

ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Immigrant camps in Spain

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Abstract

Immigrant detention camps have existed in Europe for more than 25 years and currently there are over three hundred throughout the continent. In Spain, these institutions emerged in 1985, and currently add up to nine. The deprivation of freedom for people who have not committed a crime, presents great contradictions for rule of law, and is one of the most visible faces of social control related to the movement of people. Little research has been conducted on this topic in the field of Sociology of Immigration. Data available on this topic is scarce as gaining access to institutions is difficult. This article attempts to get a closer look at detention camps from a sociological perspective. Current theory is questioned to find out what can be considered an immigrant detention camp. Through a review of classical and current Social Science theories, I define what a detention camp is and outline their purpose. I analyze current data to see what characteristics detention camps have in Spain. By researching the trustworthy information available, I outline the most important characteristics of detention camp operations and propose a typology for detention camps in general. Finally, through ethnographic work performed at a detention camp in the Canary Islands, the question of what it's like to live inside a detention camp is explored with detainees. The total institution and disciplinary character of the detention camps is demonstrated, as well as the lack of regulation, and the stress that is created by the uncertainty of living inside the institution.

Key words: immigration camps, social control, immigration, total institutions