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**Restricting Immigration: Practices,
Experiences and Resistance**

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Enforcing migration control – which is considered a sovereign right of nation-states – implies making choices about who is allowed to enter and/or stay in the national territory and who is not, thus producing categories and processes of inclusion and exclusion. This project investigates how the exclusion of migrants trying to enter or requested to leave Swiss territory is practiced, experienced and contested by several actors involved. It adopts an ethnographical approach focusing on two fields of practices: border control and bordering practices, as well as immigration detention (the confinement of migrants aiming at ensuring their deportation).

Research Questions

This project investigates the measures taken to prevent the entry and stay of certain migrants considered to be irregular because they do not seem to fit the norms and needs of the current migration regime. It focuses on spatial exclusion practices and seeks to depict experiences and (re-)actions of people who execute practices of exclusion and of people at whom these practices are directed. It pursues the following overarching research question:

- What exclusion measures and practices are put in place within the Swiss immigration and asylum context and how are they perceived, experienced and contested by different actors involved?

The project is split into two case studies that are looking at different sites of exclusion – the border and the detention center – using an ethnographic approach.

The Vitality of Borders: Borderscapes, Migration Control and Everyday Practices (Jana Häberlein)

The first subproject focuses on the border as a site of potential exclusion of people trying to enter Swiss territory. It investigates firstly, how exactly the processes of migration

control are carried out at the border and how these practices vary in different sites, for what reasons and with what consequences. Secondly, it asks how the practices of territorial border control are reflected in the bordering practices and their contestations in social and cultural spaces in a city scape, integrating a gender perspective. Thirdly, the subproject focuses on the experiences, perceptions and sense-making of the border of different actors involved.

Practices, Experiences and Perceptions of Immigration Detention: An Ethnography of Detention Facilities in Switzerland (Laura Rezzonico)

The second subproject focuses on immigration detention practices in Switzerland, i.e. on the confinement of migrants who are not/no longer allowed to stay in the country in order to facilitate their deportation. It analyzes the daily life and functioning of immigration detention facilities, focusing on materiality, (in)formal rules, activities, interactions and coping strategies of detainees and employees. Furthermore, the subjective experiences of staff, detainees and other relevant actors are explored asking how they live, understand and make sense of immigration detention.

Approach

The starting point of the project is that any legal provision is translated into practices by specific actors that have a certain margin for manoeuvre in the way they implement it. This gives rise to gaps between the law and its implementation, which highlights the great importance of empirical studies focusing on the agency and power of actors in order to understand the functioning of the state.

The central notion around which the project is designed is that of exclusion. Based on the concept of social closure (Weber 1968), exclusion is defined as a status and process, by which a person or categories of persons are deprived of access to and participation in opportunities, resources and rights. Exclusion processes are thought of as being gradual, dynamic and differentiated according to the societal aspects they relate to (Achermann 2012). Spatial/territorial exclusion is understood within the project as the material and active spatial control and displacement of migrants' bodies. It needs to be related to other fields and levels of exclusion as well as inclusion.

The spatial and legal exclusion of migrants has been studied in several contexts and with different approaches, focusing for instance on processes of illegalization, securitization, deportation of irregular migrants (De Genova and Peutz 2010; Walters 2002), as well as on bureaucratic practices and decision-making regarding the right to stay in a country (Achermann 2012). Other important areas for the study of spatial exclusion are border control (Klepp 2011) and immigration detention (Bloch and Schuster 2005, Bosworth 2014, Mountz et al. 2013).

Internationally, the research on borders has shifted away from studying borders as demarcations of boundaries and the borderline towards the continuous construction of borders in the process of bordering (van Houtum 2014; van Houtum/van Naerssen 2002). The border is understood as "a socio-spatially constructed and always dynamic configuration of social relations and networks" (van Houtum 2014: 406). While research on borders in Switzerland mainly focused on historical aspects during the Second World War, the subproject on borders develops an understanding of the border as also reaching into other scales and sites within the nation-state, namely into the cityscape.

Empirical research on immigration detention has highlighted the inherent paradoxes, tensions and ambiguities of detention centers, which have been described as spaces of uncertainty and insecurity both for detainees and employees (Bosworth 2014; Griffiths 2013; Hall 2010). These studies also show that detention performs exclusion in various ways and particularly through enclosure, isolation and deportation, as well as through the reification of the boundaries between the citizen and the non-citizen (Griffiths 2013). An empirical analysis of the Swiss case – where

immigration detention is formally embedded in the carceral and penal system – is still lacking and will contribute to an understanding of the nature and logics of this particular form of administrative detention.

Methodology

The project is based on an ethnographic approach, with the aim of apprehending the complexity of the observed phenomena as well as grasping the points of view of various actors involved. In the first subproject, participant observation is conducted at border posts and interviews are carried out with members of the Swiss Border Guard, migrants and their supporters. For the second subproject, participant observation and interviews with detainees, prison staff, NGOs and cantonal authorities are conducted in two detention facilities.

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