

CFP: The Moral Economies of Knowledge Production on Migration: Conflicts, Values, Positionalities

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Organizers: Research Group “The Production of Knowledge on Migration”, Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies (IMIS), University of Osnabrueck, Germany

In current research about migration, there is a growing interest in the ways in which knowledge shapes migration and the experiences and apparatuses connected to it. Researchers, thus, draw attention to the categories, technologies, and data that inform border and migration policies (and vice versa). They point to the ways in which different mobilities come to be categorized, ordered and made legible to the state. They explore how the production of mobile subjects such as “the expat” or “the illegal migrant” is interconnected with specific imaginations of nations, societies or empires. Or they guide the view to the structures and assumptions that shape the politics of expertise in migration studies and related fields. Our conference approaches the interconnection between the production of knowledge and migration by placing a particular emphasis on the struggles that centre on peoples’ mobilities and their ‘correct’ quantification, categorization and interpretation. In order to make these conflicts intelligible, we propose to apply the notion of moral economies as it has been discussed in different disciplines recently.

Conflicts about migration and its effects as well as the struggles of migrants themselves often lay bare not only the different experiences and socioeconomic situations of the many actors involved but also their conflicting worldviews and value systems. We suggest taking a closer look at how different imagined geographies and ideas of justice, community, and belonging structure these conflicts. Using the notion of moral economies, we aim to systematically reflect the moral positions that guide the production of knowledge on migration as well as the different political and societal contexts in which this production takes place.

A moral economies perspective takes different positionalities, value systems, and worldviews into consideration when making sense of conflicts in, between and across various fields and groups, be they humanitarian actors, academic researchers, migrants, activists or political experts. We use the term moral economies as shorthand for a perspective that considers both the socioeconomic situatedness of actors and their value systems. When the British historian E.P. Thompson first developed the concept based on the protests against rising food prices in 18th century Britain, he was interested in the values that guided these (mostly rural) struggles. Thompson argued that the protests were not mere “rebellions of the belly” but that they were caused by a clash between traditional local notions of justice and a new capitalist logic.

Taking up Thompson's older notion, scholars such as Didier Fassin use moral economies in order to direct attention to the moral dimension of conflicts and protests as well as to their socioeconomic situatedness. Scholars in the field of Science Studies who are interested in the role of beliefs and values in the production of knowledge do so as well. By integrating "morals" and "economies" into one analytical framework, they acknowledge that not only social thought but also social actions and notions of belonging depend on different value regimes and worldviews (and vice versa). Our conference proposes to make use of these debates.

We suggest exploring the moral economies of researchers and other knowledge producers by examining the material and moral dimensions of knowledge practices on the ground and by focusing on the various people and artefacts bound together by these practices. Moreover, we propose taking a closer look at the ways in which both mobile people and their various observers navigate and influence the political, moral, social and economic landscapes in which their activities are situated. In doing so, we seek to advance a globally conscious understanding of the knowledge production on migration as a highly situated set of practices.

We invite papers from a range of disciplines that investigate the following topics:

Delineating the Field: (Co-)Producers and Production Sites

- the knowledge produced for and by administrations, governing bodies, international organisations and the police
- the history, institutionalization, and structure of migration studies in different national and transnational contexts and their impacts on the changing paradigms of migration and integration
- the materialities and sites of the production of knowledge about migration
- the analytical use of intersectional perspectives when analyzing the producers of knowledge and their positionalities

Spatializing the Knowledge on Migration: Geographies and Imagined Geographies

- the (geographic) positionalities of different knowledge producers and the geographies of the knowledge on migration they produce
- the impact of specific imaginations of nations, societies or empires on the categorization and datafication of migration
- the knowledge of border and migration regimes in different geographical and historical contexts
- (euro)centrism, marginalized positions and the analytical use of postcolonial perspectives in this context

Ordering Migration: Categorizations and (E)valuations

- the political, public and academic conflicts concerning migration and the question of how to define, name and quantify it
- the knowledge of activists and the categories, data and narratives used in political conflicts and protests
- master narratives and counternarratives
- the relationship between migrant subjectivities and dominant forms of categorizing mobilities and of “making up people”

Navigating the Academic and Political Landscape: Of Truths and Values

- the relationship between academic, political and public agendas and roles
- practices and forms of boundary work
- the values and worldviews of the different actors involved in making migration into a “social fact” and sociopolitical field
- selling knowledge and promoting truth in different fields and contexts

The conference is organized in cooperation with IMISCOE’s Standing Committee “Reflexive Migration Studies”.

Submissions should include a paper title, an abstract of up to 500 words, and a short biographical note. Please submit proposals by the 15th of March 2020 to Matthias Land (matland@uni-osnabrueck.de). The organizers will cover basic expenses for travel and accommodation.

For questions or further information please contact the two heads of the research group, Dr Isabella Löhr and PD Dr Christiane Reinecke: isabella.loehr@uni-osnabrueck.de and christiane.reinecke@uni-osnabrueck.de.