

Call for Contributions

Forced Migration in Transition: Perspectives from Social Science and Law

Conference of the SYLFF Mikrokolleg on Forced Migration
14 – 15 November 2019
Ruhr University Bochum

Forced migration has taken center stage in public and academic discourse over the last years. Given its contemporary relevance, familiar as well as novel theoretical and methodological approaches to migration studies gain momentum. Multifaceted and controversial debates reveal various transitions concerning empirical dynamics and approaches to address forced migration as well as theoretical, methodological and legal challenges to grasp the complex phenomenon. Exploring these transitions, the conference will provide a space for interdisciplinary debate as well as exchange between academia and practice. It aims at stimulating a discussion between scholars of humanities and law and representatives of civil society, governments and international agencies. The conference will encourage scholars to reflect on the real-world outcomes of their research and animate practitioners to scrutinize their day to day work. In four consecutive workshops, we will analyze transitions of concepts, perspectives, law and civic spaces.

We welcome contributions that provide theoretical or empirical arguments addressing the following challenges related to forced migration studies:

- ❖ **Transition of Concepts:** While the field of research has long been dominated by refugee studies, scholars increasingly acknowledge the multidimensional nature of forced migration and dismiss the binary juxtaposition of economic versus humanitarian motivations of migration. Instead, forced migration has often been conceptualized as an integral part of global social inequalities that continuously produce forced mobility. To explore the scope of this concept, we will discuss in how far everyday manifestations of the so-called north-south divide qualify as drivers of forced migration: For instance, shall we understand peasants in the global south, who cannot compete with international agribusiness and must leave their lands, as forced migrants? Would such an approach sharpen our analysis or render the concept futile? What would it mean for bureaucratic categories and real-world outcomes and how, if at all, could it be applied within the legal framework of international human rights and migration law?

- ❖ **Transition of Perspectives:** Social scientists and human rights theorists have introduced actor-oriented perspectives into forced migration studies, opposing an understanding of migrants and refugees as passive beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance and objects of migration regimes. We will discuss the influence of actor-oriented perspectives from two angles. Empirically, an actor-oriented perspective allows researchers to ask how migrants make use of their (limited) room for maneuver: How do they perceive and react to the drivers of their own migration, what are their aspirations and what motivates their decisions? What rights do they claim and against whom? How do they creatively react to restrictive migration regimes? Legally, this understanding puts the prerogative for the interpretation of situations, rules and interests in the hands of decision makers, states, and those affected, migrants themselves. An actor-oriented perspective changes the way in which we interpret human rights regarding their realization and enforcement, especially when it comes to balancing interests and designing procedures for administrations and courts to interact with affected individuals.
- ❖ **Transition of Law:** Against the backdrop of global investment interests in land and increasing scarcity of this finite ‘commodity’, potential conflict between vulnerable groups such as indigenous peoples, small-scale agriculturalists and (ethnic) minorities looms as an ever more important driver of forced migration. In reaction to this issue, we observe attempts to integrate land rights into the existing framework of international human rights law and international law more broadly. In this panel session, we will explore in how far land rights, understood as human rights, may defuse or rather trigger conflict and how they are used in practice to strengthen land-related claims and mitigate an important driver of forced migration. Do they expand the room for maneuver of people who are threatened by displacement and forced migration?
- ❖ **Transition of Civic Spaces:** In many countries, public discourse and migration policies are increasingly shaped by anti-immigration sentiments and xenophobia. Within a heated political climate - often accompanied by the exclusion and repression of advocates for an open, plural society - the civic space for migrant and civil society organizations is shrinking, limiting the opportunities and the legitimation of political articulation and dissent. This panel seeks to discuss ways of reclaiming or re-opening civic space, elaborating on the responsibilities of governments, academia, and civil society. Taking up the questions of previous panel sessions, we will explore responses to a discourse that entitles some migrants and delegitimizes others and ask what an actor-oriented approach – taking migrants seriously as actors on their own behalf – would mean for existing practices of social movements and civil society organizations.

To offer a presentation please send an abstract (approx. 400 words), including a title and 4-6 keywords to sylff-conference@rub.de by 31 July. Applicants will be notified by 31 August. If your abstract is accepted, we will ask you to submit a detailed handout by 15 October which will be distributed to all participants in advance. Please ensure that your arguments are comprehensible to an interdisciplinary audience. There are no conference fees, however please note that we won't be able to cover accommodation or travel costs.

If you would like **to participate without a presentation**, we also welcome your interest. Please register through sylff-conference@rub.de. As there is limited space, seats will be allocated on a first-come-first-serve basis. For updates regarding the conference and more information on the Kolleg, please see our website: http://www.research-school.rub.de/about_sylff.o.html.

The Organizing Committee – Sylff Mikrokolleg on Forced Migration:
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