

Title: WE, THE BORDERS. On the complex relationship between ‘borders’ representations and the affective dimension of citizenship

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Border fences are not a new phenomenon. The novelty today is that they are built to respond to the new challenges and fears related to globalization and issues like terrorism, poverty, organized crime and migratory movements. By drawing simultaneously belonging and exclusionary lines around people and things, borders become instruments of dichotomisation, the dividing line between “them” and “us”, embodying regimes of exclusion and, with it, of discrimination and privilege. They, thus, create new spaces of violence, feeding what Nicholas De Genova defined as “the border spectacle”, a scene of exclusion produced by unequal politics of citizenship performed by and institutionalised in anti-migration laws.

Much of the literature on borders and boundaries approach migration as a security issue. Some address the discussions on the colonial legacy; others privilege the contradictions hidden behind the humanitarian and security discourse. Aesthetic-oriented research has been concerned with migrants’ representations within mainstream media and political rhetoric, as well as with the narratives and counternarratives produced around the topic of migration more broadly. And yet, however, these perspectives often fall in the trap of reproducing a discourse that neglects migrants’ own voices and representations of what borders and political belonging mean to them, as well as the challenges they face even when they already formally belong to the political community.

Against this background, and as stressed by David Newman in a call for the next generation of border-related research, borders should be studied not only from a top-down perspective, but also from the bottom-up, focusing on individuals’ border narratives and experiences and reflecting on the ways in which borders impact upon their everyday life. They should be seen not only as barriers, as they have been traditionally constructed, but also and most of all for their potential to constitute bridges and points of contact. It is embracing this call that this study seeks to be built. Stemming from a critical outlook combining international relations, particularly security, border and migration studies; focusing on the perspective of those who, being excluded, dare to cross the border(s) challenging its exclusionary logic, (re)signifying and (re)negotiating it through their own bodies on the move and a cultural production that keep alive the memory of their border crossing. Methodologically, relying on qualitative methods and drawing on insights from postmodern approaches on borders, affect theory and the politics of aesthetics the study mobilizes the notions of ‘border’ and the notion of ‘citizenship’ in order to explore the regimes of inclusion and exclusion they produce; and how they work to challenge global inequalities in migratory context. In this way, this research seeks to contribute to the construction of a rationalizing (or rational) narrative of the border that may integrate and better fundament the implementation of public policies in terms of integration, fostering the eradication of the inequalities that permeate politics of citizenship and bordering practices.