

### **Labour Migration and Transnationalism in Europe. Contemporary and historical perspectives**

**Veranstalter:** University of Regensburg, Chair of Southeast and East European History

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**Bericht von:** Karolina Novinščak, Universität Regensburg; Ulf Brunnbauer, Universität Regensburg

This international workshop „Labour Migration and Transnationalism in Europe. Contemporary and historical perspectives“, held at the Südost-Institut (Institut for Southeast European Studies) in Regensburg, was organised as part of the research project „Bavaria-Croatia transnational“ (University of Regensburg) within the Bavarian Research Network „Migration and Knowledge“ (FORMIG). The workshop discussed transnational social links of labour migrants in post-Second World War Europe with a focus on migrants from Southeastern and Southern Europe. The discussions revolved around the question of the salience of transnational links of migrants and the viability of the concept of transnationalism for different spatial and temporal contexts. The presentations covered both contemporary and historical perspectives, and came from different disciplines: anthropology, sociology, history, and economics.

Keynote speeches were delivered by ULF BRUNNBAUER (Regensburg) and JANINE DAHINDEN (Neuchâtel). In his talk Ulf Brunnbauer highlighted the usefulness of the specific epistemology of transnationalism for Balkan history for overcoming the predominance of the national perspective, which is still salient in the Southeast European historiographies. He argued that the evidence of the Balkans also shows that migrant transnationalism is not a new phenomenon, as it can already be detected in the 19th century. Brunnbauer discussed how governments in Southeastern Europe responded to the emergence of transnational social practices by designing policies which aimed at extending sovereignty across borders, so that the social and political spaces of the nation would coincide. He emphasized the importance of the

politics of emigration in shaping of transnational social networks. As for the conceptual problems of transnationalism, Brunnbauer stressed that in a region such as the Balkans, where state and nation are not continuous and the boundaries of the nation are not predicated upon state borders, „transnational“ can subsume national but at the same time cross-border links. The implicit assumption that „transnationality“ transcends the nation needs qualification because transnational – in the sense of cross-border – links can be a resource for the pursuit of a nationalist agenda. Brunnbauer suggested thinking about alternative terms, such as „transterritorial“, „trans-state“, or „trans-local“.

Janine Dahinden linked the transnational perspective to questions regarding the integration of immigrants. She argued that „until recently, in studies examining settlement processes of migrants in the receiving countries, transnational aspects were either ignored or simply dismissed as disintegrative“. Dahinden, in contrast, was interested in the links between integration processes and transnational practices. She elaborated on this problem by using a case study of Albanian-speaking migrants from former Yugoslavia (Kosovo) in Switzerland. Dahinden demonstrated how four different transnational formations have evolved and changed dynamically over the years. These were always linked to integration. Dahinden urged to „transnationalize“ integration theory which opens a series of possibilities for analyzing social structures which, in a globalized environment, produce new conditions for integration. She concluded that access to resources is important for maintaining transnational links; this is the reason why sometimes only well-integrated people are engaged in long-term transnational practices. Hence, transnationalism is linked to social inequalities.

Theoretical and empirical methods of researching transnationalism were surveyed in the first panel. MAJA POVZANOVIC FRYKMAN (Malmö) underlined the usefulness of the transnational paradigm for capturing the perceived normality of practices of transnational connection and the related normality of multiple attachments and inclusions. This paradigm should be combined with

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multi-sited ethnographic methods in order to follow specific people on their travels while obtaining a sense of commonalities between the varieties of routes and practices on the micro-levels of transnationalism. To illustrate the processes of homing and re-grounding as well as the importance of personal travel and being home at different places, Povrzanović Frykman presented case studies connecting Sweden, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. Her new project investigates „the transnational life of objects“ in order to capture the role of ethnicity for transnational practices.

The sociologist GABRIELE CAPPAL (Bayreuth), who does extensive research on Italian migrants (mainly from Sardinia) in different parts in the world, suggested considering transnationalism as a „mental activity“: migrants „cross“ national borders even when they do not move in space. He called this phenomenon „cognitive transnationalism“. While physical movement in space of migrants across national borders is actually rather limited in terms of frequency, migrants in their every-day-life constantly compare phenomena, situations and processes of the destination country and of the „home“ country. Migrants experience the host society on the background of their experiences in their home country. Cappai concluded that cognitive transnationalism can motivate efforts to improve things back home.

CHRISTOPHER MOLNAR (Bloomington) stressed that transnational theories of immigration often neglect the significance of geography for the maintenance of cross-border networks. Yugoslav migration to West Germany, and particularly to Southern Germany, provides an example of the salience of geography for the shaping of immigrants' transnational experiences. The geographical proximity of Yugoslavia – especially Croatia and Slovenia, where many Gastarbeiter came from – and southern Germany allowed Yugoslav immigrants to construct particularly dense transnational networks. Molnar underlined that „transnational families“, i.e. families in which one part lived in Germany and another in Yugoslavia, and Pender migration were the consequence of the combination of geographic proximity and the maintenance of close social relations at „home.“ These trans-

national networks also helped many refugees during the wars in the 1990s to come to Germany.

SUSANNE BECKER (Frankfurt/Main) presented results from her research on the second generation of Turkish immigrants in Germany and their transnational links. She called for an extension of the concept of transnationalism to include not only physical but also imaginary cross-border relations, such as mental references to Turkey. Highlighting different practices of producing transnational spaces between Germany and Turkey, Becker identified three dimensions of transnationalism: first, transnationalism through physical border crossings by the subject in question; second, transnationalism due to physical border crossings by others; third, transnationalism without physical border crossing through the distribution of information and the consumption of transnational media. The „imaginary“ transnationalism was also a result of the fact that individuals whose parents are Turkish, even though born in Germany and German citizens, are labeled Turks in Germany.

The second panel focused on the impact of transnational practices of different migrant groups in post-war Europe. ROBERT PICHLER (Graz) presented the migration history of a family from the Albanian village of Veleshta in the Republic of Macedonia. He focused on two different generations (father and son) in order to compare expectations and results of migration. The case study gave insights into the complex decision-making processes revolving around the question of labor migration, the cultural and material transfers engendered by migration and the changing opportunities of migration. Pichler outlined the impact of the social and political circumstances in Macedonia and Austria on migrant expectations. He also stressed that due to transnational experiences, expectations as for the results of migration changed between the generations.

GRAZIA PRONTERA (Salzburg) delineated Italian migration patterns to the Federal Republic of Germany in the postwar years focusing on Wolfsburg, where Volkswagen recruited many workers from Italy. She emphasized that migrants are continuously redefining their own identity which fluctuates bet-

ween the local, regional, national and transnational depending on the context and conditions in which they find themselves. These conditions also affect the gradual change of their life values. She argued that through the analysis of narrative interviews it was possible to understand how important choices, such as the decision to leave Italy, return to Italy, or stay in Germany, are connected with changing living conditions and patterns of identification. Even though many Italians in Wolfsburg still feel alienated they also became increasingly critical of conditions „back home“.

IDA LULIĆ (Regensburg) discussed the economic effects of immigration concentrating of the impact on wage levels; this is also a politically sensitive issue because opposition to immigration is often substantiated by the claim that immigrants put a downward pressure on wages for the native population. Based on economic models, Lulić concluded that the impact of immigration on the local wage levels and labor supply is relatively low.

Causes and Effects of Return Migration was the central theme of the third and final panel. JASNA ČAPO ŽMEGAČ (Zagreb), who studies migrants from Croatia in Bavaria, began with the statement that there is no „natural“ return. Migrant return is the result of a long-lasting, multifaceted, and complex process of decision making, which involves romanticizing „home“ and pragmatic weighing of opportunities. Many migrants from Yugoslavia (Croatia) postponed their eventual return and often rather engaged in translocalism living „here“ and „there“ at the same time. These migrants have often kept two households in different geographic places located in different states which led to the creation of a single social space that spanned different localities in two or more nation-states. So, a „doubling home desire“ emerged. Čapo Žmegač argued that the process of return, in order to be understood, needs to be set against particular stages in the individual and family life-course and their dynamics, the entire migration history of the individual and the family, as well as the changing meso- and macro-structural conditions. Return should be seen as an act of migration in its own right.

KAROLINA NOVINŠČAK (Regensburg) presented preliminary findings of the ongoing

FORMIG research project „Bavaria-Croatia transnational“. She analyzed life-narrative interviews focusing on the ways migrants from Croatia and their descendants conceptualize return. She stressed that „return“ is a recurring topic in the life-narratives, both of the first and the second generation. In contrast to their parents, the members of the second generation develop new forms of transnational linkages such as virtual social networks; in many cases these practices are also supposed to facilitate their eventual „return,“ namely the relocation to Croatia. Novinščak concluded that return (real or imaginary) is a multi-stage process.

SARA BERNARD (Regensburg) discussed the impact of Gastarbeiter migration and Gastarbeiters' return on Serbia. She focused on the process of return migration and the role of state policies to facilitate the return. Actors on three levels were involved in return migration: the Yugoslav authorities, the Yugoslav media, and the migrants and returnees. She argued that this is one reason why return migration is such a complicated phenomenon. One particularity of the Yugoslav case were the changing policies of the federal government (often undercut by Republic governments and municipalities) to facilitate – or to prevent – return.

SONJA HAUG (Regensburg) focused on the role of social networks and social capital in the whole migration process. Her presentation was mainly based on sociological surveys of Italian migrants (a migrant group with an initially very high initial rate of return). She argued that social networks in the country of origin operate as a constraint to migration, whereas social capital of an individual in a country abroad can be a strong pull factor of migration, reducing its costs. Haug deplored that there is no elaborated method to collect data on social networks of migrants at reasonable costs. She expressed her hope that the different migration systems in Europe will once be researched by similar methods based on interviews in the country of origin and of destination.

The workshop offered an opportunity to discuss the implications of transnationalism for states, societies and individuals in a comparative and interdisciplinary way. It beca-

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me evident that the dynamics and the morphology of transnationalism could best be understood by interdisciplinary exchange. The discussions not only revealed shortcomings of the transnational paradigm, but also suggested possible innovative extensions such as the concept of „imaginary“ and „cognitive“ transnationalism or of the „transnational life of objects.“ What it made clear, though, was that even if transnationalism is often not the best category to describe actual migrant practices, it is still a very useful critical epistemological perspective.

### **Workshop overview:**

#### Opening

Karolina Novinščak, Ulf Brunnbauer

#### *Keynotes lectures*

Janine Dahinden

Transnationalism, integration and social inequalities: The case of albanian speaking migrants

Ulf Brunnbauer

Labor Migration and Transnationalism in the Balkans from a Historical Perspective

#### *Panel 1: Researching Transnationalism*

Maja Povrzanović Frykman

Why is the transnational paradigm useful? Considerations based on ethnographic research among the Croats in Sweden

Gabriele Cappai

Cognitive Transnationalism. Researching migration through qualitative Methods

Christopher Molnar

„Building Bridges to the Homeland.“ The Transnational Experience of Yugoslav Guest-Workers in Germany

Susanne Becker

Three dimensions of Transnationalism and their conceptual framework

#### *Panel 2: Experiences of Labour Migration in Post-War Europe*

Robert Pichler

Labour Migration from an Albanian Village in Macedonia: Comparing opportunities, expectations and activities of migrants from two generations

Grazia Prontera

„Work in Germany, Family in Italy.“ The everyday life of Italian workers in Wolfsburg in the 1960s and 1970s

Ida Lulić

Economic models of migration

#### *Panel 3: Causes and Effects of Return Migration*

Jasna Čapo Žmegač

„Will I be listening to frogs croaking?“ Translocalism as an alternative to migrant return

Karolina Novinščak

Transnationalism and the meaning of „return“ in the life narratives of the „second generation“ with German-Croatian migratory background

Sara Bernard

The return of Yugoslav Gastarbeiters home: a periodization

Sonja Haug

Migration and return migration: the case of Italian migrants in Germany

#### General Discussion

Tagungsbericht *Labour Migration and Transnationalism in Europe. Contemporary and historical perspectives*. 10.12.2010–11.12.2010, Regensburg, in: H-Soz-Kult 18.03.2011.