New Borderlands or Cosmopolitanism from Below?

International Conference on Linking Theories of Border, Concepts of Cosmopolitanism and Citizenship in Migration Studies

Thursday 6th to Saturday 8th December 2012
Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg, Germany

Organizers
EMMIR Consortium (European Master of Migration and Intercultural Relations)
Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg (School of Linguistics and Cultural Studies, School of Education)
Georg-August University Göttingen (Laboratory for Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies)
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa (African Centre for Migration and Society)

Conference Concept

The overall aim of the projected conference is to make a significant contribution to the development of migration theory. In order to achieve this, it will focus on three interlinked concepts: border(land), citizenship and cosmopolitanism. These are currently highly debated in transnational and transdisciplinary academic discourses – initiating a fruitful dialogue between them might lead to paradigmatic shifts in migration studies and beyond. In order to do so, the conference examines specific dimensions of the ongoing deep transformation of statehood, citizenship, sovereignty and identity formations in sending, transit, and receiving states (cf. Mezzadra).

In academic discourses, the ‘notion of border’, its governance as well as its spaces „have deeply changed during the processes of globalization“ (Friese/Mezzadra 304) and the diverse approaches to this notion make evident that it „is extremely rich in significations“ (Balibar 1). To some extent, this richness is due to the range of disciplinary perspectives, e.g. philosophy, social sciences, cultural anthropology and cultural studies. All examine both, changing geo- and bio-political border regimes as well as changing articulations and representations of social and cultural boundaries. This growing awareness of the complexity of the notion of „border“ has turned the idea of „cosmopolitanism“ into „a grounded category“ (Rovisco/Nowicka 1). „Cosmopolitanism“ is used to describe newly emerging or potential modes of relation between universality and particularity as well as individual and community. Moreover, it is employed to formulate norms and values in order to pursue conviviality and social justice as global objectives. However, the concept of cosmopolitanism has been challenged by scholars who consider „citizenship‘ the more appropriate concept to address the dynamics of migration flows, migrants’ agency and the reaffirmation, eruption or shift of borders.

The conference programme is divided in four sections, each combining keynote lectures and panels. In addition, two workshops for graduates and postgraduates are planned.

I Border Regimes: Formations of European and African Border(land)s

Recent findings question the assumption that borders would diminish in the course of European integration and the global acceleration of migration. State borders, once understood as linear geographical demarcations to mark the territorial entity of (nation) states or a confederation of nations, have indeed diminished in a variety of contexts, e.g. within the EU or the ECOWAS region. However, this process is counteracted or even superseded by continually emerging new forms of creating boundaries and systems of control.
A new type of governance emerged to regulate and manage migration and border controls. Some results: former systems of colonial power and dominance are reproduced and modernized, new inequalities are created and old ones perpetuated on local, regional and global levels. They lead to an accelerated process of zoning and produce spaces with differentiated and hierarchized sets of rights and sovereignty – within and beyond Europe. In northern Africa European border and migration regimes have been implemented in collaboration with African governments. Furthermore, the migration of refugees or labourers within the African continent is shaped by a variety of border politics, due to the construction of borders by former colonial powers and postcolonial nation states. The cooperation with African scholars in the context of this conference will address specific processes and perspectives around African border regimes, e.g. existing intra-African permeability of borders versus new foci on territorial demarcation of borders and border control in the continent. Key questions to be addressed in the keynotes and panels of this section are:

- How are geopolitical borders understood in European and in African contexts? What are the implications for migrants?
- What is the nexus between migrants' agency and border regimes? And what is the nexus between the border regime and a differential system of rights and citizenship?
- What are possible links between approaches of bio- and geopolitical border concepts to develop tools for the analysis of political strategies and practices?
- Do migration theories appropriately address concepts of border? What can border theories learn from migration studies?

II Border Imaginaries: On the Discursive (De-)Construction of Demarcation Lines

Border and migration regimes are also articulated and shaped by media (fictional and non-fictional), actively engaging in border and migration politics through particular aesthetics and ethics of representation. This includes, e.g., migrants’ literature on borderland experience, cinematic variations of transit and migration, news coverage on legal and illegal border crossings or cartographical visualizations of the border and its permeability.

Though a number of studies have shown that dominant forms of representation still contribute to perpetuating highly biased and stereotyped images of the ‘migrant’, there is a considerable increase in counter-narratives that exploit their specific aesthetic potential to critically react to (and thus contribute to deconstructing) traditional forms of representing the border and migration. In order to examine this potential by analyzing the forms and functions of border imaginaries, the contributions in this section address the following questions:

- How are borders portrayed and linked to migrant images and representations of border-crossing subjectivities? What counter-narratives and -images have been produced and by whom? And what exactly is ‘countered’ in these narratives?
- What are the chances and limits of representational politics in the context of border regimes?
- How are human and women’s rights discourses linked to border politics?
- To what extent do forms of orientalism (linked to border politics, concepts of citizenship or cosmopolitanism) frame constructions of cultures within and beyond Europe?

III Transgression of Borders and Transnational Social Experiences: A New Cosmopolitanism or Translocal, Postnational Citizenship

Cosmopolitan thinking with its diverse theoretical and philosophical considerations has not only critically reinterpreted the heritage of Greek philosophy or Kant’s law of world citizenship and the right of universal hospitality, but has also begun to embrace postcolonial as well as feminist critiques. The concept has become both, „an ethico-political ideal underpinned by legally-founded forms of supranational and transnational governance“ as well as „a concept of moral politics that is articulated in the ‘ordinary’ ways of thinking and acting of agents that are active at grassroots level in a range of transnational informal networks“ (Rovisco/Nowicka 3). Still, cosmopolitanism is often said to naturally belong „in the affluent urban North of the world“ (Hannerz 205) and that transcending local culture, identity or
politics is neither desirable nor attainable for the inhabitants of weak or „dysfunctional“ states in the global South (Grovogui 105). It is also assumed that mobility forced or dictated by economic necessity inhibits the development of a genuinely cosmopolitan engagement with Otherness and difference (cf. e.g. Calhoun).

In sum, the discussion and critiques of models and politics towards a cosmopolitan world order, democracy, the worldwide implementation of universal rights or the „rights of others“ (cf. e.g. Benhabib) remain crucial issues in migration politics. In order to discuss the concept of cosmopolitanism and to identify its strengths, weaknesses and limits in the conceptualization of border and migration, the conference presentations will address the following questions:

- How do theoretical strands of cosmopolitan ideas and principles counter the current neoliberal politics of global governance?
- How do these strands discuss the acknowledgment of „the Other“ beyond the concepts of sameness or semblance?
- Do concepts of cosmopolitanism reinterpret, question or transgress the concept of „third space“ introduced by Homi Bhabha? How are alternative ways of trans-national and trans-cultural interconnectedness conceptualized?
- What is the current (dis)connection between theory and practice of cosmopolitanism?

The notion of citizenship conceptualizes the border as a „knowledge-power-regime“, a „biopolitical assemblage“ (Walters) strongly influencing „regimes of living“ on a global scale (cf. Collier/Lakoff). In this context, some mainly empirical studies have already shown how the border functions as a filter not stopping migration but producing a strong „civic stratification“ (Morris), which tremendously affects labour market incorporation and the life expectations of migrants (cf. e.g. Transit Migration Forschungsgruppe). On the other hand, recent studies on „doing citizenship“ or „citizenship from below“ show how the struggles and practices of „self-integration“ and the transnational movements of migrants re-invent articulations of citizenship and how they are pushing the limits of the existent notions of citizenship calling for new post-national or trans-local forms (cf. Nyers). For a discussion of the conceptual potential of „citizenship from below“ in contradistinction to „cosmopolitanism from below“, the presenters in this section address the following questions:

- What are the theoretical and methodological differences or divides between the approaches, cosmopolitanism from below‘ and „citizenship from below“?
- How do geopolitical, social and cultural border politics mould, subaltern cosmopolitanisms‘ or „citizenship from below“ in European and African contexts? How are these practices gendered?
- Do these approaches lead to new theoretical and methodological outcomes which may go beyond the established transnational paradigm?

Bibliographie


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Further information

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