

Call for Abstracts for a Special Issue in *Migration Studies Journal*

Title: Towards reflexivity in the study of mobility and diversity: theories, positionality and the political economy of knowledge production

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This special issue aims to shed light on the production of migration-related knowledge, its embeddedness in societal power relations and its role in the reproduction of social hierarchies and boundary-making processes. Its aim is threefold: (1) **to investigate the political economy of knowledge production**, centering on the linkage between policy and research in the era of “policy relevant” research on migration, as well as the influence of funding constellations on research agendas in neoliberal academia; (2) **to offer theoretical discussion of the consolidation of integrationist, migrantizing and nation-centred paradigms** that still dominate the field, putting the artificially delimited field of migration into the broader study of society; and (3) **to propose alternative modes of knowledge production** by examining (self)reflexive methodologies that privilege questions of positionality that scrutinise power relations and aim to de-pathologize mobility and diversity. It aims to build on and disseminate reflections that are being developed within the scope of the [IMISCOE Standing Committee “Reflexivities in Migration Studies”](#).

This special issue aims to contribute to the burgeoning reflections in the literature on reflexive migration research (sometimes called ‘the reflexive turn’, e.g., Amelina, 2017) and the moral economies of knowledge production (Lohr, 2022). It aims to reflexively question the knowledge we produce academically (through the arbitrary delimitation of a field of study) which risks de-politicizing questions and clouding the racialised exclusionary ideologies behind the discourse on migration. By doing so, it has the potential to go beyond integrationist and statist discourses as well as the rights-claiming framework through which migrant struggles are often analysed (Balibar, 2017).

Searching for reflexive ways of knowledge production is an important step in research in general, as it has the potential to inform empirical study design and results. It plays a particularly important role in how migrant, or refugee, presence is formulated in policy considerations and wider public debates. Indeed, Migration and Refugee studies have increased significantly in the last decade in line with greater interest due to refugee presence to inform policy and academic debate, starting from the late 1990s and mushrooming after 2011 with the flight of Syrian refugees. This resulted in extensive knowledge production on an “over-researched” population (Sukarieh and Tannock, 2013), where the tendency has been to adopt a policy lens that “migranticises” (Dahinden, 2016) and “ethnicises” (Wimmer, 2007) mobile individuals, non-citizens, and racialized and minoritized groups that are *a priori* singled out as problematic (Schinkel, 2017). Studies on migration constitute part of the wider migration industry (Castles, 2004), thereby positioning the role of researchers alongside

border control agents, migrants, smugglers and many others. It is thus important to reflect on the ways in which migration related concepts are theorised and research designs are developed.

Furthermore, in a context where migration experts are expected to create “useful” knowledge, developing a reflexive approach allows for ideas on how researchers can go beyond being solely at the service of policy makers, while being cautious not to cause harm to the often vulnerable populations they study. Others have already pointed out problems of research designs that privilege the worldviews of policymakers and practitioners by taking their “categories, concepts and priorities...as their initial frame of reference” (Bakewell, 2008, p. 432) or priorities of funders from the Global North (Nimer, 2020). A move away from this complicity with exclusionary and ultimately oppressive policies rooted in nation-state-centred neo-colonial power relations requires, above all, that we put our own role as knowledge producers under question and re-examine the ways in which we (inadvertently) contribute to knowledge that cements existing power dynamics. This requires raising the following questions: who is researched as ‘migrant’ or ‘refugee’ and in what way; what are the categories we use and the material effects they produce on the lived experience of researched populations; what are the questions we pose and how are they informed by policy concerns; what kind of possible harm are we doing; and how to develop methodologies that can reverse or undo that harm and that can normalise mobility and diversity as an inherent dynamics in modern societies. This involves, among others, changing the conversation about ‘immigrant integration’, a focus which, as has been critically argued, construes a specific image of society as a homogenous, stable entity and an essentialist understanding of ethnic and cultural differences, with certain groups assumed to be in particular need of integration (Schinkel, 2017). It also involves moving away from set categories such as “Muslim” as starting point in the study of the religiously defined immigration population in European countries (Brubaker, 2013), and instead making progress in understanding migration processes.

Against a backdrop where research itself contributes to constituting migration as a “social fact” (Löhr & Reinecke, 2020), the vision of this special issue is to embark upon research that disconnects the field from the migration apparatus and perceives movement as an integral part of society and social theory (Bojadžijev & Römhild, 2014; Dahinden, 2016) and migration as a product of changing constellations and categorizations that are themselves used to allocate resources and reorder sociopolitical hierarchies (Lohr, 2022). We, therefore, invite papers that speak to these concerns and specifically address one or more of the three aims outlined above.

The proposal for this special issue is aimed as a response to a Call for Proposals issued by the journal *Migration Studies*. It is thematically an appropriate topic because it responds to two of the themes in the call: ‘Reflexivity, data collection and categorization in Migration Studies’, as well as ‘Migration scholarship and policy making’.

If you are interested in contributing, please send us an abstract (no more than 500 words) **and a short bio** (200 words max.) **to iva.dodevska@ff.cuni.cz and msnimer@gmail.com no later than August 31, 2022**. Scholars and/or perspectives from outside the over-represented Anglophone and Northwestern European regions are particularly encouraged to send an abstract.

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