



Dialogue About Border Crossers

Guest post by Trudy Milburn

On November 20th, 2015, on behalf of the Center for International Dialogue, I attended a unique event at the Scandinavia House (<http://www.scandinaviahouse.org/>) in Manhattan. The event was entitled “What border have you crossed?” (<http://www.queensmuseum.org/events/meetmarcus>) and provided an introduction to a new exhibition opening at the Queens Museum (<http://www.queensmuseum.org/>) the following day. The speakers were two of the main organizers of the exhibition and of the organization, Bords (<http://www.bordr.org/>): Chrissie Faniadis and Marcus Haraldsson, both from Sweden.



Chrissie opened the session by recounting the way their five-person group (including a third member from Sweden, another from Seattle, US and one from Delhi, India) formed a new nonprofit organization year ago at a small, red house with white borders in the south-east of Sweden. They were interested in productive ways to contribute to the growing international dialogue about migrants and borders. In many news accounts, the problem is often one of numbers, such as the millions fleeing from Syria, or hundreds of thousands of refugees entering or trying to enter various countries. Chrissie said that their group’s goal was to “put a face back on the faceless.

After about 15 minutes, Marcus came up and began to involve the approximately 100-member audience, by asking, “Has anyone every crossed a border?” and then followed up with, “has anyone *not* crossed a border.” Perhaps because this was New York City on a Friday night, the responses were a bit intellectual (suggesting borders were metaphors) and some, a little cheeky (one woman saw no borders in life). Marcus then explained that throughout his journalism career and recent research, that he’s come to view borders as “the atomic particle of all human stories.” Subsequently, their group defines borders quite broadly, comprised of three legs: geographic (space), mental (emotion) and time-bound.



The Queens Museum exhibition is based on five different projects throughout the world. Some people were initially lent video cameras in order to tell their own stories, unmediated by a journalist interpretation. With additional digital recordings captured on smart phones and extensive interviews with each participant, they were able to create individual maps illustrating the important border events for each person.

Marcus drew to a close by emphasizing that their goal is to help people realize the connections and commonalities, rather than differences, among all of us who cross very different borders throughout our lives. [One audience member likened this interpretation of borders as to our ability to transcend “inhibitions;” others might call these life-transitions]. The group from Bordrs’ believes that feelings and thoughts are very important to this project and both can lead to much more empathy and understanding than seems to be present today.

Despite criticisms from a couple of audience members during the Q&A, that this is a very serious issue that should not be taken lightly, my interpretation is that the organizers of Bordr are interested in moving beyond the common discourse of blame that includes oppressor and victim dichotomies that are difficult to transcend. Perhaps by focusing on personal border stories, we may feel more compassionate than helpless; we may recognize that even if today we are not crossing a border, we all cross borders at some point in time.

Even if you cannot make it to Queens, NY during their exhibition, then you can still participate by using their new app, which will enable each of us to interact with others by considering smaller, everyday borders in each person’s life. We’re all border crossers, and you can see evidence of this by going to Queens Museum (<http://www.queensmuseum.org/>) or Bordrs (<http://www.bordr.org/>).

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