

64. Proximity and Asymmetry in Border Encounters

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International borders are social fields for defining difference and distances and allowing transcultural encounters and proximity at the same time. Face-to-face interaction on the border brings people with different ethnic and national backgrounds into close social contact and physical proximity at the same time. But the underlying institutionalization and hierarchy of the border setting often goes hand in hand with 'backstage' activities where actors seek to reach personal goals by manipulating the Other. In the fluidity of the face-to-face encounter on the border social actors sometimes try to create mutual understanding and intimacy in order to arrange a personal deal. The interesting point to reflect on is the interconnection of antagonism and mutual trust involved in face-to-face border interaction.

The workshop would like to bring together contributions on various forms of face-to-face relations on international borders including case studies on conflictive interaction with state agents, case studies on smuggling and bribery on the border, or studies in the reception of illegal immigrants. The central dimension of the discussion will focus on the interaction of social actors with an antagonistic and conflictive relationship establishing proximity through face-to-face contacts in a specific border context.

Managing proximity and asymmetry in border encounters: A case study with undocumented migrants on a Greek-Turkish border island

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International borders are social fields for defining differences and distance and, at the same time, places for bringing people with different ethnic and national backgrounds into close social contact. The Greek-Turkish border, which divides two states with different socio-economic standings, different religions and conflicting histories but where a recent increase of relationships transcending borders can be observed, is a case in point.

One aspect of this transnational border movement is undocumented migration with people entering Greek territory by crossing the Mediterranean by boat. In the case of undocumented migrants arriving at remote beaches on the Greek island of Lesbos, two types of interaction can be observed. They often first encounter local peasants who will sometimes provide them with food and first aid following the Greek concept of hospitality towards a stranger ("filoxenia"), but then the local police or harbour police are informed and, acting as representatives of the Greek state, will arrest the

illegal border-crossers. In both cases the face-to-face interaction between locals and newcomers in the border zone takes place with limited means of communication and in an atmosphere of emotional stress. Based on the narratives of local inhabitants of the island of Lesbos, the paper draws attention to the images of the Other established in these interactions and seeks to investigate the different forms of managing proximity and hierarchy in the process of the reception of undocumented migrants. In more general terms, the case study wants to explore how cultural differences are perceived and negotiated at the border where the basic social setting gives rise to opposed and hostile positioning of cultural conceptualisations.

Charitable borders? Religion, policing, and belonging at the Italian maritime fringes of the New Europe

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This paper is based on fieldwork in the Italian southeastern border region of Apulia. I am investigating EU, Italian state, and Catholic church-based border enforcement practices and discourses of surveillance, assistance, and classification of mostly Muslim undocumented migrants. Those who maintain, cross, and debate the socio-political site of the border, I argue, do not merely locally implement, but also help co-produce practices and discourses of secularism, citizenship, and migration management. Within global policies of security, border enforcement actors heighten their vigilance at the fringes of what is being institutionally constructed as “secular Europe”. Yet they also implement certain senses of charity that have long been techniques of religious belonging. How, then, do professional-geopolitical domains interact with religious-identitarian ones? Moreover, this borderland has historically been subjected to a disparaging moral geography: the national discourse of underdeveloped otherness of the Italian “South” relies on a pervasive spatialization, and finds supranational analogies: how and where the “North” secures its distinction vis-à-vis the “South” is arguably integral to the New Europe’s institutional and popular quest for identitarian distinctiveness. How do religious, regional, and EU forms of (self-)identification and community building alternative to nation-state-centered ones relate to border enforcement and to the reception of migrants?

Becoming a Borderland: Everyday Experience and Perceptions of the New Ukrainian-Russian Border

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The paper focuses on the role of the new border in the everyday life of people on the new Ukrainian-Russian border, their perceptions of and attitudes to this new reality. The new border interrupts or re-shapes the family ties, social and economic contacts, creates new advantages and disadvantages. At the same time, by integrating the new border into their everyday life, and through informal (and often illegal) practices of dealing with the fact of the border, the local population challenges (and changes) its formal regime and symbolic meaning. People adapt to the fact of the border, and at the same time adapt the border to their own needs. On both sides of the border the population is relatively homogenous, Russians and Ukrainians are mixed due to intermarriages and intensive migration. Differences in standards of living on both sides of the borders before 1991 were also not significant. For these people, the experience of “becoming a borderland” has been a part of another experience – “becoming Ukrainians” through the Ukrainization of the administration, the

educational system and the media. The new national identity, a feeling of belonging to the “Ukrainian people” and the loyalty to the Ukrainian state is not a function of near-border location, but rather of social and economic changes in the villages. It depends on such factors as efficiency of the local administration, availability of economic resources, support from Kharkiv authorities, transport connections and employment opportunities. But permanent contacts with Russian citizens and visits to Russian territory allow local inhabitants to compare changes in both countries, and in some cases the border becomes a symbol of “post-Soviet nostalgia”.

Anti-Nuclear Activism at the Czech - Austrian Border

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After the radioactive cloud from the nuclear accident in Chernobyl had travelled over the whole of Europe it became clear that the perception of danger and the political treatment of risk was by no means the same from one European state to the next. The radioactive cloud seemed to have passed the states of Real Existing Socialism unnoticed to come down in force in Austria where it provoked strong reactions among a population that had renounced the use of nuclear energy more than ten years before. The construction and in 2001 the starting up of the Czech nuclear power station Temelin brought Austrian NGOs, citizens and regional politicians to blockade the Czech Austrian border in protest for two weeks in 2001. Although Austrian activists took pains to explain that the action was not directed against the Czech people as such but at the unresponsiveness of the Czech and Austrian governments to their worries it led to an increasing identification of Czechs with Temelin as a solely national issue and to a rejection of the Austrian interference. The paper will examine the forms of interaction and interdependence between Czech and Austrian anti-nuclear NGOs close to the border, their different forms of political action directed at their own and the other state and at the prospect of an enlarged Europe. It will focus on the issue of the transmission and re-interpretation of forms of political action across the borders, on the perception of risk and political responsibility and the expectancies linked to the idea and practice of a (European) democracy.

Informal labor market, local communities and states: Socioeconomic practices on the Romanian-Yugoslav frontier

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The main locations my research are Gogosu village and its surroundings (including the customs office of Turnu-Severin) and also some communities on the Yugoslav side where Romanian villagers would find employers. After 1990 the villagers of Gogosu reinforced contacts that they always had (in a form or another) with their Yugoslav neighbors. They began to cross the border to look for informal jobs in building, agriculture, housekeeping (especially the women) and forestry. In their turn, villagers from the Yugoslav border have been migrating since 1966. Many Yugoslav households are incomplete as almost all the young people find jobs in Austria and Germany. The Yugoslav rural settlements constitute a real informal labor market for Romanians living on the border. The socioeconomic pattern implies various types of actors, roles and social relationships. What are the implications of short-term labor migration upon household organization? Are these networks of employers, laborers, middlemen and customs officers organised by households or by individuals? What is

the significance of marriages and economic alliances between Yugoslavian and Romanian households/ individuals? Are the Yugoslav villages points of departure for more distant locations for the Romanian labor migrants, such as Austria, Germany, etc.? What are the historical driving forces of the territorialization/de-territorialization of the state and, subsequently, of settlement at political borders? In which ways are state institutions imposed and articulated to the local level? Such questions and others form the core of my paper.

Proximity and Asymmetry on the Portuguese-Spanish Border

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Borders are important places for understanding such things as the image of the state, relationships of power and control, the creation of identities and so forth, yet since no two states are exactly the same, no two borders are likely to have precisely the same characteristics. It would thus seem evident that, while it is necessary to examine the many things that all borders have in common, it is also crucial not to ignore the particularities of the lived experience of the inhabitants of each specific borderland. This paper looks at the interrelationships between those people – villagers and state officials alike – living on the section of the Portuguese-Spanish border where Trás-os-Montes meets Galicia and how these face-to-face relations are important for understanding the ways these borderlanders see themselves and see ‘the Other’.

