# Introduction: Understanding Migration Research (Across National and Academic Boundaries) in Europe

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**Abstract**: In this introduction to the special issue we argue that migration is a phenomenon that shifts space and time. It is an ageless human strategy to improve life and could be defined as a natural behaviour of human beings. What makes migration a subject of investigation are processes like nation-state-building, Europeanisation, globalisation and economic polarisation, which problematise the free movement of people. Academic researchers have responded to the challenges associated with this by drawing upon a range of disciplines, gathering evidence from a variety of countries, and employing an array of methodological tools to examine the emergent and evolving processes and patterns of Europe's new migration. Nonetheless, one is still faced with bewildering diversity in terms of migrant flows and the minority communities that form from these. This complexity, we argue, presents a new challenge for European migration research, particularly to those researchers attempting to understand patterns and processes of migration at a pan-European level and/or entering the field for the first time. The collection is an attempt to explore these challenges from different national and disciplinary perspectives and this introduction is designed to set the scene for this project.

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"To talk about immigration, it is to talk about the whole society, to talk about its diachronic dimension, that is to say, from a historical perspective, but also about its synchronic extension, that is to say, from the point of view of the present structures of the society and their functioning" (SAYAD, 1991, p.15)

Migration is a global phenomenon. Although the United Nations estimates that only 2% of the world's population are migrants, it is a far more important process than this percentage suggests. It is an accelerating, diversifying and politicised force (CASTLES & MILLER, 2003) which has revolutionised the way we conceive nation-states and group identifications. Even so, migration is not a new phenomenon: human beings have always been moving to other places, other regions and other countries. What is "new" is the relatively recent invention and creation of national borders and the "imagining" of nation-states (ANDERSON, 1983, pp.5-7). These ideological processes make migration "international" and thus problematise the natural behaviour of people attempting to improve their everyday lives. [1]

Even more recent and arguably more difficult to conceptualise are the geo-political processes of globalisation/Europeanisation. In contemporary Europe,

questions of nation-state sovereignty are being increasingly highlighted: politically by processes of Europeanisation, and economically by processes of globalisation. Migration accentuates this in a unique way. Migrants are the hitchhikers of global capitalism, and whether skilled or unskilled, their labour is now vital to the flexibility, competitiveness and dynamism of a host of economic sectors. They have also become vital constituents in the contemporary imagining of nation-states.[1] [2]

The reception of migrants in Europe, and the images, representations and attitudes towards them are determined by global, European, national and local factors. Thus, despite processes of Europeanisation and globalisation and related moves toward the "harmonisation" of immigration policies within the EU, national traditions remain strong.[2] This national specificity relates both the political-economic as well as the scientific-academic sphere.[3] Migration to France or Britain, for example, cannot be understood without stating the relevance of colonialism and post-colonialism, and the different national and academic treatment of the issues around this. In Britain "ethnic community relations" framed this debate until recently, whereas in France migration was linked to "the universal-republican" ideals around integration and assimilation.[4] Furthermore, Germany and Switzerland, without this still vivid history of colonialism, have traditionally been more concerned with the specific "guest-worker" question. These different national political contexts, allied with different academic traditions, have led to divergent ways of understanding migration, citizenship and nationhood.[5] [3]

In terms of modern accounts of migration to Europe, the 1973 international economic crisis marked a political and academic watershed. In political terms, European borders were officially closed to new migrant workers because of the economic downturn that followed the oil-price rise. The question of "immigration" that emerged in different European countries, i.e. the move from seeing migrants as temporary workers to seeing them as human-beings with long-term family commitments, came to the fore. Related to this, there was a search for a "European solution" to the "problem" of immigration, and from the time that the post-war "colonial" and "guest-worker" migration slowed, EU-Member States began constructing a "European line" against migration. For academics, this shift

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1   In the UK this has manifested itself most visibly and publicly through the appropriation of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi food into the national cultural fabric.

2   Most recently Europeanisation of immigration policies has been discussed in relation to a "European green-card" for skilled migrants. This follows discussion of issues such as shared-border policing amongst EU Member States, and a common refugee system.

3   Marco MARTINIELLO (2001, pp.29-39) talks about a "Europeanisation uncompleted" for the period between 1973 and 2000, caused by the relevance of national approaches in migration policies and studies. Dominique SCHNAPPER (1992, pp.12-21) also underlines the importance of national conceptions of policies, even if, as she states, behind different "national" concepts coming from different national traditions there are exactly the same kind of policies.

4   For this question, see the comparison between Britain and France made by Didier LAPEYRONNIE (1993).

5   See for example Rogers BRUBAKER's (1992) classic comparison of citizenship and nationhood in France and Germany.

marked the beginning of critical engagement with migration as a "political problem" to be analysed and challenged.[6] [4]

New research topics appeared in the political and scientific agendas from the early 1970s. Migrants were not longer considered to be just workers, but as people actually inhabiting cities, with families, often with young school-aged children, and using public services such as hospitals and advice centres. Questions around welfare provision, housing allocation, and neighbourhood integration began to be taken into account by social scientists. Most notably, there was concern with issues of social equality, economic integration, and cultural assimilation. Thus, whilst it was still important to know how many migrants there were, the immigrant question moved the research agenda into new terrain. Moreover, the topics addressed called for more complex and sensitive approaches that relied upon qualitative methodologies as well as more traditional quantitative approaches.[7] [5]

Since the great political changes of 1989-1991 international migration to Europe has evolved significantly, and has once again stimulated interest amongst both the public and policy-makers. Events like the collapse of the Soviet Union, the war in the former Yugoslavia, and the progressive strengthening of the European internal market, have diversified migration movements. Similarly, the advancement of globalisation in both the cultural and economic spheres has added further complexity to international migration. Today it is more difficult to compartmentalise migration into one or two discreet streams such as the labour, refugee and family reunification movement of the past. The scale of contemporary migration has grown within Europe, and it is also increasing in scope both in terms of country of origin and country of destination. This complexity is further increased by the different disciplinary approaches used to investigate migration and the different national-academic research traditions. [6]

What the changes mean in practice is that we now have "new countries of immigration" like Ireland, Italy and Spain. Moreover, irrespective of whether one looks at these "new countries", or at the "old countries" of labour migration, flows are incredibly diverse and fragmented. This poses real challenges for academics attempting to research contemporary migration. It also poses great challenges for those attempting to compare different migration streams, and to those wanting to position new forms of migration against those of the past. [7]

In light of this contemporary diversity, a number of scholars have sought to draw together different disciplinary perspectives from sociology, anthropology, politics and economics (BOMMES & MORAWASKA, 2005; BRETELL & HOLLIFIELD, 2000). This has meant that different research approaches are now increasingly being considered alongside each other. There is, in short, a growing recognition that

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6   See for example the analysis of Abdelmalek SAYAD (1984), who talks about how immigration was "discovered" as a research topic in France after it became a "political problem" in Europe after the post-war economic boom.

7   This qualitative perspective is particularly evident in Sociology (RIBAS-MATEOS, 2004; REA & TRIPIER, 2003).

ostensibly similar issues can be looked at and talked about in different ways, but that because migration has become so fragmented, there is a simultaneous need for scholars to draw their different disciplinary and national perspectives closer. [8]

As part of this, qualitative approaches to migration have acquired a special importance in recent years. Such approaches have always been used by social scientists: this dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when sociologists around the Chicago School established the relevance of qualitative research for investigating group life in urban contexts, and anthropologists like RADCLIFFE-BROWN, MALINOWSKI and MEAD introduced the fieldwork method to social science. Their work led to the development of a range of fieldwork methods to investigate particular social issues, many of which related directly to the everyday lives of migrants and the issues they faced (BLAUMEISER, 2001; BOHNSACK, 1999; DENZIN & LINCOLN, 1994; KLEINING, 1995). [9]

The Chicago School showed how disciplines could come together using similar epistemological approaches, and the recent re-emergence of this perspective provides the impetus behind this special edition. Our collection of papers is also informed by feminist methodologies. Since the 1960s, feminist scholars have criticised the limited perspective of quantitative-positivistic accounts of migration, especially in terms of their gender-blind approach. They proposed qualitative methodologies to address this issue, and to more broadly bring out the complexities of migrant lives (particularly those of migrant women). These feminist perspectives also brought attention to class, age, gender, and other social divisions that can shape experiences of migration (BECKER-SCHMIDT & BILDEN, 1995; BRAH, 1996; KOFMAN et al., 2000; YUVAL-DAVIS & ANTHIAS, 1989). [10]

There are clearly many different approaches to examine the multiple realities of migration in Europe, and through qualitative reflection from a range of social-science disciplines we intend to explore and draw together some of these approaches. In this vein, it is worth considering Norman DENZIN and Yvonna LINCOLN's (1994, p.3) advice:

> "Qualitative research as a set of interpretive practices, privileges no single methodology over any other. As a site of discussion, or discourse, qualitative research is difficult to define clearly. It has no theory, or paradigm, that is distinctly its own. (…) Nor does qualitative research have a distinct set of methods that are entirely its own". [11]

The following collection will present insights into migration that draw upon this rich but diverse qualitative tradition. In doing so, the collection will inevitably reflect the scale and scope of Europe's migration, and the diversity of academic approaches to this phenomenon. Nonetheless, we also intend to convey the many similarities that unite us as qualitative migration researchers within a European context. [12]

This issue has been compiled by members of the HERMES (European Researchers in Migration and Ethnic Studies) network: a European non-profit

organisation that brings together researchers of migration from across Europe at the start of their academic careers. HERMES members are based in numerous European countries and have diverse national and disciplinary backgrounds. The organisation works as a trans-national and trans-disciplinary discussion network, allowing members to share knowledge and skills from a wide range of countries and subject areas. HERMES' aim is to advance our understanding of European migration by overcoming the national and disciplinary boundaries that have historically framed social research. In this vein, HERMES also aims to disseminate findings to international audiences, in ways that both conform to and challenge the traditional channels of academic communication. This collection of papers marks one phase in a much broader and long term attempt to construct a pan-European research arena for migration studies.[8] [13]

The issue is divided into three parts: Part I includes theoretical reflections on qualitative migration research, highlighting important questions about the way in which the personal and the academic combine to produce "what we know" about contemporary European migration. Papers by BORKERT and DE TONA (Stories of HERMES: An Analysis of the Issues Faced by Young European Researchers in Migration and Ethnic Studies), GANGA and SCOTT (Cultural "Insiders" and the Issue of Positionality in Qualitative Migration Research: Moving "Across" and Moving "Along" Researcher-Participant Divides), MARTÍN PEREZ (Doing Qualitative Research with Migrants as a Native Citizen: Reflections from Spain) and WEISS (Comparative Research on Highly Skilled Migrants. Can Qualitative Interviews Be Used in Order to Reconstruct a Class Position?) will be included here. In Part II we will address more practically some of the qualitative methods used to investigate migration. The aim here is to offer thought on how to improve and advance our understanding of qualitative research tools. Papers by CATALÁN-ERASO (Reflecting Upon Interculturality in Ethnographic Filmmaking) and FRISINA (Back-talk Focus Groups as a Follow-Up Tool in Qualitative Migration Research: The Missing Link?) will be included in this section. In Part III, DEGNI, PÖNTINEN and MÖLSÄ (Somali Parents' Experiences in Bringing up Children in Finland and its Social-cultural Implications for Change) and MANTOVAN (Immigration and Citizenship: Participation and Self-organisation of Immigrants in the Veneto [North Italy]) will use a case-study approach to review the general issues that surround contemporary European migration. In order to show the huge range of contemporary migration research conducted throughout Europe two other contributions will be included in this section: Within the field of ethnomusicology BOURA follows a case-study approach for investigating music and identity of a Greek labour migrant in Germany (Imagining Homeland: Identity and Repertories of a Greek Labour-immigrant Musician in Germany), while the research group NOHL, SCHITTENHELM, SCHMIDTKE and WEISS designed and applied a sophisticated model of researching cultural capital during migration processes on the ground of a systematic comparison of status groups (differing

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8   It is important to note here that we are not arguing comparative approaches will ever "overcome" national and academic differences. Indeed, migration in different European countries will always require unique national perspectives. It is also important to note, from a practical perspective, that although English is the academic "*lingua franca*" difficulties remain in the translation of the theoretical and conceptual nuances from other languages. There is also the issue of privileging English-language knowledge at the expense of other approaches and points of view.

on education titles, respective place of acquisition and residence status) in Germany, Canada, Great Britain and Turkey (Cultural Capital during Migration— A Multi-level Approach for the Empirical Analysis of the Labor Market Integration of Highly Skilled Migrants). Moreover, an interview section is provided in which DE TONA questions Ronit LENTIN and Hassan BOUSETTA about the state of the art of contemporary migration research in Europe. [14]

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## Citation

Borkert, Maren; Martín Pérez, Alberto; Scott, Sam & De Tona, Carla (2006). Introduction: Understanding Migration Research (Across National and Academic Boundaries) in Europe [14 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 7(3), Art. 3, http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs060339.