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Remembering as bordering: Using memory studies to understand border temporalities

Abstract

Over the past decades the field of border studies has shown substantial interest in questions of collective memory, examining for example the role of memory and monumental politics in nation-building processes, memories of forced migration, the relation between official and vernacular memories in borderlands, and processes of historical reconciliation. Despite this growing body of research, memory studies and border studies have developed largely separately from each other, and dialogue between the two fields has been limited. As a consequence, while memory is empirically explored, it tends to be underconceptualised, and opportunities for conceptual dialogue are missed. In my talk I make an attempt of bringing the two fields into conversation and outlining how memory helps us to conceptualise border temporality based on three shifts: firstly, a shift from the linear passing of time that has been the centre of evolutionary studies of borders to memory as “past presencing” (Macdonald 2013), focusing on how the past is experienced, interpreted and produced the present. Secondly, a movement from time in singular to the study of multiple and intersecting temporalities, building on multi- and interscalar perspectives in memory studies. Thirdly, a shift from the tracing of historical change to considerations of memory as bordering, a process that naturalises borders and legitimises their fortification and surveillance. Overall, I argue that a stronger crossfertilisation between the two fields has the double advantage of bringing questions on temporality more centrally into border research and helping us to better understand the complexity of border time.

About

Dr Alena Pfoser is Senior Lecturer in Communication and Media Studies at Loughborough University, UK. Her main areas of expertise include memory in contested settings, heritage and tourism industries, borders and borderlands, and qualitative and arts-based methods. Her work has been published widely in leading journals such as *Memory Studies*, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *Geopolitics*, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Europe-Eurasia Studies*, and *European Urban and Regional Studies*. She was a Marie Curie Experienced Researcher at the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography in Leipzig and a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Excellence in Intercultural Studies at Tallinn University and the Research Centre for the History of Transformations at University of Vienna. She has recently completed a research project funded under the UK ESRC’s New Investigator programme (ES/R011680/1), which examines memory production in Russian postimperial tourism and is working on a monograph on this topic.