



The Deportation Corridor. A spatial, institutional and affective state of transit

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In the course of the last two decades, the territorial exclusion of unwanted foreigners, constructed as a threat to national security, has become an important tool of current policies of migration to act both as deterrent and control. In Europe and North America, the quest for border-based national security has led to a substantial transformation in the application of immigration penalties, culminating in the 'normalisation' of the administrative entanglement of detention and forced return (see for instance [here](#) for the UK and [here](#) for the USA). This development contributed to a discursive association between terrorism, security and immigration, resulting in a rising application of deportation as a tool to effect



departure.

In this post we wish to underline the importance of taking a transnational perspective over what we have termed the *deportation corridor*, and we will do so by drawing on the contributions that formed part of a special issue we edited for the [Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies](#) entitled '[Deportation, Anxiety, Justice: New Ethnographic Perspectives.](#)'



Deportation, the forced removal of foreign nationals from a given national territory, is not a singular event. It is a process that begins long before, and carries on long after, the removal from one country to another takes place. Deportation crosses places and spaces, connects countries and nations. Most important, deportation involves more than those who are or might be deported. The experience of deportation ties together deportable and deported individuals as well as their families with the decisions and actions of state officials, bureaucrats, lawyers and judges - it brings them together with security



personnel, agents of border control and prison staff, it involves political activists, rights-focused non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as the media.

Referring to the processual quality of deportation described above, we argue for a transnational perspective over the deportation corridor, which covers different places, times, actors, organisations and institutions, as well as different domains and sites of experience, such as arrest, imprisonment, detention, removal, return.

Corridors are spaces of in-between-ness and movement, connecting and referring to rooms of clearer positionality, assignment and representation. In many corridors of institutional spaces, empty chairs signal the passive, waiting position to which actors have to submit themselves; corridors here host an atmosphere of clear hierarchies, governing and spatial order. In contrast to the spaces they refer to—that appear clear, agreeable and inviting—corridors are often poorly lit, shady and suspect. They may be impersonal and affectively cold as nobody is supposed to live in them.

By connecting the notion of the corridor to the enactment and the experience of deportation, we wish to highlight a spatial, institutional and affective state of transit, which appears permanent and transitory at the same time.

We also pinpoint dichotomies such as inside/outside, centre/margins, inclusion/exclusion, which are both produced and problematized through the process of deportation.



An ethnographic examination of the deportation corridor presents however great methodological and logistical challenges. Not only are many of the locations difficult to access or even to locate (deportation flights, immigration detention centres, border posts, and so on), but also researchers are faced with temporal and often financial limits to their ethnographic fieldwork.



In the special issue we have collected papers that trace the deportation corridor. United under different perspectives, covering different steps, stages and angles along its way in different parts of the world, the ethnographies that formed part of the collection can be understood as complementary to each other.

Drawing on the contributions to this special issue, we wish to show here that, from an empirical point of view, the situation and experiences met along a chronology of deportation are related, connected to, and constitutive of each other. In the special issue, [Heike Drotbohm](#) examines the conflicts experienced within transnational families that are generated by the threat as well as the realization of deportation. In her paper, she includes both the perspectives of family members staying behind in the country of destination and the problematic living conditions of Cape Verdean deportees after their involuntary return from the USA and their aim to reintegrate into rather hostile 'home' communities. Other papers cover the conditions and experiences of deportability as well as the fear of, and protest against, deportation. [Ines Hasselberg](#), concentrating on the British case, reflects on the impact that migrants' perception of their own deportation process bear in their perceived entitlement to participate in open forms of political action such as demonstrations and protests [Barak Kalir](#) takes instead a closer look at the [Israeli case](#), where the public debate on the treatment of asylum seekers carries strong references to a Jewish history of persecution.



The examination of the situation of migrants under the threat of deportation is complemented by an additional focus. We examine the transient phase that involves state measures such as arrest and detention, deportation flights as well as the political collaboration between the 'country of residency' and the 'country of citizenship' in having to negotiate over the migrants' condition of return. In the special issue, [Nicolas Fischer](#) reflects on his fieldwork carried out in an immigration detention centre located at the international airport of a French city. There he concentrated on the everyday interactions between detainees, staff, lawyers and other professional groups. He pinpoints a crucial contradiction of these transitory spaces: detention centres are not only violent policing institutions, but also a 'humanitarian' realm, where extreme forms of suffering, whether self-inflicted or otherwise, call for immediate relief.



The circumstances of deportees in their alleged countries of origin is covered by



[Treasa Galvin](#) as well as [Liza Schuster](#) and Nassim Majidi who elaborate on the situation of deportees returned to Zimbabwe and Afghanistan, respectively. Treasa Galvin centres on [the normalisation of deportation](#) in what has become a routine border crossing between Botswana and Zimbabwe, focusing both on the disruptive impact of deportability and actual removal, and on migrants' strategies to minimise its impact. Liza Schuster and Nassim Majidi focus more specifically on [the experience of arriving empty-handed to Afghanistan](#) in the follow-up of deportation proceedings and the role that stigma has on deportees' aspirations to re-emigrate.

Tracing the deportation corridor demands an examination of different topographies, which the special issue does in extending the geographical sites not only to cover Europe, Africa and Asia, but also, and most importantly, by going beyond the north-south perspective and including an examination of south-south deportation trajectories. Through contrasting examples of deportation, which occur within the so-called Global South, we are able to take into account the hierarchisation of different countries. This is an ordering undertaken not only by policy-makers and border control agents but also by migrants and their social communities who give meaning to different types of spatial mobility. Such is well evidenced in the above-mentioned contribution by Schuster and Majidi that reveals the different experiences of forced return according to the departing region. In Afghanistan, as the authors so clearly show, not only migration but also forced return is now seen as part of a daily routine with neighbouring countries, such as Iran and Pakistan. This echoes Galvin's findings of deportation from Botswana to neighbouring Zimbabwe that point to the normalcy of deportation, despite the hardship that it provokes. Interestingly, however, Schuster and Majidi show that this perception of deportation as a side event is not applicable to those returning from further afield as Europe, the USA or Australia. In these instances, deportation is taken as a serious failure and deportees (and their families) suffer from high levels of stigma.



All these insights make clear that deportation has become an often-experienced state practice, which can go along with a certain process of adaption and normalisation, while at the same time producing agency and resistance.

We also consider those approaches that include the perspectives of different actors of the deportation process both in the countries of settlement and in the countries of origin (see for instance [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). Likewise, the special issue addresses the points of view and experiences not only of migrants themselves but also of politicians, government agencies, lawyers, civil society, bureaucrats, agents of border control and deportees' family members. It does so by examining the perspectives and



interests of different types of actors along the deportation corridor such as: the production of, and response to, deportability among deportable migrants, their families as well as their ethnic communities, NGOs and political activists (see above-mentioned contributions by Galvin, Hasselberg, and Kalir); those involved in removal procedures and related practices, such as local government authorities, Human Rights advocates, medical staff as well as the detainees themselves (see above-mentioned contributions by Galvin, and Fischer); and finally, those actors coming together in the moment of arrival, when deportees have to familiarise themselves and resettle in often unknown 'home' countries, in which they are received by state authorities as well as rather unfamiliar local communities (see above-mentioned contributions by Drotbohm, and Schuster and Majidi).

The deportation corridor is the stage of intense emotional and normative



expressions, which emphasises the interconnections between deportation, justice and anxiety. These go hand in hand with public and individual perceptions of fairness and justice that shape and influence how deportation is experienced, felt and interpreted. As the papers to the special issue show, governments, agents of border control, the media and citizens of host societies can both produce and struggle with conflicting feelings of anxiety, channeled to irregular(ised) migrants who are perceived as a diffuse threat in the pursuit of security.

According to our understanding, it is the diversity of emotions as well as the diversity of normative standards inherent to the deportation corridor that shed light on the complexity as well as the inconsistencies and contingencies of deportation.



In her commentary to the special issue, [Susan Bibler Coutin](#) highlights [crucial legal paradoxes stemming from deportation](#). Protection or control, compassion or justice, individual or collective rights, humanitarianism or enforcement prove to be highly contradictory, 'doublebind' categories in the context of forced removal.



Despite its dubious effectiveness both in managing migration and protecting national security, deportation has come to be regarded as the unavoidable way to deal with those foreign nationals who are deemed unwanted. Providing new and complementary insights into what 'deportation' as a legal and policy measure actually embraces in social reality, the contributions to the special issue trace the deportation corridor. In doing so, they shed light on the effects of deportation practices on the lives of the people concerned before, during and after forced removal and on migratory aspirations of future or already deported migrants. Most importantly, they highlight the social suffering inherent to deportation and show clearly that the deterring intention and security rationale of deporting states is hardly ever realised which calls into question the legitimacy of such practices.