

Presenters' Paper Abstracts

European Borders Studies in the past decades

(by Martin van der Velde)

In this presentation I would like to take you along some strands that can be observed in the field of border studies. It concerns mainly three strands that are partly more or less responses to developments in an integrating Europe(an Union). Although importance of these strands are certainly fluctuating over time, it is not so that one strand is replacing the other. They do exist (and flourish) next to each other. To follow the Nijmegen border scholar Henk van Houtum, the three approaches can be labelled as a flow-oriented approach, a cooperation-oriented approach and a people-oriented approach. The first one is based on perceiving the border as a possible barrier to cross-border flows. The cooperation-approach focuses on borders as places where regions and countries are communicating with each other and as such as potential points cooperation. The third one questions the *raison-d'être* of borders. Why do we need borders at all and what functions and ramifications do they have. This latter approach is taking on a much more constructivist view, where borders are seen as the outcomes of bordering practices (both by individuals as well as collectives). It is in this latter approach that the Nijmegen Centre for Border Research has rooted its border-related research to a large extent. In that perspective issues of 'indifference' as a strong bordering attitude as well as the perception of the other side of the border as (un)familiar are considered to be important factors for understanding the why and how of borders, especially in the European Union, where borders are supposed to have disappeared or at least to be in a process of nullification.

Border in the Americas in the Era of Trump, Walls and Closed Borders

(by Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera)

This work will describe the current configuration of borders and migration patterns in the Americas in an era of increased border enforcement, extreme violence and expansion of different forms of organized crime. This paper will evaluate the current actions toward achieving closed borders in different parts of the region as well as the effect of such policies on U.S.-Mexico border relations, security and organized crime.

Theory-Practice Gap in Contemporary Border Studies

(by Serghei Golunov)

The problem of theory-practice gap is persistent in many social disciplines. Many researchers are reluctant to generate policy-relevant findings not so much because of divergences between academic and practical knowledge but rather because of potential ideological controversies: these researchers do not want to contribute to legitimizing and reinforcing current political orders (with their agendas and frames) that are seen intrinsically unjust. Some argue that critical theorizing should be equated to practice, as such ideas could shape or destroy existing social and political order. This approach, however, entails some potential dangers, such as ending with an “armchair revolution”, confining oneself with destructive criticism without offering something viable, and concentrating just on “grand issues” while disregarding pressing mundane problems.

The problem of theory-practice gap is quite characteristic for contemporary Border Studies, in which essentialist (but not praxeologic), deconstructionist, and emancipationalist trends are prominent. While there is a lot of works analyzing and deconstructing the phenomenon of national borders, works offering realistic practical solutions are relatively scarce.

What kinds of practically relevant findings can be found in recent visible research in the field of Border Studies? Do existing Border Studies theories have practical potentials? What kinds of alternative practically relevant theories can be offered? These questions to be highlighted in the proposed presentation.

Back to the Future: A world of “fortresses”?

(by Akihiro Iwashita)

Asia’s maritime border areas have recently attracted a great deal of attention in the light of a series of conflicts occurring in the East China Sea, Sea of Japan, and Sea of Okhotsk. On the basis of numerous case studies conducted primarily in Europe and North America, the author considers the concept of timeline to be a valuable tool for the comparative studies of borders. This concept has been developed from the four-stage border transformation model proposed by Oscar Martinez, in which borders develop from a “fortress,” via “coexistence” and “interdependence”, to “integration”.

In Martinez’s stage theory, contemporary Asian maritime disputes would move towards a peaceful resolution. The author wishes to consider whether this is a realistic proposition, and how it might come about.

By contrast, Eurasia’s continental borderlands appear to be de-coupling, moving from “coexistence” or “interdependence” back to a “fortress” situation, as seen in the fences being built by Hungary and others to shut out refugees in the EU or current situation in

eastern Ukraine. In fact, political space across Eurasia evidences a mix of these four-stage phenomena in a variety of timelines. The author argues that developing a framework within which to compare these timelines would provide us with a powerful tool for developing new perspectives on the transformation of borders.