

# Doris and the re-framing of frameworks

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Jahrbuch der Geographischen Gesellschaft Bern**

Band (Jahr): **66 (2018)**

PDF erstellt am: **22.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-960455>

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# DORIS AND THE RE-FRAMING OF FRAMEWORKS

Ulrike Hanna Meinhof

*This short thank you note is in honour of my dear friend and colleague Doris Wastl-Walter whose participation in two EU Framework Programme projects that I coordinated between 2000 and 2003 (Border Identities), and 2007-2010 (SeFoNe) has been an academically inspiring and unforgettable experience, delightful from a personal and human perspective. A more academic discussion of bordering co-authored by myself and Heidi Armbruster appears in the same volume, but here I want to add two brief anecdotes that are entirely characteristic of Doris' enthusiastic entry into my life.*

## 1999 AND THE SWISS TROJAN HORSE

The first goes back to 1999 when I was putting together a consortium for my first ever EU grant proposal. On board were already Dariusz Galasinski from the University of Wolverhampton, who had been my co-applicant for a previous ESRC grant on the former German-German and German-Polish border, Werner Holly, a long-standing friend and colleague from the University of Chemnitz, and also a contributor to this volume, Emidio Sussi and Augusto Carli, both at the time from the University of Trieste, and Brigitta Busch and Brigitte Hipfl from the University of Klagenfurt. As far as we were concerned, that was our group.

However, a month before submission I received a phone call from a professor at the University of Bern in Switzerland unknown to me till then: it was Doris! She told me that she had heard about our project in preparation, mentioned her long-standing experience on the Hungarian-Austrian border and expressed her strong wish to join our group. I immediately saw the attraction of adding this 6th borderland to our design since it would fill a gap in the line of border communities from the Baltic to the Adriatic Sea. However, at that time Switzerland was not yet eligible for EU funding, so I sadly declined her offer. But I had not counted on Doris' in-

genuity, stamina and persuasive skills. She proposed to go to the Swiss government and her own university to request that co-funding be made available for her part of the research should we be successful with the EU. And being Doris she managed in no time to bring in a guarantee from these institutions for a very substantial sum to cover the three years of joint research – in her case for looking at the three-generation families in the Austrian village of Moschendorf and its neighbour in Hungary, Pinkamindszent. So we were able to include Bern as partner in the proposal and the money duly came forward from Switzerland once the EU had offered us the support for our project: *Border Discourse: Changing Nations, Changing Borders, Changing Stories*.

We started the work in the spring of 2000 with a team of specially appointed research fellows. Together our consortium consisted of 19 senior and junior academics who met at six-monthly intervals. During those three years everyone visited all the seven border communities where research was being conducted by individual research teams. It was a most extraordinary experience to visit places where most of us had never been and to engage with local politicians and members of the public. For the research design, each team followed the same methodology: first, we identified three-generation families living on either side of these borders. Secondly, we all used the same method of triggering narratives from the family members by showing them photographs that were clearly identifiable as belonging to one of the the three periods in question: 1) Pre-World War II; 2) 1945–1989, 3) post 1989–2000.

The results were thus clearly comparable, and our first joint publication (followed by many others) *Living (with) Borders* was published by Ashgate in 2003 in a series that Doris herself had just set up. For all of us these three years were a formative experience, informing our work but also building some lasting future collaborations and strong friendships.

## 2005 AND THE RE-FRAMING OF BORDERS IN SEFONE

My second Doris anecdote is from 2005. Again a phone call came from her. This time she was telling me about a new EU call which I was not particularly interested in since I had been pursuing a different line of research by then with African-origin migrants in capital cities (The EU City Spaces-project 2002-2005). This new call was for research on *New Borders, New Neighbourhoods* following the expansion of the EU to the East, and thus not really in my field of expertise (which was on the former German-German and the German-Polish borders). However, after some discussion Doris convinced me that it would be worth my while to accept her invitation to Bern and see if we could find a shared perspective on this call. We also invited Werner Holly to this meeting, and the three of us sat together in her office for one long day, at the end of which SeFoNe was born (acronym for *Searching For Neighbours: Dynamics of Mental and Physical Borders in Europe*).

And during this day we also found some old and some new partners to join the team. The proposal for SeFoNe was more complex than the Border Identities one, since we were proposing to bring together three strands in one cohesive research design: old and new geopolitical borders of the European Union (all borderlands of Hungary with its neighbours; and the disputed Cypriot border); symbolic, mental and liquid borders in regions where there were no or no longer any geopolitical borders of the EU (Bayreuth/Upper Franconia, and Chemnitz/Saxony in Germany, Catania in Sicily), and racial borders with black African-origin minority populations. This time we were focusing on the activists who were engaging in cross-border relations with the aim of demonstrating good practices in good neighbouring. We also wanted to show good practices in action ourselves through cultural events involving NGOs and especially artists.

## REACHING BEYOND ACADEMIA

To enable us to translate academic work into something that would touch the general public we planned to demonstrate cultural diversity in action: the coming together of cultural differences through the arts. For this we needed an artist as a mediator and we found him in a well-known musician, cultural activist and former independent MP from Madagascar, Dama Mahaleo (or his official name Zafimahaleo Rasolofondraosolo), who became our consultant and co-curated a series of cultural events in selected border regions including a public concert in Bayreuth with 6 musicians from very diverse cultural backgrounds.

We also collaborated with the African Arts Centre, the Iwalewa House, in Bayreuth, who had already offered us a base for the two post-doc researchers working with the Southampton team of SeFoNe. For the cultural events in Bayreuth a well-known photographer of Nigerian heritage working in Berlin, Akinbode Akinbiyi, joined us. He supervised two photographic projects during a year of the project's duration, one with school kids at the Albert Schweitzer Hauptschule in Bayreuth and another with young adults in a photo club in Chemnitz. The pictures taken by these amateurs were exhibited in the Iwalewa House alongside those by the professional photographer Akinbode himself. Thus through music and photography the crossing of multiple boundaries were made to come alive in many different ways, complementing the academic work (see the joint book publication co-edited by Armbruster and Meinhof *Negotiating Multicultural Europe: Borders, Networks, Neighbourhoods*. Palgrave 2011).

None of this would have been remotely possible without Doris, so THANK YOU and keep on dancing.

## **AUTHOR**

**Ulrike Hanna Meinhof** is Professor of Cultural Studies and was Head of the Research Centre for Transcultural Studies at Southampton University until 2015 (Professor emeritus since 1.10.2017). Her research projects deal with border studies and discursive border identities, transcultural neighbourhoods, migration and transcultural networks between the global North and the global South.

