

3. Attrition and Collaboration

But why is this Securitas-violence inherent to the camp system? The degrading conditions at the *camp*, including the Securitas-violence, the endlessly dragging procedure to gain the right of asylum, the constant uncertainty and the ever-present risk of being arrested and deported obviously seem to be an attrition strategy by the SEM. The camp for “intractable people” in Les Verrières is part of this strategy. Many witness accounts reveal how the violence by the Securitas is wearing people down, in addition to the physical and grave mental harm:

During this time I didn't eat much anymore, because I was too exhausted to fight for it. I gave myself up. (Youssuf)

It is actually assumed that the SEM not only puts up with this mental damage, but consciously generates it, in order to wear the people who've arrived down and frighten others off.

Presumably, everyone who works with people who experienced migration, knows about this steady and systematic process of physically and mentally wearing people down. The violence documented in this brochure has a tendency of being used against specific groups of asylum seeking people - especially against people from the Maghreb. The violence is wielded against those who on the one hand have a very low chance to get asylum, but on the other are difficult to deport for the SEM. With most of their home countries, Switzerland does not have a readmission contract. In consequence, the SEM is not interested in the immigration of people, who are hard to deport and therefore insert a demoralization strategy that eventually leads these people to give in to the pressure and leave Switzerland 'on their own accord'¹. *Nadji* thinks along the same lines:

Because the Securitas know it's difficult for Swiss administration to deport people from the Maghreb, they treat these people so badly. (Nadji)

The feeling of complete powerlessness is part of the demoralisation of people who seek asylum. In the triad SEM-ORS-Securitas there's a well functioning strategy of shifting responsibility from one to the other. The residents of the camp report that they do not get support by any of the posts in the *camp* system:

¹ In the language of bureaucracy this is called 'uncontrolled departure' or euphemized 'voluntary return'.

The ORS knows everything, they speak German. If they do not see it, they hear about it, that much is obvious. (Ibrahim)

I spoke to a member of the ORS staff, because he witnessed it. But he didn't do anything. (Djamal)

Did you report the incident somewhere, e.g. the ORS?
No. The ORS collaborates with the Securitas, they're accomplices. They say it's our fault, instead of the Securitas and they make up lies. (Tayeb)

I ran away, for the Villa. But he got hold of me and brought me straight to the cell. There, there were five of them. One laughed while the others beat me. The door was open and the director of the ORS passed outside. He looked inside and saw what was happening, but he walked on without a word. (Nabil)

For the people affected by the violence and dependent on these institutions, this results in an impossibility to turn to any one of the authorities, because they all cover up for each other. Understandably, the residents of the camp gain the impression that the SEM, ORS and Securitas are one and the same, wearing different names. They clearly describe a complicity among the different institutions in the camp:

You can't talk to them [the Securitas]. Neither to the people from the ORS, they always refer us to another staff member of the ORS. ORS, Securitas and Nurses - they are all the same. (Nadil)

The knowledge about the Securitas-violence circulates in the Federal Asylum Camp Basel. People who are seeking asylum and are not directly affected by the violence, tell us about it as well. The SEM and ORS hold meetings together weekly - it therefore has to be assumed that the SEM knows about the excesses of violence. When confronted with the reports, it reacts with denial and counter accusations, instead of immediately arranging for an independent investigation.

Despite the impression of a homogenous camp bureaucracy, some residents have tried to file a complaint against the Securitas violence internally. But none of them received an answer.

Does the ORS know what's happening?

Yes of course, but they all work together. I told the legal representative everything and showed them my injuries. But they just said: 'Later, later, I'm only responsible for the process to grant asylum, nothing more'. I wrote a complaint with the OESA², but I didn't hear anything. They always just told me to wait. (Djamal)

² OESA: Ecumenical pastoral care for asylum seeking people nearby the camp. The mentioned complaint has been shown to the collective.

I asked for a doctor and demanded that the records of the cameras next to the entrance be checked for the incident. I wanted to press charges against the 'Russian' because of this treatment and asked, how I could do that. They told me I could write down my complaint and submit it, no matter which language. So I filed a complaint in Arab and delivered it to the camp direction. Until now I haven't heard anything. (Nadji)

For the victims of this violence there is, in consequence, no possibility to speak up against the abuse. The constant mutual shifting of responsibility and the empty internal promises are characteristic for a *camp* – a space, where different rights apply than for society outside of *camp*. In addition it's a space that's closed off to the public, where as little information as possible finds its way out. The locations of the Federal Asylum Camps are remote and fenced in, visits are prohibited, the media is refused entrance and it's not permitted to film or take a picture. The residents of the *camp* are completely at the disposal of the bureaucracy and the 'Security Service' without protection. To cite Giorgio Agamben:

It's exactly the radical transformation of politics in a space of naked life, which is to say a camp, that legitimizes total control and renders it necessary. Because, in our days, politics have turned into complete bio-politics, it's become possible to constitute a totalitarian politics in an as yet unknown measure.