How the Border Colonizes Our Everyday Life: Urban Borderlands, Citizenship, and the Politics of Contestation

Henrik Lebuhn, HU Berlin

Abstract

Various countries in the world have seen a proliferation of borders over the past few decades. Rather than leading to a world of free migration and mobility, globalization appears to have transformed the old lines of territorial demarcation. New regimes of control and exclusion have emerged that expand into the public and private spaces of everyday life, far from any actual border. Simultaneously, immigrant rights movements have mobilized against restrictive border policies and progressive politicians and administrative agencies have developed strategies to maintain or create social entitlements for citizens and denizens alike. In this process, cities with their institutional density and as hubs of migration have become an important arena, where the connection between borders and citizenship is negotiated, contested, and re-shaped “on the ground.” This concerns not only the regulation of regional labor markets, but also access to education, housing, health care, and cultural citizenship. This lecture draws from research in Europe and North America, and offers a conceptual framework that links border studies with research on urban citizenship and presents a comparative approach that explores the socio-political forces and effects at work in different settings.

Revisiting Borders: New Ideas in Border Studies
Borders are generally understood as lines and edges. They also signify the spatial separation or division between distinct entities. However, such recognitions have increasingly become obsolete in understanding how borders function in the immensely complicated world we live today. From this perspective, we face the risk of an increasing disconnection between the complexity of the world on one hand, and the lack of imagination with which borders and bordering practices continued to be dealt with on the other. Therefore, we need to revisit borders in terms of the constantly changing political and social contexts to comprehend their “undetermined” nature in time and space.

Some new approaches to Border Studies have offered new understandings of border spaces as processes. Borders are constantly being imagined and reimagined. What needs to be examined is the following: By whom, how, and why are borders created? Whose interests and motivations are served? How may we conceptualize the multifaceted and ever-changing nature of borders? These questions lead to the pursuit of a critical understanding of “the socially constructed nature of borders.”

Engendering Borders: Women and Children Living in the China-Hong Kong Borderland

CHOI Susanne Y.P.

Abstract

Advances in transportation and communication technology and the accelerated process of globalization have prompted some to envision a borderless world. Instead, in the past decade we have witnessed increasingly uninhibited anti-migration movements, which have culminated in the election of a commander-in-chief in the most powerful country of the world whose foremost agenda includes building a wall to fend off immigrants from neighboring countries. Border-crossing, border politics, and borderlands are therefore three simultaneous processes in the contemporary world. Although recent studies of borderlands have attempted to adopt a bottom-up perspective that foregrounds the impacts of bordering on the lives of ordinary people, insufficient attention has been paid to the gender dynamics of this process. Using the experiences of cross-border families living in and around the China-Hong Kong borderland, this paper examines how female marriage migrants and their families are constrained by border regimes, stigmatized by border politics, and actively build a life around bordering. This
case study underlines the tension between globalization, the persistent salience of border regimes, and the conflicts of interest between communities and individuals located on different sides of the border. It also brings to the forefront the intersectionality of border politics and traditional axes of inequality including, but not limited to gender.