

International and interdisciplinary conference

“B/ORDERS IN MOTION: Current challenges and future perspectives”

15-17 November 2018 at the European University Viadrina, Frankfurt/Oder



PANEL A3: Un/Certain Borders. Practices, Affects, Experiences

Concha Maria Höfler (Durham)

The panel starts from the observation that borders and boundaries, perhaps counterintuitively, are constituted by and create uncertainty. Focusing on this uncertainty unveils a tension that might be taken as constitutive for processes of (un)making borders and boundaries: they are established in attempts to order the (social) world in its unsettling complexity, to clearly stipulate rules of who belongs and who does not, of who may pass freely and who will be detained. Borders and boundaries have to be understood, however, not as “simple lines” but as complex assemblages that create unsettling uncertainties, not necessarily only for those meant to be excluded. It is this tension in the dynamic processes of (un)making borders and boundaries that the panel sets out to explore. We welcome contributions that take up our concern with the dimension of uncertainty in studying borders and boundaries. We are especially interested in contributions that shed light on theoretical aspects or take up the methodological challenge of researching the manifold ways in which borders and boundaries remain and/or become uncertain, even or perhaps especially when they are established and portrayed as “certain”.

PANELISTS:

Representations of Borders in Austrian Public Discourse and in Narratives of Displaced Persons: Creating and Dealing with Un/Certainty.

Sabine Lehner (Department of Linguistics, University of Vienna)

The rise in numbers of arriving refugees in 2015 and 2016 was followed by restrictive political measures in Austria and extensively covered in the media. During this time range, public discourses on asylum were dominated by spatial concepts (e.g. “borders”, “fences”), marking the resurgence of border practices in Austria. Politicians drew on feelings of uncertainty and therefore, the construction of borders should provide safety against the perceived threat of asylum seekers. Asylum seekers, once they have passed (Austrian) borders, still face several uncertainties as to their future in Austria.

Based on interviews with asylum seekers and a discourse analysis of Austrian public discourses on asylum in 2015 and 2016, this contribution investigates the legitimization and representations of borders, with respect to the dimension of un/certainty. The study also explores, how un/certainty is experienced by those who are discursively constructed as a threat.

Preliminary results show various forms of borders, which prove to have different meanings and consequences for different actors: While public discourses reinforced feelings of insecurity and

argued for the fortification of borders in order to re-establish control, order and security, asylum seekers struggle with various insecurities and uncertainties, given the long duration of proceedings and the indeterminate temporariness of their legal status.

Vulnerability in Borderland-Discourses and Practices

Kamil Bembnista (Leibnitz-Institute for Research on Society and Space, Erkner)

Following the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse, we consider local public discourses in media and in narrations of local actors in the Polish-German border region as public forums in which ascriptions of meanings with regard to the border (region) are developed, stabilised, but also renegotiated and changed. Following this aspect, borderlands can be seen as areas of vulnerability if we consider: first, the borderland as an area of physical transformation. Second, the border as a socio-spatial construct, which is vulnerable from local actors' perspective according to social boundaries, different identity-formations, language barriers etc. Which socio-spatial transformation processes are being discussed? Are there stronger or weaker feelings of the common spatial units (Germany, Poland) in this border region in time, or can we even observe mixed zones, like interstices? In our DFG-NCN-funded research-project „Socio-spatial transformations in German-Polish ‚interstices‘. Practices of debordering and rebordering“, we will focus on local discourses, on space-related knowledge, and on practices of both residents and local actors. Regarding the practices, mobility patterns as well as materialities of debordering and rebordering will be examined. For detailed analyses, the mobilities and materialities will be made visible by visual methods (video-walkings, etc.). The analysis on high-circulation newspapers of Germany and Poland will illustrate the public discourse on rebordering and debordering tendencies. Therefore, not only verbal data (e.g. newspaper articles, book chapters) will be collected, but also visual depictions of 'borders' or border characteristics.

The Emotionality of Dis(b)ordering Britain

Dr. Kathryn Cassidy (Newcastle)

Low-paid migrant workers often occupy some of the most precarious or uncertain positions within the workforce. The combination of unclear or restricted immigration status with low-paid work has been described as 'hyperprecarity' (Lewis et al, 2015). Since Romania joined the EU in 2007, Romanians migrating to the UK have been subject to a range of bordering policies and wider representations and discourses that have de- and rebordered their position within the country (Cassidy et al, 2018; Wemyss and Cassidy, 2016). From limiting access to the labour market and social support to the introduction of a new 'settled status', these de- and rebordering processes have produced uncertainty that have greatly impacted upon their everyday lives. In this paper, I explore the emotionality of living with this uncertainty for low-paid Romanian migrant workers, based in South London and the North East of England. I will draw upon ethnographic material gathered from 2009 to 2016 and analysis of policy, press and media sources to explore the emotions that drive efforts to challenge or dis(b)order wider bordering processes. I argue that any attempt to understand the b/ordering of the lives of EU migrant workers in the UK that leaves out this shifting and changing

emotional landscape is incomplete. Like the wider de- and rebordering processes, attempts to dis(b)order are both dynamic and also situated, i.e. dependent upon the particular social positioning of the individual as well as the shaping of that positioning in dialogue with wider structures and discourses.