

## WS 13

### Dynamics of differentiation: is the refugee/migrant distinction negotiable?

AG Migration

30.09.2019, Teil 1: 14:00-15:30 Uhr / Teil 2: 16:00-17:30 Uhr, Raum A701

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In contemporary political discourse and everyday discussions, the categories 'migrant' and 'refugee' are often used in clear-cut ways, whereby the former is said to leave home by choice while the latter does so under duress. However, now more than ever before in history, the question of who actually is a migrant and who a refugee seems to be decided on a case-by-case basis. It is thus a matter of continuous negotiation between and among bureaucrats and humanitarian agents, but also among the very subjects of these debates: namely those with experiences of (forced) migration.

Among anthropologists who work in the fields of migration and refugee studies the question of how to theorize the everyday practices of enacting the refugee/migrant distinction has rarely been addressed. However, the research that they instead engage in has risked reproducing the distinction, since migration scholars and refugee scholars often operate with distinct theoretical apparatuses and engage in different scholarly debates.

In this workshop, we aim to address these various dimensions of the refugee/migrant distinction. We particularly invite papers that discuss the tension between the importance and non-negotiability of the refugee/migrant distinction in people's life-worlds on the one hand, and the fact that both labels are nevertheless the outcome of continuous negotiations among various actors on the other. Questions tackled may include: Why and under which circumstances do individuals and groups stress their identities as migrants or refugees? How do these terms circulate, transform and become manifested? Moreover, we also invite papers that address methodological, epistemological or ethical questions related to the refugee/migrant distinction, by raising questions such as: What are possible consequences of weakening or reproducing the refugee/migration distinction? And, to what extent does choosing a refugee- or migrant-lens affect the design, methodology and outcome of our research?

Keynote:

**Nicholas Van Hear** (University of Oxford's Centre on Migration, Policy and Society)

#### **In the mix: the rise of the concept of mixed migration in research and policy**

In the discourse on migration a basic distinction is often made between those who chose to move and those who are compelled to – that is, between 'voluntary' migrants and 'forced' migrants or refugees. The distinction is particularly salient in the policy world, where governance of international migration is shaped by the distinction between 'voluntary' and 'forced' migration as mutually exclusive categories – reflected not least in the different institutional architecture for refugees and other kinds of migrant. In reality of course the distinction is far from clear-cut: analysts have for long pointed to a continuum between force and choice in driving migration.

Increasing recognition of such complex dynamics has led to the growing purchase of the notion of 'mixed migration' in analysis and policy. But the problem remains that policy regimes still tend to classify migrants by discrete categories based on a single motivation for migration – labour, highly-

skilled, refugee, family, student – and organise entry and entitlements accordingly. This presentation will track the unfolding of the notion of ‘mixed migration’ both as an analytical concept and in the policy sphere, and how the notion has been modulated by the interplay of these two fields.

Vortragende Teil 1 / Speakers part 1:

**Nanneke Winters** (Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz) und  
**Heike Drotbohm** (Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz)

**Locating, challenging and appropriating bureaucratic categories along the way:**

**African mixed migration in Panama and Costa Rica**

Since 2015, the visible presence of a highly diverse group of African migrants/refugees travelling through Central America has increased. Often problematizing this presence in terms of ‘crisis’, Central American governments have responded in various ways, ranging from turning a blind eye to outright blocking of entrance. This paper focuses on the countries of Panama and Costa Rica, which are the only ones to have established a formal level of cooperation regarding this relatively unfamiliar and hard-to-grasp group of people ‘in transit’. Based on fieldwork in both countries, the paper will explore how migration officials, humanitarian agents and African migrants/refugees themselves negotiate the categories of migrant (*migrante*), refugee (*refugiado/a*), and other ‘local’ labels (such as *extracontinental*) in their encounters. In particular, the paper will address how distinct localities shape categorization along the way. The paper will show the importance of engaging with the temporalities and non-linearities of volatile journeys in order to understand the lived experience of bureaucratic categories (and move beyond these), particularly in the so-called Global South.

**Jelena Jankovic-Rankovic** (University of Notre Dame, USA)

**Is It a choice or coercion? A dichotomy or spectrum?**

**The dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in the realm of human mobility and displacement**

Every year thousands of people are forced to leave their countries because of wars, human rights abuses, and/or economic and social exclusion. Once they reach safety, the question of whether an individual will be classified as a refugee or migrant comes immediately to the fore. In general, refugees are often legally and conceptually separated from migrants due to the involuntary and political character of their displacement. In practice, however, this distinction can be problematic since it is often impossible to clearly delineate between choice and coercion. While it may serve political and analytical purposes, this paper argues that such distinction needs to be understood as a spectrum rather than an apparent dichotomy.

This paper explores how existing policy categories frequently and inefficiently capture dynamics on the ground and how those who experience migration in return perceive themselves. It is based on five months of ethnographic fieldwork in two Asylum Centers in Serbia, including surveys and interviews with refugees, government and NGO representatives. Both refugees and migrants seek safety and socio-economic prospects in exile from the outset of dislocation; therefore the dichotomous categories that juxtapose them are generally imprecise and ill-suited to capture the underlying complexity of contemporary human mobility.

**Elizabeth Ekren** (University of Bonn)

**Forever refugee?**

**Integration, state negotiations and the distinction of refugeehood in Cologne, Germany**

State-negotiated terms of refugee migration are often highly restrictive, distinguishing refugees socially, legally and economically from other migrant groups. To what extent can this distinction change? Using qualitative case-study data from field research with refugees in Cologne, Germany, this paper argues that the mutability of the refugee-migrant distinction relates to the extent that state-negotiated terms of refugeehood promote refugees' agency to rebuild life and successfully integrate into new communities. Because refugees lack institutional support to decide without restriction how to move on, establish daily routines and become like those around them, they remain isolated and become demotivated to pursue change. State response is often more restrictive terms that further widen social and opportunistic differences between refugees, other types of migrants and native Germans. The evidence suggests that the distinction might be more mutable with state institutional frameworks that empowered refugees towards easier participation in community life, promoting mutual socioeconomic benefits and helping them to overcome the on-going state-imposed position of "other."

Vortragende Teil 2 / Speakers part 2:

**Margit Feischmidt** (Hungarian Academy of Sciences)

**The migrant-refugee divide in narratives of Hungarian migrants working or volunteering in the refugee reception system in Germany**

This article addresses the discursive construction of refugee representations in a social context entangled by various types and forms of transnational migrations and mobilities. Specifically, it focuses on Hungarians working or volunteering in the German refugee reception institutions and organisations, and asks how refugee representations are interconnected with personal migration experience of the helpers. The analysis is built upon 16 interviews, carried out in 2017 summer and autumn, with teachers, social workers, community organisers, active in the reception of refugees and asylum seekers in Berlin and Munich. We show, firstly, that the image dominating the interviews is that of the economically deserving refugee, who is hardworking and ambitious to acquire proper education, employment and regularisation and legal residence in Germany. Secondly, interviews reveal that the performing refugee may partly be constructed based on identification of helpers with their students and clients, with reference to own problems, difficulties, struggles of the helpers to settle in Germany. Thirdly, the focus on economic and educational deservingness, and within, on similarities and sameness of struggles of settlement and 'integration' in Germany of people belonging to different migrant categories is strongly interwoven with shifting away attention from the causes of migration, and with an unanimous blurring of boundaries between different legitimate causes – economic or political – of migration.

**Souleymane Diallo** (University of Münster)

**Refugee crisis, labor migration, and the making of Tuareg diaspora in West Africa**

Drawing on Lubkemann (2008; Malkki 1995; Sammadar 1999; Sommers 2001), this paper discusses the interaction between forced migration and labor migration in West Africa. It reflects on how the refugee crisis contributes to labor migration and, inversely, how labor migration is used as a strategy to respond to the predicament induced by adverse and often deeply humiliating living conditions of exile. The analysis focuses on life trajectories of freeborn Tuareg from Mali in Niamey, Niger. By examining how Tuareg forced migration is constitutive of labor migration and how

labor migration is used as a strategy to respond to the predicament induced by exile in Niamey, the paper moves beyond conventional understanding of forced migration and labor migration as two distinctive patterns of migration, thereby failing to address how these are related. In this, the paper brings into conversation two bodies of scholarship that are usually taken to be separated: refugee studies and studies of labor migration. The results prompt reflection that prioritizes empirical connections between forced and labor migrations over their differences often taken for granted in the literature and political narratives.

**Tabea Scharrer** (MPI Göttingen)

**The Same but Different? About making analytical distinctions between ways of migration**

The distinction between migrants and refugees is first and foremost a legal and a political one – it is legal in the sense that the legal framework determines who can be recognized as refugee, and it is political in the sense that the application of the legal framework can vary considerably according to the political situation (as can public discourses about this distinction). This research shows that it is often very difficult to place specific migration experiences and stories within these clear-cut categories. This becomes even more difficult when adding other categories of distinction (such as forced migration) or other frameworks of analysis (such as mobility). Yet, when doing research with Somali migrants in Kenya and in Europe (some of whom are Somali nationals and others are citizens of Kenya) one can also ask, if there are, in an analytical sense, really no differences in the way people from these two groups experience their migration. Therefore, this presentation will use this example to discuss which distinctions between different ways of migration might make sense in the research process and what kind of problems these categories might entail.

**Maja Zwick** (FU Berlin)

**Are refugees migrants after all? Senses of belonging in the context of impeded decolonization, extended exile and transnational migration.**

**Lessons learned from the Saharawi refugee camps in Algeria**

This paper problematizes the assumption that »refugees are migrants after all« (Scalettaris), drawing on the Saharawi refugee camps in Algeria. These camps are one of the most protracted refugee situations worldwide. Yet, for the Saharawis, they are not only »ordinary« refugee settlements but a place of their struggle for the still outstanding decolonization of their country, Western Sahara. On the other hand, manifold, circular and multi-spatial migration, both in and out of the camps, have become a common feature in the everyday life of the camps. Thus, whilst being legally recognised as refugees under international law, Saharawis are simultaneously educational and/or economic migrants who have left their first country of asylum. These practices seem to confirm recent criticism on the categorial distinction of the categories »refugees« and »migrants«. Moreover, they show that the boundaries between »voluntary« and »involuntary« mobility are blurred and that refugees are part of complex migratory phenomena. However, although having the status of migrants in their second or third host society, Saharawis continue to refer to themselves as refugees. By exploring the reasons for that, the paper demonstrates that being a refugee is not only a label but a sense of belonging that emerges from the suffering from being out of one's home.