Shifting German and Central and East European Landscapes: Cultural Hybridity and Place

Conference abstracts

Jon E Fox (The University of Bristol)
Kin states, external minorities, and the illusion of national unity

Ernest Gellner defines nationalism as the project to make the state, the political unit, congruent with the nation, the cultural unit. This project is pursued when there is an imperfect fit between nations and states. Some states are too big for their nations, and some nations are too big for their states. In the latter case it is not uncommon to find states portraying themselves as the state of the entire nation, even that portion of it that spills beyond its political boundaries. This relationship is expressed variably in immigration policies that privilege co-ethnicity as a criterion of ‘return’, educational policies that promote the titular national language and culture in countries where the national minority is found, and political sponsorship (and patronage) of local political parties and organisations that purport to represent the interests of the national minority abroad. The shared objective of these and related strategies is to unify the nation across political boundaries. But to what extent is this national unification successful? The purpose of this paper is to consider two important obstacles to national unification. The first is contending with other national sensibilities, and the second is contending with non-national sensibilities. In the first instance, kin states are faced with external national minorities who have been socialised in different national contexts. As a result these national minorities often confront their putative national homeland as a foreign country. In the second case, kin states have to also contend with national indifference. The politics of national unification does not always resonate evenly with those people in whose name it claims to speak. Drawing on examples from Hungary’s fraught relationship with Hungarians in Transylvania, this paper will explore the illusion of national unity.
David Galbreath (The University of Bath)
Place and 'Other' in an Age of Democratic Justice

This paper looks at how the modern state is challenged by notions of the 'other' in contemporary political debates. With the 'death of/to multiculturalism' abound, this paper challenges the territorial basis of the modern democratic state arguing that this characteristic of territoriality maintains the systems of state vs minority, majority vs minority and liberal democracy vs minorities, to the detriment of all. Working towards problematising the protection regime for its lack of empowerment, this paper looks towards the basis of social democratic justice as a means of transforming these systems of power. The paper speaks to ethnic and linguistic minorities and migrants.

Ada-Charlotte Regelmann (Queen’s University Belfast)
RussenDiskoPartizani. Ethnic minority participation in the political process

Research on majority-minority integration in liberal democracies across Europe points to the crucial impact institutional legacies and external pressures have on domestic policy-making. These studies explain interethnic integration by the functional imperatives of the liberal state and the allaying impact of democratization and minority protection norms on nation-state building. Other contributions to the debate place minorities at the centre of enquiry, emphasizing the salience of the perceptions and motivations of minority actors involved in interethnic bargaining and ethnic mobilization. Overall, despite wide acknowledgement of the idea that integration is a ‘two-way process’, studies of interethnic integration often portray minorities as a problem to integration, security and regional stability rather than part of the solution for such challenges. These contributions either over- or under-emphasize minorities’ potential to induce social and institutional change and leave out of the debate some of the institutional and structural contexts most crucial to the political participation of minorities. Building on these contributions, my paper asks how non-dominant groups, such as ethnic minorities, can shape the very institutional settings that constitute their minority status. Embedded in a structurationist theory of agency I distinguish two mutually constitutive processes of minority integration: First, how do the institutional dynamics of ethnic diversity management impact minorities’ perceptions of their own opportunities to participate in the political process; second, what are the converse effects this has on minority political actor formation as well as on institutions. By the example of minorities in Estonia and Slovakia the argument is made that minority participation is constrained by the resilience of the essentialist system of group relations and its 'self-reinforcing' potential; this is expressed in dominant minority agendas calling for participation based on territorial strength, community self-rule, or group distinctiveness. These agendas mirror, as well as reinforce, the emphases of institutions regulating group relations. Consequently, my study suggests that minority participation plays an important role in state- and nation-building. At the same time, minority policies shape minorities’ political agendas, effectively constraining minority groups’ attempts to establish themselves as autonomous political actors.
Gaëlle Fisher (University College, London)
Creating Homes and Building Myths: the Case of Darmstadt's Heimstaettesiedlung

The paper will explore the memory of displacement of Germans from Bukovina. It takes as its case study a particular area of Darmstadt that welcomed a number of Vertriebene after World War II, including a few thousand Germans from Bukovina, but also the Donauschwaben and the Einheimischen who settled in what has been called the Heimstaettesiedlung in the south of the city. It will investigate the interaction of discourses about the settlement's history and character - the competing and overlapping discourses of belonging - which can be understood as processes of home-making and myth-making. The paper highlights the tensions and contradictions between the desire for integration and the 'minority status' or 'difference' of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe. Notions of authenticity and hybridity are therefore important alongside concepts around place-making and home-making.

William Niven (Nottingham Trent University)
Europeanising the memory of expulsion: the work of Sabrina Janesch

This paper examines two novels by Sabrina Janesch, Katzenberge (2010) and Ambra (2012). Janesch is arguably the first German writer to produce a truly European literature of expulsion. Her writings echo with the experiences of displaced Poles as well as Germans, and show that these experiences of double displacement are often inextricably interwoven – not just historically, but also within individual families, and within the supernatural sphere of hauntings and spells which characterise her work. Does Janesch's work represent a new way of contextualising and understanding the difficult German legacy of flight and expulsion?

Karoline von Oppen (University of Bath)
Saving multiculturalism? Saving the nation?

This paper argues that the war in Yugoslavia (1991-1995) has had a negative impact on discussions about multiculturalism in Germany. While many liberal reporters and intellectuals claimed to be passionately defending coexistence in Bosnia, it seems that they may in fact have contributed to a growing scepticism of multicultural models. Analysing representations and discussions of ethnicity and nationalism, this contribution argues that German reporters were too caught up in Cold War ideologies and their own post-Wall national celebrations to comprehend the exact nature of multiculturalism in Bosnia. As a consequence, they missed an opportunity to acknowledge a radical model of Christian/Islamic coexistence in Europe that might have had an impact on Germany?5s problematic relationship with its own migrant populations. Instead, they made an important contribution to the so-called normalisation of the recently reunited German nation-state.
Renate Rechtien (University of Bath)

**Overcoming nationhood? The Turkish-German axis in recent German cinema and literature**

This paper explores representations of Turkish-German identity constructions in recent German cinema and literature. Drawing on a number of films by Fatih Akin (Head On, The Edge of Heaven, Soul Kitchen) as well as on Yadé Kara’s text Selam Berlin (2003), the paper explores whether hybrid identity constructions and complex identifications by individuals with a multiplicity of places and spaces are able to provide credible alternatives to notions of belonging associated with national or sub-national spaces and processes of ‘home-making’. Given that even discourses about multiculturalism in Germany which aim to foster inclusion, tend instead, especially where Turkish-German minorities are concerned, to re-inscribe bipolar notions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ (Yildiz 2012), the paper explores the degree to which Turkish-German cinema and writing may be said to have moved beyond such polarities. Investigating in particular potential tensions between what Pierre Bourdieu has captured theoretically with his notion of ‘habitus’ on the one hand and individual’s desire for agency and self-definition in a globalised world on the other, the paper will ask what kind of Germany second and third generation migrants are constructing and whether this Germany to them is envisioned as (at least potential) home or as a lost Germany.

Sabine Egger (University of Limerick)

„The East“ as a transit space in the new Europe? Transcultural train journeys in contemporary German literature

The past three decades have seen the development of a European literature characterized by multi-ethnic themes and the emergence of transcultural subjects and spaces. Following the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the enlargement of the European Union, with migration an everyday reality for many in this new Europe, geographical and historical borders are being questioned in literary texts by spaces of hybridity, cultural overlap or encounter. This also applies to dichotomies which have defined images of Europe at different times, not least that between “East” and “West”. In texts subverting such dichotomies by contemporary German-speaking writers, the train journey into the East emerges as a recurrent motif. The traveller encounters this East in Siberia, but also in various places or spaces in Central and Eastern Europe. Examples to be discussed include poems and narrative texts by Lutz Seiler, Kurt Drawert and Herta Müller. My analysis will focus on movement in these texts, which tends to affect temporal and genre boundaries as much as those between self and Other. The train itself or the landscape travelled through becomes a transcultural or transit space. Spatial concepts by Benjamin, de Certeau and Augé will be employed, also to take a critical look at ideas of hybridity, inter- or transcultural relations.