knowledge of this difference, taking advantage of exchange rates or lower-priced items. Exploitation of opportunities can also go beyond knowledge of price differences to engaging in illicit activities of various degrees. There is a steady stream of American 18 year-olds traveling to Canada where they can legally drink alcohol and of individuals returning with items that they do not declare. In the mid 1900s, interviewees remember their father buying calves in Canada and smuggling them through the woods in a burlap sack to add to his own herd (Teatreault and Lessard, Personal Communication 7/27/06). Prohibition was probably the most spectacular example of illicit cross-border activity, and some borderlanders aided rumrunners for much-needed cash, or became rumrunners themselves (Wheeler 2002; Elliott, Personal Communication 6/28/06; Downing, Personal Communication 7/10/06). The depth of local knowledge necessary to subvert regulations and the practice of subversion add to the core borderlanders’ difference and identification as such.

Though the position as core borderlander can bring great privileges, some also see it as conveying certain responsibilities. The deep knowledge of local roads, customs, and people held by some borderlanders places them in a particularly good position to identify threats or illicit activity at the border. It is not uncommon, for example, for residents of some of the more rural areas to be able to identify the owner of every local vehicle and their typical routines. Anything out of the ordinary, then, can be remembered and identified. While neighbors are likely to turn a blind eye to each other’s indiscretions, they will more typically notice and report suspicious activities from outsiders. Those who do so tie themselves even more completely to the border by
unofficially becoming part of its defenses.

Core borderlanders do not speak of laws as applying to locals and outsiders equally. In this way, their understanding has not kept pace with the changing law enforcement aspirations and realities. This difference is particularly noticeable when there is a change in the regulations and day-to-day activities are suddenly criminalized. For example, there are multiple stories in the collection of an individual making a routine trip to Canada to get a haircut or visit someone only to be halted by the authorities and informed that they are now in violation of some newly-issued regulation. Today, everyone must stop and show identification. As Marie George from Newport recounts: “Since 9/11, I’ve had to show ID. Even if the person knows me. ‘Hi Marie, how are you? Show me your driver’s license’” (Personal Communication 7/10/06). This woman’s attribution of the change to 9/11 is typical. Though some borderlanders do engage in illicit activity or inadvertently break the law following legal changes, on the whole they represent the infractions of locals as minor and not worthy of official attention or policy change. More restrictive laws are almost uniformly explained as written to control not locals but terrorists, big-time smugglers, and other groups of outsiders that, while perhaps not ill-intentioned, do not know how things work.

Though identity as a core borderlander is an important marker for understanding an individual’s behavior, it is not all-determining. Instead, it is better thought of as one of a set of identity narratives (Vila 2000, 2005), attitudes, and predilections. Though core borderlanders count their closeness to the border as significant, they do so in varying ways, and what for some are very important aspects of their identity might not exist for others. This can be seen in discussions of French-speaking in the area. Of the individuals in the study the number of primary
French speakers who later learned English vastly outweighed the English speakers who later learned French. This is despite the fact that bilingual individuals have always been sought after as translators or to work with French and English speaking clientele. For example, as recounted by Harriet Downing, around the 1950s the local customs office did not employ anyone who could speak French, so they would ask the owner of the local general store to interpret for them when necessary (Personal Communication 7/10/06). This apparent lack of French speakers is probably due in part to the fact that American schools did not teach French, and teachers discouraged students from speaking French among themselves (Gascon, Personal Communication 6/28/06). French was considered to be a poor and uneducated person’s language for much of the 20th century and, despite the obvious economic advantage, French-speakers were regularly discriminated against. Harriet Downing remembers that French-speaking children in her area were unwilling to speak French in mixed groups after they had learned English, probably in response to just these social pressures (Personal Communication 7/10/06). In general, English-speaking core borderlanders chose to uphold their anti-French narratives and attitudes over economic advantage and an opportunity to deepen their cross-border competences. French-speaking core borderlanders, for their part, tried to distance themselves from the language to escape discrimination.

It can be seen here that individuals’ identities as core borderlanders influence their interactions with the border only in concert with their other identities and opportunities. The core-periphery designation is an acknowledgment of varying competences, experiences, and preferences for which physical distance from the border is not the sole determination. These identities play out in practice as borderlanders use their narratives to determine and explain
future actions. Core borderlanders are aware of their relatively privileged position with respect to the border and do not use this advantage to uniformly subvert or uphold the border, its regulations, and its institutions, but mix both attitudes into a complicated, unique set of interactions.

*Identity and the Border: Discussion*

Identities of borderlanders are complex, multiple, and shifting. Their relationship with the border is, therefore, one of a number of factors used in these identity negotiations. These are accomplished through the attribution of meaningful differences between core and peripheral borderlanders and outsiders and the use of identity narratives that inform individuals’ actions. These categories mark variation in the actions of their members in numerous ways, some with very real legal, economic, and social consequences.

This connection between identities, narratives, and logics translates into differing conceptions of a ‘border’ for core borderlanders, academics, and politicians. All of the groups agree that a border is a physical entity that can be identified on the landscape that marks a political boundary. At times, all use it as a symbol which can represent, for example, a threat of terrorism or the strength or weakness of the nations concerned (Nevins 2002). The similarities end here. Policy makers and academics tend to use the term ‘border’ to either refer only the dividing line or to include both the physical dividing line and the borderlands in both countries, in this case, the U.S. and Canada. They are also more likely to speak and think of the border as a symbol and an amalgamation, often referring to the U.S.–Mexico border even when discussing the U.S.–Canadian border. In contradiction, the core borderlanders interviewed in this study refer to ‘border’ as the dividing line or the dividing line and the Canadian borderland, excluding the
U.S. borderland from the concept. Also, unless explicitly noted, they speak solely in reference to ‘their’ border, without reference to the border with Mexico. This conceptual difference separates them from those who analyze, write about, and shape their experiences through policy development.

In an attempt to access the uses and meanings of this polysemantic symbol and investigate the connection between identity, logic, and action, I offer a concept that I call “border events.” I define a border event as any event that is inherently bi-national in character and involves an international border. To illustrate, let us apply this definition to a seemingly straightforward narrative taken from the interviews. Namely: a family crosses the border to see an Italian opera in Montreal, returning to their home in Vermont after the show. Is this a border event?

One line of reasoning would say that attending an opera in Canada is not a border event. The central action has nothing to do with the border in question. The experience sought is not unique to either community. It can be found in both Canada and the United States, but is not so prevalent that it would be available in every town, so most expect to travel some distance. If one were to follow this logic, the border is peripheral to the action and need only be considered if something involved with the border crossing interferes with the family’s plans. In this mindset the physical border and its crossing is normalized to the point of insignificance. This is how the core borderlanders see the situation. For them the border becomes significant only when its presence is manifested, such as by providing an opportunity or an inconvenience.

Alternatively, the border crossing can be seen as the central feature of the story. That a family is capable of and willing to cross an international boundary for an evening’s entertainment
speaks volumes about the border, the people who make their lives on it, and the surrounding countries. The ease with which the border is crossed can be seen as encouraging members from both nations to establish and maintain trans-border bonds and influence each other socially, culturally, and economically. It is this point of view that is taken on the whole by peripheral borderlanders, politicians, and social scientists. For these groups the act of crossing a border is always inherently significant, if for different reasons. A peripheral borderlander may focus on the perceived or real difficulties of crossing the border and communicating in a foreign country. Social scientists may find this story diagnostic of a number of political, legal, and socio-economic factors. Politicians and law enforcement officials tend to be more concerned with economic impacts, regulating crossings, and protecting national security and interests. This difference is not purely academic: these points of view are not equally recognized, and all border crossings are legally border events and are regulated at the federal level.

What has been suggested throughout this paper and is illustrated through the above discussion of the trip to the opera is that the core borderlanders use not only different identity narratives, but also a different logic from that guiding official regulations. This can have varying consequences. In the narrative as told above, the border crossing is uncontested. Let us add a fictional, but highly possible, element: the family did not stop and report to national authorities when entering Canada. Within the memories of the interviewees this would not have been illegal or, more recently, while illegal it would not have been pursued or prosecuted. Today this is illegal and prosecuted, but the action would still be understood differently by the authorities, academics, and the borderlanders. Authorities understand it as illegal.2 Some academics might offer this as

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2 Though governmental policy varies in its interpretation and implementation and governments should not be treated as monolithic entities, they will not receive the consideration they are due here. Governments, and bureaucracies in
an example of an act of resistance. In some cases, borderlanders certainly do engage in acts of resistance, such as the examples of smuggling above. Here, however, and in similar examples from my research, I would argue that they are not consciously or unconsciously involved in an act of resistance. Instead, they understand the situation “slantwise.” This is a concept developed by Campbell and Heyman (2007) in recognition of the fact that categorizations and logics are not universal and that not all actions are embedded in relationships of dominance and resistance. The term “slantwise” identifies actions that are both outside relations of dominance and resistance and driven by logics different from the official logic. Though this term has broad applications, it is particularly useful in studies of borders, as they are areas where not only nation-states and populations meet, but also where one finds conflicting or simply unrelated sets of logic. The residents in the above example, then, are slantwise: they are not consciously acting within relations of dominance and resistance and are driven by a logic that is not officially recognized.

While core borderlanders have been accustomed to preferential treatment at the border, this situation is eternally in a state of change. Over recent years, advances in technology have allowed for more thorough surveillance and documentation, lending more power to the governments to impose their understanding of laws. Growing national security and immigration concerns have also increased regulatory oversight. Activities that in the past were undetected or overlooked, such as visiting a neighbor in Canada without reporting at the border, are now traceable and penalized. This historical change causes dissonance between the lived experience and the identity narratives of those individuals.

These changes also serve to limit slantwise activity and create tensions and general, are exceedingly difficult to study, as noted by Heyman (1995), and fall outside the purview of the project at hand.
misunderstandings. This happens in three primary ways. First, laws can limit legal activities along with the illegal acts they target. For example, with the identity card requirement, some locals who were accustomed to visiting Canada daily or weekly are not able to afford the necessary documentation and thus cannot cross the border. The study was conducted before these requirements went into effect, and it is still too early to determine the long-term impacts of these changes.

Second, regulatory changes may be resisted as diluting the feel of the local bi-national community. This is understood as occurring in three ways. First, increased oversight serves as a constant reminder of the Canadians’ difference. This reinforces the national split in the community, which core borderlanders already regarded as artificial. Second, regulations are a reminder of the security problems they were designed to prevent. This taints all transborder activities with the fear and stigma associated with dangerous or illicit behavior and makes all border crossings suspect. There is evidence from the interviews that the climate of fear present after 9/11 and still palpable during the study period prevented some locals from crossing the border at all. Further research would be needed to determine how widespread this reaction has been, and its longer-term impacts. Third, locals express their alienation from their treatment at the border. Border guards and new regulations are critiqued as being ‘from the Mexican border.’ Though the truth of this statement is often not known, it serves to mark the border guards and the regulations they enforce as foreign. In this way locals emphasize a difference from ‘their’ border by referencing characteristics they attribute to the U.S.-Mexico border, namely: strict regulation, harsh enforcement, and more dangerous conditions. The border is understood as being taken over by non-locals, be they the ‘Mexican’ border patrol or the potentially dangerous outsiders who are
perceived as the targets of the new regulations. All of the above serve to emotionally broaden the border – creating greater distance between U.S. and Canadian borderlanders and increasing the mental weight of the border’s presence.

Third, and finally, some of the changes forcibly alter what it means to be a resident, negating certain identity narratives. For core borderlanders this part of their identity is intimately tied to their privileged situation at the border and their ability to function transnationally. Today the first is in decline and the second is increasingly suspect. Additionally, the augmented technicality and ‘foreignness’ of the border has increasingly separated most local residents from their border-related informal privileges. With the emotional broadening of the border their privileged treatment is now non-existent, their roles as privileged guardians or transgressors are increasingly sidelined, and their special position and skill sets are devalued. As such, these changes influence not only how core borderlanders can act on and across the border, but also their own identities.

**Concluding Remarks**

In this discussion I have argued that in Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom individuals’ situation as core borderlanders is tied in to their identities, narratives, and logics of appropriate behavior. Their relationship with the border creates identity boundaries that set them apart from peripheral borderlanders and those who create and enforce the laws regulating the border. This difference in perspective creates tensions and misunderstandings, particularly around changing regulations and the increased concern with national security. These are especially visible around differing understandings of border events. One of the consequences of this is that not all
borderlands residents will be impacted in the same way by changes in regulations and the evolving border climate. With U.S. and many international borders remaining highly politicized and dynamic, local and national identities will continue to be of importance in debates globally. Social scientists should increasingly direct their attention to themes and border regions that remain understudied today.

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