

Global Refugee Studies - 8. Semester written course exam 2020

Wided Bouchrika

1. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the concepts 'displacement economies', 'regimes of mobility' and 'migration infrastructure' in relation to one or more of the empirical texts by Turner, Kihato, Lucht and/or Worby.
2. Describe and discuss two approaches to refugee management through empirical examples [such as border control, camps etc.] within the course literature.

1.

Below, I will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of these different lenses as they accentuate or obscure certain aspects of migration.

Displacement economies

Strengths

Displacement as an operational concept is problematic as it tends to oversimplify and overemphasise the documented and encamped, Amanda Hammar argues (Hammar 2014). Her broadened, agency-centric approach finds its strength in how it historicises displacement, embraces paradoxes such as dislocation and confinement, sees the displaced as resilient and engaged actors shaping their own lives and acknowledges the influence of other actors in displacement processes. It also looks at what displacement produces, which goes beyond the material and can relate to shifts in labour types, to different relations between either formal and informal economies or people, changes in social identities, new or amended political and administrative practices and so on (Hammar 2014).

Through the lens of *displacement economies* we can see the displacement of Burundian refugees in Nairobi not as a single event, but in a larger context as a deliberate choice for extended uncertainty. A precarious life in the city creates a resource of hope for a future different from the known prospects in the safety of the camp. This way, the Burundian refugees prove that uncertainty can be productive (Turner 2014). Finally, the refugees aren't the only actors impacting their displacement: rebel movements in the camp help them get access to an alternative future in the city. In Nairobi, the pastors and household heads nurture their hope for the future and encourage self-discipline and passionate suffering in the present (Turner 2014).

Similarly, the fishermen from the small Ghanaian village Senya Beraku presented by Lucht (2011) defy the hopeless status quo back home and take on the dangerous journey to Italy which creates the opportunity to re-enter what Lucht calls the circulation of goods, and move forward. The displacement produces upward mobility. Social identities shift in the case of the fishermen, but also for the villagers back home. Their displacement also creates a shift in labour types: Their skills allowing them to cross the Mediterranean navigating the smugglers' boats at first, later their introduction to the informal Italian tiling industry (Lucht 2011). They

too prove that precariousness can be productive. Lucht doesn't victimise the fishermen, nor highlights desperation, but the human capacity to take action (Lucht 2011).

Finally, the Zimbabwean migrants in Johannesburg too aspired upward mobility in choosing the uncertainty of a new life in South Africa (Worby 2010). However, they find themselves legally and economically constrained as they need to navigate different material and ethical demands both relating to relatives back home as well as to their network in Johannesburg. They aren't able to lead a 'dignified life' having to uphold their reputation and respect, answering to the imagined futures of relatives and friends back home (Worby 2010). Those relations shape their lives across borders and eventually lead to them being stuck or confined in their dislocation often resulting in the decision to disconnect and become socially invisible rather than visibly immoral (Worby 2010). However, this doesn't bring Worby to present the migrants as victims.

Weaknesses

However broad, the concept of *displacement economies* doesn't include everything. It's agency-centric, but anthropo-focused, which limits the lens to human agents. It helps look at the relationship between displacement and changes in authority structures, but fails to answer what actually happens to forms and practices of authority and citizenship, being and becoming, when people, material, ideas and the likes get displaced and the economy is redefined. Finally, displacement products don't seem to account for cases of continuity or stagnation (Hammar 2014).

In the case of the fishermen, the sea is not viewed as an agent. In what Lucht defines as existential reciprocity, the sea takes on an active role in relation to the fishermen: The sea owes them something. This idea influences the livelihoods of the Ghanians as they put their lives at risk to get results. When their efforts are in vain and the sea brings no fish, they look to another sea to be crossed to reposition themselves in the circulation of goods (Lucht 2011). Furthermore, their upward mobility changes the village society from a distance. Julie Chu's concept of emplacement can help answer the question Hammar left open (Chu 2006). The investments of the migrated fishermen in bigger homes in the village, shift the power structures back home. Those who stayed behind and may have occupied a position in society with higher regard before, would find themselves displaced despite not having moved as their means could not meet the imported wealth of the formerly lower class fishermen (Lucht 2011).

The Zimbabwean migrants uphold an image of wealth back home in a different way: they disconnect. The detachment of the most insecure might only further deteriorate their situation. Their sense of being and becoming is also affected: realising their personhood is indefinitely suspended (Hammar 2014; Worby 2010). In his research on social becoming, Vigh notes how stuckness in a position of youth prevents reaching the authority and status associated with adulthood (Vigh 2006). So it is through mobilisation, joining in war, that young men in Bissau aim to realise social being. By severing ties with peers and family back home after their mobilisation, the Zimbabwean migrants presented by Worby however, stop the process of social becoming implying the suspension of their authority claim. Though through Hammar's lens this isn't seen as a product of displacement, it helps to look at the Palestinian subjects in Anja Kublitz's study on liminal becomings across Palestinian generations in Denmark. They constantly refer to a continuity in all aspects of their lives despite their many moves, opposing the idea of social mobility produced through actual mobility (Kublitz 2016).

Regimes of mobility

Strength

Nina Schiller and Noel Salazar's *regimes of mobility* offers a bridging stance between agency and structure. They turn to those who facilitate or prevent movement, rather than to the people who are actually on the move. Schiller and Salazar argue that both wealth and the movement of the wealthy are dependent on the continuous movement of the poor which is intertwined with (possibly illicit) labour (Schiller & Salazar 2013).

When applying the regimes of mobility approach to the story of the Ghanaian fishermen, we can recognise this interaction at different stages. The movement of people from the African continent to Europe, allowed that same movement of the fishermen who got their ticket in through their navigating skills: the poor moving the less poor and vice versa (Lucht 2011). Living and working in Naples, the fishermen with their new status of migrant workers help keeping the wages low in Italy: money saved on floors can possibly be invested in the luxury of free movement (Lucht 2011). Finally, the fishermen's achievement of travelling to Europe creates a social shift and class difference back home. Due to their endeavour, they get to - physically - construct an image of wealth in the village, investing their new funds in the building of bigger homes (Lucht 2011). Only because of those who remained in the village,

does the hard-earned money from Italy turn into wealth, redefining who's poor and who's rich in that small Ghanaian village.

Meanwhile, in researching how migrant women in Johannesburg interact with the state, Kihato also offers an example of how the mobility of the poor helps maintain or create wealth (Kihato 2012). It is both through the presence of state regulations and illicit labour that local police gets to execute its strategy for personal benefit. The implementation of regulations isn't always used with regards to the law, but thanks to the police's image as carrying out state authority, they get to engage in informal negotiations with traders in the market (Kihato 2012). Structure and agency are bridged as state power configures and is reconfigured by the migrants in the market (Kihato 2012).

Weakness

Schiller and Salazar discuss the idea of new contemporary cosmopolitanism and question how mobility of certain people is celebrated while that of others is criminalised (Schiller & Salazar 2013).

This privileged-stigmatised dichotomy is addressed by Julien Jeandesboz when discussing smartening border security in the EU (2016). He argues that the EU aims to strengthen its external border control, while simultaneously making border crossing more efficient for 'the vast majority' of travellers (Jeandesboz 2016). Though it can be argued that this only applies to what can also be described as 'the privileged few'. These new technologies help the state in what Kihato calls its 'battle for sovereignty': Rules and innovations are meant to shape behaviour and make populations legible (Kihato 2012). When the migrant women in Johannesburg hide from the government, this obstructs the state's goal to control their behaviour (Kihato 2012).

However, Friedman and Friedman criticise this stance on new cosmopolitanism arguing that such discourses are not only a product of the cosmopolitan elite, but one of hegemonic decline (Friedman & Friedman 2013). In the West this can be perceived as a vertical polarisation with cosmopolitanism at the top and rootedness at the bottom. They perceive this as a flawed world view, as the opposite can be said of the new hegemonic centres in the East (Friedman & Friedman 2013).

This critique can further be illustrated by the same example of the migrant women in the market. The urban governance in Johannesburg isn't only created by formal state regulations,

but consists of a multitude of formal as well as informal norms and forms of discipline that coexist as interrelated regimes of power that feed off each other (Kihato 2012).

Migration infrastructure

Strength

In their structural approach, Xiang and Lindquist focus on migration infrastructure: a multitude of technologies, institutions and actors ranging from recruitment intermediaries, state processes and administration, communication and transport, to international organisations and migrant networks, that are interconnected into a system that facilitates and conditions mobility. With their concept of *infrastructural involution* they argue that the intensified infrastructure hasn't enabled more people to make independent decisions, building relations or changing routes with regards to migration (Xiang & Lindquist 2014).

As mentioned before, new technologies such as those relating to the EU's smartening border security do not only aim to smoothen travel for its citizens, but are put in place to strengthen external border control (Jeandesboz 2016). In other words, for an external person, such infrastructure is more likely to make the trip more complicated. It is then clear why the migrant women in the Johannesburg market hinder the state by hiding from it, when the state aims to establish its sovereignty by making migrants legible through enhanced infrastructure (Kihato 2012). As Xiang and Lindquist put it: Once we focus less on the movement of migrants and more on how they are being moved, it is clear that Europe - or states in general - aren't passive with regards to migrant flows, but through their infrastructure are actively working on regional relations in order to control them (Xiang & Lindquist 2014).

Weakness

However, by focusing on the migration infrastructure and the people navigating its system, Xiang and Lindquist's approach loses sight of actors like Kihato's invisible women. The rise of regulated migration may be disproportionate compared to the increased investment in infrastructure - this does not account for informal migration that can be produced by it. As Bridget Andersson notes in her research on *migration, immigration controls and the fashioning of precarious workers*, immigration restriction and enforcement do not contribute to the reduction of migrant precarity, they even actively produce and strengthen it (Andersson 2010).

Similarly, the Burundian refugees who choose a precarious, uncertain life in the city are not considered through the lens of migration infrastructure. Although it can be said that their mobility was a result of the Burundian refugees initially being rendered immobile through the camp infrastructure: In the security of the UNHCR, they wait until through the regulated system they get to take up political agency back home at an unknown time (Turner 2014).

The case of the Ghanaian fishermen is another example of migration infrastructure conditioning immobility: EU measures complicate legal access to the continent, but through informal migrant flows those restrictive measures ended up indirectly mobilising the fishermen for whom a job was created in navigating the smugglers' boats. And from an extractivist point of view, the EU pressure on marine resources resulted in the very village situation the fishermen decided to escape. Meaning the EU is both pushing and pulling the fishermen (Lucht 2011).

2.

Refugee management

Following Alexander Betts' thinking, we can situate the refugee concept within a framework of international law and institutional structures emerging from the sovereign state system (Betts 2009). This means we can argue that refugeeness has its roots in the Westphalian sovereign state system that was conceived in 1648 (Haddad in Betts, 2009, p. 31). The very existence of the refugee helps strengthening and legitimising the sovereign state system: The state is the norm and a refugee finding itself without the protection and outside of that state, defies the norm. The refugee is an anomaly that needs to be reinserted in the 'normality' of the state system. This has led to the perception of refugeeness as a problem that needs to be managed (Haddad in Betts, 2009, p. 56). Although it can be argued that there is no 'proto-refugee' as such, in a bid to manage refugees, they are more often dealt with as a generalisable type, a 'fixable phenomenon', eroding the diverse mix of stories and histories of refugees as persons (Malkki 1995). The existence of the refugee in relation to the sovereign state has led to a policy of containment and management implying a controllable, securable and even lucrative dynamic regarding refugee camps and border externalisation.

In this light, I will discuss the concepts of extraction and subtraction as presented by Aradau and Tazzioli (2019). The authors note a discontinuous hold over migrants' lives either by

highly controlling them (extraction), or managing their movement through non-governing (subtraction) (Aradau & Tazzioli 2019).

Extraction

Extraction as discussed by the authors, is a biopolitical mode of governance: They say the refugee camp is a ‘spatial political technology’ where forms of abandonment, colonial technologies for population management, and humanitarian control coexist, and the managing of refugees at sea is like ‘biopolitical warfare’ where the military is involved in rescuing as well as containing migrants (Aradau & Tazzioli, 2019, p. 9).

Datafication

In the border zones of Greece, biopolitics and value overlap in data circulation: Value is extracted from the mobility of migrants (Aradau & Tazzioli 2019). This can be illustrated with the Refugee Cash Assistance Programme: a centralised debit card system implemented in Greece to provide monthly financial support to asylum seekers (Aradau & Tazzioli 2019).

Although the system is presented as a way for migrants to enhance their autonomy, it is simultaneously linked to the requirement of residing in Greece. Migrants need to be registered and in possession of the right documentation to be eligible for the prepaid debit card, otherwise their application for it will be declined or delayed. Extracted digital data makes refugee movements and conducts legible and thus governable (Aradau & Tazzioli 2019). As Kihato notes: In its battle for sovereignty, the modern state requires populations to be legible (Kihato 2012).

Similarly, when looking at the transformation of Danish policy regarding prostitution, Marlene Spanger notes that the problematisation of human trafficking has rendered undocumented migrants visible, legible, often leading to their repatriation under the guise of protection, all the while precarious livelihoods of documented migrants in prostitution were left unaddressed (Spanger 2011). With the datafication of refugees, hierarchies and disparities between different categories or types of refugees are formed (Aradau & Tazzioli 2019). Data isn’t used for individual control or surveillance, but it contributes to the labelling and categorising of refugees as ‘social tribes with shared cultures and identities’ rather than the concept being a common legal status umbrella encompassing a very diverse mix of people with individual traits, stories and histories. This goes along with the narrative that the state of

origin is responsible and the refugee would rather be 'home' than in a strange country, which legitimises repatriation as the best solution (Stein in Malkki, 1995, p. 508).

Fostering divides

Rather than looking at one's place of birth or nativeness, Malkki believes that the multiplicity of attachments people form to places not only by living in them, but remembering and imagining them too, is a better approximation to the notion of identity (Malkki 1992). However, in relation to migration governmentality, Aradau and Tazzioli argue that divisions between and exclusions of migrants are 'fostered between 'host populations' whose life and wealth should be enhanced, and the racialised refugees who, from a state-based perspective, would threaten the wellbeing of the former' (Aradau & Tazzioli, 2019, p. 7). The fostering of those divides, ties in with Ghassan Hage's idea of the threat of the humanised other: What is really feared is not the otherness, but the sameness of the other, he argues (Hage 2003). Schiller and Salazar explore this relation between the privileged and celebrated movements of some and the criminalised movements of others within new contemporary cosmopolitanism (Schiller & Salazar 2013). A concept that, following the critique by Friedman and Friedman, is not only a product of the cosmopolitan elite, but one of hegemonic decline: In other words, it is a Western concept describing the vertical polarisation of cosmopolitanisation or mobility at the top and rootedness or immobility at the bottom (Friedman & Friedman 2013).

Subtraction

Non-governance leads to what the authors call the *debilitation of racialised migrant bodies*. Mobility becomes a form of biopolitical control that takes away - or subtracts - 'the autonomy of movement' (Aradau & Tazzioli, 2019, p. 20). This is illustrated with the example of migrants in Calais.

In the autumn of 2016, migrants were evicted from the so-called 'jungle' and asked to move into specific centres that were created across France where they could submit their asylum claims (Aradau & Tazzioli 2019). But many perceived this solution as a trap that could possibly send them back to the EU state through which they had entered. So rather than staying in the hosting centres, many migrants returned to Calais. However, there they were prevented from settling: Every trace of their presence, such as sleeping bags and tents, was removed. And infrastructures for food, water and hygiene put in place or requested by ngos

were either dismantled, denied or regulated with strict time slots and changing locations (Aradau & Tazzioli 2019).

Spatial reorganisation

When defining subtraction, the authors refer to Keller Easterling's work on architecture in which the concept is linked to the removal of buildings - not only in the sense of demolition, but as in the reorganisation of space (Aradau & Tazzioli 2019). In order to take away terrain - literally, and figuratively in the sense of power - from under migrants' feet, technologies of biopolitical control are meant to keep people and infrastructures on the move, disable them and prevent them from stabilising (Aradau & Tazzioli 2019).

Terrain can be related to power as the control of it allows both the establishment and maintenance of order (Aradau & Tazzioli 2019). Like in the example of Calais, actual physical changes in terrain can lead to a power shift, the difference between settling or not.

In his *Ethnography of Cement* in the setting of a Palestinian refugee camp, Nasser Abourahme links agency to matter (Abourahme 2014). According to him, the world consists of a material order and one of meaning or culture. This helps explain how different building materials and structures ranging from cloth tents and plastic sheets, to cement and bricks, shape not only visibly the camp, but the notion of refugeehood too as meaning is attributed to structures relating to either stabilising or not (Abourahme 2014).

In the specific example of the Palestinian refugees in the camp, Abourahme notes a friction between the political imperative to return - which means upholding the idea of temporariness in the camp - and the need for comfort and materialities in daily life which is expressed through building and in turn associated with permanency (Abourahme 2014). It is that friction that lies at the basis of the debilitation aspect of biopolitical control in the Calais 'jungle'.

Hyper-mobilities

Taking away terrain produces mobility. Infrastructures are removed so migrants can't stay. Meanwhile, local decrees are implemented to obstruct them in their access to asylum applications. This subtractive approach leaves asylum law in place, but limits access to it by hindering migrants in their mobility and by preventively rendering them illegal (Aradau & Tazzioli 2019).

This leads to so-called hyper-mobilities in which migrants are forced to undertake complicated routes and do the same trajectory several times. When police in Calais urge the

migrants to move, they are both propelled into an incessant mobility and a legal limbo or indefinite wait (Aradau & Tazzioli 2019).

This type of mobility, however in less extremity, can be recognised in Kublitz' account of Palestinians in Denmark. When telling their life stories, she notes they tend to apply the terms *mukhayyam* and *nakba*. Although they have left the land associated to those words, left family and homes behind, moved many times, a lot has remained unchanged - even at the level of their daily lives (Kublitz 2016). They stress the continuity in their lives and in doing so challenge our perception of mobility as tied to change. Rather than celebrating their mobility, the Palestinians in Kublitz' research point out the national order of things as being what put them into this liminal position (Kublitz 2016). Not quite dissimilar to the indefinite mobility of the migrants in Calais: Although there is continuity in their movement, there is no permanence in their locality. There is an indefinite extension of temporality through the incessive disruption of the spatial plan by means of movement.

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