

ECHOING BORDERS: The Production of Space within New Paradigms of Citizenship

Nora Akawi, Nina V. Kolowratnik

With the overwhelming density and rate of forced migration in the world, borders are multiplying and dissolving, shifting and transforming, challenging static forms of representation of boundaries and of mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion. This seminar takes as a starting point our problematic understanding of territoriality, which is still heavily rooted in our imagination of the world as divided into compartmentalized, distinct, and mutually exclusive formations.

Addressing issues of mobility, fluidity, and geopolitical transformation, especially in relation to the place of the refugee in migration politics, requires the rethinking of spatial visualization tools: moving beyond the static representation and understanding of identities, borders, territories and topographies of legal and control mechanisms, into depicting their mobile and fluctuating reality. The hope is for new imaginaries and readings of the territories in question to emerge.

The conventional, static form of representation of geopolitical borders brings forth the central problematic question, and the tension where the project situates itself: the tension between the rising density and rate of migration across borders on the one hand, and the static definitions of contemporary citizenship and human or citizen rights on the other. By realizing that borders are physically manifested through fences and trenches, but also through international networks of border patrol, biometric identification, access to shelter, jobs, and healthcare, and fluctuating policies and regulations, the project attempts to redraw contemporary borders with a focus on elements of movement and time – challenging static representations of what are in fact mobile and fluctuating conditions.

In particular, the figure of the refugee calls for addressing questions on mobility, temporariness, and access in contrast to the static character of the sovereign state and its borders, and to the geopolitical limits of citizenship and human rights. As we experience a time of momentous transformations, we want to rethink our disciplinary tools and resources to re-present the landscapes of control, risk and suspension forming contemporary borders. Mobilizing familiar visualization attributes and activating them not as static representations, but as processes in themselves; not to be taken as technologies of capture, but as techniques of addition.

“How does one focus on moves when all one has is nouns with which to work?” In response to this question, scholars have called for the introduction of the notion of “verbing” into communication studies (Brenda Dervin, 1993). They have worked with terms like “bordering”, “securitizing”, and “refugeeing”. On “bordering” they suggest that our ingrained notions of territorialized identities, borders and orders are spatialized and de-spatialized, and destabilized in radical new ways by acts of “bordering”: the inscription, crossing, removal, transformation, multiplication or diversification of borders. It is the act of bordering then, that is in itself, a series of moments of spatial arrestation of the continued reconfiguration occurring at the identities, borders, and rights nexus, on the one hand. And on the other hand, it is the materialization of contemporary migration politics, which allows us to read borders and orders that are “in-formation” and to rattle their dangerously static representations.^{[1][2]}

Borrowing from critical cartography discourse, these visualizations “have no ontological security; they are of-the-moment: transitory, fleeting, contingent, relational and context dependent. They are never fully formed and their work is never complete” (Kitchin and Dodge 2007). They recognize that they are never complete, which allows for them to capture processes. And perhaps “make room for things to happen”? (Deleuze & Guatari 2004 – A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia)

Course Structure

The semester will be structured through discussions on weekly readings (see bibliography below), and three exercises: conceptual diagrams, a mapping project, and a short essay.

Conceptual diagrams: Based on the readings, participants will develop diagrams on concepts of hospitality, human rights and citizenship.

Mapping project: Each participant will develop its individual research topic of a particular border context into a cartographic study and critical mapping focusing on migration and movement across borders.

Essay: In parallel to the mapping exercise, participants will develop the theoretical framework and their context specific research through which they will argue for and complement their mapping methodology. The essay should range from 2500 to 3000 words.

Grading Structure

20% Participation and readings discussions

10% Conceptual diagrams

15% Midterm paper submission

15% Midterm mapping project presentation

20% Final paper submission

20% Final mapping project presentation