

Borders and border experiences

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Abstract

The idea of a “Europe without borders” has been contested for the last decade and is increasingly overshadowed by rebordering phenomena. This development has sparked debates within border studies on how borders should be thought of and investigated. The introductory article deals with this and reconstructs the formation and differentiation of the bordering approach. Furthermore, the concept of border experiences is determined as an investigative perspective that is interested in everyday cultural arenas of bordering processes. It puts the agency of ‘border(lands) residents’ in the center and provides insights into everyday cultural border (re)productions. With this in mind, we will present the book articles in the final section.

Keywords

Border studies, bordering, border experiences, Europe without borders, social practice

1. Borders

With the concept of border experiences, this volume aims to strengthen the facet of the concept of the border that is oriented towards everyday cultural realities. This endeavor ties in with the 2016 Association for Borderlands Studies’ European Conference, entitled “Differences and discontinuities in a ‘Europe without Borders,’” and seeks to raise awareness of the numerous and often-‘overlooked’ forms of articulation of borders. The background of this is an increasingly questioned epoch, which was discussed in academics until the 2000s as a “borderless world” and is contested in politics today operating under the slogan “Europe without borders.” In this volume, Yndigegn speaks about six decades which were politically guided by the idea of a “Europe without borders”, but in the past decade, we have increasingly been confronted with a renaissance of borders in Europe. This is reflected in, among other things, the reintroduction of border controls at EU internal borders (Evrard/Nienaber/Sommaribas 2018), the growing

Euroscepticism (Klatt 2018), burgeoning nationalisms (Lamour/Varga 2017) in connection with farther-reaching populism (Brömmel/King/Sicking 2017). These developments, which should be looked at more closely in the context of terrorism, financial crisis, flight, Brexit, Ukraine crisis and many more (Yndigegn in this volume), seem to be the driving force for the fact that the era of “Europe without borders” is already being overshadowed by an epoch of rebordering. The latter has given border studies tangible impulses in recent years with regard to, among other things, a re-considered concept of the border (Wille 2020).

In Europe, increased attention on borders can already be observed in the area of tension of the ‘borderless world’ and ‘Fortress Europe’ of the 1990s, referring also to the simultaneity of globalization dynamics, the fall of the Iron Curtain, on the one hand, and the emergence of new nation states and the stabilization of the EU’s external borders, on the other. These seemingly contradictory developments, which have been perpetuated in accentuated form in the recent rebordering tendencies (Yndigegn in this volume), have sensitized us on the concept of the border in such a way that Hess (2018, p. 84) speaks of a *border turn*. This is characterized not only by the heightened interest in and the increased academic involvement in border and migration dynamics, but also in a reorientation of border research, which is oriented on the *practice turn* (Schatzki//Knorr Cetina/Savigny 2001) and implies an understanding of borders, which some authors also refer to as constructivist (Bürkner 2017; Herzog/Sohn 2019). It overcomes the notion of fixed and set borders in favor of the view that borders are the results of social processes (Newman/Paasi 1998; Konrad 2015). This approach is not aimed at the border as an ontological object, but at the processes of the (de-)stabilization of borders—and thus at the forces that create them, as they take place in and through practices or discourses (Newman 2006; Kaiser 2012). In this context, an approach has been adopted across disciplines that provides a catchy term for the notion of border as a social production: the bordering approach, which, with the intention of processualizing, defines the border as a social practice. However, it is not to be understood as an analytical instrument that is applied and makes borders immediately describable and analyzable as de- and rebordering practices. Bordering, according to Yuval-Davis/Wemyss/Cassidy (2019, p. 5), “[...] constitutes a principal organizing mechanism in constructing, maintaining and controlling social and political order.” It is therefore a fundamental viewpoint that focuses on border (de)stabilization and/or the mechanisms that are effective and articulated within it.

The implementation of the bordering approach can neither be clearly dated nor attributed to a specific author. It was already being mentioned

in the political sciences in the 1990s (Albert/Brock 1996), made productive by human geographers at the turn of the century (van Houtum/van Naerssen 2002) and only later received in other disciplines. The temporally offset reception and ongoing empirical examination of bordering processes has further stimulated and conceptually enhanced the debate on borders. Some authors, for example, address border practices and/or practices of borders as possible operationalizations of the *bordering* approach (Auzanneau/Greco 2018; Wille et al. 2016; Parker/Adler-Nissen 2012; Paasi 1999). In addition, a distinction is to be made between de- und re-bordering processes through which the dynamic and unavoidable interplay of destabilization and stabilization of borders is conceived (Salter 2012; Yuval-Davis/Wemyss/Cassidy 2019, p. 59). The empirical observation of such processes has also shown that border (re)productions – whether in stabilizing or destabilizing form – seldom merge into binary codes, emanate from one actor with a clear agenda and identity or explicitly materialize in a particular place. Rather, the processes of bordering are multifaceted, which is why they are increasingly understood as multiple processes and examined as such (Wille 2020; Gerst et al. 2018). The representatives of critical border studies have largely been responsible for the sensitization of this (Parker et al. 2009; Parker/Vaughan-Williams 2012; Salter 2012; Jones 2019; Brambilla/Jones 2019; Yuval-Davis/Wemyss/Cassidy 2019), and their concerns are based on a rather catchy observation: “the construction of borders [...] must always be done somewhere by someone against some other” (Tyerman 2019, p. 2). Thus they are not only interested in the fact that borders represent social (re-)productions, but rather take a critical-differentiating view of how the multiple processes of bordering (strategically) take place: for example, from whom they emanate, with which interests, effects and who is addressed. In this context, the everyday cultural realities of life become more important as they are now included as sites for bordering processes and assumed to be constitutive of borders (Parker/Vaughan-Williams 2012; Rumford 2012). Addressing everyday cultural realities allows processes of border (de)stabilization to be recognized more broadly, to counteract a simplifying understanding of borders and to inevitably direct the focus onto ‘border(lands) residents’ as agents of the border. Such an orientation, which is enhanced by everyday cultural arenas, above all challenges cultural border studies and makes discussion possible with the concept of border experiences.

2. Border experiences

The concept of border experiences ties in with the idea of the border as a social (re-)production and the insight that processes of bordering are not reserved exclusively for political-institutional actors. Border experiences strengthen the perspective and thus the role and agency of those who ‘inhabit’ the border, meaning those who are entangled in them and who with their (bodily and sensory) experiences or generation of meaning in and through everyday practices, narratives, representations or objects continuously (re-)produce them. It is an approach that focuses on ‘border(lands) residents’ and their border experience in order to better understand the modes of action and function, but, above all, the ways in which borders are appropriated and thereby produced. This approach can be understood as a ‘humanizing the border’ (Brambilla 2015, p. 27), which is discussed and/or practiced by a multitude of authors, each with different focuses (Auzanneau/Greco 2018; Considère/Perrin 2017; Boesen/Schnuer 2017; Brambilla 2015; Amilhat Szary/Giraut 2015; Schulze Wessel 2015; Rumford 2012; Wille 2012; Newman 2007; Rösler/Wendl 1999; Martínez 1994). With this in mind, border experiences is neither a clearly defined concept nor the sovereignty of interpretation of an author or a group of authors. Nevertheless, border experiences can be characterized by the following points as a category, complementary to geopolitical perspectives of borders.

The concept is not just a complementary view *on* the border through the eyes of the ‘affected person’; rather, border experiences are developed *through* the border. This methodological approach, which Rumford (2012, p. 895) conceptualizes as “seeing like a border”, describes the fundamental issue of following the border in its performative arenas: to where the border takes place as everyday cultural (re-)production. These include moments of representation or meaning production coded in practices, discourses or objects and in which borders are (made) relevant. While Rumford (2012, p. 897) emphasizes that “[i]n aspiring to ‘see like a border’ we must recognise the constitutive nature of borders in social [...] life”, Considère/Perrin (2017, p. 16) focus on possible access points for this: “The border [...] is reflected in perceptions, everyday practices, and constructed ideas.” Border experiences stand for such everyday cultural settings and give the border its (sometimes temporary) existence. A vivid example of this is given by Martin in this volume, in which the Franco-Luxembourgish border reproduces itself through an everyday “cut-off point”, that cross-border commuters experience on their way to work in Luxembourg: “conversations were interrupted, pages stopped downloading, and there

was no signal. Mobile phones were put away in pockets by all those users who had subscriptions to a French network. We have qualified this cut-off point as a real digital border [...].”

Border experiences also imply multiple understandings of borders. This refers to the fact that everyday-culture-oriented considerations exclude neither marginalized nor privileged actors. The concept refers to the entirety of the actors “at, on, or shaping the border” (Rumford 2012, p. 897) and moving in and through the border space (Schulze Wessel 2015, p. 51) and inevitably leads to the insight that “borders [...] mean different things to different people, and work differently on different groups” (Rumford 2012, p. 894). This differentiating view, which Józwiak describes in this volume with the statement that “the border is not experienced by everyone in the same way”, is based on the multiplicity of border experiences and gives the border multiple and time-changeable existences. In other words, borders are (re-)produced and transformed in a variety of ways, for example by refugees, international managers, tourists, and these ways also include border non-experiences (Rumford 2012, p. 889). This experience is clearly shown by Boesen in this volume with residential migrants, who sometimes have “left Luxembourg without arriving in another country.”

Whether and to what extent borders will acquire existences through border experiences or become/(are made) effective in border experiences will remain question to be answered empirically. This question is at the very center of this volume and is being worked on in border crossings – i.e. in the context of (forced) migration, residential migration, travel, commuter and other everyday mobility as well as in language contact situations. In particular, the areas of everyday life, working life, and communication and languages are considered, as well as the border experiences emerging there. These stand for everyday cultural realities in which borders are (made) relevant and thus (re-)produced in and through practices, discourses or objects. The approach of the authors can be summarized in three overlapping questions. *Firstly*, it is a question of to what extent borders are (re-)produced in and through practices, discourses or objects. In addition, awareness of the everyday cultural sites of borders should be raised. The range of such sites is diverse, ranging from (cross-border) recreational practices, shopping and information practices, to those related to (cross-border) employment or relocation, to border control practices or language contact situations. *Secondly*, it asks what social logics are embedded in such (re-)production processes. Questioning from this perspective addresses the creation of meaning of everyday cultural border (re)productions, which can also be discussed as border knowledge (Gerst and Józwiak in this volume) or border culture (Álvarez Pérez in this volume). Especially with re-

gard to border regions, the aim here is to better understand the (strategic) use of the border and the local appropriations of the border in and through everyday practices. The use of the border is often based on the pursuit of maximizing individual benefit, but not exclusively, as shown by Wille/Roos in this volume. At the same time, the aim is to uncover the structures of meaning that are constitutive for borders in representations or projections. Several authors comment on this, such as Gerst using the example of a political event on security issues, Boesen through ‘moving stories’ by residential migrants, Martin with the media practices of cross-border workers, and Álvarez Pérez with border residents. And *thirdly*, this volume asks which effects of the (dis)continuity originate from borders and to what extent they are (made) effective for actors at, on, or in the border. This applies, for example, to Spanish travelers, who – since they too have been able to enter France with simply an ID card – “feel a little more equal to the much-envied citizens of democratic Europe” (Permanyer in House in this volume). However, the potential spaces opening up through borders or border crossings have also been worked out, which, for example, Pigeron-Piroth and Belkacem in this volume understand as a “resource”, Martin as a “reservoir of cultural resources” or Dost/Jungbluth/Richter as liminal spaces marked by in-betweenness.

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