Towards Reflexivity in Migration Studies. Knowledge Production in Times of Contested Politics and Post-Colonial Dynamics

Midterm Conference of ESA's Research Network 35 "Sociology of Migration", in collaboration with the IMISCOE Standing Committee "Reflexive Migration Research"

10-11 September 2020, Technical University of Berlin (Germany)

Local Organizers:
Anna Amelina (Cottbus University, MIKOWA Research Platform)
Janine Dahinden (Neuchâtel University, IMISCOE SC "Reflexive Migration Research")
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Confirmed keynote speakers:
Pawel Kaczmarczyk (University of Warsaw)
Sharam Khosravi (Stockholm University)
Gökce Yurdakul (HU Berlin)

Deadline for abstract submission: 29 February 2020

ESA's Research Network 35 "Sociology of Migration" will hold its next midterm conference at the Technical University Berlin, 10-11 September 2020. Mirroring recent trends and debates in the field of migration studies, the conference will focus on the topic of *reflexivity in migration research*. The conference is organized in close cooperation with the newly founded IMISCOE Standing Committee on "Reflexive Migration Research" as well as with local organizers from TU Berlin, Cottbus University and the University of Neuchâtel.

We invite all interested scholars to submit proposals for single paper presentations or thematic sessions by 29 February 2020. We want to provide a platform for those who have already met at earlier conferences to continue our exchange, and at the same time invite other scholars to join our discussions. RN35 aims to have lively and focused debates at its midterm conferences. Hence, submissions that have a clear and strong link to the conference theme will be given priority. A detailed elaboration of the conference topic can be found in our extended Call for Papers under https://www.europeansociology.org/research-networks/rn35-sociology-migration.

Conference theme
Calls for *reflexivity* have become widespread in migration studies. As the field of migration research continues to grow, it is increasingly faced with the need to reflect upon its relations to social and political dynamics surrounding "migration". At the same time, the field is also becoming more and more differentiated and contested concerning its conceptual, epistemological, and methodological foundations. In this setting a variety of strategies of reflexivity emerge, including the reflexive use of categories and concepts and a self-reflexive stance on researchers' positionality; awareness of the mechanisms of knowledge production; and the public engagement, positioning as or collaboration with actors outside academia. The critique of methodological nationalism and essentialism, the denaturalization of key migration concepts, and the de-migrantization of research themes are just some of the elements relevant of a reflexive approach. It is also crucial to rethink the distinction of categories of practice from those of analysis. Finally, reflexivity implies a critical engagement with dominant (Western) epistemologies and the structures of knowledge production, as well as with existing power hierarchies and postcolonial legacies and continuities.

However, the foundations of reflexivity, the ways in which it can be achieved, as well as its consequences and implications for migration studies often remain unclear. Against this background, the aim of our conference is to clarify and discuss understandings of reflexivity in the field of migration. The conference seeks to grasp the complex entanglements of academic and non-academic knowledge production, their multiple contestations as well as their transnational post-colonial embeddedness. We invite paper proposals that deal with any of these issues. Both theoretical and empirical papers are welcome. In order to allow for a fruitful

exchange, paper proposals should clearly state their relation to the conference theme. Among others, this relation may be defined through four major challenges scholars regularly encounter in doing migration research – namely, (1) conceptual, (2) normative and (3) epistemological, and (4) methodological challenges, each of which points to specific varieties and aspects of reflexivity.

Presentations might consider the following set of questions:

- Which social theories and concepts (e.g. regime, dispositive, belonging, boundary, positionality, reflexivity) help us to analyse or deconstruct normative and hegemonic discourses about migration and support us to develop alternative narratives? How can these inform social theories more broadly?
- How can the inputs of post- and de-colonial perspectives (as well as the postsocialist lens) be used to advance reflexivity and to unravel the mechanisms of knowledge production and the contestations and conflicts around migration?
- What kind of answers and strategies do particular methods, methodologies and ethics (e.g. feminist, post-colonial, transnational or critical race theories) offer or imply to produce critical knowledge?
- How is academic research related to practice and activism, and what role does knowledge produced outside academia play inside and outside of it? How can we critically engage with the origins and assumptions behind key concepts of the field? Does a reflection on the conditions of knowledge production and the underlying power structures question the relevance of those concepts? Can they be fruitfully rethought or redefined?
- How does accounting for power relations affect our understanding of migratory phenomena and their study? And do the categories of global North, global South, or global East do justice to the challenges we face?
- How do national histories and local contexts affect the understanding of the notion of reflexivity? (ex. The question of power relations is likely to differ in the West and in the East of Europe). How can we take this variety of national and local perspectives and positions into account? How is spatial re/organisation and re/scaling related to these dynamics and how are urban transformations in the Global North and the Global South becoming connected through migration?
- What use can be made of the notions of positionality and situated knowledge? What does it mean to put those ideas into practice in the field of migration studies?
- What ethical or deontological questions are specific to the field of migration studies and how has this field addressed them? What are future paths?
- What tools allow for a reflexive conceptualization and contextualisation of research findings? What are ways to effectively communicate researchers' position without invalidating one's findings in the so called post-truth era?
- What are best practices when it comes to our own roles in terms of activism and research? How can we balance normative considerations and aspiration to objectivity in scientific studies?

Format: As in our past conferences, we aim for an interdisciplinary and multi-methodological dialogue that brings younger and well-established scholars from across Europe and beyond together. Paper proposals on these topics including a transnational and/or comparative perspective are particularly welcome. Apart from single papers, we invite proposals for thematic sessions. A session proposal should include three to maximum four papers (titles and abstracts) and a brief indication of the session's overarching theme. Please be aware that there is no guarantee that sessions can be integrated in the suggested form into the final program.

Fees and accommodation: No conference fees will be charged, but conference participants will need to pay their own travel and accommodation. Information on hotels and hostels close to the conference venue will be communicated in due course.

Proposal submission: Please submit your abstract (max. 300 words) plus a short biographical note to RN35conference@h-da.de by 29 February 2020. For full session proposals please include all abstracts and information on individual presenters, together with a session title and a very brief description of the session theme in one file. Decisions will be communicated in April 2020.