

The Past on the Line

The Use of Oral History in the Construction of Present-day Changing Identities on the Portuguese-Spanish Border

William Kavanagh

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While it has long been recognised that borders are prime sites for the defining and redefining of nations and states, it is only comparatively recently that it has been thought worthwhile to examine closely the social reality of those actually living on international borders. This paper looks at some of the oral history – ‘the stories they tell about themselves’ – of the inhabitants of a part of the Portuguese–Spanish border; specifically an area of the frontier between the Portuguese region of Trás-os-Montes and the Spanish region of Galicia. Tales of bandits, of smugglers, of the Spanish Republican maquis and of the police of both sides reveal the often surprising fluidity of who is ‘us’ and who is ‘them’, as well as perhaps helping us to understand just how much the new ‘Europe without Frontiers’ is rhetoric and how much is – or might become – reality.

*Professor William Kavanagh, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Madrid; Universidad San Pablo-CEU, Madrid; Velázquez, 7, ES-28006 Madrid, Spain.
E-mail: su.kavanagh@profesor.sumadrid.es*

Talking not long ago with one of my friends – there was a time when we used to call them our ‘informants’ – of the changes brought about at his village on the Portuguese-Spanish border by the so-called ‘Europe Without Frontiers’ (or at least without internal frontiers), he thought for a moment and then he replied, carefully and repeating his words: ‘You may remove the door, but the doorframe remains . . . you may remove the door, but the doorframe remains.’

We are told that borders are important places for understanding such things as states and nations – ideas, abstractions, ‘imagined communities’, to be sure – but with administrative powers which have very real practical consequences for those who live in them and, in a special way, for those who live on their borders. I suggest it may be interesting to listen to those living on the border, to listen to their oral history – ‘the stories they tell about themselves’ – to perhaps help us understand just how much a ‘Europe Without Frontiers’ is rhetoric and how much is – or might become – reality.

The research I have been carrying out on a section of the Portuguese-Spanish border is long-term and on going. The object is to observe at close hand, at one specific location, the much-heralded transformation of Europe’s ‘internal’ international borders from ‘barriers’ to ‘bridges’. Although these frontiers always have been – and according to my friend in his border village, always will be – a bit of both. The area of the Portuguese-Spanish border – or Spanish-Portuguese border, if you prefer – I have been looking at is the land border known as the *raia / raya seca* (‘the dry borderline’) between the Portuguese region of Trás-os-Montes and the Spanish region of Galicia, specifically between three villages – a Galician village whose territory juts like a spur or wedge into Portugal and the two Portuguese villages on either side of it. One of the Portuguese villages is only two kilometres to the south of the Spanish village, while the other Portuguese village is somewhat further away to the west. All three villages are at approximately the same altitude and their soils



In a field divided by the border, a man from one of the Portuguese villages who is married to a woman from the Galician village.

and climates are similar. As may be seen in photograph 1, the landscape does not appear to change in any significant way at the border. The same may be said for the languages spoken on either side of the border – the Galego of the Spanish village is not that different from the Portuguese spoken in the Portuguese villages. The older village houses appear to be the same on both sides of the boundary – and most still have hollowed out spaces in their walls (known as *secretas*) where the smuggled contraband could be hidden when the border guards came to inspect. Yet these villages have had very different national histories, different political systems and different state administrations for hundreds of years. It comes as no surprise then that many things change radically when one crosses the border. Take the religious celebrations, for example, which people from both sides will attend. While at the *romerías*/romerías, which are gatherings at a local shrine, the priests from both sides will be present and there will be two masses said, one in Galician and one

in Portuguese, and the priests will also be present at the religious processions held in the neighbouring villages of the other country, the look and feel of these ceremonies are very different on one side or other of the international border, as may be clearly seen in photographs 2 and 3. The decorations of the images of Christ, the Virgin and the saints in the Galician religious procession are very simple, while those of the Portuguese religious procession are extremely ornate. The music played on either side of the frontier is very different as well. The Galicians play the bagpipes, the Portuguese do not; the Portuguese play the accordion, and the Galicians do not. And the fact that Portuguese emigrants went preferentially to France or to the United States, while the Galicians went to Germany or to Switzerland means that the new houses they built on their return give a very different look to the villages today. Yet some of the most important differences are ‘invisible’ at first glance – all those aspects where the modern nation-state has control over the lives of its



A religious procession at the Galician village.

citizens, such as health, welfare, education, justice, taxes, etc. Even the time changes at the borderline, with the clocks in Portugal set an hour behind those in Spain.

It has been said that, as reminders of the past, borders are 'time written in space'. This is certainly true in the case of the border between Portugal and Spain, which as one of the oldest in Europe – dating from the founding of Portugal as an independent nation in the 12th century – has been altered very little since then. It has not always been a peaceful border, as the many fortifications on both sides of the border show only too well. Portugal is only one-fifth the size of Spain and has only a quarter of the population of its larger neighbour. Not surprisingly the Portuguese have always looked with certain apprehension at the Spanish, especially since the period of some sixty years (1580 to 1640) when Portugal was incorporated in the Spanish crown. However, things have been changing since both Spain and Portugal joined the European Union (then known as the 'European Com-

munity') in January 1986. Communications have improved. New roads and new bridges have been built between the two countries that occupy the Iberian Peninsula. Two countries that lived for many years back to back, ignoring each other. At least that was what Lisbon and Madrid did. What happened at the border was another matter.

Border regions are often peripheral areas of peripheral regions. The very name for the Portuguese border region, Trás-os-Montes (which means 'beyond the mountains') reveals the isolation and the marginality of the area, whereas Galicia, on the map the bit of Spain that sits on top of Portugal, has been characterised as 'poor, damp and difficult to reach'. Both are agricultural regions with little industry and poor communications. The only alteration since the 12th century to that section of the border under study, was made in 1864 when Portugal and Spain signed a treaty which gave the village which had been divided by the boundary line – the line passed through the centre of the village



A religious procession at one of the Portuguese villages.

– in its entirety to Portugal and the borderline was moved a hundred metres to the north. This was expressly done to control the smuggling, which, with many houses having a door giving onto Spain and another door giving onto Portugal, was inevitable, and the order of the day. The village was known as a *povo / pueblo promiscuo* and is recorded as having been so since at least the beginning of the 16th century.

A common characteristic of borders is that they are liminal areas where one may more easily elude control by the authorities. In troubled times the border provides the perfect escape for those in difficulties. During the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) there were quite a few who saved their lives by crossing the border in time. And Portuguese who wished to avoid military service have often made their way to Spain. Even after the end of the Spanish Civil War, there were a number of Spaniards living in Portuguese villages along the border. Some, if they had been identified as politically suspect by the Franco regime, were there merely for

their safety, while others were operating as anti-Francoist maquis, crossing the border to murder members of the Spanish Guardia Civil and the local heads of the Francoist regime's single party, the Falange, and then returning to their bases in Portugal.

In some circumstances, the fact that the Church is the same on both sides of the border may also be utilised by the inhabitants of the borderland. A woman of the Galician village whose husband was killed in the Civil War has been receiving a war widow's pension ever since. She has been living with another villager for many years, but has not lost the pension through remarriage. The couple simply married in the next village – in Portugal. Thus, as far as the Spanish State is concerned, the woman remains an unmarried widow, while in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church and of their neighbours, the couple are not 'living in sin'. On the other hand, not long ago a young Portuguese couple were married in the Galician village and immediately left for the United States – separately. The woman had no trouble in getting an entry visa as her parents are already living and working there and she applied as a single woman. The man did the same. Had they asked for a visa as a married couple, it would apparently have been much more difficult to obtain. So a Spanish marriage meant that neither the Portuguese State nor the American immigration authorities knew the real situation of the couple.

However, it is smuggling, more than any other activity, which exhibits the tendency of those who live on a border to live outside national laws. Smuggling is culturally acceptable behaviour on the border. 'It was lovely', one Portuguese woman told me of her years as a smuggler from the age of fourteen until she went to Paris to work when she was eighteen; of having made various journeys each night with rucksacks of whiskey and tobacco weighing some twenty-five to thirty kilos; and (the part she says she never told her mother about) of having being shot at by the guards. Border people structure much of their lives around their relations with 'foreigners'. In this sense, the border is a bridge and not a barrier. The laws against contraband, made by distant politicians insensitive to the

local realities of the border, are felt by those who live on the border to be unjust and unreasonable. The borderland villagers are a 'we' group to whom the authorities are 'they'. Especially when they know that the state officials themselves have cashed in on the illegal border trade. Many villagers on both sides of the frontier tell stories of having a pair of shoes for their child confiscated as they got to the border, only to see the same pair of shoes a few days later on the feet of the son of the border guard who confiscated them. Apparently, the border police kept most of what was confiscated. It may have been only a few kilos of rice or pasta or sometimes a much larger shipment. One man told me that he had once had five thousand kilos of bananas taken by the border guards. What most annoyed him, he explained, was that he was caught even after he had taken the precaution of first bribing the corporal then in charge of the border post. He admits, however, that it was probably thanks to the bribe that in the end he was allowed to keep half the load of bananas. Portuguese villagers tell other stories of having to sell their fields on the Spanish side of the border because of the difficulties given them by their own border police. Not only were they required to get a special permit to farm their land and could only cross the border during the hours of daylight, but the guards would often, with the slightest pretext, confiscate the crops the farmers were bringing home. Some villagers claim that the only people who would ever risk going past the border post were the smugglers – in order to pay bribes to the border guards.

Many stories are told of the frequent abuse of their position of power on the part of the border guards – of both sides – and of their not infrequent brutality. A Galician woman married to a Portuguese man said that, the day after her wedding in the Galician village, she accompanied her new husband to visit his relatives in the nearby Portuguese village only to be stopped at the border by a Portuguese border guard, who sent her back to her village, while he let her husband cross into Portugal. She explained that it was only when she mentioned the incident to the priest of her village, that she learnt she had a right to enter Portugal as the wife of a Portuguese man. Others say that when there

was a feast-day celebration at either village, the border guards would sometimes turn people back at the border. At other times they might even fine someone for 'crossing the border clandestinely'; one Galician villager told me that he had been fined various times for crossing the border because the guards 'felt like it'. Villagers say that while Spanish and Portuguese border guards were both bad and that both would confiscate whatever you were carrying, the Portuguese *guardinhas* were more likely to beat you up as well. When asked why this was so, one Portuguese man replied: 'Because they were poorer, more backward'. Another Portuguese man told me that when he was fifteen he was stopped on the borderline by the Guarda Fiscal and accused of smuggling. He says that, although he was carrying nothing, he was hit on the head so hard by one of the *guardinhas* that he was knocked unconscious. When the boy's family went to complain, the head of the border post asked the guard involved why he had hit the boy so savagely. 'Because I thought he was a Spaniard', replied the guard. He was expelled from the corps. Other stories tell of smugglers shot dead on the *raia / raya* by the border guards. One Galician man was a bit luckier: he told me how his contraband group had been challenged by a patrol of *guardinhas* at the border. But while his companions bolted off in different directions and escaped arrest, he had tried to push his way past the guards and one of them had shot him in the testicles, though luckily he suffered no permanent injury. What most angered him, he told me, was that he was 'already some two hundred metres into Spain, where the *guardinhas* have no jurisdiction whatsoever'. Many people say that the border police 'were hated by everyone'. One could, of course, sometimes hope to rely on divine intervention to save oneself from the wrath of the border police. There is a splendid mural painted on an inner wall of the church of the Portuguese village closest to the borderline, which depicts three Portuguese border guards on horseback in full gallop. The object of their chase is not shown, but the mural speaks of the *milagre* ('miracle') of a smuggler's escape from the guards thanks to the intervention of 'Santo Antonio' (St Anthony). However, quite a few villagers on both sides

of the border have spent time in prison (usually just a month or so) on account of their contraband activities.

It could be claimed as an 'anthropological constant' of the Iberian Peninsula that the people of the nearest neighbouring village are always your 'enemies' and are your rivals because in some sense they are your equals. It follows from this that the village on the far side of your traditional 'enemies' are regarded as 'friends' following the simple logic that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. And this holds true in these border villages. For this reason, it is not as straightforward as might first appear to discover what each side thinks of the 'Other'. It appears that often people speak of those on the other side of the frontier with ambiguity, sometimes with admiration and at other times with disdain. In many ways they appear to treat each other as simply neighbouring villages and without taking into account the political boundary. Thus, while those of the Galician village often speak badly of their neighbours in the nearest Portuguese village, they say the same about their Galician neighbours just down the road and, what is even more revealing, they speak of those of the Portuguese village on the other side of them (naturally, the arch-enemies of the Portuguese village nearest themselves) as being full of excellent people who make the best of friends.

Yet when one asks people what they feel about those of the other country without specifying the inhabitants of any particular village it is often mutual dislike which is the first thing to surface. The Galicians claim that, on first meeting, the Portuguese 'appear to be *muy formales*' (very serious, responsible), but when one gets to know them, they are *falsos* (deceiving). The Galicians claim that the Portuguese are 'backward, small and have big ears', while the Portuguese say that the Galicians are 'loud and stuck up'. The stereotypes come thick and fast. 'The Portuguese are poor', say the Galicians. 'The Galicians don't work', say the Portuguese, 'they sit back and live off their pensions and the dole'. 'You can never trust a Galician', say the Portuguese. 'You can't trust the Portuguese', say the Galicians, 'they are just like the Gypsies'. 'The Galicians beat their wives', say the Portuguese.

'The Portuguese beat their wives', say the Galicians. And so on and so forth, though some people do make the correct observation that 'they probably say the same thing about us.' When one asks people whether they would like to see a child of theirs marry someone from the other country, the most frequent reply is: 'No, they are very different from us'.

And while people from both sides attend the feast-day celebration in the neighbouring village, the Galicians claim that the Portuguese regard the festa as not having been a really good one if no one is killed during the day and, in support of their argument, will cite the case of the man from the Galician village who 'many years ago' was murdered by his Portuguese neighbours while attending the festa at the village next door. The Portuguese, on their side, state that the real violence happens at the Galician celebration. When speaking of their nearest Portuguese neighbours the Galicians say 'The best person at X is Jesus and even he is behind bars', referring to the image of Christ behind the grilles on the windows of the chapel at the entrance to the village. The Galicians explain that the Portuguese do not celebrate the feast day of Santiago (St James) – an important feast day in Spain – because St James was a Portuguese who 'escaped' from (a supposedly inferior) Portugal to (a supposedly superior) Spain.

The Portuguese claim that a Galician would never be generous, as a Portuguese would. On their side, the Galicians tell the story of the Portuguese who invites some Galicians to dinner and then gives his guests very little to eat. However, they were cheered up when they heard the man tell his wife to 'Bring out the chicken', until they realised that it is a live animal brought in to take advantage of the few crumbs dropped on the floor. This legendary tale is told in many places and the main character is generally 'a poor man', but at the border he becomes the 'Other'. Something of the same sort happens in the story about a woman – again, a Portuguese, as the tale was told by a Galician – who is in church talking with an image of St Anthony. The woman is annoyed with the saint since she has prayed long and hard to be sent a husband, all to no avail. In her anger and

frustration, she throws a stone at the statue, which gives off a small cloud of smoke when hit. 'There you are', says the woman, 'smoking without burning and here I am, burning without smoking'. The same story is told by the Portuguese, who naturally make the protagonist of the tale a Galician woman.

Even the apparently true stories they tell about each other frequently underline their mutual disdain. This one, for example: A Galician was working in his field on the border, when his Portuguese neighbour in the adjoining field began shouting insults at him. The Galician told his neighbour to watch it or he would let him have it with his shotgun, which he happened to have with him as he had been out hunting rabbits. The Portuguese jeered and bent over turning his backside to the Galician, who quickly picked up his shotgun and blasted the Portuguese in the arse. The Portuguese let out a cry and fell down. The Galician, suddenly aware of what he had done – he was certain he had killed the Portuguese – ran back to his village and went to ask the mayor what he ought to do, since he had killed a Portuguese. The mayor asked him if the Portuguese had been shot in Spain or in Portugal. When the Galician replied 'In Portugal', the mayor is said to have told him 'Ah, then you needn't worry. Let the Portuguese bury him.' However, that is not the end of the story. Luckily, the Portuguese was not killed and managed to limp back to his village and was taken to hospital, where he was operated on and survived. He did nothing, however, about taking any legal action against the Galician. Here the explanations vary. Some say that his pride was more injured than his bum and he feared being made a figure of jest if he reported to the police what had happened. Others, on the other hand, emphasise the feeling that the legal consequences of any crime or misdemeanour committed in one country can easily be avoided by simply crossing the borderline. People tell the story of a man from the Galician village, a well-known smuggler, who simply popped into Portugal a few years ago when the police finally came for him when they discovered Portuguese coins in the scrap metal he had been claiming to be importing from somewhere else in Spain. The somewhat hastily

'retired' ex-smuggler later made his way to Brazil, where he is living happily.

This impunity provided by the border is illustrated by another story where the young men of the nearest of the Portuguese villages had got into one of the periodic stone fights – in fair weather, a regular Sunday afternoon custom, it seems – with the young men of the Galician village. The border guards generally ignored these fights. However, when a young Galician let off a few shots in the direction of Portugal with his father's pistol in the course of the usual Sunday skirmish between the youth of these border villages, this was a bit too much for the lieutenant of the Guarda Fiscal (the Portuguese border police) who came over to the Galician village to have a word with his Spanish colleague. The Spanish Guardia Civil lieutenant called all the rowdy young Galician men involved in the border incident to his office and gave them a stiff dressing-down in the presence of his Portuguese colleague. However, as soon as the Portuguese border policeman had left, the Spanish border policeman is reported to have told the Galician youths: 'Well done, lads, only next time hit them even harder'. This story also reveals one of the elements which is repeated in many of the stories – the ambivalent position of the border police in their relations both to their opposite numbers in the other country and to their own countrymen. While both the Guardia Civil and the Guarda Fiscal had power over aspects of villagers' lives, they were never really part of the village, since they were, in the case of the Guardia Civil always and in the case of the Guarda Fiscal nearly always, from somewhere else. As well, complain villagers, while ordinary people had difficulties in crossing the border and even greater difficulties in bringing anything with them, the border guards themselves could cross freely and bring back whatever they wished. Yet the life of a border guard could be a dangerous one as well. One man from the Portuguese village closest to the borderline told me how his grandfather, a Guarda Fiscal posted in his own village, had been killed on the raia. The grandson's story is that his *guardinha* grandfather had somehow managed to infiltrate himself into a smuggling group, but that when he tried to arrest them as they crossed the

line into Portugal, he was overpowered and killed. It seems that many years after the event, a very old Galician, one of the gang of smugglers who had killed his grandfather, confessed to the Portuguese 'with tears in his eyes' that he had only hit the disguised border policeman in self-defence and had had no intention of killing him.

Villagers tell the story of one newly arrived border policeman who – incredibly – had refused to accept any bribes and had even tried to arrest some smugglers who had previously paid off his companion guards to look the other way as the contraband went through. His fellow guards – at the point of a pistol – quickly taught him the rules of the game. After that, he took his cut like the rest of them. Villagers tell the story with the clear implication that non-corrupt police are considered to be arbitrary and cruel to attempt to stop what is 'clean trade', whereas corrupt police are more human because they are more reasonable. The authorities are always to be distrusted, except when they can be shown to be human. The Galician villagers tell with glee the story of the time when some young men of their village stole the pistols of some drunken Portuguese border guards. Their Spanish colleagues 'with much mockery' returned the arms to the Portuguese.

The Galicians tell another story of the time one of their villagers was caught on the borderline by the Portuguese border guards, who suspected him of smuggling. With the excuse that he would show them where he had hidden the contraband, the Galician led the Portuguese across the border straight into the arms of a patrol of the Guardia Civil, who sent the *guardinhas* packing, saying that the Portuguese had no right to be arresting anyone on Spanish soil. In this case, one authority was used to play off against the rival authority. Another story in which the border guards are made to look ridiculous was told me by a Portuguese woman about her great-aunt who was caught by the Guarda Fiscal bringing two dozen eggs from Spain. Taking her to the post to pay a large fine – it seems that one would be fined so much for each egg confiscated – the woman was thinking desperately how to get rid of the eggs. It was quite impossible to simply throw them away, since she had one guard walking ahead of her

and one behind her. What she did was to take the eggs one by one, suck them, then crush the shells and drop the bits of eggshell in the tall grass along the path without letting the guards notice what she was up to. When the guards got her to the post, the woman was found to be carrying nothing and the *guardinhas* had to let her go without a fine.

These stories bring out what I think is one of the most salient points of inter-border relationships. That is, that while on the one hand people on both sides of the border can give excellent reasons for despising those of the other country – many define themselves as superior to an 'Other' regarded as 'inferior' – at the same time both sides have the same interests in outwitting the authorities. Since smuggling is, or rather was until very recently, so very profitable, the common distrust of authority brings together these people living on the border. People say that when there was *confiança / confianza* (trust) they were all good partners. They state that 'money would never change hands at the borderline'. The goods would be delivered and payment would be made later.

During the Second World War there was a mine near the Galician village that was used by the Germans as a cover in order to bring wolfram (tungsten ore), used in the making of bombs and aircraft, from Portugal to Spain. As Britain's oldest ally, Portugal was unable to export the wolfram directly to Germany, so the mineral was smuggled into Spain and then legally exported from Spain to Germany. At night, groups of from sixty to a hundred men would bring the sacks of wolfram loaded on donkeys and horses. The Portuguese would bring the wolfram to the border and the Galicians would then take it to the mine. The border police of both sides were bribed to look the other way (though only in a figurative sense; since the bribe was usually a percentage of the contraband, the guards would always count the horseloads). The following day, the sacks of mineral would be openly loaded onto lorries and shipped out. Villagers who worked in the mine at the time say that the amount of wolfram produced by the Galician mine was tiny in comparison to the amount of mineral shipped out as if coming from the mine.

This 'night work', as it is referred to, could be

very profitable for the villagers, but had its drawbacks. One of the local doctors confided to me that he has detected a higher incidence of cirrhosis among those people, especially those women, who worked for long periods as smugglers. The doctor puts this down to the quantity of brandy that they needed to drink to ward off the night chill while carrying out their smuggling operations.

Perhaps one of the most revealing stories is that of *la banda de Juan* (Juan's gang). This Juan was a Galician who had been a member of the Socialist party before the Spanish Civil War and had had to flee for his life to Portugal when Franco's forces took control of Spain. Juan and his band of anti-Francoist *maquis* – made up of both Galicians and Spaniards from other parts of the country, people are quick to point out – made their hideout in Portugal only a few hundred metres from the Spanish border, over which they would cross 'to rob rich fascists'. The Galician villagers speak of Juan as *una buena persona* ('a good fellow'). A bit of a Robin Hood figure, Juan is said to have escaped capture by the police any number of times by dressing as a woman. Ambiguous in more than one sense, Juan was admired as being able to move freely from one side of the border to the other, admired for being able to outwit the authorities of both countries. Eventually, however, his hideout was discovered. There was a tremendous shootout – which lasted two days, people say – until the Portuguese army brought in mortars and shelled the house. Most of the gang were killed, except for two who escaped from the house – Juan and a very young man called Enrique. Juan made for the border, but just as he got to the line was shot dead by the lieutenant of the Guardia Civil who had been lying in wait for him. Enrique was captured, spent a number of years in prison and was eventually released. Today, over eighty, he is a town councillor for the Spanish Socialist Party. Villagers all seem to agree that he is *una buena persona* ('a good chap').

Until very recently, people on both sides of the border were telling me that 'a Europe without borders' was something they felt they would never see during their lifetime. The border is a reality of their lives that they have always known, and have known as a politico-adminis-

trative reality imposed from outside. Only a few years ago it was nearly impossible to have an hour's conversation with anyone in these villages without the subject of the border coming up. When they spoke of their past, when they spoke of their present, when they spoke of almost anything, the border was always there somewhere. Today, however, the seemingly eternal vigilance of the border posts is no longer; the border guards – sometimes brutal and sometimes not, but always there – have gone; the chains across the roads have all been removed and what were once dirt tracks crossing the border are now proper roads surfaced with tarmac. One clear sign of the times was the recent wedding of a young woman from one of the Portuguese border villages with a young man from a nearby Galician border village and which was actually held on the very borderline itself!

There have been many obvious changes in a very few years, although not all of them can be considered to be positive from the point of view of the local people. Most obviously, despite all the inconveniences and the sometimes clear risks to life and limb attendant on living on an international border, was the fact that the very existence of the border provided villagers with their main source of income. The priest of both Portuguese villages, writing in the December 1992 issue of the monthly newspaper he edits, complained that the disappearance of the border would mean that his villages 'would lose their most important business and source of employment and wealth, which was smuggling'. Smuggling has all but disappeared, except for the movement of drugs such as heroine and cocaine, which most people regard as not at all like the 'clean trade' of the smuggling in the past. Another aspect of change is that neither economy is as insulated as before. This particularly affects the Portuguese, who had far less competition with a closed border, which permitted them to be less efficient than Spanish firms just over the border. For example, a man from one of the Portuguese border villages who owns his own small welding firm (he was trained as a welder in Germany, where he lived for a number of years) says he prefers to buy his material across the border in Galicia, not be-

cause the quality is any better, but simply because he finds the Spaniards to be 'more responsible' than his fellow countrymen. He says that the Spaniards deliver when they say they will, unlike the Portuguese, who don't even bother to deliver. He says you have to go to their shops in order to get what you want. He also complained that when he recently expanded his business and needed to take on two extra workers, he was unable to find any young men in the Portuguese villages in the area who were willing to work as apprentice welders and learn the trade. He had no trouble, however, in finding the two young men he needed in the Galician village just over the border. The welder's wife pointed out that now that her husband has Spanish, rather than Portuguese assistants, 'even his Portuguese clients take him more seriously', although she added that some people at their village are annoyed, 'because having hard-working Galicians coming every day shows up the Portuguese as being lazy'. More sinister were some of the rumours that were circulating in the Portuguese villages of the borderland shortly after border controls were removed in 1992. One, which was true to a certain extent, was that Portuguese girls from poor families of the *raia* were being tricked into going to Galicia with the promise of a job, would then be drugged, kept prisoners at some roadside brothel and forced into prostitution. The other rumour, for which no evidence was ever produced, had it

that Spaniards 'in high-powered motorcars' were coming to Portugal to kidnap children 'for their organs'. The level of hysteria was such at one point that the priest of the Portuguese villages told me that he had stopped his car – admittedly a Mercedes, but with Portuguese number-plates – at another border village to talk with some children, when his car was suddenly surrounded by angry villagers armed with sticks. Luckily, the priest was recognised in time.

Eight centuries are not wiped away in a few short years. As my friend said: 'You may remove the door, but the doorframe remains.' While these borderland people admit that their relations with those on the other side are now much more fluid than in the past, there is *mais confiança / más confianza* ('more trust'), it is still clearly the case that national boundaries are markers of collective identity. Perhaps due to the fact that on this section of the Portuguese-Spanish border the concepts of 'nation' and 'state' coincide to a far greater extent than they do on the Basque and Catalan sections of the French-Spanish border. The nation-state, it would appear, is still 'the primary source of welfare, order, authority, legitimacy, identity and loyalty'. The inevitable conclusion would seem to be that the task of 'building Europe' or even a 'Europe of the regions' on this particular section of one of Europe's 'internal borders' may not be as easy or as rapid as some may hope – or others may fear.