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*From Phantom Maps to Real Boundaries. Comparison of the post-Soviet and post-Yugoslav context (14th Blankensee Colloquium).* Sabine von Löwis, Centre March Bloch, Berlin; Nenad Stefanov, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 10.03.2016 — 11.03.2016.

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**From Phantom Maps to Real Boundaries. Comparison of the post-Soviet and post-Yugoslav context (14th Blankensee Colloquium)**

Maps can be powerful instruments and even weapons in the context of war and violent conflict such as in Ukraine and in the former Yugoslavia. The 14th Blankensee Colloquium âFrom Phantom Maps to real boundaries, comparison of the post-Soviet and post-Yugoslav contextâ devoted two days to analyzing the role of maps in these conflicts. Organized by Humboldt University historian Nenad Stefanov and Sabine von LÃ¶wis, geographer at the March Bloch Center, both members of the research network âPhantom Borders in Eastern Central Europeâ, the conference additionally benefited from broad institutional support. Funded by the Kooperationsfonds at the Wissenschaftskolleg, Institute for Advanced Study, Berlin and the Ministry for Education and Research. In cooperation with Phantomgrenzen, the Herder Institute, and Leibniz-Institute fÃ¼r LÃ¤nderkunde.

The conference drew on a cross-disciplinary and comparative approach, where historians, geographers, political scientists, anthropologists and cartographers from Europe and the United States debated how the power of maps work in the context of contemporary European conflict: how and by whom they are designed, used, and distributed. Indeed, the power of maps appears linked to the subjective choices of their âmakerâ: he creates a projection ranging from âwhite lieâ deriving from the difficult adaptation of our three-dimension world on a piece of paper, to weapon of propaganda.

A rich intellectual panorama emerged out of the panel discussions. It reconsidered the role of the cartographer in contemporary communication to different audiences, the actual process of map-making, its abuse through ethnicist and historicist narratives in the years leading to the Bosnian and Kosovo wars (1992â95; 1998â99), and those leading to the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Beyond these risks and limitations, maps still constitute an essential means of simplifying complex realities. Used wisely, maps still show a way to contemplate about complex social and territorial realities.

The âPhantom Borders in Eastern and Central Europeâ Project project gave the initial impetus to the colloquium by reflecting on how historical national and state borders seem to reappear in social practices, institutions, norms and values as an empiric phenomenon, SABINE VON LÃWIS (Berlin) noted in her introduction. The projectâs ethnographic approach is underlined in von LÃ¶wisâ own field research in Ukrainian villages to investigate voting practices. Are there any similarities about how maps as social constructs are used in conflicts where it seems they appear more often then in times of peace? How can one design and apply maps to illustrate complex social spatial information such as Ukraine and Yugoslavia? she asked, setting the stage for the conference discussions.

In his keynote speech, PETER HASLINGER (Marburg) overviewed the theoretical framework, analyzing in powerful terms the performativity of borders as creator of institutions and the nature of maps themselves. Though maps, as a knowledge media, are meant to âsimplifyâ reality by translating complex geographical, historical or other phenomena into a âcommon frameâ that anyone can read, they are complex objects, steeped in meanings, at times in hidden agendas, and consequently need to be read in context. Maps represent a âcreatedâ reality, embedded in discourses through the choices made by mapmakers. So not only do mapmakers create reality, they âchooseâ the reality.

**A line on a map, is more than a line.**

Delving into the micro processes of âmakingâ maps, ERIC LOSANG (Leipzig) defined the cartographic process as a projection of a three-dimensional world on a plane in such a way that the user understands it and that it fulfills his needs in a variety of ways: maps that define empires, navigational maps that focused on orientation rather than borders, data driven maps, thematic maps. The traditional âMercator mapâ intended for navigation was later misused through its distortion of the northern hemisphere to represent the domination of Europe. That is why the âpurposeâ of the map, the usage that will be made of it, is a core aspect of map-making (and map reading), as participants observed during the discussion. The map makerâs craft is about making choices based on contingencies like paper size as he progresses through the making of a map: selecting â and therefore reducing - what information to depict, determining which symbols (arrows, full or dotted lines) to use, as each is packed with meanings. These are all stages in the process from geographical reality to map.

**Maps in context of the Ukrainian and Balkan conflicts: the ethnicity bias**

The comparative perspective on the role of cartography in the Ukrainian and Yugoslav conflicts were investigated in three panels on the dynamics of conflict and maps and on visualisation of complex social and historical phenomena. Presentations and ensuing discussions underlined the misuse of maps as a tool for ethnicist and historicist manipulation. Historian NENAD STEFANOV (Berlin) drew on 19th and 20th century cartography to demonstrate the force of historicist and ethnic argumentation of maps of the Balkans. Going back to the mapping of the Balkans when this meant traveling on horseback and bivouacking in the outback, he showed that these representations of Balkan ethnic communities laid the ground for the creation of Yugoslav borders at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. These ethnological maps were set aside by socialist Yugoslavia, to be âreturnedâ in the late 1980s for instance in the form of maps published by the Serbian magazine Nin, depicting ethnic borders and claims. DIANA MISHKOVA (Sofia) underlined how prevalent the ethnographic perspective was well into the 20th century beyond the Balkan space, a rare example of transfer of experience from East to West.

The ethnic âreadingâ of maps is a core factor in the building of the conflict in Ukraine. The narrative of a âdividedâ Ukraine illustrated by bicolored maps was often put forward as an explanatory by political and media actors. Language maps and voting maps used to describe âdividedâ Ukraine, operate a fallacious semiotic shift from voting and language practices to âidentityâ, as STEVEN SEEGEL (University of Northern Colorado) noted. Drawing on the representation of Ukraine in Western media, he demonstrated how false interpretation of data can relay a politically charged and false picture of âtwo Ukrainesâ, distinctly divided along linguistic and cultural, and geographical lines. Why are mostly electoral maps and more specifically, second round presidential election voting maps used to represent alleged Ukrainian identities? When considering identity narratives the choice of the data used is crucial, he noted.

Analyzing contemporary Russian use of maps on Ukraine, GUIDO HAUSMANN (Munich) turned to a cartographic history of Novorossiya, the ephemeral entity created at the Kremlinâs behest on the separatist territories of the Donbas (May 2014-May 2015). Building on a genealogy of the narratives about Novorossiya, he showed the Kremlinâs historicist argumentation. A succession of maps of âNovorossiyaâ showed moving borders across centuries and across narratives. The visualization of contemporary âNovorossiyaâ has, in fact, little in common with that of its 18th century imperial namesake. The first Novorossiya was the âfactual representationâ of an administrative unit merging newly conquered territories of Crimea and north of the Black Sea, whereas contemporary Novorossiya is a political fiction and evocative example of using maps to serve the argument of historical âcontinuity.â

This discussion of the dramatic human implications of the misuse of maps serving ethnic and territorial claims were carried on in the evening during a podium discussion on âMaps at War: The Conflict in Ukraine and Yugoslavia comparedâ, closing the first day of the colloquium. Held at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy