

### **Minorities, Migration and Memory in East European Borderlands (1945 – present)**

**Veranstalter:** Imke Hansen / Katrin Steffen, Nordost-Institut Lüneburg; Ruth Leiserowitz, German Historical Institute Warsaw

**Datum, Ort:** 24.09.2019–26.09.2019, Warschau

**Bericht von:** Ruta Matimaitytė, Vilnius University / Antonia Wind, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg

With transregional approaches and sensitivity for the dynamics of entanglement, disentanglement and transfer, the speakers presented post-war East European borderlands as interwoven sites of cultures, politics, and social discourses. The speakers devoted particular attention to the topic of minorities and (past) multi-ethnicity. Consequently, a considerable part of the discussion focused borderland identities between separation and suture, borderland narrations and biographies. Politics of resettlement and national reframing, and their remaining traces formed another main topic of the conference.

The principal investigators of the DFG/NCN-Project, KATRIN STEFFEN (Lüneburg) and BARBARA PABJAN (Wrocław), opened the conference, expressing their hope to initiate transdisciplinary, transnational and comparative perspectives on the history of East European peripheries. The following six panels on the topics landscape and memory; fixed and phantomized borders; narratives, identification and representation; and inclusion, exclusion and repression managed to follow this outlined path.

A public lecture with the refreshing format of a dialogic keynote by RUTH LEISEROWITZ (Warsaw) and CATHERINE GOUSSEFF (Paris) opened the space for a vivid theoretical discussion on borderlands and their features and particularities. Further, Leiserowitz presented East Prussia as an archetype of borderlands, whose existence the former GDR hid in front of his citizens. Gousseff mentioned the radical displacement of Poles and Ukrainians as part of an enforced population exchange in Western Ukraine in post-war time.

As part of the first panel, BARBARA PABJAN and MATEUSZ GAŁKOWSKI (Wrocław)

presented a vivid picture of landscapes of memory in two Polish cities: Dzierżoniów and Racibórz. They scrutinized a correlation between migration rate and different attitudes towards the memory of the minorities in both places. In case of Dzierżoniów a higher migration movement could be serving as an explanation for the negative attitude towards the commemoration of the minority. The homogenous society might develop stronger excluding mechanisms than in Racibórz, where they registered a more heterogeneous community with a lower migration rate. Further, Pabjan and Gałkowski pointed out that there might be a coherence with the ethnic affiliation of the minorities: a Jewish minority in Dzierżoniów and a German/Silesian in Racibórz. In both cases strong local identities collided with implanted stereotypes.

SABINE VON LOEWIS (Berlin) opened the second conference day and the panel „Borders – fixed and phantomized“. In Western Ukraine she identified phantom borders, which she defined as detectable places of a borderland past, whose former, predominant, political borders still seem to structure the region today. In her case study about spatial experiences she looked upon the economic structure of agriculturally shaped villages in Soviet period. Since enterprises rented the decollectivized farms in these areas, Loewis worked out feelings of grief regarding the loss of their great agricultural past. Simultaneously the enterprises awoke new expectations and should fulfil the responsibility for the village communities. As one of her results, she identified how the individuals dealt with the past, regardless of the intensity and duration of Soviet power.

MELINDA HARLOV-CSORTÁN (Budapest) researched on the present memory culture of a German minority group in Austrian-Hungarian borderland, taking into account border crossing theoretical questions of identity. After 1945, the minorities were expelled from these territories, only after the Cold War era the silence broke up and a new remembrance boom could take place. On the Austrian side, she observed a represented image, which was influenced by tourism and vacation; on the Hungarian side, the focus was more on nature reserve and the memory

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of the Cold War period. The treatment of the minorities seemed to be rather sensitive and led to a wide landscape of memory today: folk culture, festivals, bilingual street names and especially considering the deportation with an official commemoration day and monuments.

By conducting Oral History interviews with members of the German minority in Upper Silesia, IMKE HANSEN (Lüneburg) was able to represent new approaches concerning their own definition of borderland identities - relationship to the border emerging from border shifting, multilingualism, identifying through memory, family tradition. Through the interviews, Hansen pointed out a kind of colonial narrative, which arose from the perception how Polish inhabitants described the relationship to German minority members and their assumed superior thinking towards the Poles.

In the last panel, LAURA-JANE DUQUESNEY (Paris) enhanced the conference's panorama by contouring the historical and current conditions of the Bulgarian and Gaugazian minorities in Ukraine and Republic of Moldova. She identified three survival strategies, especially of the Gaugazians. Firstly, the upcoming Gaugazian nationalism and movements for autonomy during the Perestroika period expressed the search for their political and linguistic survival. Secondly, referred to the right of self-determination, they enforced the building of the Autonomous Territorial Unit (ATU) of Gaugazia, which is divided by land of Republic of Moldavia. A controversial referendum in 2014 revealed the aspiration to prevent European influence, instead becoming part of CIS countries. The third mechanism was related to the economic situation in Gaugazia, which provoked a survival through emigration in mostly Russian or Turkish speaking regions.

The organizers recapitulated the conference, observing the complexity of East European border areas. A common feature of the discussed regions is basically their search for constructing or changing identities, influenced by processes of migration, assimilation and displacement due to World War II. To figure out the „Eigensinn“ of these areas, it seems evident to work more on transna-

tional and comparative studies. One recurrent question was how to integrate the history of borderlands into European history. IMKE HANSEN suggested including a transgenerational and micro historical aspect, which means to look upon individual and family stories as well.

#### **Conference overview:**

##### *Keynote:*

CATHERINE GOUSSEFF (Paris) and RUTH LEISEROWITZ (Warsaw): Beyond Borders. A Dialogic Keynote on East European Borderlands

##### *Panel I*

BARBARA PABJAN and MATEUSZ GAŁOWSKI (Wrocław): Migration and Memory of Ethnic Groups. Collective Memory of Post-Migration Communities

JULIA OISBOIT (Berlin): From Liberator to Settler. Informal Jewish Space in Post-war Kaliningrad

JOHANN NICOLAI (Dresden): Silesian „Jeckes“ in Israel and their Remembrance of the Lost Homeland

##### *Panel II*

SABINE VON LÖWIS (Berlin): A Former Borderland Today. Phantom Borders in Western Ukraine

ANNA ZADORA (Strasbourg): Phantom Boundaries between Belarusians and Poles. From Informal Practice to Contested Sovereignty

MELINDA HARLOV-CSORTÁN (Budapest): Heritagizing the German-speaking Minority in the Borderzone. But Do We Remember Them?

##### *Panel III*

ANNA LAGNO (Moscow): Western Ukraine or Eastern Poland? Destiny, Memory and Identity between Border Shifting and Repatriation after World War II

IMKE HANSEN (Lüneburg): Making a Narrative Borderland. Borders, Being and Belonging in Upper Silesian Oral History Interviews

MAGDALENA BARAN (Vienna): Transgenerational and Transnational Narratives. Shifting Borders in Silesia and Galicia in German-Polish Contemporary Literature

*Panel IV*

PÉTER BEDŐK (Budapest): The Representation of Hungary in Međimurje after 1945

YULIYA ABIBOK (Kiew): „We are not Donbas.“ Public Identity of Mariupol Inhabitants before and after 2014

*Panel V*

MARIA REISKY (Opole): German Names as a Political Problem in post-war Poland. Casus Krzanowice Community, District of Racibórz

LAURA-JANE DUQUESNEY (Paris): The Bulgarians and Gagauzians from the ex-USSR. Minorities of the Republic of Moldova and of Ukraine

TIMO MARCEL ALBRECHT (Göttingen): „Volksdeutsche“ in Central-East European States after 1945. A Legal Historian's Perspective

MAREK SZAJDA (Wrocław): Jewish Society in Dzierżoniów 1967-1968. A Microhistory of Decline

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