

Ethnic boundaries in policing. Infrastructural violence and socio-spatial control

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Events that unfold around us as well as the social geography in which they have found theoretical anchorage (e.g. Harvey 1973) have taught us time and again that space is generally commanded by the affluent whereas the poor and underprivileged (marginalized immigrants, the labour reserve, 'unruly' youth etc.) are either trapped in it or expelled from it. A certain infrastructural order is held in check by superstructural elements (e.g. ideological or legal devices) of which the examples are plenty. We are all familiar with (more or less) violent forms of socio-spatial control, which have the awkward habit of arising over and over again, albeit in new guises. Immediately springing to mind are extreme examples such as apartheid regimes or the contemporary archipelago of (il)legal detention centers the world over that preserves a certain 'global hierarchy of mobility', as Zygmunt Bauman would have it. But we can also think about such things as 'ghettoization' and the urban politics of zoning, about restriction orders or such mundane things as the uneven development of transportation services that fences off certain communities and have a decisive impact on their lived experiences.

My PhD project within the Dutch police has currently arrived at a stage in which the ethnographic material has directed my attention to socio-spatial police control and its effects upon ethnic boundaries in the urban context (mostly the cities of Tilburg and Amsterdam). In accordance with people like Andreas Wimmer and Rogers Brubaker I approach ethnic boundaries as event-bound processes and define them as those occasions in which ethnicity becomes a dominant factor in social organization, causing (1) people to reorient social interaction along ethnic lines and (2) resources to be distributed accordingly and unevenly. These resources can be both material and symbolic and it is imperative that we look at their availability, accessibility and proximity to come to a better understanding of what would be a 'just' distribution.

In the proposed paper several ethnographically reconstructed events will pass the review that I hope to analyze through the conceptualization of ethnic boundaries, infrastructural violence and socio-spatial control. I will discuss the case of 'Moroccan youth' who have been expelled to a 'reservation' at the urban fringes, in the words of a local police officer, where they are rendered invisible to 'law-abiding citizens' and where their problems are 'managed rather than solved'. I'll deal with the illegalization of khat (chewing tobacco) through an APV (a general local act) issued several years ago in Tilburg, which has forced Somali communities out of their communal areas into industrial territory, by the agency of villa residents worrying about the value of their private property. What about Amsterdam Muslim elderly (mostly 60+) showing their civil disobedience and dissatisfaction with the closure of their Mosque by peacefully marching into a city council office and being arrested for it? All these matters impel us to ask: whose police is this and who has what right to the city and its resources?