



15th Workshop Young Researchers, Association Jeunes Etudes Indiennes

« Borders in South Asia: territories, identities, mobilizations. »

Kolkata, India (4th - 7th March 2013)

In partnership with the Center for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta

Call for Papers

The **Association Jeunes Etudes Indiennes** (AJEI) gathers students from different disciplinary fields of social sciences, from MA to post-doctorate level, who are undertaking fieldwork in South Asia. The AJEI organizes every year a seminar in France and several workshops in India for young and senior researchers to present and discuss their work. The selected theme for the 2012 workshop is “Borders in South Asia : territories, identities and mobilizations “.

Borders mean both separations and resources. They crystallize conflicts, mobilizations, cooperation and strategies of actors. At a symbolic level, this very fertile theme of research can take many meanings. The mobility of borders impacts the populations concerned by shaping and reshaping national and regional identities, but also the balance of powers at the subcontinent scale, for example. Furthermore, the opening or the closing of a border raise the question of mobility and can affect the interactions between spaces and the possibility of elements able to cross any given border. Last, at different scales, the border being confronted with the ideas of location, categorization, logics of marking, structures the relation of individuals and groups to the village or urban society.

The AJEI invites papers on the three following themes and related topics: borders in terms of i) production of limits and levels of powers, ii) territorial delimitation and social constructions and iii) mobility and its crossing. The field of study remains open to include original approaches, not integrated in the present proposal.

Production of limits and levels of powers

A border may be defined as the administrative and political limits of a territory, for instance between India and Bangladesh. It is the materialization of identities, political strategies inside or outside the territory, and social and economical issues at different scales: states, administrative institutions, metropolitan regions. The border legitimizes the power entity of the concerned territory (States, Panchayats), or helps the authority to regulate it (for instance, the districts).

Historical analysis may further investigate the question of the border in the transition from imperial structures to national structures, or the long process of territorial assignment, the problem of choice in a coercive institutional system, and the issue of citizenship in the context of the Partition.

The question of the definition of a border, and of its many representations, is central in conflicts and process of negotiations. We invite contributors to consider the plural version and representation of borders, usually diverging from the official version, and indeed at times nonexistent in the eyes of the international law. For example, contributors may investigate the representations of borders produced by India, Pakistan and the separatist movements in Kashmir. In the case of Arunachal Pradesh, they may consider the McMahon line accepted as a border by India and the central administration of Tibet, but still not by China.

Moreover, the materialization of a border is a central element in case of geopolitical tensions for the border involves a powerful symbolic dimension: the expression of the States' sovereignty. Mapping – more than a tool for understanding a territory – becomes a tool of stabilization and legitimation of a border. That is why the profusion of maps in open access (Google, Wikimapia) seems to lead to a new issue for cross-border governments, for it enforces a version of the frontier for the general audience. If a border is usually legitimized as a part of the natural landscape (river, mountain range), it still expresses political strategies and construction of identities, or cultural, religious and linguistic differences between two territories. The border also results from an historical legacy (limits of expansion of an empire), explaining the instrumentalization of History in the context of redefinition of a border, but also of religion and languages (Partition, State Reorganisation Act 1956). In reciprocity, the border reifies identities.

Presentations dealing with the local dimension of administrative limits are welcomed. Behind the evolution of these limits, the games of political, economical, social and land property powers (cities, SEZ, environmental protection areas) are mixed together. In a context of rapid growth of metropolitan regions, the question of redefinition of city limits implies also a balance of power, usually decisive between the urban and the rural: What are the political wills and powers, which decide of the production and revision of these administrative limits, and how do they impose the respect of limits on long-term? For instance, which politician speculations are revealed behind these claims, such as the creation of the State of Telangana ? What are the political decision levels in force ?

Territorial delimitation and social constructions

Another axis is concerned with borders in their rather symbolic meaning. It focuses on the social constructions behind the production of borders. Confronted with the idea of location, zoning, logics of marking, a border structures the relations individuals and groups have with cities and villages. It contributes also to the construction of identities and representations, between the insider and the outsider, between here and there, between oneself and others. A border spatially marks the power relations in an urban or rural society. They are both inherited and re-produced.

These presentations may deal with the practices of exclusion and marginalization, and the processes of categorization created by visible or invisible borders which close living spaces. It evokes, for instance, some very dense colonies in East Delhi where borders are drawn in a context of uncertain land tenure (waiting for the regularization of the colony, illegal housing), which is due in particular to social and economical situations (strong social inequalities, majoritarian Muslim community, informal work), and also encouraged by politicians' strategies (control of uncertainty; logics of concealment inspired by the speculation of political interests) and the stigmatization by neighboring colonies.

Papers dealing with the physical markers of a border in the landscape are welcomed. For instance, the Ambedkar's statues used to assert control over a territory; the building of walls as dividing lines, for example in some areas in Ahmedabad; the act of renaming a place to give a feeling of the locality, as it may be the case in the temples of Hyderabad; and the ambiguity of new urban architectures.

Speakers may also pay attention to long periods of time and offer retrospective readings: are the definitions and redefinitions of borders following the evolution of segregation types (segregation by wealth, jobs, or caste?) .

Insiders and outsiders' relations, practices resulting from the development of subjective (what may be considered as the intimate space) or objectivized borders (internalization of certain types of stigmatization related to a locality, a behavior) may be highlighted under this theme. Does the gated urbanism only express a logic of marking and control of land? For instance, borders may appear within the space of gated communities located in the peripheral area of megacities: what are the behaviors of women in these areas protected from the outside, are they different in the domestic spaces and the spaces inside the gated community? The call centres or the new spaces dedicated to the IT industry as the IT parks of Bangalore are thus the example of a complex game of borders: transnational model / space of global, new temporalities coming from outside (working at night, etc).

Mobilities and crossing the border

This last theme focalizes on the idea of mobility in a context of proliferation of cross-border activities and associated actors, of circulation of goods, of constitution of social and political communities on both sides of the border.

Papers on mobility may question the way borders are crossed and the expression of transgression. What is a border for one who travels, for instance for the migrants who may have “one foot inside and one foot outside”? How do these cross-border actors participate to the production of images of the departing and the arriving country? Does the border structure mobilities?

Speakers may emphasize distinctions between those who have the option to migrate and those who are forced into displacement, and discuss for instance the issues surrounding the definition of refugees/displaced persons.

Goods and merchandise are also crossing borders. How are perceptions of borders evolving in a context of speedy integration of South Asia into the global economic space? Papers examining aspects of cross-borders economies, including cross-border illegal activities and analysis of contrabands, are welcomed.

Propositions of contribution:

The propositions of contribution (500 to 1000 words) should be submitted in French or in English before the 25th November 2012 at the following address: ateliers@ajei.org. Each presentation will be in English, are to last 20 minutes, and will be discussed by a specialist.

Please include with your proposal your last name, first name, your disciplinary field, your study level, your institution(s) of affiliation and your research topic. After the decision by the organization committee and the announcement of inclusion is announced at the end of November, the contributors will be asked to send their complete articles (10 000 words) in English to the discutant of each session, before the 15th January 2013.

Organizers:

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