# University of Luxembourg

Dr. Claudia Paraschivescu

Dr. Lucas Oesch

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Birte Nienaber

# Asylum seekers and refugees' lived experiences of borders and (im)mobility.

The case of Luxembourg.

CEASEVAL

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# Outline

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# The Luxembourgish context

- Luxembourg's only 'external' border is the airport.

- 602,005 inhabitants in Luxembourg with 48% of them not being of Luxembourgish nationality (1st of January 2018).

- Number of applications in 2017: 2,322 (one of the highest rates of registered 1st time applicants in Europe).

- Main countries of applicants: Syria (15.8%), Eritrea (9.6%), Morocco (8.8%), Serbia (8.2%) and Algeria (7.3%).

# Argument

- The outsourcing of borders from outside of the nation state to within the nation state disrupts participants' lives. The crossing of traditional borders gives the respondents the illusion of being welcomed into Luxembourg, while everyday borders performed by non traditional actors remind them that they cannot easily become full members of society.

# Theoretical Context

- Territorial borders: "a continuous line demarcating the territory and sovereign authority of the state, enclosing its domain and protecting its population" (Walters 2006:145)

- Everyday borders: the social barriers/categorisations that migrants are affected by in their daily lives depending on the lines of exclusion they are subject to, such as legal status, gender, age, race, ethnicity etc (see Fassin 2011, Yuval-Davis 2013)

- Bordering - the border 'becomes alive' (Burns 2017)

- Bordering practices: the ways in which borders are delimited and managed, borders as both a process and as an institution (Newman 2006:148, see also Vollmer 2016).

- Place belongingness and politics of belonging (Antonisch 2010, also Yuval-Davis 2013)

# Methodology

- 9 interviews with asylum seekers, refugees and 1 rejected asylum seeker (men and women from Syria, Iraq, Eritrea and Gambia)

- Arrived in Luxembourg from 2015 onwards

- 10 interviews with institutional actors at national and EU level (Officials from the Refugees unit of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, border agents, international organisations, MEP)

- Ethnography at Findel Airport (luxembourgish external border)

- Focus on **4 interviews**

- Challenges:
  - Narrative fluidity - Credibility and truth: 'What you say during an interview [with public officials] is different from what you tell to a friend' (Male Syrian refugee)
  - Absent narratives - Trauma (Syrian female transgender asylum seeker)

■ **The materiality and bodily representations of land borders:**

The first difficult point [was] **the sea between Turkey and Greece**. The second difficult point was Hungary because there were a lot of **policemen** and the Hungarian government built something to not allow you to come into the country. Not a wall, but something to prevent you to come into the country **[a Barbed wire fence]**. (…) A lot of policemen, a lot of **police cars**… (Male Syrian refugee)

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The Serbian border emerges through violence or the threat of violence of border agents. (Male Iraqi refugee)

- ## **Neighbouring countries**

It is possible to go to the bordering countries (Rejected male Gambian asylum seeker)

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The German - Luxembourgish border is 'open' (Male Iraqi refugee)

- ## **Air borders**

I: So when you first came to Luxembourg, how did the immigration officers treat you? What questions did they ask?

R: The **normal questions**. Why are you here in Lux? I told them I had a contract with the [EU institution], I had all my papers with me. 'Can I see them?' I said 'Yeah of course'. He saw the things and then ' welcome to Luxembourg' (…) My situation was really legal, so he didn't have… (Female Syrian refugee)

- **Stop and search**

R: [T]here are no borders. But there are always risks. (…)

I: What do you mean?

R: There are police controls at times. The police stops your car, out of the blue, just to check your identity, in order to see if there are no drug dealers, if you carry any drugs. (Male rejected asylum seeker, Gambia)

- **Occupational downward mobility**

It was not easy [to find a job]. I applied for many, I got many **many rejections**. (…) When I was hopeless, when I applied to many jobs and I received rejections, I applied to very simple positions and small jobs. I applied, I said, they don't have any argument to refuse me as **Junior**, because [I had] very strong experience comparing to other, because [in Syria] I had the chance to work in accounting field, which is medium size and I could work in all the departments at the same time, not like big firms where you are specialized in something. I just applied to Junior and then they offered me the contract on that position, so I got **Jr salary**, it was around 2500 net salary. (…) **But with this salary we cannot rent now something for a family.** (Male Syrian refugee)

- **Affordability**

With this salary, whenever I found an Apartment, I called the agency, so I tried to find an **apartment in a good price compared to my salary**, so they were always one bedroom and one living room apartments, so they refused always, saying that you are three, you have a child, you should look for two bedroom apartment. They say that the landlord doesn't accept. And then we go to the option which they advised, **2 bedrooms and one living room, it would be expensive they say, and your salary is not enough** to … 'I can manage my life'! 'No, it should not be higher than a third of your salary'. (…) So it was very difficult to have an apartment In the private market compared to my situation. (…) So the price [of this apartment] was high, it is not a cheap apartment, so we convinced to reduce a little bit, it was still expensive. But they did not look into **the third of a salary**. They accepted to be higher than the third of the salary. And we try to manage our lives. (Male Syrian refugee)

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Last time I was in Esch, I found an apartment, I went to the agency and first two months, cost 6000€, something like that. I have looked for something for 3-4 months, in a room, to share it, in an apartment. I did find it, but they want at least 6 months contract to job, full time. (Male Iraqi refugee)

# Feelings of belonging



- **Sense of feeling at home**

I: Where do you see yourselves in 5 years? Still here? In a different country? Luxemburgish nationality?

R: 5 years? I should be a **national**. (…) in an ideal world, [I would like to] **to stay here,** to have my own business, to bring my parents and that's it. (…) Actually the decision or the plan of asking for Lux nationality comes from the truth that when you are outside of Luxembourg, we feel that we are **at home** when we come back. (Male Syrian refugee)

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In general people are **friendly**, and the thing that I like, Is that they they are really friends with you. It's not just the appearance, 'we are friends and we want to help you and when you need them,  and when you need something they are not there. So this is something I really appreciate here.  And I think because Lux has a particular situation because it has **a lot of foreigners**, you don't feel this tension. Everybody is a foreigner, you will never hear Luxemburgish on the bus, you will here so many languages. For example I visited my brothers in Berlin twice, the only thing you hear is German, if you don't speak German you feel a little bit excluded. (…) Here In Lux you feel it's more **cozy**, it's a city and a village at the same time. I really like it. (…) quiet people. For me, as I have a family here, I am really **content** with this. I think if you want to **raise a good family**, Lux is the best place, really. (Female Syrian refugee)

# Conclusions

- Borders between countries have loosened, but within countries have become more sophisticated and strengthened

- Barriers on the labour market influence barriers on the housing market

- By moving to other places, the participants destabilise traditional borders, but are destabilised by everyday borders

- Sporadic mobility with a mind to permanency in order to settle in Luxembourg => Luxembourg as a destination rather than transit country