

Who Shapes Global Migration Governance Today and Who's Affected by It? Report from the Conference 'Geopolitics and Transnational Migration'

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Transnational migration has been widely discussed in both the academic and the public sphere in recent years and has become a highly sensitive political issue in particular since 2015. The working group on transnational migration within the research programme 'Global Conflicts and Local Interactions' at the Czech Academy of Sciences aims (among other things) to create space for interdisciplinary theoretical discussions about current migration trends through a series of conferences organised jointly by the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences and the Faculty of Humanities of Charles University. Last year, the participants explored the issue of borders and justice, while this year the conference's main topic was migration governance and the political economy of migration. The presented papers discussed the role of families in transnational migration in the context of social reproduction, access of civil society actors to the processes of global migration governance, the ethnography of transnational care practices, and the linkage between migration governance and precarity. The conferences seek to open up interdisciplinary discussions on transnational migration in its various contexts and complexity, something that is urgently needed in the current debate.

In the first lecture, Professor Eleonore Kofman from Middlesex University in London outlined the changes in policies on the migration of family members and the implications of this for the process of social reproduction, which is becoming more and more transnationalised. On both sides of the Atlantic policies on family reunification and the migration of family members have become increasingly stricter since the 1990s. Kofman noted the example of Canada, which has seen a significant decrease in the migration of family members as a result of stricter rules specifically targeting parents and grandparents. The situation in the EU is similar and generally all OECD countries have placed restrictions or quotas on the migration of family members (the EU restricted the rules even further after 2015 in reaction to the increased number of refugees coming mainly from the Middle East). Policies tend to use the argument of 'human capital' to justify the restrictions; in this perspective, family members, especially older parents and grandparents, are seen as 'irrelevant' for the economy of the destination country. The restrictions on family migration thus go hand in hand with the introduction of regulations and quotas aimed at

facilitating skilled migration that is directly adapted to the needs of the labour market in the settling country. Kofman argued that various tools such as requirements for minimal income or permanent housing are being put in place to ensure that the state can shuffle off any responsibilities for transnational social reproduction, while at the same time creating class-based migration and increasing the effect of social stratification.

The growing body of research on transnational families, transnational parenting, and the concept of care in transnational migration, on the other hand, provides increasing evidence of the importance of family migration in social reproduction. Much of the focus has been placed on those left behind, especially children, but in recent years more and more researchers have been providing insight into transnational parenting/family relations as such and the practices of care that emerge in response to the situation of living within a transnational family. While the policies are primarily designed around the notion of an independent adult who does not need care, the research shows that families are often a major source of care and support and thus play an indispensable role in social reproduction: family members play a role in childcare, elderly care (which may be otherwise inaccessible to migrants), and the socialisation of children and play an important role in the organisations within which social reproduction occurs.

An example of the latter was provided by Dr Monika Palmberger from Vienna University in her contribution. Palmberger uses the concept of care as a tool for analysing transnational migration and presented two examples from her own research: the situation of elderly migrants in Vienna and the transnational care practices developed among refugees using digital communication tools. For example, Palmberger discussed Turkish migrant associations in Vienna as 'places of caring' for ageing migrants. As she pointed out, almost every third person living in Vienna over the age of 50 is of migrant origin, a consequence of the massive Gastarbeiter migration that started in the 1970s. The idea of a Gastarbeiter was designed around very similar premises that Kofman described in her presentation (skilled migration being seen as relevant for the needs of the growing post-war economy and labour market), but many of the workers stayed and also brought their families. Yet, migrants are almost never included in the current public and political debates around ageing and care. While their mobility might be restricted (as spending more than two months outside of Austria might put their compensation payments at risk), they are increasingly forced to (re)produce 'places of caring' for themselves in their host country. Using examples from her ethnographic research Palmberger illustrated how voluntarily organised migrant associations and communities play an important role for elderly migrants as places for social reproduction and provide a social context for their personal stories of transnational family history.

While Kofman and Palmberger provided insight into current transnational migratory processes from below by focusing on those who are subjected to migration governance by geopolitical actors, the two remaining speakers, Stefan Rother from Freiburg University and Carl-Ulrik Schierup from Linköping University, focused their lectures on migration governance from a top-down point of view.

Rother presented findings from his ongoing research on the role of civil society actors in migration governance through the example of Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. He traced the organisation of various civil society bodies that represent migrant voices (such as the International Migrant Alliance and Global Coalition on Migration) and their involvement in the process of creating the Global Compact. As he pointed out throughout his talk, the involvement of civil society actors in the processes of migration governance is crucial not only because of the democratic principle and participatory approach that the international bodies seemingly aim to introduce, but also because global geopolitical tools and documents (such as the Global Compact or, for example, the UN Migrant Worker Convention) have a direct impact on national policies and subsequently on the individual lives of migrants, issues discussed by Kofman and to some extent also Palmberger. Rother used the concept of invited vs invented spaces to illustrate how civil society actors are trying to create as much an impact as possible, while resisting being contested and co-opted by the same policies that often push them into precarious positions. While Rother illustrated various examples where civil society actors managed to overcome these obstacles, the question remains as to whether the emerging global migration governance as it is employed nowadays helps or hinders the agency of those who are most affected by it. If a specific status is required in order to be able to participate in the governance processes that most migrants are not able to obtain (such as the ability to travel to the place where the convention is being held), how can we make sure that their voices are heard and listened to in the debate and how can they employ their agency without being co-opted by the governance regime that prevents them from being a part of it?

Finally, Professor Schierup's presentation provided the entire debate with a broad theoretical and conceptual frame, while addressing the question raised by Rother – how is migration governance linked to precarity? Schierup pointed out that most of today's migration is forced and thus followed up on a question already touched upon by all the other speakers – how do we acknowledge and analyse migrants' own agency in a situation where migration is mostly caused by neoliberal globalisation worldwide and subsequent dispossession? The deregulation of labour markets and increased regulation of the mobility of migrants themselves (as described by Kofman) are pushing more and more migrants into the position of extreme vulnerability, while at the same time truncating the concept of citizenship along the lines of ethnicity,

race, gender, and age (as Palmberger illustrated). In this sense, many of the 'invited spaces' of agency in relation to migration governance that Rother described in his presentation have already been co-opted by more powerful players representing corporate interests. Schierup asked what under these conditions is the actual space of action and influence for migrant organisations, unions, and civil society. Along with an analysis of global compacts, Schierup added a critique of the concept of 'managing migration' that was developed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Migration is being 'managed' instead of 'governed', and this is effectively excluding migrants and civil society actors from the decision-making process, which is subsumed into the neoliberal framing of migration. Schierup proposed various conceptual frameworks to develop a rights-based approach (Purcell's 'network of equivalence' and Hosseini's 'transversal cosmopolitanism') and cited the example of the World Social Forum on Migration (WFSM) as a potential invented space from below.

The four presentations and the debates thus all circled back to the question of *who* really participates in migration governance in a world shaped by geopolitics and neoliberalism and *how* they participate. How can migrant women, transnational families, elderly migrants, refugees, and grassroots civil society organisations representing the voices of these actors reclaim their agency in global migration governance processes? Several ensuing questions were addressed in the discussions, such as the need to rethink the current terminology of 'economic migration'. Are people migrating because of the harsh economic situation in their home country and working under extremely precarious conditions in the host country simply for purely economic motivations, or are they acting out of the need to survive, and if so, are they the victims of the neoliberal geopolitical order in the same way that refugees are victims of war and conflict? Is the label 'economic migrant' still applicable then? Many researchers have thus pointed to the need to fundamentally rethink the legal categories of 'migrants' and 'refugees', as they no longer reflect current migration trends and, most importantly, the root causes of migration, as discussed during the conference.

The conference's closing presentation by the photographer Antonio Cossa then symbolically concluded the discussion by offering a visualisation of the situation of those actors whose voices are currently not being heard in the discussion, though they are among the main subjects of current political and public debate – refugees seeking asylum in Europe.