

# Border Transgression

Mobility and Mobilization in Crisis

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Titelbild: Protest gegen Jugendarbeitslosigkeit, Madrid im April 2011, © Eva Youkhana.

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## Introduction

### Mobility and mobilization

Migration of people from the Global South and / or developing countries, regions of conflict and war, and places threatened by natural and manmade disasters to Europe increased significantly after 2007. Since the financial and economic crisis hit the global economy, migration has been used as a strategy to overcome threats to people's livelihoods, and to avoid unemployment, hunger, and death. Different types of migration (labor migration, serial short-term migration, circular migration, refugee and asylum-seeking migration, family or student migration, environmental migration etc.) mobilize not just people but also concepts, value systems, and commodities, and are challenging governments, administrations, the labor market, public institutions, belonging, and identity constructions, as much as the role of civil society.

Given that the number of refugees drawn towards Europe is likely to rise (compare Rodríguez Borges in this volume), migration is becoming a growing concern of the member states of the European Union, which are struggling for sovereignty and to maintain their privileges as part of the Global North. At the same time, the aging European society needs immigration to keep up their living standard and ensure the maintenance of people in need of care (children, elderly, the sick). Germany plays a significant role in both developing perspectives on how to deal with the growing number of refugees and (re)establishing a restrictive European border regime to keep the crisis within the Global South. Thereby, rules and regulations concerning deportation of rejected asylum seekers become sharper, just as have those concerning family reunion and the surveillance and detention of "terror suspects". The German Government, in addition, engages in international development cooperation and aid in order to solve problems related to underdevelopment, conflict, and bad governmentality in migrants' home countries. Just recently, the German government has presented different programs for the voluntary return of rejected asylum seekers in order to repatriate them and link the migration process to the development of

small businesses in their home communities. Even though appreciated as an alternative to deportation, the outcomes of these measures are uncertain. Another strategy is to support the creation of refugee camps in countries of destination such as Jordan, which are becoming entire cities with their own supply and control infrastructure.

In Europe, relief organizations, volunteers, and aid organizations try to improve the conditions in reception centers and the temporary accommodation of refugees. In contrast, activists of the political right mobilize against the growing number of asylum seekers and refugees seeking shelter in Europe.

Within these processes surrounding migration the media plays a significant role, because digital networks, information, and communication structures are used to improve mobility, transgress borders, and build networks and new collectivities (Reichert 2013: 29). On the one hand, they stimulate political communication and participation among migrants and thus have a high potential for political, social, and cultural mobilizations as well as shifts in power relations. On the other hand, they are used as instruments to promote processes of social exclusion through polarized reporting.

Thus, the negative sentiments toward migration are once again growing. German media, for instance, are talking about the danger of increasing “poverty-driven migration” from South and East Europe, and the German Government veto against granting Romanians and Bulgarians freedom of movement under the Schengen treaty. In the same vein, the former German secretary of the interior, Hans-Peter Friedrich (2011–2013), cautioned against the migration of people from non-member states living in (Southern) Europe and called for stronger measures to prevent their movement within the EU member states.<sup>1</sup>

This populist propaganda mirrors demands by nationalist groupings that talk about a “case of emergency” (Ernstfall), an “ethnic pluralization”, and a situation prior to civil war (“Vorbürgerkrieg”). According to xenophobic parties in Germany such as Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) or Pro NRW, a “multi-ethnic society” is, naturally unstable and must be avoided in order to sustain the nation and its homeland and to prevent so-called ethnic conflicts.<sup>2</sup>

These examples show the increasing need to oppose tendencies to ethnicize political and socio-economic contestations and conflicts (Butterwegge 2007, Groenemeyer 2003, Nghi Ha 2000), stereotyping, xenophobia, and racism that resurfaced in many European countries along with the outbreak of the economic crisis in 2007/2008 (Rodríguez Borges 2011) and the shortcoming of political solutions surrounding the impacts.

The study of these developments, and the analysis at the interface of (human)

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1 <http://www.n-tv.de/politik/Rumaenen-bleiben-draussen-article10253091.html>.

2 <http://ernstfall.org/ernstfall/drohende-ethnische-konflikte/>.

mobility and mobilization (in times of crisis), is an international and interdisciplinary concern that needs to draw on new scientific concepts and approaches that give justice to the fluidity of social relations and relationality with further socio-cultural conditions and political and economic developments. Methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2006) based on essentializing conceptions of belonging, assuming primordial ideas of origin and “gruppist” (Brubaker 2009) imaginations of the social, are scientific approaches that do not sufficiently address the multiplicity of contributing factors that influence these mobilizations in times of migration. Instead, they comply with the expectations of gruppist and essentialist notions of the collective and pave the way for processes of social exclusion. Without questioning the epistemological and scientific contribution of conventional approaches in migration studies (new economics of labor migration, dual labor market theory, transnational theory, migration network theory), here, social markers such as nationality, race, and ethnicity are becoming naturalized categorizations instead of being subjects for further scrutiny and reflection.

Due to the dynamic experiences of migration during the last two decades, Spain has become a hot spot for the analysis of this new form of mobility through which nationalized and regularized Latin Americans move from Spain to Germany, Spaniards move to Argentina or Colombia, and people from Africa or Eastern Europe to Spain. Conceptions of belonging and citizenship that range from essential notions to cosmopolitan constructions of social relations are put to the test against the backdrop of these experiences (Anthias 2009, Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011, Yuval-Davis 2011).

## The international conference in Bonn

The international conference on “Border transgressions: Mobility and mobilization in crisis”, which took place at the Interdisciplinary Latin America Center (ILZ) of Bonn University from 8<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> May 2014, resulted from networks and joint research activities in Spain, Ecuador, and Mexico within the “Research Network on Latin America: Ethnicity, Citizenship, Belonging”. Financed by the Fritz Thyssen foundation, scientists from different disciplines discussed how belonging is mobilized, produced, challenged, and negotiated, and how identities are constructed and reinforced by the media. In particular, questions about how migrants use different resources, media, artifacts, and the material culture to engender agency and enact citizenship were elaborated. With the presentation of case studies from Spain, Ecuador, and Mexico different articulations of belonging and acts of citizenship were debated from a trans-local and comparative perspective. Migration politics and regulations in Europe were introduced, and

it was explored how citizenship rights are allocated and / or enacted and how processes of social inclusion and exclusion happen under different legal and labor conditions. Practices of migration and “critical cosmopolitanism” from a gender and postcolonial perspective were presented, looking at the intersection of different social and racial and/or ethnic discourses.

Arguments were made about the ways in which media and language influence public opinions about migrants, as well as enable the production of transnational social networks and the enactment of citizenship. A presentation critically reflecting the meaning of space with regard to migration politics introduced the conceptual thoughts being followed by a discussion on how migration studies can benefit from Science and Technology Studies (e.g. ANT) and vice versa.

## The composition of the volume

Corresponding to the main topics of the international conference the volume is divided into three parts. The first part sets out to critically discuss established paradigms in migration studies and politics in order to suggest new approaches and settings for the analysis of mobility, migration, and boundary-making approaches.

Maria José Guerra discusses women’s role as laborers within the global economy and debates different notions of migration and citizenship in discourses about national sovereignty. She argues that gender aspects are widely ignored in immigration policies and not problematized when addressing structural inequalities at a global level. She relates this “gender blindness” to an androcentric bias in traditional notions of the concept of citizenship in which the title “citizen” is mainly associated with men. Given that migration responds to a globalized sex/gender system and to the extension of global care chains, Maria José Guerra explores how the care regimes in European countries become a core driver for the feminization of migration. She argues that this trend is linked to women’s “social citizenship” in education, health, housing, and care (of children, elder and sick people) in general. She discusses the disproportionate burden on women in developing countries after the Structural Adjustment Programs during the 1980s and 1990s, and referring to Saskia Sassen (2000), shows how these resulted in even more structural gender injustices. Women’s survival within these “cross-border circuits” implies transnational motherhoods, a certain degree of independence and empowerment of women. From this, Maria José Guerra votes for deterritorialized models of citizenship in order to give justice to the transnational productivity of women.

The concepts of territory and space are being addressed by geographers, but not yet sufficiently by scholars of migration studies, as has been argued by

Yvonne Riaño. She conceptualizes space in transnational migration studies by suggesting to look more carefully at the multiplicity of locations, including the intersecting social and material dimensions of space, within which migrants' practices can empirically be observed. Yvonne Riaño proposes to consider three interrelated dimensions of social space: a) the materiality of space, the physical dimension as the material basis for any kind of interaction; b) the social practices, interaction, and networking organized within and between certain locations; c) the dimension of meaning, referring to the significance people attach to places alive with symbolic representations and imaginaries. With her model she reworks the triad of Lefebvre's production of space (2007/1974) (representational spaces; spatial practices; representations of space) and is able to make it available for transnational migration studies.

Materiality and material semiotic perspectives as proposed by Riaño are also picked up by Maria Schwertl, who describes the effects of the analytic turn back to space and materiality on ethnographic studies of migration and border regimes. Thus, she presents three materialistic approaches that have been discussed rather controversially in migration studies: Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) (Latour 2005); post-humanism; and assemblage approaches. While ANT focusses on non-social networks composed of techno-social practices between heterogeneous actors, post-humanism follows things, artifacts, and materialities rather than social actors. Finally, assemblage approaches zoom in on situations, focusing on their microphysics and logistics, and question the explanatory power of the macroscale, as argued by Maria Schwertl. Giving the example of different uses of a container in the course of a development project in Ghana, the author put to the test the mentioned approaches by opening the container, its varying and changing the content, and the social practices around it. From this, Maria Schwertl is able to show what migration studies (and also development studies) can learn from these new materialist approaches and vice versa, and how the material turn in social sciences can benefit from studies of migration, border regimes, and mobility. In particular, the question of agency – not just of people but also of non-human actors – is posed while challenging the widespread assumption in social sciences that things and artifacts are just passive bearers of agency.

The conceptual part of the volume ends with a discussion of the normative dimension of human (im)mobility, borders, and the inequalities that emerge from them. Juan Carlos Velasco describes the increasing use of fences, trenches, and walls that impede human mobility even though the dilution of the role of the nation-state and its sovereignty can be observed from a global perspective. He argues that these developments (calling for national sovereignty, implementing ever-more restricted border regimes) contradict the idea of the freedom of movement of people understood as a human right of individuals in a globalized

world. Instead, borders are creating unjust human relations and inequalities, even standing in a dialectical relationship with justice, which brings into question the legitimacy of (national) borders. Following previous discussions by for example Sandro Mezzadra and Bryan Neilson, Juan Carlos Velasco shows that borders differentially include or exclude people in an arbitrary way – a process that can be compared to a lottery. Whether one belongs to this or the other side of the border, lives in a rich or a poor country, and benefits from citizenship rights or not, depends on the fortune of one's place of birth, and is, as explored by the author, disconnected from personal choices and beyond one's control. In order to rectify the "strange" relationship between fortune and (in)justice, Velasco proposes a world with open borders (rather than a world without borders) in order to overcome the exclusionary character of borders due to the fate of birth.

The second part of the volume presents empirical cases from Latin America and Spain to demonstrate how migrants challenge, negotiate, and mobilize citizenship and belonging under different conditions.

Based on empirical research, participant observation, and interviews with undocumented migrants of Central American origin at the border between Guatemala and Mexico, Yaatsil Guevara Gonzales shows that the varying practices and social interaction of migrants and smugglers at so-called clandestine borders open up new opportunities and create collective agency. The Guatemalan/Mexican border, which has undergone a severe reinforcement plan in order to discourage unregistered border crossings from Central Americans towards the United States, is a case in point to demonstrate how routes and trajectories of migrants have been reconfigured since then. With an historical review of the activities and functionalities of the Mexican borders in the southern part of the country, Gonzales argues that these borders have always been permeable to the trade of goods, services, and people. Even though incidences such as the enactment of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), the strengthening of the borders after 9/11, the "war" against drug trafficking, recent development strategies (Plan Puebla Panamá), and natural disasters in El Salvador and Guatemala have made border crossings an increasingly difficult undertaking, undocumented migration is still functioning with the provision of reliable services and safe guidance. As a result of the above-mentioned difficulties, more sophisticated strategies for border crossing lead to more concerted activities that have a positive and supportive effect on people.

The wish to leave as much as the wish to return is shaping and transforming migrants' trajectories, and therefore must be regarded as one stage in a larger migration project. Giving the example of Ecuadorians returning from Spain to their home country, Gioconda Herrera and Lucía Perez Martínez examine the labor and social integration of returnees in the context of the global crisis, and show what roles gender and social background in migrants' countries of origin

play for the reintegration of the returnees. By framing the state of the art with regard to the still sparse literature on return migration, particularly after the European crisis, the authors provide empirical evidence for their assumption that men tend to be more likely to return to their home countries than women. Because of a greater recognition of their work and activities in the countries of destination, a better income situation, and more decision-making power, women often see a return to their home countries as potentially risking their relatively enhanced position as migrants. Besides gender, the stage at which a person is at in the life cycle matters and has an effect on return migration, because the younger a person is when migrating, the better he or she can gain social capital. However, Herrera and Martínez argue that labor and social integration on return is still more related to the social position and capital of migrants before they leave their home countries, and therefore contradicts literature that credits return migration with a much larger role in the (economic) development of the countries of origin.

Further examples of how migrants challenge, negotiate, and mobilize citizenship are introduced by Lara Jüssen, who looks at the lived practices, enactments, emplacements, and embodiments of citizenship through the struggles of Latin American household workers in Spain, Madrid. Here, citizenship is not considered as an assigned legal status but animated by the denizens with or without citizenship rights. Referring to previous works by Engin Isin and Bryan Turner (2007), Lara Jüssen argues that a praxeological approach to citizenship allows us to place those actors who would not otherwise be considered as citizens in the picture. She states that a static interpretation of the concept of citizenship excludes irregular migrants' strategies and practices of reappropriating the public space, staging political theatre, and voicing their claims, and thereby participating in decision-making, as shown in the example of female household workers in Spain. In fact, these practices are often part of a larger political movement to claim rights and create access and more democratic structures. The case of household workers in Madrid is indeed an interesting one as the feminist movement, and various political steps towards the regulation of household labor in Spain were put in place during the last decades in order to also protect work in the "private sphere".

The third part of the volume deals with the question of how belonging is produced and identity constructed at a transnational level. New information and communication technologies, and human mobility, and also the mobility of concepts, ideas, and values being represented and translated by the material culture foster these collectivization processes across physical and symbolic boundaries.

To exemplify these social-material relations a third example of Latin American migrants in Spain is given by Eva Youkhana, who looks at the role of the



figure of the “Virgen del Cisne” for the sense of belonging of the Ecuadorian community in Madrid. The study of the origins of the artifact laden with symbolic meaning, and its veneration and valorization, offers insights into the transcultural dynamics between both countries since colonial times, in which claims to common goods were enforced by both the colonizers and the colonized. Youkhana follows these transregional and historic relationships by unfolding the social and political landscape from an art object and its diverse replicas, which became powerful allies in enforcing the interests of both the Catholic Church and an association of Ecuadorian migrants in Madrid. By describing a recent conflict over the power of interpretation of the Saint, the author is able to show how agency can be conducted by an art object (Gell 1998) for up to several centuries.

Since the European economic and financial crisis, perspectives on migration have shifted from the notion of a development engine for the countries of origin to a risk for the social security systems of the countries of destination. Through increasing numbers of refugees from war regions and countries such as Syria and Iraq, the negative perspectives on human mobility (irregular migration and refugees) are strengthened. Rodríguez Borges argues that the European crisis threw into question the model of the social welfare state, which has led to a renationalization of political discourses and a new political right that marks immigrants as scapegoats to be blamed for all negative impacts of the crisis. The mass media plays an important role in this trend due to its strong influence on public opinion. By analyzing the political and public discourses around migration in Spain from 2005–2014 Rodríguez Borges analyzes how negative notions and images in particular of refugees, produced and distributed via the mass media, support racist and xenophobic interpretations of migration by nationalist groups. He shows how the media coverage of migration goes hand in hand with strategies of the European Union and the member countries to control the external borders and further trail the politics of shielding. Giving the example of the Canaries, where an increasing number of refugees and irregular migrants have arrived during the last two decades, the author shows how new “facts” are created through language by sensationalist reporting. Thereby, migration and migrants are imagined as a threat to the security of citizens and the survival of the value system of various countries, of the entire European continent, or even of the entire Christian occident.

The medium of radio is an important communication tool for migrants, and it connects diasporic communities with their countries of origin, families, friends, and all those left behind in the homeland. Marisa Ruiz Trejo analyses the mobilizing power of radio broadcasting for constructing national and religious identities, reproducing language and dialects, and creating citizenship – a topic that, she argues, has been ignored by anthropologists and scholars of migration

studies in the past. By introducing the term “transnational radio fields” she shows how Latin American migrants advertise and commercialize aspects of their culture and lifestyles and at the same time engage in so-called ethnic economies being surrounded and affected by the economic crisis. The author’s detailed insights into daily experiences, articulations, and emotions of Latin Americans in Madrid are enriched by the personal observations of an anthropologist with a feminist orientation.

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