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Debordering and everyday (re)bordering in and of Dover: Post-borderland borderscapes

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we argue that traditional borderlands have undergone a rapid transformation in recent decades, as a result of multiscalar de- and rebordering processes. We draw on recent insights from critical border studies to re-examine one of its historical sites of research, Dover in South East England. In doing so, we seek to elucidate what happens in border towns, when de- and re-bordering processes effectively displace key aspects of the border elsewhere. We argue that this shift is critical not only due to the decline of economic opportunities and ties to the border, but also because these necessitate new narratives and understandings or imaginaries amongst borderlanders. Whilst all elements of the border have not been dispersed, many have materially 'moved' elsewhere. We posit that Dover, like other border settlements, has become a post-borderland borderscape, where we can see evidence of everyday bordering processes similar to those elsewhere in the UK and use a situated, intersectional framework to illustrate the impact that differential social positionings have upon experiences of and perspectives on de-and-reborderings.

Introduction

In this article we ask critical questions about what happens to so-called borderlands when the border or more accurately 'borderings' are displaced to other spaces. In doing so, we explore recent processes that have been the key focus of critical border studies, which have challenged theoretically the territorial fixity of borders (van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002; Newman, 2011; Scott, 2011, pp. 123–142), but also emergent policies which undermine processes that gave some credence to at least a public sense of fixity (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, & Cassidy, in press, b). We posit that being in and of the borderland has long constituted a sense of belonging for UK borderlanders and that although the 'place' of the border has now been challenged conceptually, for many borderlanders, despite its precarity, it gave both material and symbolic meaning to life in the borderlands. In acknowledging the dynamic of socially and spatially differentiated processes of bordering, much recent work has shifted the focus away from the 'traditional' empirical sites of border studies – border communities. Here, we draw these insights together to better understand exactly how these borderscapes (Brambilla, Laine, Scott, & Bocchi, 2015) are being deconstructed and reconstructed through the differentially situated gazes of borderlanders.

We argue for a post-borderland borderscape – a space which remains embedded in its narratives of the border(land) in spite of a complex array of de- and rebordering processes, which have shifted social, economic and political relations. But just like any 'post', what came before is an imaginary, a construction of fixity or territory which still lingers on in the situated imaginations (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002) of the borderlanders, who derived meaning and understanding from it. We argue that in such a borderscape, (post-)borderlanders undertake a range of practices or 'borderwork' in everyday life in order to challenge these emergent processes, which do not reflect their understanding of the borderland. In disputing these processes, borderlanders' differentially situated gazes are visible, as their accounts of what was past and present are contradictory and, at times, conflictual. To fully understand post-borderland borderscapes, we need to operate a dialogical epistemology (Hill-Collins, 1990) encompassing these varied situated gazes which contribute different aspects as well as perspectives of

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the local situation.

State-sponsored de-bordering processes in border towns, such as Dover, have contributed to a reduction in employment in occupations traditionally associated with the 'industry' of the border, e.g. at the port. With the construction of the Channel Tunnel, whose entrance for vehicles is based in nearby Folkestone and whose frequent trains services now connect London directly with cities on the continent, such as Paris and Brussels, the border has to a great extent materially moved elsewhere; to the Eurostar terminals in St Pancras and Gare du Nord for those travelling by train or to Coquelles for the Eurotunnel, due to the UK-French agreement on juxtaposed controls. These local processes have been accompanied by an increasing internalisation of (de)bordering processes, particularly as a result of recent UK immigration legislation, which have shifted borders away from the margins and into everyday life (Lahav & Guiraudon, 2000). For example, those living in the UK are now subject to immigration checks as part of everyday activities, such as in renting a home, applying for a job or bank account and accessing healthcare. At the same time whilst the port has remained one of the busiest in Europe, the town of Dover has become increasingly disconnected from activities there. This is evident in the stream of traffic that still uses the port for cheaper travel to the continent and the coaches that whisk cruise passengers away from the Western Docks to the quaint historic streets of Canterbury or the retail outlets at Ashford.

In framing Dover as a 'post-borderland' borderscape, we draw a connection between the emergence of borders or borderings in other spaces and the debordering (Sohn, 2014) of border areas and explore the differentially situated perspectives of local inhabitants as they seek to understand these changes. In our analysis, we draw upon Anzaldua's 'mestiza consciousness' (2007) of the borderlands, which challenges the essentializing approaches common to early identity and minority political struggles. We argue that whilst the border may have become less present due to debordering processes, it remains a central theme in local consciousness(es) or border imaginaries, which are bound up in but not reducible to national-level contextual discourses in the media and politics. Our situated intersectional approach presents an alternative to methodological nationalism by utilizing a holistic, place-based analytical lens, which encompasses migrants and non-migrants. Caglar (2016) believes this is necessary as a means to create coevalness between migrants and non-migrants and deconstruct the boundaries inherent in the vast majority of literature on migration. Caglar suggests the use of 'emplacement', i.e. the processes by which all urban dwellers attempt to create a place for themselves in cities amidst 'the processes of dispossession and displacement […] entangled with the accumulation of capital and the restructuring processes of cities' (Caglar 2016: 10). An intersectional approach situates migrants and non-migrants within processes of social stratification, dehomogenizes them and does not privilege (non)'-migrantness' ahead of other categorisations. In this case we are concerned less with processes impacting cities and more with restructuring of the UK's borderlands, and in Dover in particular because of the ongoing importance of the border in local imaginaries, even in light of the displacement of some bordering processes to other locations.

This paper is drawn from ethnographic research we carried out in Dover (and surrounding areas), primarily between April 2013 and May 2014. The material used in the paper was, therefore, collected before the 'Brexit' EU referendum had taken place, but the nostalgic hankering for 'proper' national borders evident in the imaginaries of the people we interviewed is one of the factors which contributed to the fact that Dover, like the overwhelming majority of English and Welsh coastal towns, voted to leave the EU. The notion of the post-borderland borderscape which is presented in this article is a descriptive snap shot of a particular time-place construction which no doubt will change again dramatically as a result of Brexit. However, this does not diminish its analytical importance as one of the outcomes of de- and re-bordering processes that have taken place as a result of the EU political project as well as wider political, economic and technological globalisation processes.

We begin the paper with a brief description of processes of debordering in and of Dover, focusing particularly on infrastructural changes including the construction of the Channel Tunnel, the 'Sangatte Protocol' and juxtaposed controls, EU labour migration and the 'border-as-resource' (Sohn, 2014). We then present a short review of the relevant literature on bordering(s), borderlands and borderwork, framing the need for a situated intersectional approach to border studies. Following a brief methodological note, we use in the final section of the paper ethnographic material from Dover to explore differentiated perceptions and experiences of the bordering, de-and-rebordering processes.

Debordering Dover

Infrastructural change and debordering

Whilst the 'debordering' in and of Dover can be linked more widely to historical changes in travel and tourism, we will commence our detailed review of these processes with the opening of the Channel Tunnel. The tunnel itself had been part of contemporary academic and policy debates since the 1950s, which led initially to a proposal in 1963 upon which the current tunnel is based. After a false start in 1973, the plan was relaunched in 1981 at the Anglo-French summit. The tunnel was seen to be a means to remove what was widely considered to be a final barrier to the single market of the European Economic Area, namely direct road and rail links to the continent (Fayman et al., 1995). The so-called bottleneck caused by ferry transportation at Dover was to be bypassed by a rail connection from nearby Folkestone to Coquelles in France. Unlike in France, where plans for the tunnel involved collaboration between central, regional and local government, planning on the British side was very much undertaken by central government (Dundon-Smith & Gibb, 1994).

At the same time as the Channel Tunnel was completed, Dover also became connected to the new M20 motorway via a dual carriageway extension to the A20, which opened in 1993. This extension links the port directly to the motorway and at the same time cuts the town off from the port. Dover remains the UK's busiest port, carrying 12.7 million short sea international ferry passengers (a 7% annual increase), however this figure was 20% lower than in 10 years previously (Department for Transport, 2013). International sea passenger journeys for all ports have been in decline since the Channel Tunnel opened in 1994 (Department for Transport, 2013).

Debordering and juxtaposed controls

The tunnel opened in 1994 and in addition to the loss of traffic through Dover, which will be discussed in more detail below, the construction of the tunnel also led to the signing of an agreement between France and the UK, the so-called 'Sangatte Protocol' (1991). According to the protocol, French and British immigration and customs officials would undertake checks on the territory of the other state, i.e. for the French in Folkestone and the British in Coquelles. These have become known as the juxtaposed controls and were extended in 2000 to encompass train services from France and in 2004 to incorporate Belgian services as well. Consequently, not only were immigration and customs checks, an

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