



Twelfth Biennial MESEA Conference

May 27-30, 2020

University of Central Lancashire,

Cyprus Campus

Pyla, Larnaka, Cyprus

**Communities of Engagement:
Contesting Borders, Barriers and Walls in the Era of Climate Crisis**

Keynote Speakers:

Jeffrey Cohen, Professor of English and Dean of Humanities in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Arizona State University and Co-president of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE)

<https://isearch.asu.edu/profile/3269566>

Johan Schimanski, Professor of Comparative Literature and Head of Research, Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages (ILOS), University of Oslo, and Professor of Cultural Encounters, University of Eastern Finland

<https://www.hf.uio.no/ilos/english/people/aca/johanhsc/>

Karen McCarthy Woolf, poet, the Recipient of the Kate Betts Memorial Prize and an Arts and Humanities Research Council scholarship from Royal Holloway, University of London, and Fulbright Scholar/Writer in Residence 2019-20 UCLA Promise Institute for Human Rights

[https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/karen-mccarthy-woolf\(b81a2a1c-dc4b-43a1-bca4-3d6c8896d50a\).html](https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/karen-mccarthy-woolf(b81a2a1c-dc4b-43a1-bca4-3d6c8896d50a).html) and www.mccarthywoolf.com

Inaugural *Atlantic Studies* lecture:

William Boelhower, the Robert Thomas and Rita Wetta Adams Professor of Atlantic and Ethnic Studies Emeritus, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Louisiana State University

<https://www.lsu.edu/hss/complit/People/faculty/boelhower.php>

On November 9, 1989, the East Berlin's Communist Party announced that citizens of the GDR were free to cross the country's borders, leading to speculations of a "world without borders." Yet, as Elisabeth Vallet argues, a renewed emphasis on wall-building since this epoch-marking event has become a "global phenomenon."¹ As this trend is gaining new momentum with the recent electoral victories of nationalist populists across Europe, in Israel and in Trump's United States, borders are fortified and walls built to "protect" polities or to keep out refugees and migrants. We contend that these walls, borders and barriers are not only physical but also ontological and, as BREXIT shows us, ideological borders can be just as debilitating to liberal values and ideas. The 2020 MESEA conference will enable the discussion of the power of nationalist ideas that promote such borders and the ways through which activists and artists work to challenge, combat or break them down, often using utopian ideas of post-nationalism or transnationalism. As Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe note, "Bordering is ordering, othering and negotiating difference"; however, apart from producing "*B/ORDERING* processes of *EXCLUSION* and inclusion," borders can "surface as aesthetic *FIGURATIONS* – narratives or tropes – which can also interrogate their including/excluding function."²

In addition to geopolitical and ideological contexts, the significance of borders is emphasized in the era of the climate crisis. In global terms, climate change also literally alters the physical geography of borders, undermining vulnerable communities worldwide as well as creating schisms between political and economic groups, as climate change deniers disregard, condone or even actively promote and facilitate the continued exploitation of the earth's natural resources. The malleability of such borders, the threat to them from denier ideology and the vulnerability of those living in these liminal spaces will also be key themes in the conference. The contestation of ideological as well as natural borders, walls and barriers will also be a central focus of this meeting.

For the twelfth MESEA conference we welcome papers that look at the ways in which literature, film, and other art forms as well as social and political activism critically engage with climate change and (shifting) physical borders, and/or virtual, social, political, and cultural ones. The conference welcomes intersectional approaches to its topic, including but not limited to perspectives that include race, gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality. Environmental Humanities perspectives are especially welcome to shed light on the gathering catastrophe that these border-strains presage. Held in Cyprus, within the liminal UN Buffer Zone that divides the island, this conference will provide a forum for discussions on the global climate crisis, the effect of borders on competing ideas of nation and religious belief, as well as the ways in which artists and activists work around these difficult issues. We welcome papers that revel in the fact that borders can be significant nodal points for the exchange of new ideas as well as papers discussing the representation of borders, barriers and walls, in literature, film, and other cultural and artistic expressions or in legal, economic, and social situations. This conference operates as a platform for critical and cultural interventions in the variety of debates around contesting walls, borders and barriers from postgraduate students, academics, artists and activists across all disciplines in the arts and humanities, social sciences and science.

¹ Elisabeth Vallet, ed. *Borders, Fences and Walls: State of Insecurity?* Routledge, 2014, 1-2.

² Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe, eds. 'Intersections: A Conclusion in the Form of a Glossary.' In *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*. Berghahn, 2017, 149.

Potential paper and panel submissions can but are not limited to work around the following topics:

- Climate change and movements of people and borders
- Raising borders and denying climate and social change
- Trump's Wall and refugees/migrants
- Israel's wall and border conflicts
- Graffiti on walls
- Refugee and migration comics
- Art and Activism in the borderlands
- Native and Artistic responses to and interventions in (potential) cross-border ecological disasters like the Keystone Pipeline
- Horror and Science Fiction as response to Liminal zones/borderlands
- Class, Race, and Gender and their intersections in the borderlands
- The Paradox of Peace Walls/Lines erected to preserve peace by dividing communities
- Communities of engagement and peace-building at borderlands
- Generational protests: youth activism
- Walls of the past, artworks of the present
- Cross-national activist networks
- Performing protest

Proposals should be submitted to our website at <http://mesea.org/> between **August 20 and November 15, 2019**. Submitters will receive notification of acceptance by January 6, 2020.

Preference will be given to complete panel proposals with an inter/transdisciplinary and/or transnational focus. Panels may not include more than 2 participants from the same institution. Presenters must be members of MESEA or MELUS in 2020-21.

As in previous years, MESEA will award at least one **Young Scholars Excellence Award**.

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For more information please visit: <http://mesea.org/>