

Theory-Making and Methodologies at the Intersection of Mobility and Institutions: Perspectives from and on the Global South

May 16 – 17, 2024, University of Cologne

Tagungsraum (Seminargebäude)

Organizers: Mario Krämer & Michaela Pelican

(Research Unit “Transborder Mobility and Institutional Dynamics” in cooperation with the Global South Studies Center)

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Thursday, May 16

- 14:00 – 15:30 Keynote by Oliver Bakewell (University of Manchester): “The Subversive Institutionalisation of Migration Governance”
- 15:30 – 16:00 Coffee Break
- 16:00 – 18:00 Panel 1 “Decolonizing Migration Studies and Institutional Theory” (convenors: Michaela Pelican / Katharina Inhetveen)

Friday, May 17

- 10:30 – 13:00 Panel 2 “Emotions in and of the Field: Exploring Epistemic Affects in Mobility and Institutional Research” (convenors: transMID Young Scholars)
- 13:00 – 14:00 Lunch
- 14:00 – 16:00 Panel 3 “Power, Authority and Interconnecting Mobilities in Africa” (convenors: Mario Krämer / Rijk van Dijk)
- 16:00 – 16:30 Coffee Break
- 16:30 – 17:30 Final Discussion

Program

Keynote: "The Subversive Institutionalisation of Migration Governance" (Oliver Bakewell, University of Manchester)

There appears to be a growing consensus around core ideas of migration governance that are encapsulated in the objectives of the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. These include a concern with the rights of migrants and improving the conditions in which they move, strengthening states' systems for managing borders and creating clear procedures for legal migration, and collecting high quality migration data. In this presentation, I will discuss some African examples to explore some of the ways in which such objectives are being institutionalised in domestic policies and local practices. I will argue that one of basic tenets of the GCM is that only regular migration can be safe and orderly. Drawing on data from two ongoing projects, I will show how this focus on regular migration excludes large numbers, possibly the majority, of migration journeys in some parts of Africa. Moreover, this 'irregular' movement plays a critical role in the lives and livelihoods of millions of people. As states embed the GCM in their policies, they have little incentive or capacity to curtail this mobility. As a result, it is a subversive form of institutionalisation of the GCM that is emerging – one that disrupts, unsettles and upends assumptions embedded in the compact.

Panel 1: "Decolonizing Migration Studies and Institutional Theory" (convenors: Michaela Pelican & Katharina Inhetveen)

This panel concerns the intersection of migration studies and institutional theory. It foregrounds perspectives that recognize the Global South as a locus of theorization and that contribute to decentering concepts and paradigms rooted in the Global North. The scholars in this panel take inspiration from examples in South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Persian Gulf. They speak to the question of what we gain from decolonial perspectives that interrogate statist perspectives and promote location-sensitive approaches.

- Chair: *Michaela Pelican (University of Cologne)*; Discussant: *Nele Kortendiek (Goethe University Frankfurt)*
- *Laavanya Kathiravelu (Nanyang Technological University) "Decolonising the figure of the 'migrant': non-binary categorisations and Asian mobilities"*
Taking 'Asia as method', this paper starts from empirical findings to interrogate how framings of contemporary institutions we take for granted could be epistemologically inadequate. Looking at mobilities of both temporary low wage labour and the middle class from Southeast Asia and the Persian Gulf, this paper explores how the figure of the migrant can be problematized to expose imperial raced agendas in statist epistemological formations. In acknowledging precolonial historical mobilities which de-center the nation-state's conceptual and physical boundaries, this paper calls for reinterpretations of institutional affiliations and categories. This pushes us to pay better attention to the particularities of institutional formations within the Asian continent, and allows for the speaking back to conceptual paradigms in migration studies that have emerged primarily from North American and Western European contexts.

- *Snehanjali Chrispal (Monash University) "Decolonizing institutional theory? A radical location-sensitive account of efforts to disrupt normative violence against women in India"*
Would we recognize institutional change if we saw it? This is the question that pushed us to rethink the importance of location in institutional theorizations. In this paper, we aim to explore how a radical conceptualization of location can strengthen critical forms of theory to recognize and understand change in cultural contexts that are different from the Global North. We reveal that by being location-sensitive, scholars can contribute to a deeper understanding of the situatedness of institutional processes. Further, by drawing on decolonial theory, we propose that institutional scholars need to rethink their epistemological and ontological assumptions in their pursuit of knowledge. Through this consideration, and using a decolonizing critical ethnography with an organization, its beneficiaries (women who face violence), and related actors in India, we theorize that space and place have particular importance to institutional work processes, and the maintenance and destabilizing of the oppressive institution of gendered violence.
- *Jonathan Ngeh (University of Cologne) "Decolonial Perspectives on Im/mobility and Institutional Dynamics: Africa to Europe and the United Arab Emirates"*
Migration studies have long grappled with Northern biases, often neglecting the importance of regional context and sidelining the voices of minority scholars (Boaventura, 2014; Purkayastha, 2023). These shortcomings are not restricted to migration studies, as indicated in the current debates on epistemic in/justice (Fricker, 2007) and the decolonizing of disciplines: sociology (Burroway, 2021) and anthropology (Lücking, Meiser, & Rohrer, 2023). Central to these debates is the recognition that there are different perspectives, knowledge, and ways of knowing rooted in specific experiences and contexts, all of which are relevant to understanding complex social problems. Moreover, concerning migration studies, these debates reflect present contestations and negotiations on international migration, both on the political and epistemic levels. To address the above biases in our study, we apply a decolonial lens in a framework that integrates the diversity of contexts, perspectives, and experiences. We focus on the migration of Africans within Africa—from Ethiopia to Egypt, to the UAE, and Sweden. The questions we seek to answer are: How do different migration regimes/systems impact the mobilization and immobilization of migrants? Who are the actors of contestation and negotiation (individuals and institutions)? How do historical legacies, including colonial influences, and contemporary power asymmetries shape migration regimes/systems today?

Panel 2: "Emotions in and of the Field: Exploring Epistemic Affects in Mobility and Institutional Research" (convenors: transMID Young Scholars initiative together with Working Group III "Methods and methodological reflection")

In the panel, we aim to discuss what insights can be gained about our field of research and our own practices of research from an explicit recognition of emotions and affect in the process of knowledge construction (Stodulka, Dinkelaker & Thajib 2019). In line with the overall conference theme, we are particularly interested in contributions that address epistemic affects in mobility and/or institution-related research. Mobility involves emotional processes that are important to investigate when wanting to understand the attachments, interactions, experiences and the social relations between the different types of actors involved (Svašek 2010). Institutions often have their own emotional regime and confront us with the challenge of dealing with their taken-for-grantedness, the seemingly self-evident and unquestionable grounds for their existence. Particularly when it comes to powerful institutions like the state, important insights can be gained from analysing their affective basis (see, e.g., Aretxaga 2003). The panel aims to provide a space for discussing affects and emotions in and of the field with a particular focus on their role in researching processes of im-/mobilisation and institutionalisation.

- Chair: *Emmanuel Ndahayo (University of Siegen)*; Discussant: *Habibul Khondker (Zayed University)*
- *Saleh Seid Adem (University of Cologne) "Emotions in Motion: Autoethnography of the Affective Realities of Ethiopian Migrant Workers' Institutional Encounters in the Kafala System"*
This paper explores the emotional landscapes encountered during fieldwork among Ethiopian transnational migrant workers within the shadows of the Kafala system. The researcher navigates the nuanced interplay between institutional dynamics and human emotions through reflective encounters at airports, shared apartments (Ijaza Houses), consulate gates, hospitals, public parks, and bureaucratic gateways. Each documented encounter highlights the profound impact of emotion on migrant experiences, from pre-flight anxieties to moments of resilience amidst adversity. Reflecting on the journey from embodied to epistemic affects, the researcher employs an autoethnographic approach to intimately engage with migrant experiences, uncovering deeply ingrained anxieties, fears and hopes that shape their daily trajectories. The discussion reflects methodological challenges, emphasising self-consciousness, attentiveness, and reflexivity. Exploring the affective nature of institutional practices and their impact on the researcher's perspective, language choices, and analytical approach, the contribution seeks to contribute to the conversation on "epistemic affects" in mobility and institution-related research. It navigates the challenges of achieving objectivity in a setting where emotions are integral to the lived experiences of the research subjects and the researcher. The paper illuminates the transformative power of embodied affects in shaping knowledge production and fostering empathy and understanding within the academic community through autoethnographic engagement.
- *Stephanie Schneider (University of Siegen) "Emotions and Affect in Researching Administrative Encounters: The Case of Deportation Suspension in Germany"*
In my contribution, I will focus on how state institutions are not only far from the Weberian ideal-typical affective neutrality but actively generate and reproduce an emotional regime with tangible effects on both administrative staff, the people concerned, and on the researcher trying to observe and explicate what happens on the ground. Based on interviews with tolerated persons and observations of encounters for renewal of the toleration permit, I will a) provide insights into the affective and emotional basis of institutional practices and how they are co-constituted by the different actors involved. Engaging in a reflexive exercise using examples from select situations in the field, I will b) illustrate how state effects may challenge and even hinder research efforts at 'objectivation of the subject of objectivation' (Bourdieu 2003) or at 'alienation of one's own culture' (Hirschauer & Amann 1997) and discuss what this might tell us about the entanglements between institutions, (im)mobilities, and academic research. In place of a conclusion, the contribution seeks to open a space for discussing alternatives to the impossible and arguably delusory endeavour of trying to objectify oneself.
- *Edda Willamowski (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg) "Unpleasant Data. Researching Precarity, Institutional Boundaries, and Blind Spots in Viet-German Lifeworld's"*
My contribution deals with the dilemma of unpleasant data in mobility research in times of tightening migration policies. I focus on current mobility phenomena from Vietnam to Germany that are accompanied by specific affective dynamics. In conversations with migrants, professionals from social work, education, and health sectors, as well as with administrative staff from civil, social, and youth welfare offices and the police, our team aims to understand the challenges and vulnerabilities that co-create everyday interactions. Those affected express disappointment after arrival and withdraw. Professionals mention frustration due to limited options. Weakened administrative structures cannot meet the reality of cases and lead to overload. This complexity has promoted the professionalization of a precarious economy based on institutional blind spots targeting dependencies. Addressing these mechanisms of exclusion through applied anthropology is part of critical mobility research. Still, it might fuel unpleasant discourses.

Panel 3: “Power, Authority and Interconnecting Mobilities in Africa” (convenors: Mario Krämer & Rijk van Dijk)

The panel explores the interconnections of mobility and diverse types of authority in various African contexts. We conceive of mobility in both its spatial and social meanings and the focus is on how authorities (such as chiefs and religious leaders) impact on patterns of mobility of their subjects, but we are also interested in how these authorities engage themselves in and are affected by phenomena of mobility. In order to explore the interconnections of spatial and social mobility and thus to address an existing research gap, the panel investigates how specific spatial mobility patterns impact on social up- or downward mobility and – vice versa – in how far a rise or decline in social, economic and political status influences forms of spatial (im)mobility of authorities and subjects.

- Chair: *Mario Krämer (University of Cologne)*; Discussant: *Rijk van Dijk (University of Leiden)*
- *Jill Kelly (Southern Methodist University) “Women’s Mobility, Traditional Authority, and the Natal Native Code in Apartheid South Africa”*
Pass laws governed the mobility of Africans men under colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. The 1952 Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents Act consolidated this system but debate emerged around whether or not pass laws would apply to women. The Natal Native Code of Law positioned African women of all ages as legal minors under the control of husbands, fathers, and traditional leaders. The 1955 announcement that the law would be extended to women sparked local, regional, and national protests against the curtailment of women’s mobility amid a groundswell of opposition to apartheid more generally. While in some rural communities, traditional leaders served as rallying points for anti-apartheid organizing, gendering this opposition requires grappling with traditional leaders as enforcers of pass laws and intermediaries between rural residents and the apartheid state. This paper considers both the nature of women’s protests – in which they circumvented their traditional leaders to directly confront apartheid officials – to defend their mobility and the state’s reliance on male intermediaries to police women’s behaviors.
- *Cyriaque Hakizimana (University of Western Cape) “Rural Youth Mobility and Patriarchal Authority in Mount Kenya Region”*
The generational dynamics of land transfer are complex and nuanced. There are interlinked socio-economic and cultural factors that are involved in land acquisition within the household, and the interplay of these factors creates processes of unequal generational assets distribution, particularly land. The patriarchs hold on to land, using different conditionalities for inter-generational land acquisitions that are socially constructed to protect their vested interest in agrarian resources. They are often reluctant to hand over land to next generation. Rural youth mobility is an important aspect of rural young people’s response to these generational power relations that constrain their access to agrarian resources while they are still young. This paper examines rural young people’s straddling between places (rural and urban areas) and sectors (farm and no-farm sectors) and argues that rural youth mobility constitutes, indeed, the nature of their rural livelihood strategies in the context of increasing agricultural commodification that makes farming more and more profitable and lucrative.
- *Laura Pargen (University of Siegen) “Traditional Leadership Program: Institutionalizing and Legitimizing Authority in Zambia”*
This presentation analyses the interrelationship of the institutionalization of power (Popitz 1992) and the political networking of Zambian Chiefs and Chieftainesses. It focuses on the Traditional Leadership and Governance program offered by Chalimbana University as a training opportunity for traditional authorities, specifically Chiefs and Chieftainesses in Zambia. Following a study

identifying alleged gaps in leadership skills, Chalimbana University offers a range of courses as part of a diploma and bachelor degree. Zambian traditional authorities use this training program – as I argue – not just as an opportunity for political networking but to further legitimize their intermediary rule. Based on participant observations and interviews, I elaborate on the challenges in the implementation of the study program as well as the consequences for the participating traditional authorities on the one hand and the university on the other.