

FOREWORD

Since 2006, when the interdisciplinary research group “The Borders of Europe” was founded at the University of Bergen, the members of the group have been investigating how boundary lines are drawn in Europe in the fields of art, literature and philosophy. Especially, we have been looking into how various kinds of borders have contributed towards establishing and redefining the power structures of hegemony and mental images of *Europeanness*. What does it mean to be European and to belong – or more important: to feel as *not* belonging – to a European historical and cultural tradition?

To discuss this kind of questions by focusing on cultural minorities in Europe, especially on artistic expressions from members of Jewish communities, “The Borders of Europe” arranged in October 2013 an international seminar in Odessa, which was followed up by an international workshop in Bergen in May 2014. To the members of our group, mostly Norwegians, coming to Odessa was of special interest, as one of the theoretical foundations of the group are the works of the great Russian philosopher, linguist and theorist of literature Michail M. Bakhtin, who studied for several years in this town. Today Odessa is an important centre of Bakhtinian studies, and it is also a town of special interest for the study of the role of Jewish cultural expressions, as it used to host one of the most important Jewish communities in Europe.

The members of “The Borders of Europe” are scholars from various fields of the humanities, mostly from literary or philosophical disciplines, but also from academic studies on art, architecture and theatre performances. We have been organizing international seminars in Russia, Greece, Turkey and Norway, which have resulted in two scientific anthologies.¹

The first of these volumes, *The Borders of Europe. Hegemony, Aesthetics and Border Poetics*, is divided into three sections. In

¹ Holm, H.V., Læg Reid, S., Skorgen, T.: *The Borders of Europe. Hegemony, Aesthetics and Border Poetics*, Aarhus University Press 2012 and Holm, H.V., Læg Reid, S., Skorgen, T.: *Europe and its Interior Other(s)*, Aarhus University Press 2014.

the first section, we discuss aesthetic hegemonies and divisions between centrality and periphery in Europe. The second section presents various constructions of national, regional and artistic identity in European literature and art, whereas the volume's third section is devoted to poetics and aesthetics of borders (and border crossing) in contemporary literature and art.

In our second volume, *Europe and its Interior Other(s)*, we are mainly focusing on the historical dimension of what we call the "European Other(s)", e.g. members of minority cultural groups in Europe throughout the ages. After an introduction on European notions of identity and otherness in times of crisis, we look into the history of some of the European Other(s), through various literary expressions from different historical moments, among others in medieval literature, in narratives from European pilgrims leaving the old continent, and in examples of nationalistic poetry. In a following section we analyze how the situation of European Jews are described in novels both by Jews and non-Jews, and we conclude by presenting some "variations on the interior Other(s)" in Russian, Nordic and Turkish literature and architecture.

To our group, coming to Odessa and having the opportunity to discuss important cultural and artistic European questions with local colleagues, represents not only a scientific event and a rewarding challenge. Taking into consideration the political earthquake that started in Ukraine just some month after our seminar and of which we still don't see the final outcome, we most sincerely hope that our academic collaboration with colleagues from the Odessa National University will continue and hopefully be expanding through new research projects linked to our common European past, present and future.

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