

The Power of Borderland(s): In Media's Res

Veranstalter: IRTG Baltic Borderlands, University of Lund / University of Tartu / University of Greifswald

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The present report explores some of the common threads and themes that have arisen across the different panels and also in the Q&A sessions in the conference „The Power of Borderland(s): In Media's Res“. Its objective is to tie back the recurring themes to the central topic of this conference: borders, bordering and the media broadly defined.

The contributions have taken on the core theme of the conference from different vantage points. The following six underlying themes have been identified.

The meaning and definition of borders, bordering and borderlands generally has been addressed on more than one occasion. The audience has been duly reminded that bordering involves a process of negotiation or renegotiation that can take place at different levels: social, cultural, religious, political, linguistic, or economic — just to mention the most common ones. The first day's keynote by VLAD STRUKOV (Leeds) led the participants to the front line to take a glimpse into the future. What about bordering in dimensions like cyberspace and social media? Is cyberspace not the last, but certainly the latest frontier, where battles are being fought to control and to dominate this space? The future presented by Strukov was not necessarily a familiar or a comfortable one, and his paper engaged the central themes of this conference via the dream machines of film makers. He asked probing questions about what the future might hold, and more specifically *who* is empowered to imagine the future.

Media itself offers a multifaceted bordering experience, or more commonly also as a bordering tool. At a conference with media as a central theme, this was bound to be a topic that would be dissected at different levels. Whether in film, newspapers or public

education, it has been shown that the media plays an important role in the cross-border negotiation of images, labels, or interpretation of events. These issues were raised in several papers, such as by LINDA KINSTLER (Berkeley), VLAD STRUKOV (Leeds) as well as by VERONICA CASTILLO MUÑOZ (Santa Barbara). In this she presented how the coverage of the Mexican Revolution evolved against the backdrop of US investment interests in Mexico and created a legacy that echoes until this day. OLGA DOROKHINA (Tbilisi) addressed the concept of the „creeping border“ in Georgia and South Ossetia, as well as issues surrounding its validation (or dismissal) by different agents in government and media. Then there were the historic and evolving stereotypes exemplified by ANTI SELART (Tartu) with reference to Latvia and Estonia, or between Poland and Sweden by BARBARA TÖRNQUIST-PLEWA (Lund).

As inevitable it might have been to take apart the new frontiers and the media borderscapes, it was also clear that the contributions would at some stage need to address the imagining, creation, and relativization of national borders. The national border has without doubt acted over the past two or three centuries as a powerful organizing tool that has been backed by the authority of the sovereign and the state's evolving control of the instruments of violence. Imagining countries such as the Belarusian People's Republic (PER RUDLING (Singapore)), or crossing different layers of socio-political and historic borders in the Holy Roman Empire (MARGOT DAMIENS (Paris)) were themes that drew special attention. There were also allusions to intersections with the supernatural, but this was chiefly restricted to a differentiation of Christian denominations.

Then there were the many roles of bordering in collective memory as well as memory management in the public space (via different types of media). What is chosen to be remembered and how one decides to remember it, or what one would prefer to forget and just simply ignore are deliberate choices made in an on-going engagement and re-negotiation with the past. Several papers touched on this problem, ranging from PER RUDLING's (Singapore) Be-

larusian People's Republic to border museums in Texas, presented by ALEXANDER SCHWANEBECK (Köln). What separates the Texas and Belarusian experiences is whether there is an alignment of oral history and personal memory with a cogently crafted, centrally elevated, and carefully managed narrative. This alignment can either be deliberate or subconscious as people seek to reconcile their own personal or family experiences with a meta-narrative that is put on display in national museums and special exhibits, or then found in school textbooks and in social media. These meta-narratives significantly contribute to how personal experiences are understood and give primordial shape to what and how things are remembered. A number of papers looked at borders and bordering as *lieux de mémoires*, or so-called „realms of memory“. PAWEŁ MIGDAŁSKI's (Szczecin) paper was interesting insofar as he showed how the western border of Poland was reinforced through means of targeted commemorative action, from churches to memorials, coins and postage stamps. These were not only designed to create and shape awareness within the broader segments of Poland's population, but significantly also acted as symbolic reinforcements and instruments of broader societal validation. Another paper that picked up this theme of the Polish western border was by MAŁGORZATA DĄBROWSKA (Szczecin).

The duopoly of centre and periphery was also bound to arise. There were several papers that addressed centrality, marginality, standing at the fringe, or repercussions of shifting from one to the other. Examples from Belarus, Ukraine, Estonia, Denmark and also the United States were mentioned. The city of Narva assumed the centre of attention in the papers by ANDREY MAKARYCHEV (Tartu) and KARI ALENUS (Oulu). The media moved into the picture when it became necessary to address misconceptions, raise awareness, or also to develop public policies with an aim of rectifying a perceived imbalance. In the case of the Ukraine, LINDA KINSTLER (Berkeley) and MYKOLA MARKHORTYKH introduced the power of the new media and showed how anonymous random testimonies can be brought into an information collage to

become a work of art that clashes with established views portrayed in the mainstream media. Against the backdrop of recent developments it is unsurprising that topics such as Europe's outer borders, migration, conflict, and access points would move to the forefront of debate. As KAZIMIERZ MUSIAŁ (Gdansk) explained in his keynote opening address for the second day, such access points could be both physical (such as border crossings), or epistemic (spatial, disciplinary, contextual and temporal).

Maps and cartography in general formed the backbone of panel IV with presentations by PAWEŁ MIGDAŁSKI (Szczecin), DMITRY SAVCHENKO (St Petersburg) and MYKOLA MAKHORTYKH (Amsterdam). Maps, first and foremost, are visual aids. They can be made to inform or even deceive; they can stake claims and project power. Several presentations highlighted the significance of satellite and interactive digital mapping, and juxtaposed these to the traditional „static“ maps. Interactive digital maps, moreover, have changed both the learning experience and knowledge landscape, and they have done so with serious consequences as well: for the dissemination of knowledge, for understanding and developing military strategy, for propagandistic ends, or for announcing political ambitions. Some papers also singled out the ability of digital maps to be quickly updated, projected, legitimized, interpreted, as well as decoded. They are particularly effective in supplementing the dearth or abuse of information from persons on the spot. These led on to questions about how violence can be cleansed or smoothed from maps. Two papers raised the democratization of knowledge, but democratization is always associated with a certain messiness where one or a few interpretations will eventually prevail in a gradual consensus-building process. This raised questions of who is empowered to enter and update the interactive digital data, who maintains it, and who might continue to draw on it in the future.

Conference Overview:

Keynote

Vlad Strukov (Leeds): Future Borders: Media and Mediations in the Age of Artificial Intelli-

gence

Panel I: Border Challenges

Olga Dorokhina (Tbilisi): Evolution of the Description of New Dividing Lines in Mass Media (on the Example of Georgia)

Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (Lund): Stereotypes and Bordering - The Image of Poland in Sweden

Per Rudling (Singapore): The Belarusian People's Republic at 100 – Europe's Last Government-in-Exile: Communicating Nationalism and Migrating Memory

Veronica Castillo-Muñoz (Santa Barbara): A Transnational Revolution? U.S. Investors, Rebels, and Workers across the U.S. - Mexico Borderlands

Panel II: Border Crossings

Margot Damiens (Paris): From the Same to the Other: Crossing the Border(s) between Denmark and the Holy Roman Empire in the 18th century

Linda Kinstler (Berkeley): The Phenomenology of the Contact Line

Claire M. Massey (Greifswald): Proclamation! Poetry as Resistance in the US Mexico Borderlands

Panel III: Border Exhibitions

Alexander Schwanebeck (Cologne): African Americans in Contact Zones. US - Museums and Representations of 19th Century South-Western Borderlands

Kamil Bembnista / Thorsten Heimann (Erkner): Discursive Borders and the Construction of Memory. Different Orders of Knowledge in Slubice and Frankfurt (Oder) 20 Years after the Odra Flood from 1997

Andrey Makarychev (Tartu): Narva as a Cultural Borderland: From the 1993 Referendum to the 2024 European Cultural Capital

Keynote

Kazimierz Musiał (Gdansk): Epistemic Gateways to the Baltic Sea Region and About Possible Consequences of Using Them

Panel IV: Mediating Borders

Mykola Makhortykh (Amsterdam): Charting the Conflicted Borders: Narrating the Conflict in Eastern Ukraine Through Digital Maps

Dmitry Savchenko (St. Petersburg): The Border Between Russia and Belarus: Cross or Transgress

Paweł Migdałski (Szczecin): Polish Border Posts on Oder River. Symbolic View of Polish - German Border in Pomerania during Polish People's Republic Period

Panel V: Depicting Borders

Kari Alenius (Oulu): The „Wild East“ of Estonia. The New Border Areas Depicted by the Estonian Media, 1918 – 1940

Małgorzata Dąbrowska (Szczecin): The Loss of the Lubusz Land in the Middle Ages as Narrative of Constructing the Post-war Ziemia Lubuska

Anti Selart (Tartu): Humble and Despised Latvians. The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia and the Good and Evil Peoples in Livonian History

Final Remarks

Peter Borschberg (Singapore)

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