

"Die wandernde Grenze. Die EU, Polen und der Wandel politischer Räume, 1990 - 2010

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Since the conception of modern transnational studies historians and political scientists have recognized one of the drawbacks of such undertakings: either one remained at the global level, comparing international entities, or one stuck to the regional, which meant that in areas like South East Asia or the Caribbean, the sheer number of official languages alone required a research institute to complete a single study.[1] That helps explain the number of collected volumes in the field of transnational history.

Steffi Marung's "The Wandering Borders" is a single-handed attempt to approach the global, the national, and the local. She is fluent in large bureaucratic negotiations of the European Neighborhood Policy Instrument as well as small regional actors like the Dom Europy. She explores not only the nitty-gritty of EU newspeak but also the impact of Poland's myth of the Jagiellonian Empire. Perhaps it is logical, then, that although hers is no longer than most German dissertations, it comes across as two, perhaps even three books in one.

The author has three different general aims in her book. She wants to remove the study of space creation (Raumherstellung) from the hitherto myopic focus on the nation-state to include contingencies and contexts at a variety of levels. In the first segment, Marung describes how the expansion of the Schengen Zone resulted in new, more coherent border policies. Notions of border protection were redefined, with some borders being seen as "outer borders" of the EU. Typologically, these were borders, not a border. The major geographic difference was land and sea. But it was precisely here, within these two border zones, that policy was developed: towards eastern states (initially Poland, but later Ukraine and the Caucasus) the EU pursued greater border openness. In the south, the European Union desired greater security. In other words, the EU's "outer borders" were geo-political constructs with effects at many levels. At the European level, the EU and its constituent states developed a more nuanced language and understandings of the border – they changed from control to management. All the while, the EU was trying to define expansion in terms of possibilities rather than restrictions.

How these understandings were developed and transformed at the national and local level is the next issue that Marung covers in her book. She focuses on the (generally positive) role of Poland in the EU expansion (p. 246). From 1994 to 2010, Poland was transformed from an EU outsider to an EU insider with a uniquely powerful role since, she argues, since it was able to serve as a role model. Indeed, a fusion of dissident discourse of the late 1980s and more traditional narratives of Poland's tolerant roll in the *kresy* (Poland's formerly eastern territories) penetrated national politics in the 1990s. Now foreign ministers and state presidents developed the idea that Poland was both the impetus to focus east as well as a "Bindeglied" inviting eastern populations west. As she writes, "Poland's civilizing mission was quasi 'un-imperial' and bound to a particular space." (p. 224) Poland's role was strengthened after EU ascension not only due to this narrative, but also since it consistently pursued openness with Ukraine and since, as a country, it could be paraded as a success story of European integration.

Finally, in a brief micro-study, Marung describes how political space was created on the Polish-Ukrainian border. Using primarily the examples of the British Department for International Development (DFID) and the Ukrainian-Polish Agency for Cross-Border Regional Development (UPCBC Agency), Marung explores how the former was a child of colonization, which over the course of 60 years underwent both a change in name and focus (p. 296). Interestingly, the fact that DFID funding in the East was annulated was a success: first, funds were transferred to local organizations; secondly, they were subsumed into EU funding; and finally, DFID claimed, its mission had been successfully been completed. In the case of the UPCBC Agency (a brainchild of the DFID), Marung reveals how Poland's ascension in the EU changed its role in the agency. As of 2004, Poland received asymmetrically more funds and responsibility. As with Poland's political role in the EU as "un-imperial" civilizing missionary, so was the case in various NGOs after Poland joined the EU: the Polish side gained in stature, and also acted as a model for the East. Ukrainian organizers blamed Western benefactors for asymmetry and illogical spending requirements, and not Poland. "The [West] does not recognize existing cooperation and rejects sponsoring concrete material and infrastructural projects." (p. 330) That is all the more ironic, since early in Poland's path to join the EU, (as Marung shows earlier in her book) it received far more pecuniary assistance for "technical assistance" (i.e. infrastructural projects) than for civil society networking (pp. 292–293).

Marung's work is well-researched. She is capable of managing a vast array of both legalistic as well as cultural concepts. She shows how the notion of EU borders quickly changed after the end of the Cold War to reflect the Union's role as a regional power. She also effectively shows how it became a force where the aims and goals were region-specific. In other words, the EU – and Poland in particular – is a global force without global ambition. Instead, it is a force (in the East) which tries to be "un-imperial". Like the Haager Program she writes about early in the book, the EU on the one hand enforces border regimes, but also aides in close-border traffic.

The work started out promising to become a transnational study, which included a variety of different levels. As a historian, I initially was confused where local actors were when Marung discusses European development of borders. The author is familiar with literature concerning civil society and the fall of state socialism. There, transnational groups – founded at the grassroots level – protested the building of dams or supported transnational contact. While she would like to analyze NGOs in Poland and Ukraine, nearly all of the ones she discusses are, in fact, tied to governmental funding. All the while she is critical of the fact that regional studies

are primarily performed by "universities and think tanks" (p. 128). Is it the voice of local actors – something comparable to the Orange Alternative in 1980s Wrocław – if it relies on the EU or other state-sponsored funds? [2] The author is interested in "narrative fields" and "variable geographies," but she does not integrate – with very few exceptions – the narrative fields of everyday individuals (pp. 134–139).

At the same time, I was wondering about comparative structures and approaches outside of Europe. The author does explore northern Africa (from the perspective of Brussels), but was European attempts to define "outer borders" different than in other transnational organizations? The author is also uncritical of the *colonial* side of European ideals, which would not entail the imposition of foreign rulers on a region, but the imposition of foreign rules (such as civic norms, transparent government, and human rights) on a region (p. 121). Is that not – for better or worse – a form of neo-colonialism? Or is this a historically unique moment when the European Union is actually creating a new and unique concept of border relations? I think the author would say so, but since she is interested in the process of border-building, the global comparative is lost.

Perhaps we have, once again, reached the point of original departure: transnational studies are difficult because they are either too general, or too close to local actors. Marung's work, in this regard, is laudable in its attempt to incorporate so many different national and societal levels. Where I am less forgiving is in the organization of the book. It is rigid, and the reader has a hard time following the progression of the argument. Rather than extensive explanations of secondary works, this reader was interested in the advancement of Marung's unique narrative. Especially given the author's ability to explain complex local, national, and transnational concepts, I found the exploration of points of contacts between EU policy, national politicians, and local actors intriguing and fascinating. Unfortunately, this is not a constant in the work. That said, Steffi Marung has started the scholarly series on "Transnationale Geschichte" off on a good path. In light of upcoming agreements between the EU and Ukraine (and the controversy that it is causing in Russia) perhaps Dr. Marung will write a new, updated version of her book.

Notes:

[1] Cf. Akira Iriye, *Global Community. The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World*, Berkeley 2002.

[2] Cf. Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution. Central Europe 1989*, Princeton.

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