

Research program
***“Borderscaping: thinking, acting, inhabiting the border-migration nexus
at the borders of Europe, in the Mediterranean and beyond”***

Annex C

Department of Human and social sciences

Tutor: Prof. Gianluca Bocchi

Project research

The Mediterranean has emerged in the last years as a crucial space for investigating borders not as taken-for-granted entities exclusively connected to the territorial limits of nation-states, but as mobile, relational and contested sites, thereby exploring alternative border imaginaries 'beyond the line'. Emerging as a crucial laboratory for elaborating innovative concepts, methods and practices to face political and social changes in the contemporary era of globalization and transnational flows, the Mediterranean speaks directly to some of the key themes focused by critical border studies that has been characterized in recent years by an increasing concern about the need to revisit its traditional conceptual and methodological toolbox to better understand the shifting nature of bordering processes 'beyond the line'.

Although the 'processual shift' (from 'border' to 'bordering') in border studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s has encouraged a significant turning point in the reflection on borders, this research is concerned at how the bordering perspective can be further broadened as the bordering lens is up to now too narrow to fully capture the multifarious implications that the constantly changing historical, political, and social Mediterranean contexts imply, given the backdrop of fluctuating and often dramatic scenarios of what has been labelled as the 'refugee/migration crisis'.

In the light of these needs, this research explores the conceptual and methodological potential of the borderscaping approach to investigate the complexity of the border-migration nexus at the borders of Europe, in the Mediterranean and beyond, from the geopolitical level to the level of social practices and cultural production, thereby considering borders as zones of contact and of multilinguistic and cultural exchange. Accordingly, borders are not only related to politically defined territories and to the exercise of political power, but they are also understood as complex entities defining the boundaries of what is permitted, culturally and socially prohibited or artistically justifiable; we have to deal with the aesthetic and conceptual borders defined by individuals and collective grammars. The critical potential of borderscaping is not only due to the fact that the borderscaping approach allows for the modern, state-centric geopolitical order to be called into question, which the concept of bordering does as well. Beyond this critical move, borderscaping also provides a political insight into border studies that encourages a better understanding of the multidimensional epistemic, linguistic, spatial, and temporal complexity of borders, thereby showing borders as resources in terms of the construction of alternative geopolitical imaginations, social and spatial imaginaries, cultural images and practical strategies to pursue them. Borderscaping fosters a productive understanding of Mediterranean imaginaries and beyond, as well the border-migration nexus by raising three arguments that the bordering perspective neglects:

The politics-aesthetics nexus and the need for considering that political implications of border imaginaries are closely interweaved with aesthetic activity, at the same time bringing into the foreground aesthetic languages' crucial position in the articulation and transformation of spatial imaginaries, which, in their turn, translate into beliefs, rules, policies, and practices.

The need for a 'genealogical' viewpoint on the border-migration nexus. Giving visibility to the 'time-print' of borders allows us to historicize the border-migration nexus and to avoid the ahistorical bias, which besets much of the discourse on the present political and socio-cultural Mediterranean challenges. This means rethinking Europe as an 'ambiguous space' that reflects its colonial and post-colonial experiences, also understanding the ambiguity that marks the EU's engagement with its various neighbourhoods.

The need for a novel methodological approach, which is conceived as political, performative and participatory. This would allow a double gaze that helps to overcome the gap between the two main approaches to borders - one focused on actual social processes at specific borders (what is called border studies) and the other using borders in a largely metaphorical and conceptual manner (what is called border theory). The differences between the two perspectives have recently generated indeed important discussions about how borders should be conceptualised and studied within the social sciences and the humanities. Today's long-sighted epistemologies point out the need to overcome modern oppositions between narratives and theories, between theories and practices, by highlighting, instead, how it is just in their interplay, in the space of translations between languages and disciplines, that a new emotional and synesthetic knowledge could be produced. Embracing this viewpoint, the borderscapes approach aims at showing the potential of developing an integrative approach dealing with socio-cultural practices and discourses as contact zones of language and culture, thereby bridging the insights of social sciences and humanities research on borders together for promoting a more comprehensive understanding of borders and the changing scenarios of globalised contemporaneity, as well the major changes affecting it, including migration and transnational flows.

Within this framework, the borderscapes approach contributes to showcase border research as an interdisciplinary field with its own academic standing.

These conceptual and methodological insights will be explored referring to multi-sited ethnographical research work on transversal, mobile Euro/African borderscapes, thereby describing the shifting processes of b/ordering 'in-between' Europe and Africa.

Objectives of research programme

Anchored in this conceptual and methodological background, the central objectives of the research programme are:

Elaborating about the need for an innovative multi-sited approach to borders at different levels. This approach involves not only a multi-sited rendering of borders in space, but also encompasses different socio-cultural, political, economic, legal and historical locations where a space of negotiating actors (not only the State), discourses, and practices is articulated.

Contributing to a deeper analysis of the relationship between bordering processes and the 'where' of borders - that is to say, their shifting and changing location - which initiates a complex interaction between processes and practices of border externalization and internalization. This enhances a critical understanding of the relationships between the hardening and policing of external political and territorial borders (which concern the exercise of modern state sovereignty) and the production of boundaries as internal social categorizations (which are related to politics of identity).

Contributing to respond to the urgency to bridge the gap between theory and practice in border studies to critically understand borders and bordering in and around contemporary Europe. By creating a sharp contrast between 'theory' and 'practice' we may be missing an opportunity in border studies to see how the ways in which we theorize borders have a very real implication for the borders we practice. This implies to extend the meaning given to 'borderscape' term by social sciences, mainly describing geopolitical connections, therefore relating the concept of borderscape not only to borders *sensu stricto*, but even to a more general and far-reaching approach to the multidimensional complexity of the very condition of border formation.

Exploring the conceptual and methodological potential of the borderscapes approach to investigate Mediterranean imaginaries and the complexity of the border-migration nexus at the borders of Europe, in the Mediterranean and beyond, from the geopolitical level to the level of social practices and cultural production.

Moving on with an understanding of borders as a resource for political innovation through conceptual (re)framings of social, political, economic, and cultural spaces. This would render possible a move towards a new politic of the Mediterranean based on a reconfiguration of its political space as a socially produced, processual, and relational site where a plurality of visions are interwoven, opening up the way for encouraging new conditions of possibility for agency.

Analysing the complex relation between the conceptual thinking about borders and their visual representation, by focusing on the notion of borderscapes and taking visibility as a research topic invoking the intersection of visibility, space and power in the constitution and transformation of contemporary European borderlands.

Advancing an interdisciplinary conceptual and methodological approach based on innovative ethnographic, multilingual and intercultural methods. Special attention should be given to people's perceptions, interpretations, experiences and representations of borders by adopting participatory and performative methodologies aimed at fostering not only participation but also engagement of a wide range of different actors.