Conceptualising, Navigating and Representing the Field in Migration Studies

Budapest, 1 – 5 July 2019

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Course description

**Discipline areas:** Anthropology, sociology, migration studies, refugee studies

The aim of this summer school is to examine the field of migration studies with a focus on three key aspects: (1) reflecting on “migration studies” as a discipline and critically examining the assumptions that underlie the production of knowledge about migrants and migration; (2) reflecting on the process of migration research fieldwork and of conducting work “in the field” with migrants and other related actors; (3) critically engaging with the way the field of migration research is represented and exploring possible alternative ways of speaking about and representing migration research. This summer school will be led by interdisciplinary scholars working on different aspects of contemporary and historical migration and their connections to broader social and political questions. Faculty will explore together with participants assumptions that structure and determine knowledge and meaning-making in migration studies. A range of research methods will be discussed, including ethnography, statistical analysis and the use of case studies.

Undertaking migration research is an exercise fraught with a number of potential pitfalls. Migration researchers work with vulnerabilised populations, in areas oft-described as crisis zones. They need to navigate complex social and relational landscapes involving a range of diverse, sometimes conflicting, political and social actors, institutions, histories and interests. This requires making difficult methodological, ethical, epistemological, and political choices. Researchers are also often encouraged to take on positions of ‘experts’, people able to explain the complexity of human mobility, re-iterating and recycling modes of understanding and framing that sometimes speak more to the conceptualisations and concerns of Euro-American academia than to the complex realities of contemporary migration.

One consequence is that ‘migration studies’ emerges as a series of distinct fields with concerns, questions and issues that not only tend to reproduce state-centered categories (refugee studies, forced migration studies, integration studies) but also separate them out from other similarly-constituted disciplinary areas. This leads to a series of dichotomies that structure how we study migration. Migrants are ‘outside’ of nation-states, their histories and their political and social formations. Opposed to ‘citizens’, migrants are exhaustively accounted for in terms of lack - they lack political subjectivity, their histories and the politics that structure their mobility become simplified, understood in relation to the fulness of citizenship. A second consequence is that
migration studies and research become coloured by these assumptions. Migrants are people ‘on the move’, who require ‘integration’ and who actively threaten the political and cultural boundaries of nation-states. ‘Migrants’ are also considered to require different forms of knowledge and intervention depending on simplified and abstracted understandings of the form of mobilities they enact. Scholarly studies often prescribe different models for ‘integration’ of those seen as ‘asylum seekers’, ‘refugees’ or other figures of migration. A third consequence is that migrants become framed in ways that allow the instrumental assertion of a specific and also highly simplified national community. This allows for the cultural or political exclusion of people who don’t fit - migrants as well as internal ‘others’. Migration scholarship can be complicit in these processes of dehistoricisation, depoliticisation and rendering abject so long as the assumptions that structure the production of knowledge about migration and migrants - or better, human mobility - remain unreflected upon. A fourth consequence is that gendered and Eurocentric assumptions about migration and mobility can tend to become the default view.

During this summer school, participants will be encouraged to critically assess the epistemological, methodological and political implications of doing ‘migration studies’ in relation to their own research. The course will centre on the concept of the field: how is the field of migration studies produced and bordered? How are our individual fieldwork experiences framed and navigated? Issues of gender inequalities and intersectional matters (entanglement of gender and other hierarchies) will be explicitly addressed through the topics of ethical and political implications of research (Session 4), anthropology of power (Session 5), knowledge co-production (Session 7), as well as media representation of migration (Session 11). The film screening (Session 14) will also be an opportunity to discuss the gendered and racialised construction of the subject of migration research, and associated politics and public debates - in their tangible and less visible consequences.

Based on non-traditional, interactive lectures combined with group work sessions and peer-to-peer engagement, the course will focus on problematising how knowledge about and around migration is produced, ‘owned’ and circulated. By the end of the course, participants will gain knowledge of key social and political issues that impact on the study of migration, and will be able to reflect on these in relation to their field.

**Eligibility**

Participants will be graduate students and postdoctoral fellows working on migration issues broadly understood at different stages of fieldwork, including researchers who have yet to undertake fieldwork (but are about to), researchers in the field, and post-fieldwork researchers writing up their research. By bringing together people imagining their field, people doing the field and people struggling with the dissonances that often come from ‘writing up’ the field, we aim to encourage creative synergies and discussion. In order to ensure that the focus of the course remains on issues to do with the field, we aim for approximately two-thirds of participants to be PhDs who have done fieldwork or postdoctoral fellows.
This first day will sketch out some of the debates that will structure the summer school through a theoretical examination of the emergence of the field of migration studies and an investigation of the understandings of mobility which it recognises, naturalises, encourages or at times disregards and invisibilises. How does this process of dichotomising mobilities also participate in asserting a particular idea of political organisation centred on territoriality and the state? How do these reflect and sustain gendered views on migration and mobility? How may non-Eurocentric accounts of migration and mobility resound on how the discipline frames its subject? The objective of this first day is to try to identify/question/decontain/destabilise the field of “migration studies”, by placing migration in a broader disciplinary, historical, and political perspective.

In this opening, we will also discuss research methods, focusing on the epistemological assumptions of different methodologies. While an overview of different methodological approaches will be discussed - including that of statistical methods and case studies - the first session will focus on ethnographic methods, paying attention to how fields are framed and the types of actors and relations that are highlighted in ethnographic approaches, as well as key problems for ethnographic fieldwork including the difficulties of multi-sited or multi-scalar fieldwork, questions of access to the field, and ethical issues including protection of informants and data.

9:00-10:40 am. Session 1. Introduction to the Summer School (CC, PKR, VZ)

This session will present the aims of the course and its learning outcomes. The goal is for participants to have a clear sense of the structure of the course and the key themes covered. This introductory session will be led by Course Directors Dr Celine Cantat and Dr Prem Kumar Rajaram, who have research knowledge and experience in the field of migration studies, and Dr Violetta Zentai, co-Director of CEU Centre for Policy Studies. The introductory session will continue with an in depth-discussion centring on uncovering the emergence of the field of migration studies and its understanding of human mobility. The course directors will seek to foster discussion of the critical boundaries of the discipline and its epistemological, methodological, gender and political implications.

References


Additional Readings


11:00 am-12:40 pm. Session 2. Territoriality, Methodological Nationalism and Transnational Perspectives (OF, ZsA)

This session will be led by Dr Olena Fedyuk and Dr Zsuzsanna Arendas. Dr Fedyuk and Dr Arendas will bring theoretical and empirical perspectives on migration to examine how an idea of the nation-state has taken precedence in framing migration. The talk and interactive conversation will also include an examination and critique of transnational perspectives on
migration which seeks to go beyond the ‘methodological nationalism’ of much migration studies. Critiques of migration studies led by transnational migration scholars are often not sensitive to accounts of inequality and power relations, particularly in relation to gender or age that structure the politics of mobility (for example migrant children; reflecting on the process of researching on children/ with children, the methodological and ethical concerns related to it, also taking into account the diversity of transnational child experiences). This session will thus reflect on some of the dominant critiques that emerged from within migration studies while also pointing to the issues that they continue to occlude.

References


2:00-4:30 pm. Session 3. Group work 1.

Participants will have the opportunity to present papers that they will have written before the course starts in small workshops led by course faculty including external faculty members. Each group will comprise eight to nine participants. Each group work session will feature the work of three participants so that each participant can have time for presenting his or her work and
receive in-depth individual comments by faculty and peers over the course of the summer school. Each group work session be attended to by two faculty. Participants will receive feedback on their work and advice on how to construct their papers in relation to key themes in the field. These workshops will serve the following aims of the course: (1) assist scholars develop chapters of their thesis or other pieces of writing and (2) develop the course pedagogy which is centred on collective reflection of key themes and how these may apply to individual research.

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DAY 2 - NAVIGATING THE FIELD (1)

This theme will explore the methodological, epistemological, political and ethical issues that arise in relation to migration-related fieldwork. The aim here is to build on the critique and understanding of ‘migration studies’ explored in Theme 1 in order to think of practical and conceptual tools for navigating their research fields.

9:30-10:40 am. Session 4. Ethical and Political Implications of Researching Migration in Times of ‘Crises’ (KR, SR)

This session will be led by external faculty members Dr Katerina Rozakou and Dr Shahram Khosravi who have both extensively reflected and published on the ethics and politics of conducting migration fieldwork. The aim of this session is to discuss difficulties researchers encounter when conducting fieldwork around migration. These difficulties may arise because of deeply unequal positionalities between researcher and research subject, because of the multi-layered politics that determine how actors and institutions act and relate in the field, as well as because of how different discourses around migration leads to the visibilisation or invisibilisation of certain people, sites and topics. By lacing in the course participants’ experiences, the session will offer particular insights on the way in which depictions of migration as crisis impact on researchers in the field and on the relationships they are able, encouraged or at times discouraged to develop when conducting fieldwork. By the end of the session, participants will have been exposed to some key reflections about the ethical, epistemological and political issues associated with conducting fieldwork about migration in current times.

References


**11:00 am-12:40 pm. Session 5: Anthropology of Power and Resistance in Migration Contexts (KR)**

This session will be led by Dr Rozakou who will reflect on her empirical experience of conducting fieldwork around migrants’ struggles, migration solidarity, humanitarianism and detention regimes in Greece both before and after the naming of a “crisis”. Dr Rozakou will reflect on issues of positionality and the ethics of undertaking research in politicised and quickly changing sites. She will invite the course participants to reflect on the synergies and tensions that emerge from conducting engaged research with political committed participants and on the contradictions associated with conducting ethnographic fieldwork in geographies often described as being at the epicentre of ‘migration crises’. The session will build on topics and themes articulated in Session 4, and ground them in empirical situations. By the end of the session, participants will have sound knowledge of the way in which the academic discipline of migration studies and the reality of vulnerable populations in places of ‘crisis’ interrelate.

**References**


**2:00-4:30 pm. Session 6. Group work 2. (2-3 participants’ projects presented per group work session in each group)**
Participants will have the opportunity to present papers that they will have written before the course starts in small workshops led by course faculty including external faculty members. Each group will comprise eight to nine participants. Each group work session will feature the work of three participants so that each participant can have time for presenting his or her work and receive in-depth individual comments by faculty and peers over the course of the summer school. Each group work session be attended to by two faculty. Participants will receive feedback on their work and advice on how to construct their papers in relation to key themes in the field. These workshops will serve the following aims of the course: (1) assist scholars develop chapters of their thesis or other pieces of writing and (2) develop the course pedagogy which is centred on collective reflection of key themes and how these may apply to individual research.

5:00-7:00 pm. City tour of Budapest

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DAY 3: NAVIGATING THE FIELD (2)

9:00-10:40 am. Session 7. Knowledge Co-production and Auto-ethnography (SK)

This session will be led by Dr Khosravi who will bring his field experience based in part on auto ethnography of mobility and in working with vulnerable populations. The session will explore the conditionality of knowledge about the field, specifically how knowledge is intertwined with experience, access and the unequal positionalities of researcher and research subject. The session will explore methodologies of doing auto-ethnography, with the aim of helping participants reflect on the importance of thinking themselves as actors in the field, alongside their informants.

References


11:00am-12:40 pm. Session 8. Re-imagining your Field (KR, SK, VZ, PKR, CC)
Course faculty will facilitate this session in which key lessons and themes of Dr Rozakou’s and Dr Khosravi’s epistemological, methodological and ethical insights into fieldwork will be deployed to help participants re-imagine their field. This will be done through small-group workshops and practical exercises. Participants - whose research projects the faculty will know - will be assisted in re-constituting and re-framing their field in relation to the questions and themes brought up in Sessions 5 and 6.

2:00-4:30 pm. Session 9. Group work 3.

Participants will have the opportunity to present papers that they will have written before the course starts in small workshops led by course faculty including external faculty members. Each group will comprise eight to nine participants. Each group work session will feature the work of three participants so that each participant can have time for presenting his or her work and receive in-depth individual comments by faculty and peers over the course of the summer school. Each group work session be attended to by two faculty. Participants will receive feedback on their work and advice on how to construct their papers in relation to key themes in the field. These workshops will serve the following aims of the course: (1) assist scholars develop chapters of their thesis or other pieces of writing and (2) develop the course pedagogy which is centred on collective reflection of key themes and how these may apply to individual research.

5:00-7:00 pm. Roundtable followed by a Reception: Engaged Research and the Possibilities of Solidarity (KR, SK, PKR, CC)

This public roundtable will reflect on the possibility, desirability, challenges and limitations of conducting engaged research - including engaged ethnographies - on migration. What are the role and responsibility of engaged migration researchers today? Can and should scholars support solidarity initiatives for and by migrants? How have forms and practices of solidarity evolved over the last few years, as migration-related issues gained further prominence as “crisis”? This roundtable will invite the Course Directors and External Course Faculty Members to reflect on some of the key themes of CEU CPS-hosted project MIGSOL: Migration Solidarity and Acts of Citizenship Along the Balkan Route, led by Dr Cantat.

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DAY 4: REPRESENTING THE FIELD (1)

The last two days will be concerned with various ways migrations are represented, spoken and communicated about.
9:00-10:40 am. Session 10: Critical Approaches to Quantitative Data in Migration Research (VM)

Statistics and data play an important part in making the complexity of human mobility accessible to researchers and the public, particularly on a large scale. However, it is challenging to mirror the complexity of migration and mobility in a fair and transparent way through statistics. The selective and biased use of data is also frequently used by politicians to support their claims. Numbers can also ‘flatten’ difference and find points of comparability between different experiences of mobility. How may statistics and other modes of quantitative research be accessed, interpreted to ensure that difference in migration experience are fairly addressed by research? What are the limitations of various data sources on migration? The aim of this session is to allow participants to understand the core characteristics of data types, to become critical about statistics and other sources of data. Participants will be asked to reflect on how statistics may allow their field to be ‘upscaled’ while also being aware of the epistemological implications of doing so.

References


11:00am-12:40 pm. Session 11. Representing and Mediatising Migration (VM, ZsV)

Migration has become in recent years increasingly ‘mediatised’, meaning that it has become a subject of wall to wall coverage across different forms of media, ranging from newspapers to social media. As a mediatised representation, migration becomes ‘spectacular’, an image or representation that sits in place of engagement with the complex realities of human mobility. Mediatisation is the outcome of the cross-fertilising processes of how the ‘migrant other’ is constructed by political, social, and media actors. Various strategies, such as politicising, criminalising, securitising, dominate the field of the political and the media which to a large extent fix discourses on migration. The aim of the entire session is for participants to reflect on the modes of knowing propounded by media outlets, to critically interpret media content, to identify typical contextual and visual elements of representing migration in frames of securitisation, humanitarianism or culturalism. We also aim to reflect upon how media representation frames migration, as well as its implications for understanding and researching migration.
References


2:00-4:30 pm. Session 12. Beyond Spectacle: Rethinking Representation of Our Field

The aim of this session is to reflect on representations of migrations through numbers and media. Led by Course faculty, the session will consider how representations of spectacularised migrants and how the ‘scaling up’ of migration through the use of statistics and other quantitative data also frame the field in specific ways, authorising certain research agendas while perhaps making others less important. Course faculty will pull out key lessons and questions of sessions 10 and 11 and will encourage critical discussion and knowledge-sharing among participants on these issues.

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DAY 5: REPRESENTING THE FIELD (2)

This session will build on the critical insights and collective reflections developed the previous day to start thinking about alternative ways to represent and communicate about research on migration. It will discuss alternatives research methods, including participatory and action research as well as examples of collaborative work, in the aim of suggesting different research tools that may bring into question how the field is constituted and explored. Dr Arendas will present the work of Ethnographic Museum in Budapest on alternative ways of re/presenting migration through individual narratives and objects, sharing research methodological dilemmas and thoughts on alternative institutional practices.

References


Additional Readings


11:00 am-1.30pm. Session 14: Film Screening: "Olha’s Italian Diary" followed by Q&A with director Dr Olena Fedyuk and Dr Violette Zentai

Olha is a migrant woman whose life is packed with turning points enough to fill up a few soap operas and yet, it is so similar to the lives of many women of such background – Ukrainian care workers in Italy. Olha’s Italian Diary is a work in progress; a film which aims to break away from the "separation with the family" focus in transnational migration. It is an intimate sneak-peek into one of the contemporary taboo topics: the intimate lives of the female migrants away from home.

2:30-4:30pm. Session 15. Course Reflection
This will be a participant-led reflection on the course. Participants will be encouraged to provide frank feedback on the different lecture sessions and to recognise and maintain key synergies and engagements with other participants or teachers after the course has ended. The aim of the closing session is to provide Course Directors and Faculty with information and feedback on participants’ opinion on whether the learning outcomes of the course were met, and to encourage the development and maintenance of an engaged group of researchers concerned about issues to do with knowledge production in the field of migration studies.