



Borders in the Lives of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Luxembourg and Metz

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Introduction

Over the past 10 months, I have spoken with 25 asylum seekers, rejected asylum seekers and refugees currently in Luxembourg and Metz about their experiences of borders. On the one hand, I wanted to capture the meaning they attributed to border crossings and how these interfered with their movements. On the other hand, I was interested in finding out more about the ongoing barriers they experience in the host country, in the form of difficulties in finding employment or housing. This is what I found:

Borders were often conceptualized in terms of natural borders (the Aegean sea between Turkey and Greece), **material things and bodily representations**.

A Syrian refugee who arrived in Luxembourg in 2015 gave an extensive account of how a natural boundary and a man-made border intersect in the creation of borders:

“The first difficult point [was] the sea between Turkey and Greece. The second difficult point was Hungary because there were a lot of policemen and the Hungarian government built something to not allow you to come into the country. Not a wall, but something to prevent you to come into the country. [Barbed wire fence].” (Syrian refugee in Luxembourg)

An Iraqi refugee who has been in Luxembourg since 2015 told me about how the Serbian border emerged through violence and the threat of violence of border agents:

“When I was in Turkey, my friend told me that Hungary is building this [fence] along the borders. When I arrived in Belgrade they finished it. There were a lot of policemen.” (Iraqi refugee in Luxembourg)

Despite their objective to regulate and/or stop human mobility, borders fail to impede the participants' mobility trajectories. Rather, they contribute to a change of the migratory movements.

Borders do not deter asylum seekers to get to their destination.

An Eritrean asylum from Metz whose first country of entrance was Italy told me about his failed attempts at crossing the Italian-French border at night, through the forest. He would know he arrived in France when he would be caught by the French police and sent back to Italy. In the



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end, he decided to change the route and managed to travel to France via Switzerland and Germany, where he applied for asylum. Once his identification procedure was completed and Italy told the French authorities that he was not wanted back, he was able to lodge an asylum application in France.

The respondents in this study found ways to get across the borders by avoiding increased security flagged up by smugglers or friends. Nevertheless, the barriers experienced once arrived in the country of destination seemed to be less porous.

Everyday borders

In their everyday lives, asylum seekers and refugees are surrounded by borders which are not carried out solely by traditional actors such as border agents. These barriers can be enacted by any individuals during asylum seekers' and refugees' daily interactions. In this respect, control mechanisms of migration have moved from the outskirts of the territory towards its centre, represented by the societal level. In a similar vein, Yuval Davis et al. (2018: 230) argue that everyday bordering and ordering "involve the territorial displacement and relocation of borders and border controls that are, in principle, being carried out by anyone anywhere – government agencies, private companies and individual citizens".

"Last time I was in Esch [in Luxembourg], I found an apartment, I went to the estate agents and the first two months, cost € 6000, something like that. I have looked for something for 3-4 months, to share a room in an apartment. I did find one, but they want at least a 6 months job contract, full time." (Iraqi refugee in Luxembourg)

Housing represents a key dimension of integration as it can influence refugees' sense of belonging to the community and neighbourhood. It is however, closely connected with employment, as access to private housing is often made difficult without the presence of an employment contract and substantial savings for the upfront costs. Since refugees often experience bad labour market outcomes represented by occupational downward mobility (Jackson and Bauder 2014), access to decent housing is often challenging.

To conclude, the preliminary fieldwork findings indicate that the reinforcement of borders between countries via walls, fences, presence of police and border agents etc has proved immaterial to movements. However, the everyday borders within countries have become more sophisticated and strengthened, particularly concerning actors from the private rented sector and labour market.

References

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