

From the Iron Curtain to the Schengen Area: Bordering Communist and Postcommunist Europe

Veranstalter: Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for European History and Public Spheres (LBI-EHP); Institute for Human Sciences (IWM); Historical Commission of the Austrian Academy of Sciences

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From September 28-30, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for European History and Public Spheres (LBI-EHP), the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), and the Historical Commission of the Austrian Academy of Sciences held a conference in Vienna on the history and legacy of East European borders throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Topics ranged from the very construction of the Iron Curtain (in hearts and minds as well as with bricks and mortar) to parallels in everyday life on opposite sides of the border, to current day issues with new zones, frontiers and migration across former borders.

Three keynote addresses framed the conference from ALFRED RIEBER (Budapest), SABINE DULLIN (Lille), and ALF LÜDTKE (Erfurt). Rieber made a useful distinction between borderlands and *frontiers*, i.e., zones of conflict on the edge of multinational states or empires, and gave examples of several transhistorical zones (such as the Danubian Basin or the Pontic Steppe) that have played key roles in a long series of regime changes. Dullin presented a convincing argument that the Iron Curtain has a vivid prehistory in earlier Soviet attempts to control its Western border during the Interwar Period. Her focus on administrative detail and the everyday life of border guards, as well as those moving legally and illegally across the border, revealed experimentation with different techniques of border crossing, surveillance, and eventually control that were then directly reproduced on the Western borders of the USSR after WWII. In his even closer examination of the Friedrichstraße checkpoint throughout its existence, Lüdtke also drew on documen-

tation of the everyday life of border guards and border crossers, but highlighted the exceptional nature of the human interaction in this environment: border guards were to exercise both technological precision and extra-human capacities to recognize signs of danger, while travelers entered a type of liminal state which, according to Lüdtke, could constitute almost a formal rite of passage. In sum, this quite diverse assembly of approaches, by three well-established scholars in the field, illustrated the potential of this concept across disciplines - a potential which was well explored during the two full days of presentation and discussion.

One striking feature of this gathering was how the very experience of crossing borders during the Cold War seemed to spontaneously summon personal testimony from that generation of scholars who had done so. The 'border-crossing anecdote' became a veritable leitmotif of the conference, with no less than seven examples when senior scholars volunteered their own stories of encountering the curtain. There were tricksters who were able to deflect the queries of the border guards with unexpected props such as dogs or books bearing the face of Ceaușescu; citizens who were detained for long periods of time because of accidentally breaking protocol (i.e., showing up at the border with four IDs instead of one); others were simply testifying to the seriousness of the endeavor, and to the atmosphere of dehumanized restraint that was so pervasive in this particular space and time that bore the whole representational weight of Cold War politics and ideology. The overall effect was of such confessions was twofold: they were personal, even intimate glimpses into the lives of these scholars; but at the same time they had a distancing effect, as stark reminders of the deep structural transformation that had once made it so difficult to travel, say, from Prague to Vienna.

The conference was organized very logically by approach, e.g., institutional and state-centered narratives vs. more micro-historical, or papers with an economic and consumerist angle vs. studies of cultural representation or symbology. This made for panels with a refreshing mix of disciplines (though broadly speaking, history was the most prominent),

and an appropriate liberation from the logic of territory or nation-state. Across these panels, a few major topoi emerged where one could see the productive intersection of several trains of thought.

One of the first themes to stand out was the internalization of the concept of the border throughout communist societies, whether through propaganda, the image of the border guard, or actual mobilization of everyday citizens.

A frontier passes through our hearts / and we are all frontier guards, frontier guards / of the strict homeland – Communism.

This is an excerpt from a longer poem published in 1976 by the Bulgarian poet L. Levchev, as quoted by NIKOLA VUKOV (Sofia) in his paper on the Turkish-Bulgarian border; Vukov stressed the border's prominence in the Bulgarian cultural imagination, witnessed in such poems or practices like the „cultural marches to the border“ of the 1970s. The image of the border guard played an important role from the earliest Soviet propaganda, as presented by Dullin in her keynote address, but takes on interesting new dimensions in later varieties of socialism. One could see, for example, an unexpected extension of this heroization in EMILIYA KARABOEVA's (Plovdiv) presentation on Bulgarian truck drivers – figures who came to embody the heroic trope of the border, containing both the power of the border and the capacity to legally transgress it.

Furthermore, several presenters brought up the resettlements of people in different contexts as mechanisms of border control and internalization. In his paper on the discourse of „reliability“ in the Czechoslovak borderlands, MATEJ SPURNÝ (Prague) detailed „the removal of the unreliable citizens of Czech nationality“ in the period directly after the war, that is, before the implementation of Beneš decrees, and their replacement by more 'reliable' Czechs resettled from Ukraine and Bohemia. EAGLE GLASSHEIM (Vancouver) looked at a later period in Czechoslovak society, and the legacy of this uprooting of local multiethnic traditions and culture in the reform movements of the 1960s and dissident movements of the 1970s. In Glassheim's paper we could see that the politically and de-

mographically constructed border was still internalized, but experienced as a loss.

Another popular motif could be found in presentations on „twin“ border communities, separated by the Iron Curtain at the birth of the Soviet bloc. It's worth noting here that this conference grew out of a Ludwig Boltzmann Institute research project currently directed by LIBORA OATES-INDRUCHOVA (Vienna) on „Border Communities: Micro-studies in Everyday Life,“ where the focus is precisely on collecting a wide range of such examples to produce a broader scale view, still based on micro-historical principles. More details about the project's events and publications can be found here: <http://ehp.lbg.ac.at/node/375>.

Some of the best examples of this type of study were from MURIEL BLAIVE (Vienna) on České Velenice and the Austrian town of Gmünd; EDITH SHEFFER (Stanford) on the twin FRG-GDR towns of Sonneberg and Neustadt bei Coburg; ELZBIETA OPILOWSKA (Wrocław) on Polish Zgorzelec and East German Görlitz; and ALENA PFOSER (Loughborough) on Narva and Ivangorod, in Estonia and Russia, respectively. Here the periods under examination were quite different. Scheffer and Opilowska focused on the 1970s, and the period of détente when more movement was possible across borders, whereas Blaive used a longer historical view to understand the postwar construction of the Austrian-Czech border in reference to 1918, and Pfoser conducted an ethnography of the postsocialist period. However, the four studies all set up dialogic approaches, in which each town's cultural identity was largely defined in relation to that entity across the border.

Dialogic does not necessarily mean positive, however: in the 1970s, on both the Polish-German and FRG-GDR borders, we see a similar clash between perceived stereotypes, material inequalities, and emotionally charged encounters. Another intriguing ethnography on intra-border cultural perception was ALEXANDRA SCHWELL's (Vienna) study of Polish and German border guard communities pre- and post-E.U. accession, in which she is able to trace the erasure of previously held stereotypes alongside the con-

struction of new ones through both professional and personal encounters. THOMAS LINDENBERGER (Vienna) presented on fabular border communities in two films: an accidental „Western zone“ which appears in the GDR border town in „Die Dubrow-Krise“ (Wolfgang Menge, 1969) and the ghostly story of one man occupying two Berlins in „Meier“ (Peter Timm, 1986). Within these narratives, Lindenerberger was able to show the Western fascination with transgressing the border, and a surprising richness of detail and historical accuracy in the Western German imagination of its ‘twin’ communities, which points to the high level of interaction that in fact did take place during the late Cold War between the two Germanies.

Although the question of gender was not foregrounded by the conference organizers, it came up in several of the presentations and even more so in the discussions afterwards. The aforementioned image of the border guard was stressed as a crucially masculine one by Dullin; this echoed strongly in Karaboeva’s discussion of Bulgarian truck drivers. She found that as the truck drivers’ fundamental social identity was linked to mastery over borders (as well as the economic gains that came from that privilege), the experience of losing that position in the post-1989 period was also a deeply emasculating one. Perhaps the clearest expression of the interrelation between masculinity, the socialist past, and the neoliberal present could be found in KRISTIN GHODSEE’s (Maine) paper on the Bulgarian town of Maydan. In Ghodsee’s account, Maydan’s rapid development during the early socialist period was linked to mining and the glorification of the miner as a modern, Socialist, man; the town’s de-industrialization in the 1980s and economic abandonment in the postsocialist period has led to new constellations of family life, gender, and religious identity. Following closely on that theme was ALISSA TOLSTOKOROVA’s (Kyiv) presentation on transnational parenting in Ukraine. Her wide-ranging study of women living in emigration who have taken over as the primary breadwinners, the effect of this on family structure, child psychology, and the civic fabric of life in Ukraine, was a stark reminder of the power of borders to determine lives

even when they are reconfigured as political and economic ‘zones.’

The final roundtable of the conference stayed firmly on this ground, as DARIUSZ STOLA (Warsaw), ENDRE SIK (Budapest), and ALEV KORUN (Vienna) debated „Migration Policies and Theories of Migration for the 21st Century.“ Sik gave a brief history of the state of research on migration, and suggested that the biggest challenge today is in finding support for quality, social scientific research in this area. Stola’s main point was more rhetorical: given that migration is inherently good for Europe, and in fact necessary, *how can we build a dialogue or even a policy that will help sell this to the voters?* Korun, an MP for the Austrian Green Party focusing on migration and human rights, played a mediating role, agreeing that both further research and better talking points are vital to furthering this debate in Europe. While the ensuing discussion exposed disciplinary differences and a deep frustration with the current state of migration policy in Europe, it was a fascinating capstone to two days of scholarship on the creative and counter-intuitive ways that supposedly fixed political borders were ideologically and socially constructed, deconstructed, and otherwise transgressed. By juxtaposing these two points of view – the porosity of borders under regimes of control, and the difficulty of overcoming borders that are embodied by migrants even in a supposedly borderless European zone – the conference seemed to signal that a more flexible understanding of the past could lead to a more productive approach to the present. In the very last moments of the closing discussion, Alev Torun’s quiet reminder to the audience, „I am a migrant,“ invoked the previous border-crossing anecdotes of senior scholars. Most of us attending did indeed travel across borders to get to Vienna, but only some have had this internalized experience of carrying the identity of the border with them wherever they go.

There were several other thought-provoking and worthwhile presentations, particularly in the areas of intellectual history and the cross-border transfer of ideas, and visual representation in the form of film and monumentality. Due to lack of space, they are not described in detail above, but can

be easily found in the program below, and along with abstracts on the conference website: <http://ehp.lbg.ac.at/en/programme/detailed-programme>.

Conference overview:

Keynote addresses 1 and 2:

Alfred Rieber (Professor of History, Central European University, Budapest, and Professor Emeritus, University of Pennsylvania), Frontiers: Symbolic and Geo-Cultural; and

Sabine Dullin (Professor of Contemporary History, University of Lille 3), Implementation and Export of the Soviet Border Regime in Eastern Europe

Chair: Wolfgang Mueller (Austrian Academy of Sciences)

Discussant: Andreas Kappeler (Professor for East European History, University of Vienna)

Panel I: Borders and Border Guarding

Dan Draghia (University of Bucharest): „Bordering with Tito”: Romanian borders under the pressure of the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict

Alexandra Schwell (University of Vienna): When worlds collide: How German-Polish work ethics shape the European border regime

Nikolai Vukov (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences): The Guarding and Breaking of the Bulgarian-Turkish border in Communist Bulgaria: Practices, Experiences and Memory Traces

Chair: Libora Oates-Indruchová (LBI EHP, Vienna)

Discussant: Gerhard Sälter (Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer, Berlin)

Panel II: The Making of Border Populations

Kristen Ghodsee (Bowdoin College): Bulgarianizing the Border Zone: Rural Industrialization, Resettlement and Muslim Minorities on the Greek-Bulgarian Frontier

Matej Spurný (Charles University, Prague): The discourse of reliability and the border (Czech borderlands, 1945-1949)

Eagle Glassheim (University of British

Columbia): Human and Natural Ecologies of the Post-war Czechoslovak Borderlands

Chair: Klaus Nellen (IWM)

Discussant: Machteld Venken (German Historical Institute, Warsaw)

Panel III: Making the Borders More Permeable: The Détente and After

Edith Sheffer (Stanford University): More Crossing, More Estrangement? Paradoxes of Permeability in Cold War Germany

Martin D. Brown (American International University in London, Richmond): Recognizing „East” and „West”: British foreign policy and the mutual recognition of Europe’s frontiers during the Helsinki Process 1970-75

Muriel Blaive (LBI EHP, Vienna): Nation, state and socialist bloc: České Velenice, a Czech outpost at the border to Austria

Chair: Wolfgang Mueller (Austrian Academy of Sciences)

Discussant: Jan Rychlík (Charles University, Prague)

Panel IV: Heroes and Villains: Borders in Propaganda and Creative Representations

Sune Bechmann Pedersen (Lund University): The aesthetics of a collapsing border: The fall of the Berlin Wall in German cinema

Thomas Lindenberger (LBI EHP, Vienna): Imagine the End of Absurdity: Transcending the Iron Curtain on German Screens

Chair: David Schriffel (Austrian Academy of Sciences)

Discussant: Heiner Stahl (University of Erfurt)

Keynote address:

Alf Lüdtke (Honorary Professor of Historical Anthropology at the University of Erfurt, and Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Research Institute for Comparative History and Culture Hanyang University, Seoul): Working the Passage: East German Border Check Points, 1961-1990: The Case of „GÜSt Bhf. Friedrichstrasse”, Berlin

Discussant: Thomas Lindenberger (LBI EHP,

Vienna)

Panel V: Economic and Consumerist Aspects of Borders

Emiliya Karaboeva (Eindhoven Technological University and Plovdiv University): Borders and Go-betweens: Trafficking in Desiderata. (Bulgarian international truck drivers during the Cold war)

Alissa V. Tolstokorova (International School for Equal Opportunities [ISEO], Kiyv): Family Frontiers: Cross-Border Caring and Transnational Parenting as New Migratory Phenomena in Ukraine

Elzbieta Opilowska (University of Wroclaw): „The Miracle at the Oder“: The opening of the Polish-German border in the 70s and its impact on the Polish-German relations in the borderland

Chair: János Mátyás Kovács (IWM)

Discussant: Dragos Petrescu (University of Bucharest)

Panel VI: Intellectual Cross-Border Cooperation and Penetration

Sari Autio-Sarasma (Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki): Knowledge through the Iron Curtain: East-West Interaction and Diffusion of Knowledge

Andrea Orzoff (New Mexico State University): Writing across the Wall: The German PEN Clubs and East-West dialogue, 1964-1968

Christian Henrich-Franke (University of Siegen): Airy Curtains: Demarcating Cold War Europe in the Ether

Chair: Thomas Lindenberger (LBI EHP, Vienna)

Discussant: Friederike Kind-Kovács (University of Regensburg)

Panel VII: Borders in Memory Cultures and Everyday Life

Tatiana Zhurzhenko (University of Vienna): On the Trans-Border Life of a Historical Myth: Commemorating the „Eaglets“ in Lviv and Przemysl

Borut Klabjan (University of Primorska, Slovenia, and Humboldt University): „On the

Wrong Side of the Border“. Commemorating Yugoslav Partisans on the Italo-Yugoslav Border

Alena Pfoser (University of Loughborough): „This used to be one space“: The transformation of the Estonian-Russian borderland in biographical narratives

Chair: Muriel Blaive (LBI EHP, Vienna)

Discussant: Jan Palmowski (King's College London)

Panel discussion: Border Crossings: Migration Policies and Theories of Migration for the 21st Century

Alev Korun (MP, Spokesperson for Integration, Migration and Human Rights, Austrian Green Party)

Endre Sik (Centre for Refugee and Migration Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences; TÁRKI Social Research Institute, Budapest)

Dariusz Stola (Collegium Civitas, Warsaw)

Moderator: János Mátyás Kovács (IWM)

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