

B/ORDERS IN MOTION: Current Challenges and Future Perspectives

17.09.2019

Berichtet von Bericht von Peter Ulrich Berichtet von PD Dr. Carolin Leutloff-Grandits Berichtet von Dr. Norbert Cyrus Berichtet von M.A. Maria Klessmann Berichtet von M.A. Snezana Stankovic

In times of a successive acceleration of societal transformation processes, the shifting, dissolution, and consolidation of borders and social orders have moved into the center of public and academic attention. In this context, it is not only territorial-political demarcation processes of nation-state borders (like the Polish-German border) but also social, cultural or temporal demarcations (*boundaries*) that are of central interest. Around the globe, practices of *de*-bordering through transnationalization, globalization and economic interdependence, on the one hand, as well as practices of *re*-bordering as a response to increasing migration flows, re-nationalization and protectionism, on the other, take place at the same time and illustrate the omnipresence of often paradoxical demarcation processes. Investigating the dynamic interplay of borders and social orders in contemporary societies has been the main driving force of the Viadrina Center B/ORDERS IN MOTION, which was founded at the European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder). On the occasion of its fifth anniversary, the interdisciplinary research center organized the international academic conference "B/ORDERS IN MOTION - Current Challenges and Future Perspectives", focusing on four thematic streams:

- Un/Making Borders and Boundaries
- Borderless Labor - Labor across Borders
- Migrating Borders & Boundaries
- Territorial Borders: The Institutionalization of Crossings

These thematic streams were each composed of three panels. Together with two round table discussions, a key note lecture and a poster session on research projects addressing topics within the research field of B/ORDERS IN MOTION, these overall 12 panels represented the discussion forums of this interdisciplinary conference in Frankfurt (Oder) - Słubice.

The three-day conference was opened by Claudia Weber, director of the Viadrina Center B/ORDERS IN MOTION, and Martin Eisend, vice-president for research at the Viadrina. This was followed by an introduction into the work of the Center and the analytical interrelations of borders and orders by Carolin Leutloff-Grandits, its scientific coordinator. In his key note speech on "Sealing Borders? Rethinking Border Studies in Hard Times", Sandro Mezzadra (Bologna) gave a personal insight into his approach to borders and related this to the changing

configurations of borders that especially affect migrants. He stressed that borders are a construct of social relations which can consist of a multiplicity of – either linguistic, cultural, legal or economic – boundaries, organizing as well as crisscrossing different social orders. He outlined his special research interest in processes of proliferation, heterogenization and the reinforcement of borders and their entanglements with the practices of border crossings. Focusing on the simultaneous processes of the selective softening and hardening as well as opening and sealing of borders for different kinds of flows, he proposed to deconstruct the notion of borders simply as protection walls and to document the changing and ambivalent character of borders. Last but not least, he reminded border scholars about the need to take sides, as border regimes appear to be extremely violent towards "unwanted" crossers, and even criminalize "humanitarian interventions" of NGOs who try to help those in their attempts to cross. He concluded that borders remain a crucial research field, as the changing global (and local) order and its new political economy (which proceeds with people according to a logistical rationality serving capitalist interests) abound at the border.

The first round table on "Current Challenges" addressed pressing questions concerning contemporary b/order arrangements on the one hand and possibilities and obstacles for scientific inquiries on the other. According to historian Beata Halicka (Poznań), who stressed the importance of the temporal dimension of border- and boundary-making, changing historical borders, forced migration, the appropriation of culture and the re-allocation of borders have a lasting impact on societal orders. Especially with regard to Central and Eastern European countries, such as Poland, she highlighted that research on b/orders in motion should emphasize aspects of how to deal with multi-ethnic groups and sociocultural boundaries. For historian and border researcher Martin Klatt (Sønderborg), borders are products of social practices or power relations. Klatt suggests focusing more on the population of the borderlands (like the Polish-German border region) and on the social impact of bordering processes, rather than on the common notion of "flows" in border(land) studies. Conclusively, he states that the border studies community is not sufficiently developed and that it would require comprehensive transnational research projects to further evolve this scientific field. Paolo Cuttita (Amsterdam, Kiel) illustrated the achievements of critical migration research by highlighting the important insights that concepts such as the "border regime" had provided to critical border studies. At the same time, he criticized the EU-centric view in research on b/orders in motion, demanding that it be overcome in order to fully capture the multicomplexities and fragmentations of borders, as well as the border imaginaries and functions for different people.

In the concluding round table on future perspectives in the research field of b/orders in motion chaired by Hannes Krämer (Duisburg-Essen), Chiara Brambilla (Bergamo, Milan), Sabine von Löwis (Berlin) and Burcu Togral (Erkner) discussed future theoretical and methodological conceptions in the field. Chiara Brambilla (Bergamo, Milan) began her analysis by focusing on b/orders as an interdisciplinary field that experiences obstacles due to diverging terminology in the different disciplines and that requires a stronger alignment of concepts and heuristics for the public dissemination of research outputs. In general, she identified a complexity shift in b/order studies as borders symbolize different epistemic systems for different subjects and carry temporal dimensions – an aspect which needs to be further researched. Sabine von Löwis (Berlin) made the case for a stronger focus on

the temporality of borders in the sense of the impact of historical territorial borders, referring to historical relocations of borders, as in the Polish case. Beyond that, the research on *phantom borders* has shown that former territorial borders are sustainably affecting social orders, which needs to be studied in more detail. Examples for *phantom borders* could be seen in Poland in the discrepancies of regional electoral behavior. Burcu Togrul (Erkner), who researches bordering processes with regard to refugees from Syria in Turkey and Germany, asked to take a closer look at the bordering processes and actors who are drawing or shifting these borders/boundaries. This includes the agency of administrators and migrants. As far as research on borders and migration is concerned, she proposed a research focus "towards more subjectivity" with an emphasis on personal experiences and effects of bordering practices.

In the two round tables and twelve panels, several repetitive issues and controversies emerged during the discussions. From a methodological viewpoint, the question of a joint vocabulary and methodology in the field of research on b/orders in motion was frequently raised. It was also discussed whether a stronger cohesion of concepts, methods and terminology in research on b/orders in motion is needed. While some of the contributors claimed that a heuristic view on borders and orders is fruitful to gain a stronger and sound research framework (such as the heuristics of *borderscapes* or *phantom borders* in border studies), others pointed to the diverging functions, appearances and relevance of borders and orders in different settings.

From a rather theoretical and conceptual perspective, the interplay of borders and orders, the claim of the alleged complexity of borders and ambivalent processes of de- and re-bordering were recurrent motifs of the conference. Nearly all presentations referred to this connection, albeit in different manners. Given the interdisciplinary character of the conference and the fact that the notions of "borders" and "orders" are broad concepts, the understanding of the terms is partially disparate. In most cases, orders refer to societal, institutional or (trans)national orders that both shape and are shaped through bordering processes. However, borders can also represent and widen the in-betweenness of binary orders, as in the case of gender orders exemplified in negotiations of the role of transgender in contemporary societies (see panel A2). Additionally, the crossing of borders confronts migrants and labor workforce with different societal and national orders in their daily lives (see panels B1, C1 and C2).

Another conceptual guideline was the notion of the border itself. It was not only Sandro Mezzadra who rejected the idea that borders were a "thing" or a territorial line. Rather, borders are composed of several overlapping theme-specific boundaries. As a result, the (nation-state) border represents an agglomerate of different interrelated forms of institutions, actors, materialities, practices and discourses. It is, therefore, crucial to not only look at borders but also at the specific bordering processes. During the conference, sociolinguistic (see panels A1 and C3), gender (see panels A2 and B3), sociocultural (see panels A3 and B1), economic (see panel B2), historical (see panels C1 and D2) and institutional (see panels C2, D1 and D3) boundaries were investigated in terms of their effects and impact on societal orders. The observation of ambivalent and simultaneous processes of de- and re-bordering was another predominant element in the discussion. As addressed in the keynote lecture, the European paradigm of "open borders" in the 1980s never existed, but rather the functions

of borders changed over time. Moreover, "open borders" imply concurrent boundary drawing processes on different levels.

Whilst being open to global b/order-related issues, the conference also contributed to several discourses in interdisciplinary Polish studies. Here, the main research fields comprised sociology, political studies on migration, linguistics and spatial planning/political geography. As far as sociology was concerned, the presentations by Anna Amelina (see panel A1) and Kamil Bembnista (see panel A3) both applied approaches from the sociology of knowledge. Bembnista analyzed the discourses and narratives in the Polish-German borderlands in the context of the flooding of the Oder River in 1997 by applying the notion of "vulnerability". Political scientist Monika Szulecka scrutinized inconsistent control practices in Poland with a focus on admission processes of short-term workers (see panel B1). Linguist Dagna Zinkhahn Rhobodes (see panel C3) focused on the interaction and mixing phenomena of German and Polish transgressing linguistic boundaries, which in turn create a third space or liminal zone. Finally, panel D3 discussed governance and cross-border cooperation (primarily) in the German-Polish border region from a political geography perspective.

The interdisciplinary conference mirrored the ambitious research that was conducted at the Viadrina Center B/ORDERS IN MOTION. Because of the different research foci, it was a challenge to handle diverging theories, heuristics, methodological considerations and terminologies beyond the different topics and panels, as well as to obtain a vibrant and fruitful discussion. In order to bring these different disciplines together, the approach of combining classical *border(land)* and *boundary studies*, as well as the analysis of the interrelation of borders and orders appeared to be especially helpful.