

PENS-318

Border ForensicsHassoun Munia, Joost Stéphane, Lerch Mathias, Levak Tomislav, Michel Stanislas
Hugo Werner, Panese Elio

Cursus	Sem.	Type
Projeter ensemble ENAC	BA6	Opt.

Language of teaching	English
Credits	4
Withdrawal	Unauthorized
Session	Summer
Semester	Spring
Exam	During the semester
Workload	120h
Weeks	12
Hours	4 weekly
Courses	1 weekly
Project	3 weekly

Number of positions

It is not allowed to withdraw from this subject after the registration deadline.

Summary

This course introduces forms of violence linked to state borders and social boundaries in Switzerland. Drawing on the work of Border Forensics, it presents transdisciplinary investigative methods from geostatistical analysis to (auto-)ethnography used to document and contest this violence.

Content

The idyllic landscape of Switzerland is striated by multiple borders and social boundaries, which particularly affect racialized populations, including asylum seekers. This course will introduce students to scientific and innovative spatial methods developed by Forensic Architecture and the Swiss-based agency Border Forensics allowing to document, contest and transform these forms of invisible violence. In particular, we will explore the forms of harm that are inflicted on asylum seekers through the Swiss Asylum Dispositif. The laws, administrative measures and bureaucratic practices that make up the Swiss asylum dispositif and are mobilised with the aim of selecting people and controlling migratory flux transport and translate borders within the State, "into the middle of political space" (Balibar 2004, 109), along with their "potential for violence". While the violence perpetrated by the "borders within" the Swiss territory may be less spectacular than the large-scale deaths of migrants crossing the external borders of Europe, it nonetheless translates into social exclusion, as well as psychological and physical harm (Panese & Michel, 2024). As it will be explored during the semester, these "borders within" complexify the temporalities and embodied experiences of migration, embedded not only in one-off crossings of external borders but also endured in the long term in seemingly non-violent settings, in the mundane aspects of everyday life and in the most intimate spaces and realms of existence. We will further explore the ways in which the social boundary of race affects racialized people's experience of space, subjecting them to the constant threat of racial profiling and police violence. All in all, we will explore the broader theme of how borders and social boundaries materialize in urban environments. In order to encompass these topics, the course is divided into three parts.

- The first part offers a theoretical and methodological introduction to border violence and its documentation. This lays the foundation for a precise understanding of the notions of border, "border within", border violence, as well as the temporalities and embodied experiences they foster. Students will be introduced to these concepts practically through a field trip, along with the counter-forensic approach pioneered and developed by Forensic Architecture to account for and document said border violence, in its various forms and expressions. We will focus specifically on the research conducted by the teaching team within the Swiss-based research agency Border Forensics.
- The second part will initiate students to the concrete experimentations and applications of those methods while reflecting critically on their use and sometimes ambivalent effects. Students are invited to dive into a rich body of multiscale and transdisciplinary investigative techniques and the practical, ethical and conceptual challenges they entail. This second part is designed to prepare and inspire them for the third and last part of the course in which they

have the opportunity to appropriate and experiment with these tools in groups on a selected subject.

- The third part of the course will bring students to focus on specific manifestations of borders and social boundaries across the territory of Switzerland, and the way they affect the lives of asylum seekers as well as the racialized population. Students will develop their own investigations in groups and experiment with tools and approaches they encountered in the first and second parts of the class. The investigation topics will be anchored into ongoing Border Forensics' investigations and the contemporary context of violence

The course will allow students to address a wide range of questions: How political terms such as violence, authority, and border are understood and embodied in the context of the Swiss asylum *dispositif*? How can we understand, document, and render visible *violence* in its many different guises? How does the violence of borders and social boundaries operate and how are geophysical environments harnessed within it? How can we navigate complex regimes of (in)visibility, in which deaths can be hidden but also spectacularized? How does the notion of dehumanization impact the institutional policies and practices, and how does it relate to the survival strategies adopted by asylum seekers in that space? What is the politics of different technologies and methods used to reconstruct cases of violence? How can spatial interventions articulate places of (in)visibility, resistance, coordination and memory? Can these interconnected places become places that question the very process of the broader city and the built environment?

By exploring these questions, the course will equip students with the conceptual and methodological tools to navigate the complexities of research-based spatial practice.

Keywords

Borders, asylum, asylum seekers, refugees, (im)migration, (counter-)forensics, human rights, violence, territory, body, spatial analysis, remote sensing, traces, visualization, (im)mobility, (in)visibility, potentialities, solidarity, hospitality

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, the student must be able to:

- Discuss contemporary debates and approaches in relation to (im)mobility, borders, social boundaries, spatial practice and the counter-forensic approach, through the example of Swiss Asylum Dispositif
- Identify how the production of space shapes violence and how spatial analysis in turn can offer a critical edge in analyzing and contesting it
- Conduct individual and collaborative spatial interdisciplinary research combining qualitative and quantitative methods of humanities and social science with creative visual practice
- Discuss critically theoretical, political and methodological questions in relation to the different tools and methods used to register traces of violence
- Use of Exploratory Spatial Data Analysis (ESDA), and Geovisualization (GVIS) technologies
- Use of visual and qualitative investigative tools and methods
- Design how infrastructures that enable and/or constrain mobility may be transformed to mitigate border violence and foster mobility justice

Teaching methods

The course is designed to be highly participative, with an active engagement of students with readings, class discussions as well as on the collaborative development of their projects. The teaching team will accompany students throughout the semester, share insights based on their own research projects and investigative practices. Students will build on a rich range of investigative methods, sometimes adapting their analytical and technical skills and know-how to address critically new topics while reflecting critically on their own practices. To do so, they will rely on the methods developed by the agency of *Border Forensics*.

Through this, we will focus on the potentialities and possibilities of the border to motivate a process from hostile spaces to niches of hospitality. In the process, we will explore concrete proposals to transform (im)mobility infrastructures operating in the selected border zones to undermine border violence and enable mobility justice.

Assessment methods

- 20% Active participation in the class discussions
- 30% Mid-term presentation
- 50% Final group project

Resources

Bibliography

- Å#ama. (2022). Before we die. For Alireza, killed by Swiss migration policy. https://projet-evasions.org/beforewedie_eng/
- Achieme, E. Tendayi. 2019. "The Postcolonial Case for Rethinking Borders." *Dissent* 66.3: pp.27-32. <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-postcolonial-case-for-rethinking-borders>
- Affolter, Laura. *Asylum matters: On the front line of administrative decision-making*. Springer Nature, 2021.
- Alberti, C., & Borrelli, L. M. (2025). Disciplining Asylum Seekers through Infrastructure. *Migration and Society*, 8, 172-187.
- Balibar, Etienne. 2004. *We, the People of Europe?: Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*. Princeton University Press.
- Bathla, N. (Ed.). (2024). *Researching Otherwise. Pluriversal Methodologies for Landscape and Urban Studies*. gta Verlag.
- Borrelli, L. M., & Walters, W. (2024). Blood, sweat and tears: On the corporeality of deportation. *Environment and Planning*, 42(8), 1387-1404.
- Casas-Cortes, M., Cobarrubias, S., Heller, C., & Pezzani, L. (2017). Clashing cartographies, migrating maps: The politics of mobility at the external borders of E.U. *rope. ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 16(1), 1-33.
- Fassin, D. (2016). L'ethnographie retrouvée. Sur quelques approches contemporaines des pratiques policières. *L'Homme*, 219 - 220(3 - 4), 287-310.
- Fuller, M., & Weizman, E. (2021). *Investigative aesthetics: Conflicts and commons in the politics of truth*. Verso Books.
- Gabrys, Jennifer. 2014. "Programming environments: environmentality and citizen sensing in the smart city", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 2014, volume 32.
- Gill, Nick, Deirdre Conlon, Dominique Moran, and Andrew Burrige. 2018. "Carceral circuitry: New directions in carceral geography." *Progress in Human Geography* 42, no. 2: 183-204.
- Hammerstad, A. (2016). Securitisation and Forced Migration. In E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, G. Loescher, K. Long, & N. Sigona (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (p. 265-277). Oxford University Press.
- Haraway, Donna. 1988. Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 575-599.
- Heller, Charles and Pezzani, Lorenzo. 2014. "Liquid Traces: Investigating the Deaths of Migrants at the Maritime Frontier of the EU", In *Forensic Architecture* (ed.), *Forensis : The Architecture of Public Truth*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.
- Herscher, Andrew. 2017. *Displacements: Architecture and Refugee*. Cambridge, MA, USA: Sternberg Press.
- Keenan, Thomas. 2014. "Getting the Dead to Tell Me What Happened: Justice, Prosopopeia, and Forensic Afterlives", In *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*, ed. Forensic Architecture. Berlin: Sternberg Press, pp.35-55.
- Khosravi, S. (2019). What do we see if we look at the border from the other side? *Social Anthropology*, 27(3), 409-424.
- Khosravi, S. (2024). Doing migration studies with an accent. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 50(9), 2346-2358.
- Kurgan, Laura. 2013. *Close Up at a Distance: Mapping, Technology, and Politics*, New York: Zone Books
- Lindberg, A. (2024). *Researching Border Violence in an Indefensible Europe*. Geopolitics.
- Mann, Itamar. (2020). Border Violence as Crime. *University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law*, 42(3), 675-736. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/upjil42&i=685>
- Mbembe, Achille. 2019. "Bodies as borders". *From the European South* 4 <http://europeansouth.postcolonialitalia.it>
- Panese, Elio. 2022. "Border Violence by Other Means An Inquiry into the Embodied Experience of the Swiss Asylum Dispositif."
- Panese, E., & Michel, S. (2024). Explorer les frontières internes, documenter le continuum de violence. *Multitudes*, 97(4), 81-89.

- Parks, Lisa. 2009. "Digging into Google Earth: An analysis of "Crisis in Darfur", *Geoforum* 40: 535-545.
- Piguet, E. (2019). *Asile et réfugiés: Repenser la protection*. Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes.
- Schmid-Scott, A. (2024). Bureaucratic and benign? The violent continuum of Home Office reporting in the UK. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 1-17.
- Schuppli, S. (2020). *Material witnesses: Media, forensics, evidence*. MIT press.
- Shahvisi, A. (2021). *We Are All Police Now*. Resisting everyday bordering and the hostile environment. In K. Duff (Ed.), *Abolishing the Police* (p. 39-#51). Dog Section Press.
- Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the Wake : On Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press.
- Stoler, A. L. (2022). *Interior Frontiers: Essays on the Entrails of Inequality*. Oxford University Press.
- Walia, H. (2021). *Border and Rules : Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism*. Haymarket Books.
- Weizman, Eyal. 2014. "Forensics: Introduction", In *Forensics: The Architecture of Public Truth*, ed. Forensic Architecture. Berlin: Sternberg Press, pp.9-32.
- Winter, Yves. 2012. "Violence and Visibility", *New Political Science*, 34, no. 2: pp.195-202.

Ressources en bibliothèque

- [Ãama. Before we die](#)
- [Achiume. The Postcolonial Case for Rethinking Borders](#)
- [Affolter. Asylum matters](#)
- [Disciplining Asylum Seekers through Infrastructure /Alberti](#)
- [Borrelli. Blood, sweat and tears](#)
- [Casa-Cortes. Clashing cartographies, migrating maps](#)
- [Fassin. L'ethnographie retrouvée](#)
- [Forensis : the architecture of public truth / Forensic Architecture](#)
- [Hammerstad. Securitisation and Forced Migration. In The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies](#)
- [Gill. Carceral circuitry](#)
- [Haraway. Situated Knowledges](#)
- [Khosravi. What do we see if we look at the border from the other side?](#)
- [Khosravi, S. Doing migration studies with an accent](#)
- [Lindberg. Researching Border Violence in an Indefensible Europe](#)
- [Mann. Maritime Legal Black Holes](#)
- [Mbembe. Bodies as borders](#)
- [Parks. Digging into Google Earth](#)
- [Schmid-Scott. Bureaucratic and benign?](#)
- [Schuppli. Material witness](#)
- [Shahvisi. We Are All Police Now](#)
- [Winter. Violence and Visibility](#)
- [Find the recommended books at the Library](#)

Websites

- <https://www.borderforensics.org/>
- <https://forensic-architecture.org/category/forensic-oceanography>