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Sovereignty, Borders and Refugees

The Crisis of Democracy and Human Rights in
Europe

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Abstract

The thesis examines the current political situation of refugees at the European border, arguing that the refugee is herself to be understood as a consequence of the border control practices that are put in place in order to hold her back. Drawing on the method of ideology critique, I problematise our current imaginary of the border as being a hegemonic project that deeply pervades our understanding of the border as a self-evident and static idea. As a consequence, its dynamic, political and *productive* character becomes obscured. Migrants appear as a threat to the stability of the social order. In the ongoing process of their irregularisation, they are often deprived of their basic human rights. Drawing on these observations, I argue that even the normative concepts we commonly use to criticize institutional arrangements and social practices – namely democracy and human rights – reproduce the static imaginary of the border. Against this background, I critically evaluate the emancipatory power these concepts unfold regarding the moral and legal entitlements of refugees. Both democracy and human rights seem to have the potential of sustaining relations of domination *and* to transform them. In view of the contemporary developments, I conclude that instead of talking about a refugee crisis, we should talk about a crisis of democracy and human rights.

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