



Public Lecture Series

Thursday, 7 December 2023

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Governing through Mess: Data Borders, Control, Critique

Claudia Aradau, King's College London

Discussant: Ola Söderström, University of Neuchâtel, nccr – on the move

18:00 – 19:30 h

This talk will be held in person at the University of Neuchâtel, A-L Breguet 2, room 2.310, and on WEBEX ([link](#)).

Abstract

Critical border and migration studies have shown that border practices are often messy, ambiguous, improvised and uncertain. With datafication and the increased use of algorithmic technologies at borders, messiness and the effects of uncertainty and disconcertment for migrants have become both more extensive and more intensive. As Daniel Neyland (2014) has observed about algorithms, it might be exactly their messiness that makes their endurance possible through 'continual adaptations'. If messiness has become the engine that powers datafied bordering practices, how then can we critically engage with its effects, while avoiding the 'managerialism' of clarity, systematicity, and standardisation (Law and Singleton, 2000). In this paper, we draw on fieldwork in border zones in France, Italy, Germany and Spain to show, on the one hand, how messiness undergirds border practices and, on the other, how it becomes an object of critique. By drawing on Science and Technology Studies scholarship on mess, we attend to how the relation between order and mess is co-constitutive rather than oppositional. This has significant implications for how we formulate critiques of messy data and messy borders today.

Short Biography

Claudia Aradau is Professor of International Politics in the Department of War Studies at King's College London and Principal Investigator of the Consolidator Grant SECURITY FLOWS ('Enacting border security in the digital age: Political worlds of data forms, flows and frictions'), funded by the European Research Council (2019-2024). The SECURITY FLOWS project examines the epistemic, political and ethical implications of the datafication of border security. The project is situated at the intersection of critical approaches to borders and security, Science and Technology Studies and data studies.