

Double Lecture on the Austrian Border Management Regime

Tuesday, 17th April 2018, 3 pm
Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA)
Hollandstraße 11, 2nd floor, 1020 Vienna

Volunteers and NGOs in Austria's border management regime, Spielfeld 2015

Lukas Milo Strauss (University of Vienna)

In the wake of the EU's self-proclaimed „refugee crisis“, state institutions, NGOs and volunteer-activists met under new and rapidly changing circumstances. As state management of the union's internal borders was endowed with unprecedented relevance, border spaces became an arena for these diverse and highly political encounters. At the Austrian-Slovenian border in Spielfeld, the encounter took the form of a militarized, hierarchical border camp that differed sharply from the relative tranquility of nearby border crossings. Symbolizing the “state of exception” – by the end of 2015 a common trope in political and media discourses on refugees – it relied heavily on military presence, large numbers of state police and high-tech control strategies. At the same time, the camp also involved three NGOs and a considerable number of volunteers charged with handling the „humanitarian aspects“ of border/refugee management. Drawing mostly on raw data from my fieldwork in the camp (Nov. ’15 – Jan ’16), I want to sketch the discursive and practical production of a “state of exception” in everyday camp life. Furthermore, I want to elaborate on the ambivalent position of volunteers in the camp: when the spatialized hierarchy and its corresponding division of labor threatened to abstract their political convictions from their work, volunteers responded by deploying a number of subversive strategies that highlighted the tensions inherent in the state-NGO-activist encounter.

How the „Zillertaler Trachtenwelt“ became a border

MATERIALIZATION OF BORDER PROCESSES AT THE BRENNER IN TYROL

Marlene Persch (University of Vienna)

Recent research in the „Border Studies“ focuses on social theories dealing with the boundlessness of borders. A focus away from geographically fixed „borderlands“ and issues on bounded communities direct the attention towards limited access to state resources (cf. Bendixsen 2016, Ticktin 2011, Fassin 2005). Some approaches take a closer look towards the workings of the border in terms of its materiality (McGuire 2013), its eventness (Kaiser 2012) or its localization (Navaro- Yashin 2012). Schatzki formulates a critique concerning several social theories, which „do not take materiality into account“ (2010: X). Based on an observation, I made during my field research in the Austrian-Italian border region Brenner/Brennero, I tackle this issue raised by Schatzki. A common theme during my stay was the notion of local actors, that the border is not existent. This is due to its physical connotations that do not consider practices as part of an infrastructure limiting undocumented access into the country (Austria). By taking „infrastructure“, as a model of analysis I am focusing on border as a „praxis-arrangement nexus“ (Schatzki 2010). This includes materiality

and practices, as well as the surrounding geography. My argument unfolds upon an observation at the dividing state line in the town Brenner/Brennero, where a black, young man tried to get south. He was stopped by Italian soldiers and later on arrested by the Austrian police. The situation offers a thorough perspective on the embeddedness of border within space and time, and the interplay of materiality, surroundings and practices.

Lukas Milo Strauss worked as a volunteer for several organizations in the Spielfeld transit camp. He is currently working on his MA thesis in social and cultural anthropology, entitled “Calles de azúcar: Corporate Social Responsibility and Occupational Health Activism in the Nicaraguan Sugar Industry”, at the University of Vienna. His main research interests lie in the field of political anthropology, transnational governance, and the social life of institutions.

Marlene Persch is a MA student in social anthropology at the university of Vienna. In Summer 2017 she did some research in the border region between Austria and Italy, in Brenner/Brennero. She is currently working on her master thesis which is dealing with resocialisation and reintegration practices in the Maximum Security Prison Nsawam in Ghana. Her main interest lies in an Anthropology of the state from a relational perspective. State institutions such as border control or state actors in the prison allow for an analysis „at the heart of the state“ (Fassin 2015).

ROR-N brings together researchers affiliated with the Austrian Academy of Sciences – namely, Institute for Social Anthropology, Institute for Urban and Regional Studies, Institute for Iranian Studies, Institute for Cultural Studies and Theatre History, Institute for Audiovisual Research and Documentation – and the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna.