

# **Big Trouble in Borderland: Immigration Rights and No-Border Struggles in Europe**

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## **1 Introduction<sup>2</sup>**

On 22 August 2008, travelers, airport security and local police at the airport in Hamburg, Germany, found themselves in a surprising situation. Around a hundred tourists returning from Mallorca, Spain's top travel destination, got off their plane and rolled out their beach mats. On them, they had written in large letters: "Pauschaltouristen gegen Abschiebung – Package Tourists against Deportation!" "After ten days of vacation, I look forward to unpacking my luggage here in Hamburg. I think everyone should have the right to do that," said one of the "tourists."<sup>3</sup> The colorful and good-humored group in bermuda shorts and straw hats was protesting Lufthansa's collaboration with German immigration authorities. As bystanders and airport employees struggled to make sense of it, many of these strange tourists held up homemade "global passports," and others asked fellow travelers: "Where are *you* being deported to?" When the tourist group addressed the astonished crowd over a loudspeaker, the police decided to evict and ban them from the airport facilities. However, by then local television stations and journalists had gotten their "top story" for the evening news.

The guerilla theater intervention at the Hamburg airport typifies the many direct actions, grassroots campaigns and local protests that have been targeting European border and immigration policies in recent years. In addition to civil and immigration rights groups, churches and humanitarian organizations, migrants find support from activists from the anti-fascist and so-called autonomist spectrum of the European radical Left, who often come up with innovative and "artistic" interventions. The tourist group at the airport, for example, turned out to be part of an "Anti-Racist and Climate Camp."<sup>4</sup> For ten days in August 2008, several hundred activists

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<sup>2</sup> This paper is to be presented at the Radical Art Caucus panel, "Migration Struggles and Migratory Aesthetics" for the College Art Association annual conference in Los Angeles, 25-28 February 2009.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/kampagnen/euromayday-hh/de/2008/08/776.shtml>

<sup>4</sup> See <http://camp08.antira.info/index.html>

camped, cooked and held discussions – and also went on daily fieldtrips in and around Hamburg in order to disrupt the city’s daily routine with demonstrations, direct actions and public interventions, including street blockades.

No-border and immigration rights campaigns have become a major field of action for many grassroots groups in Europe. However, we can hardly speak yet of a coherent European immigration rights movement. Activists are evidently well connected across the European Union (EU), and camps and demos often draw several thousand people from different countries. But overall, protests and interventions remain dispersed and uncoordinated. It is difficult to piece together an even rudimentary overview of the immense quantity and variety of creative actions across the continent. With few exceptions, such as the French “Sans Papiers” movement of the 1990s or the Spanish legalization campaign of the early 2000s, immigration rights campaigns hardly ever make it into mainstream media news coverage. Nevertheless, currently migration struggles appear to be one of the most active, creative and engaging fields for radical politics in Europe, and grassroots groups increasingly bring together topics such as environmentalism, international migration, police brutality and precarious labor in inventive and compelling ways.

In this paper, we focus on undocumented migration and move toward a more systematic assessment of current struggles in Europe. We obviously cannot cover the entire field, but building on our concept of the “European Borderland” (Euskirchen, et al. 2007), we offer a conceptual framework to understand and assess how migrants and activists are responding to the current border regime and its exclusive immigration policies. We then discuss two specific examples of radical immigration rights protests in more detail: the activist “camp” (e.g. no-border camps, anti-racist camps, the G8 summit protest camp, etc.) and the annual EuroMayDay parades organized in many European cities in recent years. Finally, we ask some critical questions about the decentralized character of immigration rights struggles in Europe. Why has a strong and coherent European immigration rights movement failed to develop from the new forms of struggle and protest? What are the consequences of this apparent weakness? In addition to obvious disadvantages for organized resistance to the current border regime, can we also identify positive effects of the uncoordinated character of the protest movement?

## 2 Contesting the European Borderland

Over the course of the 1990s and 2000s, border and immigration policies have been targeted by grassroots protests across Europe.<sup>5</sup> Depending on the context and discussion, there are different ways to compare and categorize these networks and movements. One can look at their underlying ideologies and point out the common ground and divergences, or one can discuss how movements and movement strategies evolve against the background of regionally specific political cultures, settings and institutions. Our focus is on how migrants and activists respond to specific border and immigration policies and practices. We look at practices of exclusion and forms of resistant practice that respond to them, considering both within the context of a single border regime: the “European Borderland.”

### a) *The Deterritorialization of the Border*

Generally, the overall tendency of the emerging new border regime in Europe can be best described as a process of “deterritorialization” that transforms both external and internal border demarcations in specific ways. The clear national *borderline* is both widened and extended *back* into national territory and projected *out* into the territory of foreign states. New institutions, actors, rules and techniques have emerged on this political field. The old lines of national demarcation are being transformed into new and militarized border *zones* and *spaces* that pervade the social space of everyday life. We have suggested the term “borderland” as a concept that expresses and summarizes these simultaneous tendencies of expanded enforcement activities in the new emerging European border regime.<sup>6</sup>

When we think of European borders, we usually think of the elimination of national borders inside the EU via the so-called Schengen agreement.<sup>7</sup> While this is not wrong, it is only part of the story. New policies define “border corridors” all around the member states of the EU,

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<sup>5</sup> While campaigns against racism and for immigration rights have a long history, movements that constitute themselves explicitly as movements of “undocumented migrants” are relatively young. The first one was probably the French “Sans Papiers” movement beginning in the mid-1990s. For a historic analysis of the movements’ precursors in West-Germany see Niels Seibert’s new book (Seibert 2008).

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed analysis, see our previous essay (Euskirchen, Lebuhn and Ray 2007).

<sup>7</sup> The Schengen Agreement was first signed by Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands in 1985. It allows for the elimination of border patrols between participating countries and creates a common, external Schengen border. Today, the agreement has been signed by 30 countries, including all the EU member-states and three non-EU states (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland). With the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1999, it was integrated into the legal architecture of the EU, and has also become part of the so-called *acquis communautaire* requiring future candidates for EU membership to meet the Schengen criteria and adopt European immigration, visa and border policies as a condition of admission.

and these are closely monitored by a numerous security agencies. EU-member states also “export” European border standards to states outside the EU and create a belt of buffer-states around Europe. The standards are part of the *acquis communautaire* and are also an explicit component of the law enforcement training and assistance folded into the “humanitarian” and “technical” aid packages provided by EU states. Although these changes generally make it more difficult for European activists to target and protest the reconfiguration of the external EU border “on-site,” activist-scholars and civil rights groups provide critical research and information about current trends and situations in neighboring countries.<sup>8</sup> In 2007, for example, the German organization Pro-Asyl, in conjunction with the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, Amnesty International and Forum Menschenrechte, published an extensive report pointing out the unconstitutional and often deadly practice of the European border agency Frontex (Fischer-Lescano/Löhr 2007). The fact that national law enforcement agencies provide training, staff and equipment for Frontex also opens opportunities for political interventions. In summer 2007, activists from the “Anti-Racist and Climate Camp” in Hamburg protested outside a Federal Police training facility at the port of Lübeck, where German forces are preparing for Frontex operations.

Another critical aspect of deterritorialization is the transformation of internal borders. Although many former border checkpoints between European countries are now abandoned, the borders have in fact been extended back into national territories. All intra-European flows of communication and all nodes of regional infrastructure – including train stations, major urban subway stations, overland bus stations, interstate highways and even major city plazas – are now defined as strategic knots of transit and therefore subject to intensified border enforcement. All over Europe, when foreign-looking individuals hop on the local subway, take an overland train, or simply “hang out” in public, they increasingly are approached by regular police or special border forces and asked to produce identity papers. As a result, undocumented migrants encounter immense difficulties when trying to organize and voice their claims and concerns in public space. Under these conditions, it is a serious challenge for local grassroots groups to reach out to undocumented migrants, to include them into public campaigns and to guarantee their safety during demos and protests. In Germany, one of the most prominent responds to this

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<sup>8</sup> In Germany, for example *Forschungsgesellschaft Flucht und Migration e.V.*(see <http://www.ffm-berlin.de/>) and *ARI* (Antirassistische Initiative e.V; see <http://www.ari-berlin.org/>).

challenge is the “caravan”<sup>9</sup> – a nationwide network of refugees, migrants and antiracist groups working to assert and defend the rights of refugees and migrants of insecure legal status.

***b) The Fragmentation and Isolation of Migrant Communities***

Border patrols, the network of detention camps, the whole battery of juridical categories defining legal status, persistent practices of residential segregation and hostile tendencies in public discourse have all led to the isolation and intimidation of migrants throughout Europe. In Germany, under the globally unique *Residenzpflicht* (literally: “obligation of residence”), migrants with precarious immigration status are required to live in designated housing facilities – often quasi-internment camps typically isolated from surrounding communities – and are not allowed to leave the administrative district (county) in which their facility is located. Authorities register the names and locations of all migrants applying for refugee status, so any contact with law enforcement outside their county of registration will have juridical consequences that lead in the worst case to imprisonment and deportation. The concrete result of the new border regime is that migrants are increasingly subjected to forms of spatial exclusion and containment that socially and politically separate them from host populations and tend to cause fragmentation within their own communities. Most importantly, this hinders their ability to organize politically and participate in demonstrations and protest actions.

Immigration rights and no-border activists have been trying to address the isolation of migrants in various ways. Strategies and actions range from public campaigns and protests against internment camps and the “obligation of residence;”<sup>10</sup> to material, logistical, and juridical support, including arranged marriages for migrants with precarious legal status; to organized property damage carried out against deportation and internment camp facilities. But migrants are not only isolated from host populations; the legal obstacles also tend to separate them from grassroots groups and social movements. The annual EuroMayDay parades, the immigration rights day during the G8-summit protests in 2007, no-border camps and border caravans are all recent examples of attempts to overcome this isolation effect by opening up inviting social spaces that allow migrants and activists to form shared – and politicized – communities.

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://thecaravan.org/>

<sup>10</sup> See for example the anti-Residenzpflicht campaign: „Kein Deutschland! Keine Residenzpflicht!“ <http://thecaravan.org/taxonomy/term/16>

### *c) The Precarization of Migrant Labor*

All undocumented migrants have one thing in common, no matter where they come from and what brings them to Europe. In order to survive, they depend on the informal or unregulated labor market. While European workers and unions struggle to defend the remnants of the dismantled Keynesian welfare state, many migrants have little hope of access to minimum wages and labor regulations. Entire sectors of the European economy rely on their easily exploitable labor-power. Illegalized migrants work as manual laborers on construction sites, as pickers and processors in agriculture and as maids and nannies in the domestic service industry; they work as janitors, as dishwashers and prep-cooks in small restaurants, as sex workers and as street vendors. With no formal permission to work, they are not protected by existing labor laws and regulations, and as a result must endure forms of exploitation that exceed by far what is assumed to be “normal” capitalist exploitation of the legal labor force.<sup>11</sup>

Although this would seem to be an area *par excellence* for national trade unions, the unions actually play a rather ambivalent role in this game: they sometimes (but rarely) mobilize to defend migrant rights and to integrate illegalized workers into the regulated legal labor market, and they sometimes (more often) support anti-immigration policies to “protect” domestic workers from downward pressures on wages. Quite often, the question about how to deal with undocumented labor causes splits and conflicts within the unions themselves. In Germany, for example, the foundation of the first European Migrant Workers Union in 2004<sup>12</sup> received much public attention, but it has not received needed support and recognition from other unions.

Often, those standing with migrants at the forefront of struggles are activists from the autonomist, anti-fascist (*Antifa*) and anti-racist (*Antira*) groups and networks of the radical Left. New campaigns addressing the “precarization of labor” aim to build on common interests between students, precarious workers and migrant laborers. They try to forge alliances vis-à-vis issues of class and exploitation, in part to counter the divisiveness potentially generated by the usual focus on ethnic identities and legal status. So far, the success of these campaigns has been limited. They have not been able to provide an institutional framework to build a coherent and durable movement that can expand in time and space, nor have they been able to organize more

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<sup>11</sup> Under these conditions, it is unsurprising that some migrants prefer the illegal commerce of the street to insecure and extremely low-paid employment.

<sup>12</sup> European Industrial Relations Observatory Online (2004): European Migrant Workers Union founded, <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2004/09/feature/de0409206f.htm>

than a modest participation of migrants. Nevertheless, these campaigns have mobilized a great deal of energy and inventiveness. They have been a nexus in which radical grassroots groups all over Europe are experimenting with new forms of struggle and new strategies to organize students, workers and migrants under one radical-leftist banner.

#### *d) Discourse Politics*

All of these examples of interventions and actions also – in fact, always – have an element of discourse politics. A “discourse,” in this sense, is not restricted to a simple discussion or debate. The term refers more broadly to the way we conceptualize, frame and thus think about aspects of social reality. A good example for discourse analysis is the research and public education campaigns about the European border agency Frontex, as mentioned above (see 2 a). Hegemonic – that is, dominant and official – discourses about borders of course emphasize notions of security. They reflect, when they do not proactively generate and exploit, public fears about (real or imagined) threats to national identities, ways of life and material standards of living, and they at least tend to touch and activate latent racism and hostility toward difference. Activist discourses in response have tried to shift the focus away from security and to reframe understanding in terms of human rights, including the right to global mobility, and the problems of displacement and diaspora caused by global climate change and imperialist interventions led by the countries of the Global North.

Grassroots groups and immigrations rights campaigns are well aware of how important discourse politics are. Note, for example, that the very name of the initiative “Kein Mensch ist illegal – No human being is illegal!” underscores the fact that “legality” and “illegality” are not biological human attributes, but contestable juridical categories subject to political decisions. The battle over discourse hegemony is hard to win, though. Politicians, governmental agencies, NGOs and mainstream media all contribute to frame current practices of exclusion with a discourse that shapes public opinion about immigration along two thematic lines. On the one hand, migrants are represented as a threat to social order, and immigration as a problem of social integration. Today in Europe, the dominant stereotype of the migrant is the Islamic alien, culturally unassimilated and hostile to democratic values. The message is clear: Stop further immigration! According to the second theme we can recognize, migrants – and especially women – are portrayed as victims. At the center of this image is the organized crime of human trafficking. This representation, however, ignores or discounts the migrants’ own role as active

protagonists who have made decisions about where they want to live.<sup>13</sup> The unsubtle message: we need stricter border controls, tighter visa policies and more police-raids – demands raised not only by xenophobic conservatives but also by purportedly progressive Greens and (again) by Social-Democratic parties and unions of limited national perspective. In this discourse, immigration authorities and law enforcement are acting “humanely” on behalf of the migrant-as-victim. These two contrasting representations – migrants as, alternately, both threat and victim – function to manage public opinion and maintain support for the new border regime.

To sum up the argument so far: immigration rights and no-border movements in Europe are protesting and resisting an emerging border regime characterized, first, by a shift from traditional borderlines to *extensive* and *intensive* borderlands and zones and, second, by a public discourse that distorts representations of migrants in specific ways. This shift and the hegemonic discourse that accompanies it pose serious obstacles and challenges to immigration rights and no-border activists. At this point we can at least begin to answer one of the questions we posed at the beginning: Why is there no coherent and durable European immigration rights movement in Europe? For the reasons outlined above, the new border regime makes it very difficult and personally risky for undocumented and precariously employed migrants to organize themselves politically or even to participate publicly in campaigns organized by networks of the radical Left, the activists of which at least are not exposed to these constant threats of deportation or detention. This has certainly contributed to the failure of these campaigns up to now to develop into robust and effective social movements capable of actually stopping or reversing the trends toward border and immigration policies driven by the politics of security and fear.<sup>14</sup> However, as we’ll

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<sup>13</sup> French analyst Yann Moulier Boutang suggests that the “subjective factor” will not necessarily follow the rules of governments’ attempts to regulate people’s decisions to migrate, and cannot be reduced to capital’s demand for flexible labor either (see Manuela Bojadzije, Vassilis Tsianos: Borderclash, <http://www.kanak-attak.de/ka/text/border.html>). At the extreme of this position, under the sign of the “Autonomy of Migration,” one finds the assertion that crossing national borders without legal permission *per se* is always a subversive act that undermines the global capitalist system in its need to regulate and restrict the mobility of the labor force. The latter argument has led to some intense debates over the political dimensions of transnationalism and undocumented migration.

<sup>14</sup> Often, support groups and local activist networks do succeed in creating sufficient publicity and political pressure to delay deportations, or to even save individual migrants from deportation. However, there are at least two problems with individual support campaigns: The migrant to be protected needs to be able and to be willing to become a public person. And a large, continuously working group of supporters has to be forged with the risk of focusing on just a single person and thereby turning into even less than a single-issue mobilization.

now see, this “failure” has not been an utter one, for this field of struggles has produced a steady stream of inventive forms and tactics.

### **3 The Activist Camp and the EuroMayDay Parade**

We now look in more detail at two recent examples of radical immigration rights struggles mentioned above: The “activist camp” and EuroMayDay. The activist camp – or “bordercamp,” as it is also called in movement discourse – is an organizational form that emerged from the experiences of past struggles in Europe, among others the militant annual campaigns to block the transport of nuclear waste in Germany. In the US, the nearest thing to this model is probably the traveling direct-action training camps organized by the Ruckus Society in the 1990s. In Europe the form has been developed further by the no-border and anti-racist movements, and by the ad hoc networks of groups preparing the large-scale international protests against the G8 and other summit meetings of dominant states and institutions.

The first European no-border camp took place in 1998 at the German-Polish border. It “was initiated to allow refugees, migrants and undocumented migrants, such as the ‘Sans Papiers’ in France, and members of support and campaign groups from across Europe to forge new alliances and strengthen solidarities in a ‘ten-day laboratory of creative resistance and civil disobedience’.” (Alldred 2003: 153) Since then, various camps and caravans have been organized all over Europe.<sup>15</sup> Frequently synchronized with important EU-summits, they often function as counter-summits, bringing together hundreds and sometimes thousands of activists from different countries and diverse political affiliations within the radical Left.

Theoretically, these camps come quite close to Hakim Bey’s notion of the TAZ or “Temporary Autonomous Zone”:<sup>16</sup> organized negations of capitalist logic and normality that appear for a limited time in some crack or interstice of everyday life. With their colorful and festive tent cities, their “Food Not Bombs” style communal kitchens, and their radically democratic “assembly” processes modeled on anarchist tradition as well as the EZLN in Chiapas, the European activist camp solves the logistical problem of materially sustaining international activists gathered for coordinated protests and at the same time pre-figures alternatives to capitalist hyper-individualism and competition.

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<sup>15</sup> See the bordercamping section at <http://www.noborder.org/>

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.hermetic.com/bey/taz3.html#labelTAZ>

But many participating activists are also critical of these activist camps. Critics point out their limitations and internal contradictions. The camps are necessarily self-selecting and therefore far from ideally inclusive – not everyone, after all, is cut out for the rigors of camping. And while realization of direct democracy in the camps is indisputable, the strains of organizing everyday life and the time-consuming processes of collective decision-making, or “conflict transformation,” can become paralyzing. Finally, despite the fact that camps disappear before they can develop any permanent structure they still attract police repression – and indeed may even facilitate it by concentrating activists in delimited locations.<sup>17</sup> However, the camp model remains a unique tactical form for building critical masses of activists from different cities and regions over periods of several days, and grassroots groups are now trying to extend the movement beyond political camping and some of its tendential problems.<sup>18</sup> And while the activist camp is a tactical, rather than a strategic form, it does push against the limits of tacticality. The camp, as a social space, doesn’t just erect tents; it also constructs, each time, some of the conditions for a different kind of collective life – an alternative way of living that can be realized here and now, while struggling in common for radical social transformation within the existing reality. In this way, the camps push against the very contours of the dominant way of life. This, ultimately, is the source of the tensions within them – and also what draws repression from without.

The second example we want to point to is EuroMayDay. These colorful rallies and marches are organized by a large network of grassroots groups from across the so-called undogmatic Left. They aim to connect struggles often fought separately and to bring together workers, students and migrants in a common anti-capitalist front. The first EuroMayDay march was held in 2001 in Milan, where it now gathers up to 100,000 people each year. Since 2004, the process has spread all over Europe with radical and anarchist groups participating in dozens of cities.<sup>19</sup> In 2007, an international assembly met in Berlin and agreed on six demands for EuroMayDay 2008:

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<sup>17</sup> For a critical report from „inside“ the 2002 no-border camp in Straßbourg see for example Alldred and Raunig (Alldred 2003; Raunig 2007: 255-265)

<sup>18</sup> Over the last couple of years, the far reaching representative claims of the bordercamps have been dropped, and in 2008, the movement did not call for one particular camp, but for a “transnational chain of migration related actions in the ‘belly of the beast’: Amsterdam, Sevilla, Torino, Bamako, London, Athens, Warsaw, Hamburg, Malmoe, Ceuta ..”, „Fighting the borderregime! Transnationalization now! Common Call...” See <http://www.noborder.org/chain08/display.php?id=407>

<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.euromayday.org>

- full legalization for all persecuted migrants
- the right to form unions and other forms of self-organization free from state repression
- an unconditional (or universal) basic income
- a European living wage
- free access to culture, knowledge, and skills
- the right to affordable housing

In response to this program, the question can be posed: do we really need yet another May Day parade in Europe? (This question isn't likely to be posed in the US, it goes without saying.) The EuroMayDay marches aim to solve a dilemma that emerged within organizing on the Left over the course of the 1990s. Neither the traditional labor day rallies organized by Social-Democratic, mainly co-opted bureaucratic trade unions, nor the autonomist black-block style confrontational demonstrations were able to offer a viable pathway to a broad and radical social movement capable of effectively taking up new issues around migration and precarization. In this context, EuroMayDay – sometimes compared to a leftist carnival procession spiced up with Salsa bands, political pamphlets and banners, and humorous yet radical direct actions<sup>20</sup> – is an experiment aiming to re-occupy, re-frame and re-define the highly symbolic First of May.

Within the radical Left, EuroMayDay has often been criticized for exactly this: being fun and party-oriented. Many radicals fear that it goes too far in the direction of the carnivalesque, to the point that it de-politicizes May Day. Moreover, EuroMayDay suffers from the usual weaknesses of programmatic marches. As a tactical form, a parade can at best open social space for the performance of radically alternative *representations*. But the gap between representation and reality returns at the end of the march: the mobile carnival does not demand enough from those it attracts to radically transform their *ways of living*.<sup>21</sup> Finally, it's not so clear who the EuroMayDay demands are directed to; while few leftists would argue with these six aims, none of them are clearly linked to the political means that could realize them.

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<sup>20</sup> See for example the Hamburg Superheroes of 2006 “robin-hooding” a gourmet supermarket: <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/kampagnen/euromayday-hh/de/2006/04/452.shtml>

<sup>21</sup> Many activists, acutely aware of this limitation, look beyond the march itself and focus on the whole process of organizing EuroMayDay; for them, the detailed preparations and follow-up work are all potential pathways to politicize everyday life. In this sense, EuroMayDay, like the activist camps discussed above, tend to push beyond the limits of tacticality, even if they never attain the efficacy of the strategic as such.

From our perspective, however, EuroMayDay has at least been fairly successful in attracting new and diverse grassroots groups, subcultures and individuals, including undocumented migrants. It provides a common forum and shared experiences that potentially are the basis for closer coordinated actions in the future. And while the carnivalesque approach does risk trivializing the problems of responding effectively to the causes of social misery, the emphasis on humor, parody and surprise rather than direct confrontation does protect the demos from the usual stigmatizing reflexes and strategies of mainstream media. In any case, it seems to us that both the trade union marches and more militant black-block clashes with riot police also tend to become de-politicizing in their very ritual predictability. The vector of re-politicization begins where predictability ends, and in this sense EuroMayDay is an impressive and viable attempt to rescue May Day by reinventing it.

#### **4. Immigration Rights Struggles in Europe between Incoherence and Subversion**

Immigration rights and no-border activists are at the forefront of researching the new border regime and exposing it to public view through educational work and protest actions. But despite well-connected international networks, the many actions and campaigns across Europe remain dispersed and without effective critical mass. One obvious reason for this is the fragmented political landscape of the EU. Language barriers, highly differentiated regional labor markets and a variety of national political cultures, policies, practices and institutions make it difficult to transform dozens, if not hundreds, of local initiatives into a truly European movement. But more importantly, the effects of the new border regime itself pose serious obstacles and challenges for grassroots movements – especially when it comes to connecting local activists and migrants across national borders. As a result, there is still no unified social movement that can produce political effects at the highest level of the EU, where questions of common visa policies, cross-national law enforcement cooperation, asylum and deportation standards, etc. are being negotiated and developed.

However, from our perspective, the decentralized character of the current struggles also has some clear – if mainly tactical – advantages. Small and locally grounded movements tend to learn more quickly and adapt more flexibly to new challenges and situations than can larger, more institutionalized organizations. They also tend to be more democratic and participatory and for this reason also more effective in tapping the creativity and energy of their activist membership. The protests around the G8 Summit in Germany in the summer of 2007 and similar

large-scale, highly-visible international protests demonstrate the capacity of small groups and networks to organize effectively across borders in preparation for specific scheduled events – even if these mobilizations usually dissolve soon after. These are the tactical strengths that correspond to the strategic weaknesses we have indicated.

In fact, policy makers and politicians seem to fear the fluid and unpredictable character of the current movement, especially when the line is crossed between co-optable law-abiding demonstrations and more militant civil disobedience. In 2008, after one of the largest French deportation prisons was completely destroyed by revolting inmates, a French minister expressed fears of “an accumulation of incidents of that kind in the near future” – meaning riots, revolts and similar explosive upsurges of resistance.<sup>22</sup>

The current uprising in Greece and that in the French *banlieues* in 2005, as well as others elsewhere, indicate that his fears are not ungrounded: in a context characterized by persisting forms of institutionalized racism, reduced social entitlements, increasing precarization of labor and deepening militarization of everyday life, unexpected explosions of popular revolt are always just around the corner. Such uprisings, often triggered by incidences of police brutality or murder, are difficult and risky for states to deal with; false moves can easily pour gasoline on the flames of revolt and expose the depth of a generalizing crisis of legitimation circulating through the capitalist “democracies.” The production of borderland also produces its own specific and explosive forms of social misery. If such uprisings are to develop into effective forces for radical social change, however, the strategic weaknesses of de-centralized protest movements would have to be overcome. In the struggles over borders and immigration policies, this would mean developing organizations adequate to contemporary realities – namely, to the deterritorialized but nevertheless efficiently coordinated border regime that has emerged in Europe in recent years. The flows of migration driven by the dialectic of desire and the relentless coercions of globalized capitalism are already a material force. Borderland names the structural and institutional constraints that, so far, block this force from becoming a factor of emancipation. To overcome this blockage, the no-border movement would need to develop strategic capacity and collective agency that could open – and defend – a pathway to the goals of free mobility and access to

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<sup>22</sup> Bernard Schmid: Es brennt im Abschiebeknast. Meuterei derer, die nichts zu verlieren haben, Trend Online-Zeitschrift, 7-8/08, <http://www.trend.infopartisan.net/trd7808/t187808.html>; at the same time, French activists are being criminalized, jailed, and blamed for terrorism, because of their participation in immigrants’ rights struggles, see <http://portland.indymedia.org/en/2008/06/376311.shtml> and <https://tarnac9.noblogs.org/post/2009/01/02/terrorismus-weltweit>

social rights based on residency. In the current balance of social and political forces, this means: shaping discourses more capable of disarticulating the hegemonic representations of immigrants within the prevailing politics of fear and security, and reaching beyond the comfort zones of radical-leftist politics to build more durable and effective coalitions for struggle.

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