

Ethnography of the migrants' experience at the French Borders - Inside and around border-places of detention

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Since 2015, border controls have been continuously re-established in France, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks that occurred that same year. While at the beginning, such measures were implemented within the context and juridical boundaries of the state of emergency, they seem now to have become almost permanent. However, for some categories of the population, free-circulation was not challenged at all. Rather, what has been strongly reactivated is the border functioning as a device of exclusion, the border police taking a central role in carrying out its filtering purpose. At the same time, Europe was facing what has been called the « migrant crisis », during which external and internal borders of the European Union concentrated political, mediatic, and academic attention. In other words, the connection between national security issues and migration control has been reinforced in the last five years.

My PhD research in Social Anthropology, supervised by Professor Didier Fassin, at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Paris), focuses on migrants' experience *inside* the French borders, given that detention is an integral part of the migration process when arriving at the national territory's margins. My methodological approach comes both from an ethnographical and philosophical background. It includes observations conducted inside – and around – different kinds of border-spaces. These are located at the land borders as well as disseminated all over the territory, dependant of the French Border Police, and involving administrative custody for foreigners willing to enter the national soil. Consequently, my field research is divided between three major geographical areas. The “transit zones” situated mostly near ports and airports, which are juridically-defined places of administrative detention for foreigners, controlled by the French border police. The French-Italian Border in la Roya region, where I did my Master degree's field research among local militant migrant-support organisations. And finally, the French-Spanish border.

The main purpose of this research is, first, to give voices to those targeted by the border's discriminatory function, as well as to the different actors involved inside and around border places of detention. Secondly, it aims to analyse French Borders both from a territorial point of view, by observing the plurality of border-spaces, and in terms of the social, racial and gender boundaries, which constitute the individual experience of border-crossing in

migration. In the last few years, European borders have been in a constant state of crisis, where precarious forms of living constantly increased. The present context of a global pandemic certainly reinforces this tendency, as closed borders and a limited freedom of circulation have suddenly become an issue for a larger part of the world population. But, for the purpose of analysis, it seems necessary to allow the reflexion to go beyond the short time frame of the crisis, in order to fully disclose processes of institutionalisation of violence occurring at the borders, and participating in the creation of the crisis itself.