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## Do you need visas to go to America?

On



researching the US deportation regime

### Abstract

Creation of deportation regimes by the nation-states has become an important topic for political anthropology in the last decade (De Genova, 2010). The consequences of deportation have been studied by the anthropology of family (Boehm, 2016) and legal anthropology (Hasselberg, 2016; Zilberg, 2011). According to Walters (2002) and De Genova (2010) deportations and their sheer

possibility, or deportability of migrants, produce sovereignty in the face of uncontrolled border-crossings, perceived by the states as a disturbing symptom of “losing control” (Sassen 1996). My presentation enters into dialogue with deportation theorists (De Genova 2010; Pope and Garret 2013), and – drawing upon ethnographically grounded data it reconstructs the actors engaged in creating, transnationally, the US deportation regime.

The United States deport annually over 300,000 people (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2016, p. 103), more than the European Union member states altogether. Under the administration of the former President Barack Obama, a historically-high number of people were deported; throughout the record year 2013, 438,421 individuals were “removed” from the United States. Mexicans made up 72% of all the deportees (Simanski, 2014, pp. 5–6). It is to be assumed that the US immigration policy will keep growing increasingly strict and more people will be deported during the next three years, given Donald Trump’s anti-migrant promises during the elections and the increase in the number of detentions reported by the media.

During the *colloquium*, I will present five vignettes from my ethnographic fieldwork in the United States and Mexico. They will show the interplay of various actors engaged in the US deportation regime: politicians, immigration authorities, immigration right activists, deportable and deported migrants, their families and employers. The transnational approach adopted in my research helps to explain how the US deportation regime transnationalizes as the people are removed to Mexico. The deported people and their communities are important actors of the US deportation regime. As a result of politics that criminalize unauthorized migration they might resign from transnational mobility, and at the same time create governmentality that works in favor of the US deportation regime. Through the experience of the immobile deportees, US sovereignty is externalized or unbundled (Ruggie, 1993) from the US territory, and materializes in Mexico.

A transnational research conducted since 2012 in Mexico and the United States of America is the basis for my presentation. I carried out the Mexican part of the research in a rural municipality in the Lower Mixteca region of the Oaxaca state, the American – in Washtenaw County in Michigan. The meta-question penetrating the presentation is about the positionality of a Polish anthropologist researching the US deportation regimes in America and Mexico. During the *colloquium*, I will present my strategies of entering the anthropological “field” and researching a very sensitive problem, I will explain the advantages and disadvantages of being a stranger for the research subjects. A reflexive approach to researcher’s positionality helps to understand better the research problem.

#### References:

Boehm, D. A. (2016). *Returned: Going and Coming in an Age of Deportation*. Oakland: University of California Press.

De Genova, N. (2010). The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement. In N. De Genova & N. Peutz (Eds.), *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement* (pp. 33–65). Durham ; London: Duke University Press Books.

Hasselberg, I. (2016). *Enduring Uncertainty: Deportation, Punishment and Everyday Life*. New York, London: berghanh.

Ruggie, J. G. (1993). Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations. *International Organization*, 47(1), 139–174.

Simanski, J. (2014). *Immigration Enforcement Actions: 2013* (Annual Report). Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security. Retrieved from [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ois\\_enforcement\\_ar\\_2013.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ois_enforcement_ar_2013.pdf)

U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2016). *2015 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2015>

Zilberg, E. (2011). *Space of Detention: The Making of a Transnational Gang Crisis between Los Angeles and San Salvador*. Durham ; London: Duke University Press Books.

### **Recommended reading**

De Genova, N. (2010). [The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement](#). In N. De Genova & N. Peutz (Eds.), *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement* (pp. 33–65). Durham ; London: Duke University Press Books.

Radziwinowiczówna, A. (2016). The Materiality of the State of Exception: Components of the Experience of Deportation from the United States. *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology*, 3(2), S1–S7.