

The Border as a Space of Contention

The Spatial Strategies of Protest Against European Border Controls

Abstract

This article analyses the spatial dimension of social movements mobilizing against border controls. Focusing on the case of the protests against European Union immigration policies, it shows that new spatial strategies of collective action have emerged since the beginning of the 2000s: movements construct collective actions that aim to identify and occupy the borders. These new strategies are related with a transformation of the material and symbolic dimensions of borders in the last decades. As borders have become more diffuse and organised through a selective power of control, social movements locate strategically their protest in order to document the existence of borders and make clear what the nature of power relations in these spaces is.

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Introduction

In Europe, since the closure of states' borders in the middle of the 1970s, social movements for the rights of migrants protest against border controls and their effects on migrants' life. Forms of protest such as demonstrations, occupations, petitions, juridical actions or hunger strikes are used to make the cause of migrants visible and to demand their right to stay (Koopmans et al., 2005). In the last decades, some of these movements explore new strategies that are based on new geographies of protest. Groups and networks such as Migreurop or No Border construct collective actions which target borders specifically (whether physically through their direct location at states' borders or symbolically through their contentious representation of borders) and which demand the right to mobility. In doing so, they define borders as contentious spaces. These new strategies of protest are particularly visible at the European Union level, and they coincide with the launching of the process of integration of immigration and asylum policies. This is particularly true since the creation of Frontex (the European Union agency coordinating external borders controls) in 2004. For example, in October 2006, European networks mobilizing for the rights of migrants called for a "transnational action day against migration-control". In this transnational protest, simultaneous actions were organized at symbolic places representing states and EU borders: it was presented as "an international day of mobilisation that could take place in the sites and symbols of the frontiers (airports, detention centers, embassies, etc.)."ⁱ

This article proposes to explore the new geographies of protest against border controls and for the rights of migrants (in particular undocumented migrants) by relying on an understanding of the border as a specific geographical space in contemporary societies. Focusing on the case of the European movements mobilising against border controls, it analyses why and how borders are a new space of contention since the beginning of the 2000s.

As outlined in studies exploring the relations between geographical spaces and social practices, spaces created by human beings have a material and a symbolic dimension (Lefebvre, 1991; Gieryn, 2000). The material dimension refers to the physical organization of daily life spaces. It is a “perceived space” (Lefebvre, 1991), which is made of neighbourhoods, parks, shops, factories or walls. This space is the result as well as a factor influencing the organization of social life. It maintains social order through social control and regulation (Soja, 1996). For example, walls keep private property and their effect is to include or exclude different social groups from the daily circulation in a specific area. The symbolic dimension of space refers to its dominant meaning and representations. It is a “conceived space” (Lefebvre, 1991), which is related to the production of knowledge, signs and codes by the part of “scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers” (Lefebvre, 1991: 38).

From this perspective, I will argue that, like any other spaces, the border has a symbolic and material dimension, and that the specific features of this space shape the collective actions of social movements mobilizing for the rights of migrants. More precisely, my central argument relates with the changing features of this space. As it is shown by Lefebvre (1991), the material and symbolic dimensions of space vary in time and place. This is the case with European borders in the last decades: in the ways they are organised and conceived, they transform into a diffuse space regulated by control policies (Bigo, 2002; Walters, 2006). I will thus argue that the recent changes in the border spaces (specifically at the European level) have significant consequences on the strategies of protest for the rights of migrants. Relying on the concept of “spatial claim making” (Tilly, 2000), I will show that the transformation of borders has led social movements to launch collective actions which aim to demonstrate the multi-faceted material and symbolic existence of borders and to challenge their construction as exceptional spaces. I propose thus to bridge border studies – and more precisely those related with immigration – with a recent interest in the “spatialities of contentious politics” (Leitner, Sheppard and Sziarto, 2008; Sewell, 2001). For that, I focus on the activities of a set of European groups and networks which mobilize against border controls, and which strategically locate their protest ‘at the border’.

The next part of the article will present the methods and data that have been used for this study. I will then show how the spatial dimension of contention can be related with a socio-geographical analysis of the border. I will then present the specificities and recent changes of the border spaces. Finally, developing on the example of the groups and networks mobilizing against EU border controls, I will show how these specificities and changes affect the strategies of protest for the rights of migrants. In particular, relying on Barry (1999) and

Walters (2008), I will show that these strategies can be understood as ‘acts of demonstration’: their collective actions are located at the borders (whether physically or symbolically) in order to demonstrate their existence and, in doing so, challenge their materiality (by making them visible) and conception (by contesting their definition as a space of ‘protection’).

Methods and Data

This empirical research is based on the observation of the collective actions constructed by a set of groups and networks which emerged in the beginning of the 2000s and which mobilize against European border controls. Twelve groups and networks were analysed in total. These include networks privileging contentious forms of actions (such as No Border, Frassanito or No Lager), groups and initiatives basing their activities on information and of awareness-raising campaigns (such as Frontexwatch, All Included, Borderline Europe or Bordermonitoring) and networks with more diversified forms of protest (Migreurop in particular). All these networks and groups target EU policies. However, some of them are transnational in nature while others are more local. Thus, networks such as No Border or Migreurop gather activists from different countries and construct collective actions across borders. Differently, groups like All Included or Bordermonitoring tend to be organised and act more exclusively at the local level. None of these networks and groups has been created by migrants themselves. They define their activities as a mobilization on behalf of – or in solidarity with – migrants.

These networks and groups have been selected because their identity is specifically related with the spatial dimension of borders in Europe. As will be developed below, they mobilize for the rights of migrants, against border controls, and (most importantly for this research) 'at the border'. Indeed, one central dimension of their protest is that it is strategically located in places that are defined as being representative of border policies and practices. Therefore, the selection of these networks and groups allows us to observe how and why the spatial strategies of protest against border controls interrelate with the specific features of the border space.

I observed the spatial dimension of their collective actions through a protest event analysis focusing on three dimensions: the location of protest; the definition of borders presented in the course of their protest; the form of collective action (belonging to a contentious, pluralist or corporatist repertoire). Their protest events have been observed between 2000 and 2012. The protest events that have been selected are those in which the spatial dimension is central: those in which the location of protest is explicitly presented as a crucial dimension in the strategy of claim-making. As will be developed below, these can be campaigns of information and awareness raising, symbolic direct actions, demonstrations, blockades and disruptive actions of civil disobedience, or these can be actions such as the distribution of leaflets or the design of a map representing border control policies. In the course of these protests, activists strategically locate their action at the border. For example, they take place in airports, in front of detention centres, or at the territorial border between two countries (in Calais or Ceuta for example). They can also locate symbolically their action at the border through the design of maps for example. 55 protest events were analysed in total. The documents used for the analysis were the communiqués,

calls for participation, reports, information leaflets and background documents that were published by these networks and groups in the course of their protest. These documents were collected on their websites and archives.

The spatial dimension of contention

Since the end of the 1990s, a part of the literature on social movements has started to consider the spatial dimension of protest (Leitner, Sheppard and Sziarto, 2008; Martin and Miller, 2003; Sewell, 2001; Tilly, 2000, 2003). Studies exploring the “geographies of contention” (Martin and Miller, 2003: 144) underline in particular how space can be a constraint for social movements (Auyero, 2005). They aim to show how “geographies matters to the imaginaries, practices and trajectories of social movements” (Leitner, Sheppard and Sziarto, 2008: 158) and how spaces can “determine or at least tightly constrain social action” (Sewell, 2001: 54). For example, from this perspective, the analysis of the “ecologies of social movements” can show how certain characteristics of protest can be explained by the location and rhythmic spatial movements of participants in collective actions (Zhao, 1998). Also, studies show how the spatial concentration of specific social groups can be a factor explaining their mobilization (Gould, 1995; Hmed, 2008).

Space is both a constraint and the result of human agency (Gieryn 2000). In other words, “it is both a given and subject to transformation” (Mathieu, 2008). If many studies have analysed space as a constraint for the activities of social movements, few have explored how activists base their protest on strategies of transformation of space, how they “struggle

over the spatial constitution of social, political, and economic relations” (Martin and Miller, 2003: 150). Moreover, the question to know how and why new spatial strategies of protest emerge remains unexplored. I want to underline these dimensions through the example of the protest against borders at the EU level. My general argument is that, in this case, the changes in the features of a space (the border) in the last decades have led to the construction of new spatial strategies of protest. As shown by Tilly (2000: 146), activists can base their protest on “spatial claim making”: “the changing locations, activities, and spatial configuration of people themselves constitute a significant part of contention”. As a matter of fact, through the location and itineraries of their protest, activists give a specific impact and meaning to their collective action. In particular, they can “come to represent memberships, commitments, and collective actions” (Tilly, 2000: 148). Basing on the concept of spatial claim making, I will show how activists define strategies of appropriation, occupation and manipulation of places. More specifically, I will show that the recent changes in the features of borders have led social movements for the rights of migrants to invest the border as a new space of mobilization: they implement ‘acts of demonstration’ (Barry, 1999; Walters, 2008) that consist in the identification and occupation of borders. In doing so, they define new forms of spatial claim making. By implementing strategies to identify and occupy the border (whether physically or symbolically) and ‘demonstrate’ its existence, they aim to transform its materiality (by making it visible) and representation (contesting its definition as a space of ‘protection’).

As shown by Lefebvre (1991), a particular space is the locus of specific power-relations. This is the case of borders. The protest against borders is, in this respect, transformative: it is a performance that aims to transform the power-relations in which migrants (and in particular

undocumented migrants) are embedded. As a recent literature focusing on the internal dynamics of collective action shows, protest is an event that produces changes, independently from its outcomes in terms of policy-making (McAdam and Sewell, 2001; della Porta, 2011). It is “a moment of rupture that produces new power relations and opens new political possibilities” (Monforte and Dufour, 2013: 88). I argue thus more generally that the spatial claim making at the border is transformative: it aims to transform the materiality and representations of borders. This general idea is in line with the concept of “lived space” (Lefebvre, 1991). The lived space is the subject of strategies of appropriation and transformation by the part of those who live in it: it is the “space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate” (Lefebvre, 1991: 39). It is the space in which the practices of its inhabitants define alternative spatial orders. In other words, the lived space is the “terrain for the generation of ‘counterspaces’, spaces of resistance to the dominant order” (Soja, 1996: 68).ⁱⁱ

Analysing the borders’ space as an object of contention leads us to explore what are the specificities of this space in the first instance. This is what the next section aims to present: through the analysis of the material and symbolic dimension of this space, I explore the specific power-relations being constructed at the borders, and I show how they have been changing in the last decades.

The changing material and symbolic dimensions of borders: the construction of a delocalized “space of non-existence”

The recent literature on borders and immigration regimes shows that borders are undergoing a process of transformation (Andrijasevic, 2009). Borders were traditionally understood as being situated at the edges of states' territories, establishing a strict connection between the territory and policies of legal inclusion and exclusion. In other words, borders were conceived as an easily identifiable geographical limit which establishes a binary demarcation between the inside and outside of the territory as well as the inside and outside of citizenship (Makaremi, 2010; Neocleous, 2003). The presence of undocumented migrants within states' territories, and the policies and administrative practices related to them, show however that this conceptualization of borders is misleading. Border controls, and immigration policies more generally, acknowledge the existence of a social group who is neither included nor completely excluded from citizenship (Monforte and Dufour, 2011). As a matter of fact, the spatiality and function of borders is changing (Bigo, 2002; Walters, 2002). Borders are being delocalized and can be conceptualized more as "zones" (Newman, 2006), "nodes" (Heyman, 2004), "remote controls" (Guiraudon and Lahav, 2000) or "filters" (Muller, 2011) than territorial limits. What these different conceptualizations show is that borders are becoming increasingly diffuse: "the border is everywhere" (Balibar, 2002: 80). Consequently, whole countries become borders themselves (Balibar, 1998): they are situated everywhere in the territory and affect the everyday life of people living in it, especially those who do not have a legal residence permit. This means that the binary demarcation between the inside and the outside is blurred and that the specific governmental practices and technologies that were once situated at the edges of territories can now be encountered all over the territories (Cuttita, 2007; Rumford, 2006; Salter, 2008).

As shown by Rajaram and Grundy-Warr (2007) the border has been transformed into a politically, socially, and culturally constructed space of control. The organisation of this space makes specific social groups into subjects of political and administrative practices and discourses that fall outside the normal legal order. This perspective leads thus to focus on the linkage between the geographical dimension of border and the power relations that are constructed in it (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007: 26-27). In other words, it leads to explore the spatiality of power and governance (Allen, 1999; Foucault, 1977; Walters, 2006). As exposed earlier, this linkage can be explored through a focus on the dominant representation of space (the symbolic dimension of space) and its materiality. As the analysis of these two dimensions shows, the border is becoming more and more a “space of non-existence” for migrants (and in particular undocumented migrants): a space in which, “subjected to detention and deportation if apprehended, the undocumented sometimes limit their travel, staying home, avoiding areas where immigration officials conduct raids, staying away from checkpoints, and moving about only as necessary” (Coutin, 2000: 33).

First, the border is a symbolic space. It is imagined by power-holders and hence made of “knowledge, signs, codes...” (Lefebvre, 1991: 33). As shown by Bigo (2002) and Huysmans (1995), governments link border controls with the topic of security. This discourse of “securitisation” (Muller, 2011) defines the border as a space of ‘protection’. Indeed, in the discourse of professional politicians, immigration belongs to the new insecurities that have emerged after 1989, and it is presented through a rhetoric of fear of foreigners (Huysmans and Buonfino, 2008). This tendency has increased since September 2001, and linkages between immigration and terrorism are often made (Huysmans, 2006). From this perspective, the border – and the policies of control related to it – is conceived as a

protection against a threat for the nation. It is also perceived as a protection against “unsafety” and “unease”: borders would protect from threats for “social and community cohesion, the welfare state, the sustainability of the labour market, cultural and racial identity, etc.” (Huysmans and Buonfino, 2008: 26). Here, the border refers less to the protection of the nation than to the protection of citizens in their everyday life; it refers to what is presented as the development of a general context of insecurities. This discourse of securitization is therefore used to justify the implementation of bordering policies in all domains of social life (and thus not only at the edges of territories, but also within territories). For example, this rhetoric was specifically strong in the United Kingdom, during the debates related to the implementation of new technologies of identification (Walters, 2004).

The border is thus conceived as a protection provided by the state to the everyday unease of individuals in a “risk society” (Bigo, 2002). The political discourse on borders is related with a conception on the power of the state and its direct relationship with citizens: “it assumes that professional politicians have a power that they do not want to lose concerning their right to accept or to refuse the everyday movement of people from other countries” (Bigo, 2002: 69-70). Furthermore, from the perspective of the discourse on the governability of the unease, this assumed power on the everyday movement of people “delineates the figure of the migrant by inverting the image of the good citizen” (Bigo, 2002: 70). The political discourse conceives thus the border as an instrument that is meant to protect and reassure through the distinction between “good citizens” and those whose behaviour creates risks.

Then, the border is a material space: it is the “mundane space of everyday life and its spatial practices” (Allen, 1999: 259). In relation with borders, the focus on the material dimension suggests that “a boundary, if strongly enforced by the state, becomes ‘real’ –that is, perceived” (Dean, 2007: 191). In contemporary societies, borders are enforced by the state through policies and practices of control (Bigo, 2007; Walters, 2006). Borders become real through check points and barbed wires at the edges of territories. They also become real through police controls and measures of detention and deportation within and across territories. These “technologies of control” (Pickering and Weber, 2006) are based on the use of different instruments. They constitute specific techniques of identification or detection of hidden bodies such as biometrics, databases, scanners or CO2 detectors (Walters, 2006). Also, border controls involve different actors which are specifically trained for this purpose: beside immigration services, governments delegate power to private agents such as airport companies, to public service providers that are not related with immigration policies (hospitals, schools), and to military forces (Guiraudon, 2003). All these developments are part of a dynamic of “rebordering of the state” (Andreas, 2003), and they relate to the delocalization of borders as well as their diffusion across territories.

Consequently, specific power-relations are being defined at the borders. As developed by Walters (2006), this power-relation is a relation of “control” and “policing” that can operate from everywhere: “(...) today the experience of crossing the border is, for many people, not unlike entering a large corporate building, government ministry, a university library, gated residence or computer network. In each case, the subject is scanned, identified and profiled. A databank is accessed, a record created. An entry occurs, or perhaps access is denied.” (Walters, 2006: 197). This specific form of power operates in different ways on differently

identified groups of people. It is based on the idea that surveillance is for everyone, but control is only for the “others”, those that are considered to be “abnormal”, aliens (Bigo, 2007).

The consequence of this specific form of power-relation is that, although migrants live in the same place than other social groups (they live, work, their children go to schools), their perceived space is different. Elements of geography that are normal to other social groups (or that they ignore) determine their daily life. Places such as public transports, the street, or an official building are places where control policies targeting them specifically can appear. Also, places like detention centres are only witnessed by them. They thus live in a space of exception, a space which materiality is made of policies and practices that fall outside the normal legal order (Fassin, 2005; Monforte and Dufour, 2013).

The border is a space made of a set of constraints which specifically target migrants (and in particular undocumented migrants) and which determine their daily life. The following section explores how these features (and their recent changes) orientate the strategies of the networks mobilizing for the rights of migrants. The empirical analysis shows in particular that, since the beginning of the 2000s, they develop new forms of spatial claim making which articulate strategies of demonstration and transformation of borders.

Spatial claim making at the border: protest as a strategy of demonstration and transformation

As shown by William Walters (2008) through the example of a map representing border controls in Sangatte (near Calais), Barry's (1999) concept of "demonstration" can be used in order to analyse symbolic collective actions against border controls. A demonstration is a political and technical practice which is "a matter of making visible a phenomenon to be witnessed by others" (Barry, 1999: 77). In fact, the notion of demonstration has two senses. As we know it today, the term refers to a political act: "Demonstrators, in this sense, are markers of the unacceptability of another's action; expression of whether the exercise of power should be limited or intensified. They claim to display that subjects have a stake in government." (Barry, 1999: 76). But the term has another historical sense: it also refers to a technical act. In the Middle Ages, the demonstrator was the person who, in the anatomy lecture theatre, "pointed out the feature of the body which was being shown and about which the lecturer was speaking" (Barry, 1999: 77). The demonstrator was the person who "demonstrated" the truth: "The truth of the lecturer's knowledge was established through observing a demonstration" (Barry, 1999: 77). Although the second sense of this term has disappeared in the common language, a demonstration, as a public action of protest, is often meant to be political as well as technical. In fact, as shown by Barry through the example of an anti-road protest in the UK, it is often through the choice of their location that the technicality of demonstrations becomes visible. Thus, being located where the roads were being constructed rather than in front of the Parliament or the office of the Prime Minister, the anti-road protests were "an act of *pointing out* to others the likelihood that environmental destruction would occur. (...) The demonstration worked not by representing the views of a group or a constituency but by showing damage and destruction" (Barry, 1999: 81).

The analysis of the protest constructed by the groups and networks mobilizing against European border controls shows the prevalence of this demonstrative dimension. Due to the changing features of borders in the last decades, these groups have developed new strategies of spatial claim making in order to ‘demonstrate’ the existence of borders. Two strategies in particular are carried out: the identification and the occupation of border spaces. The analysis shows moreover that these acts of demonstration are coupled with transformative strategies: by making the border visible, activists aim to change (at least symbolically) the features of borders. In other words, acts of demonstration are strategically designed in order to challenge the materiality and representation of borders.

- The identification of borders

The first strategy which guides the protest of activists mobilizing against border controls is a strategy of identification of borders. It has emerged as a result of the delocalization of borders in the last decades. As borders become less visible and more diffuse, activists have developed new forms of knowledge and expertise in order to define the object of their grievances. The identification of borders is part of the broader strategy of demonstration because it leads to expose in the public sphere a reality which is witnessed only by those who live at the border (migrants, and undocumented migrants in particular).

This strategy is implemented through actions of information that aim to point out the multiple forms of border controls and the different types of actors involved in their management. Thus, in 2012, the London NoBorder network published a map entitled “Bordered London” that aims to “illustrate how the border regime in London and the

surrounding areas works”ⁱⁱⁱ. It locates thus the “border posts” (airport and international train stations), the “decision makers” (such as the Home Office or the UK Border Agency), the “reporting centres” (where migrants have to report regularly to public authorities), the “immigration prisons” (the removal centres), and the “immigration profiteers” (the private companies being involved in the management of removal centres or deportations for example). Other networks active in Europe have published maps that aim to identify borders and border control mechanisms. This is for example the case of the “Map of the Camps for Foreigners in Europe and Mediterranean Countries”, published and regularly updated by Migreurop since 2003.^{iv} This is also the case of the “Virtual Cartography of European Migration Policies” (MigMap) which was published in 2006 by activists involved in the TransitMigration network and which aims in particular to map “border installations” across territories. With this type of actions, these networks aim to “gather(ing) information about a complex reality, for the reason that it is intentionally hidden and that the geographical scale is specific”.^v They aim also to “name” this reality. Thus, the MigMap project is presented as a way to “investigate precisely how the new forms of supranational governance that can be observed in the European migration regime function”.^{vi}

Other forms of collective actions are constructed for the purpose of identifying borders. These groups and networks conduct regular missions of observation and they publish reports on the situation in detention centres or specific zones of control (such as Calais in the North of France, Lampedusa in Italy or at the Spanish-Moroccan border in Ceuta and Melilla). They also construct long-term campaigns that target specific agents involved in border controls. This is for example the case of the “Aviation-Campaign” launched by NoBorder in 2001 and targeting airline companies involved in deportation procedures. This

is also the case of the protests targeting the European Union Frontex agency through information campaigns and direct actions (see in particular the “Frontexplode” campaign launched by activists close to the NoBorder network, the “Frontexit” campaign launched by Migreurop, and the “Frontexwatch” initiative launched by a group of activists in Germany). These different forms of actions aim to make the borders visible through the collection and circulation of information. The “collection of information” and “gathering of witness statements” are thus presented as central objectives of the Frontexit campaign:

“The Frontexit campaign aims primarily to collect information on the operation of the Frontex agency, its activities and the consequences of these activities on migrants. Several missions, both institutional and field operations, are planned as part of the campaign. The first will take place in 2013 on the Greece-Turkey border. Volunteers are also sent to the field by the Migreurop network. The next departures are planned for April 2013 to Serbia, Greece and Ceuta. The objective is to better understand the political impact Frontex has on the states involved and to gather witness statements.”^{vii}

Further analysis shows that, through their strategies of identification, these networks relate their actions with a more general objective of monitoring of the activities of authorities at the borders. In doing so, they aim to raise awareness on the changing realities of borders. This idea is thus openly expressed by groups and initiatives such as Bordermonitoring, Borderline Europe, WatchTheMed or Frontexwatch. They present their strategy as a way to “break the silence” (Borderline Europe) and to “keep an eye on the Kerberos of the EU border regime” (Frontexwatch). In the same perspective, the Migreurop network has

launched a European Borders Observatory in 2008. This initiative is presented as a way to bring information to public attention:

“The Borders Observatory project was created in 2008 as a result of observations made during the daily activities of the network (investigations, international meetings and partnerships with other organisations): the poor conditions for the reception and integration of foreigners, the numerous violations of basic human rights and the situation of vulnerability in which migrants at Europe’s borders find themselves have barely been documented and are little known to the public, politicians and civil society members. It became apparent that there is an urgent need to systematise this information so that it may be brought to public attention and to offer a non-governmental view of European immigration policies, moving beyond questions relating solely to detention.”^{viii}

From this perspective, the question of the difficult access to information and to the places where the border is materialized (such as the detention centres) becomes central. This leads these networks to develop particular forms of actions and to use specific types of resources. In particular, they construct a regular collaboration with the academic and journalistic fields in order to gain a high level of expertise in this domain. They also launch observation missions in order to get first-hand information. Some of these networks also develop some forms of collaboration within the political field in order to demand access to the borders. This is for example the case of the campaign Open Access Now, which was launched by Migreurop in 2012. This campaign demands the granting of an access to detention centres in Europe for journalists and actors of civil society. It has been strategically constructed in collaboration with Members of European and national Parliaments, who, in many EU

countries, have access to these centres. As will be developed below, this question of access has also led some of these networks to use disruptive forms of actions such as occupations or blockades in order to collect and publicize information about border controls. The use of these forms of actions and resources lead these networks to develop specific forms of discourses in the public sphere. As a matter of fact, the analysis of their documents shows that they tend to rely on a discourse that is close to that of a report: in line with the notion of demonstration, it aims to “point out” a situation through a precise description. Thus, among many examples, Migreurop’s “chronology of migration policy” is particularly illustrative. It is presented as an instruments that aims to “picture” EU border controls policies:

“This chronology seeks to make it easier to understand European migration and asylum policies through a time-framed comparison of the evolution of the legal framework (columns A1 to A3), the public discourse (B1) and the facts (B2). The table is updated twice a year. The aim is to picture the way in which the EU policy of closing the borders, apart from the sequence of tragedies that it causes, leads to human rights violations and to absurd situations that are sometimes impossible to manage by the very people who implement them, in an escalation whose effects sometimes appear to escape the grasp of its protagonists, and bargaining among states in which migrants, refugees and displaced people represent a form of exchange currency.”^{ix}

The expertise and specific forms of discourses put forward by these networks give a specific meaning to their actions. The implicit idea behind their strategies of identification of

borders is that an expertise (that of the 'demonstrator') is needed in order to point out and to report what borders really are. These strategies imply the idea that the border is a specific space which is governed by policies and instruments which are generally unknown in the public sphere. The underlying idea is thus that the border is a space in which governments develop practices that are out of the normal legal order. By becoming the 'demonstrators', the activists of these networks become thus the 'experts', those who can show these practices in the public sphere. In doing so, they give a new meaning to spaces which are known by citizens in their daily life (for example by presenting places like airports and train stations as zones in which migrants are the subjects of specific controls), and they make visible places that are hardly accessible (reporting centres or removal centres in the case of the Bordered London map for example). This relates with a strategy of transformation of the materiality of borders. By collecting and circulating knowledge about the borders, they aim to 'normalize' this space (in the sense that they aim to include it in the normal legal order). By making it visible, activists intent to bring the border space closer to the public space, to the physical space that is inhabited by citizens. In other words, they aim to make it a less 'exceptional' space: they intend to transform it into a space that everyone can witness and reach (so not only migrants), and so that is not defined by specific practices that target migrants in particular.

- The occupation of borders

The second strategy of spatial claim making which is carried out by the groups and networks mobilizing against border controls in Europe is a strategy of occupation of the border space. This strategy is part of the more general objective of 'demonstration': these actors

implement direct actions that are located strategically in order to reveal the materiality of borders. This general objective is thus put forward in the self-presentation of the No Border network:

“Since 1999 people acting under the No Borders banner have been directly targeting the structures and organisations that uphold the system of migration management. They have set up many No Border camps round the world to take action, learn together and bring attention to the reality of border controls.”^x

Through the strategic location of their protest in the border space, these networks aim to “point out” the multi-dimensional existence of borders and the consequences they have for migrants. This is for example the case of a protest against a detention centre in the UK in 2011. As it is presented in the communiqué published by the activists who organised it, this action was a way to point out the materiality of this space. In particular, its location permitted to present precisely how the detention centre is organized (the fences and gates) and who are the actors involved in its management:

“The activists gathered outside the front gates (metal fencing with a perspex cover) with a banner denouncing Barnardo's involvement in the detention industry (the charity is running "social and welfare services" at the detention centre). They chanted through a loudspeaker and made noise with various instruments. They also walked part of the way round the perimeter fence, continuing to remonstrate loudly against detention and deportation. There were guards in hi-vis vests in the grounds of the centre, and a UKBA guard was also spotted. There was no sign of any of the detainees.”^{xi}

Another example of this form of spatial claim making is the “Boat4People” campaign which was launched by Migreurop and other European and African networks in 2012. This initiative consisted in a “boat rally” gathering a crew of “activists, parliamentarians, artists and journalists” from Italy to Tunisia. With this “sea mission”, activists aimed to “document, denounce and prevent violations of migrants' human rights at sea”, to “build a network of organizations and activists” and, more generally, to raise awareness in the public opinion.^{xii} But this action was also strategically located in order to make visible border controls in the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, in their reports of the actions, activists show how they could collect information about border controls. They also show how, by being present in the border space, they could become direct witnesses of border controls. This is thus underlined in a communiqué published at the end of the action:

“B4P’s Oloferne did not encounter any migrants in distress while at sea, but its passengers were able to verify first hand the extent of the means deployed to secure the EU’s maritime border. On the 15th of July the Oloferne was overflown by a Frontex patrol aircraft and subsequently stopped by a patrol boat of the Italian Coast Guard for identification. This encounter also gives its meaning to the B4P campaign, for as long as Frontex and national agencies cloak their activities in opacity, a presence at sea will be the only means of accessing detailed information as to their deployment.”^{xiii}

Although they privilege more disruptive forms of protest, protest events such as the “European action days for free movement and the right to stay” in 2004 and 2005, the

“European caravan against the death fence” in Ceuta in 2005 or the yearly No Border camps are based on the same strategy of occupation of the border space. All these actions are located at symbolic places representing border controls. For example, the groups participating in the European action days for free movement and the right to stay in Italy in 2005 organised their actions in front of a detention centre in Sicily and in the region of Friuli. They presented these places as “two politically crucial places, the two Italian ‘doors’ to Europe”^{xiv}. In doing so, activists aim to point out the existence of borders and to ‘reveal’ the nature of power-relations in this specific space. The significance of the location of protest is thus underlined in the call for participation in the Calais No Border camp in 2009:

“Since 1998 there have been numerous No Border camps around the world; including the Czech-German, Polish-Ukrainian, Moroccan-Spanish, US-Mexican, and Turkish-Greek border lines as well as at various points in the UK, Australia, France, Finland, and Italy. In each case hundreds or thousands of people have come together at a location that represents control, repression and injustice and have united under the slogan Freedom of Movement for All. These No Border camps represent bases for action, for building networks of solidarity, for self-education and to physically challenge the border regime. Borders are highly protected and contested areas and are therefore a challenging location for direct action. The desire to ‘tear down the fences’ is not always achieved, but they do act as a means of bringing attention on the repression that occurs in the name of defending national sovereignty.”^{xv}

As this call for participation illustrates, these networks conceive their strategy of spatial claim making as a way to witness border controls, and so to make them visible in the public

sphere: control policies become the centre of attention. As a matter of fact, this strategy has a transformative objective: it aims to challenge how the border is generally conceived in public discourses. By focusing on control policies and their consequences, it aims to present the border as a space of risk rather than as a space of protection. This is thus underlined in a communiqué published by Migreurop after the death of several migrants in their attempt to cross the Moroccan-Spanish border in Ceuta and Melilla. The description of border controls through the use of the term “war” aims to challenge the official presentation of border policies by presenting them as a source of danger:

“Having been engaged in a latent war against migrants for a number of years, the European Union has now passed the point of open war at its southern border. In just a few days, more than ten people have been shot to death while attempting to cross the Moroccan border with the Spanish territories of Ceuta and Mellila. Many others have been severely injured, and hundreds have been deported and abandoned with neither food nor water in the Sahara desert. In an attempt to contain the ‘invasion’ of those referred to only as ‘illegals’, higher and higher walls are built, more and more sophisticated systems are put in place to protect these European islets on African soil from the sub-Saharan enemy.”^{xvi}

As these examples illustrate, demonstration is a central dimension of the collective actions carried out by the groups and networks mobilizing against border controls. These actors use spatial strategies in order to point out the presence of borders as well as the power relations that relate to it. This element is not specific to the protest against border controls (or to the protest in support of migrants in general). In fact, it can be found in the collective actions put forward by groups mobilizing around very different causes (Barry, 1999).

However, in the case of the groups mobilizing against border controls, it takes a specific meaning because it is related to the particular features of borders. Indeed, by demonstrating in the public space where the borders are and how they work, activists subvert the selective character of the border space (selective in the sense that it is only experienced by migrants). Through collective action, it becomes a space that is 'witnessed' by citizens and that can be thus (at least symbolically) appropriated. Moreover, by pointing out the specificities of control policies in this space, activists aim to transform the way borders are perceived in the public space: it becomes a space of risk rather than of protection.

Conclusion

The analysis of the spatial claim making organised by the groups and networks mobilizing against border controls in Europe shows that the specific conceptions, perceptions and practices that are defined in the border space shape their strategies of protest. Since the end of the 1990s, the dominant conception of the border as a zone of protection against migrants has created new instruments of control policies that have a direct impact on migrants' life (and in particular undocumented migrants). The border is now extended across the territory, creating multiple zones of vulnerability for them. In this context, migrants live increasingly in a "space of non-existence" (Coutin, 2000), constructing strategies of invisibility and avoidance. This framework has led the networks mobilising against border controls to develop new strategies: their protests target specifically borders and are strategically located in the border space in order to make border controls visible to

everyone (so not only for migrants). Through their spatial strategies of identification and occupation, they aim to demonstrate, to reveal, the specificities of power relations in this particular space. In doing so, they aim to transform dominant conceptions, perceptions and practices of border, and so to 'normalize' it.

More generally, this study suggests that an analysis of borders as a space of contention leads to address how the "geographical imagination" (Massey and Jess, 2003: 134) shapes power-relations in it. It shows in particular that, in contemporary societies, the dominant conception of border as a zone of 'protection' contributes to reify the limits of citizenship, and so to naturalize the absence of rights for those who cross borders 'illegally'. What is at stake in these protests is the de-construction of this conception. It is the possibility to put forward "rival claims to define the meaning of places and, thereby, rights to control their use or future" (Massey and Jess, 2003: 134).

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