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Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

“L'AME à la caribéenne”. Humanitarized and hospitalized border sites in the Lesser Antilles

The Caribbean French overseas departments, an integral but often forgotten part of France and the EU, stand out for relatively high healthcare standards and hospitals with medical equipment not available on most of the neighboring islands. Drawing from ethnographic research and online interviews between 2017 and 2022, the talk takes a closer look at the situation of cancer patients from the Commonwealth of Dominica searching for and receiving treatment in Guadeloupe (FR). Based on a logic of medical humanitarianism, the state insurance AME (Aide Médicale d'Etat), which also applies in this specific postcolonial context overseas, allows nearly the same healthcare provisions to ill or injured undocumented migrants as to nationals. However, the right to AME is not only contested and concealed by local actors but also requires foreign seriously ill patients to first become and prove over time that they are “irregular immigrants”, even if they never intended to be so. In this context, the presentation explores the interdependencies of border-crossing therapeutic mobilities, immigration and the role of the Dominican diaspora in Guadeloupe in these processes. This talk specifically asks for the effects of the “AME à la caribéenne”, as one of my interlocutors named it, that does not only paradoxically cover high treatment costs and leave patients impoverished at the same time, but also essentially shifts the usually experienced border regime. Thus, while the national-territorial border-crossing becomes completely hassle-free for foreign AME patients, the hospital becomes an internal border site for them.

Corinna Angela Di Stefano is currently an academic staff member of the ifeas, JGU Mainz, and a PhD candidate in Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University Konstanz. After her MA in Translation and her Diploma in Latin American Area Studies she worked as the managing director of the BMBF-funded Research Network for Latin America at the University of Cologne. As a team research staff member and later as an associated member of the DFG project “Urban Border Spaces” from 2020 to 2023, she mainly focussed on questions of the care-control nexus in the context of health care access for unhoused people in Frankfurt am Main. In her PhD project she takes a closer look at human mobilities in the Lesser Antilles and analyses bordering practices (not) in place, through empirical access to different fields her interlocutors are moving in: migration, cruise ship tourism, health-related and post-hurricane mobilities.



Patients' charters. Photo:
Corinna Di Stefano.