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Negotiating Migration: An Outlook from the Perspectives of Historical Migration Research

Abstract

Since the late 1980s, historical migration research has delved into many forms and instances of migration as well as discourses on spatial movement. However, a tendency exists to focus on individual cases and experiences without attempting to integrate them or relate them to one another. Efforts to offer new, overarching, and integrating perspectives by engaging with the regime concept can be a reaction to this situation. This research examines this context. It aims to clarify analytical perspectives in historical migration research and provide an outline of the concept of migration regimes as well as an approach to analyzing the negotiation processes that shape and produce migration.

Keywords

Migration regime, negotiation, migration, historical migration research, migration history

Migration aushandeln. Perspektiven aus der Historischen Migrationsforschung

Zusammenfassung

Die Historische Migrationsforschung hat insbesondere seit den späten 1980er Jahren eine Vielzahl von Migrationsformen, Wandlungsvorgängen und Diskursen über räumliche Bewegungen erschlossen. Ausmachen lässt sich allerdings eine Tendenz, es bei einem Nebeneinanderstellen isolierter Einzelperspektiven zu belassen. Als eine Reaktion darauf kann das Bemühen verstanden werden, neue übergreifende und zusammenführende Perspektiven

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durch die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Konzept der Regime zu bieten. In diesen Kontext siedelt sich der vorliegende Beitrag an. Ihm geht es darum, Beobachtungsperspektiven der Historischen Migrationsforschung zu verdeutlichen und ein Konzept von Migrationsregimen sowie einen Ansatz über die Analyse von Aushandlungsprozessen zu skizzieren, die Migration formen und herstellen.

Schlagwörter

Migrationsregime, Aushandlung, Migration, Historische Migrationsforschung, Migrationsgeschichte

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Especially since the late 1980s, historical migration research has looked into many forms and instances of migration. Since the early 21st century, this line of research has grown at an accelerated rate. The field continues to focus primarily on the 19th and especially the 20th century, but for years research looking into the early modern period (overviews provide: Moch 1992; Bade et al. 2012; Niggemann 2016) and the Middle Ages (Borgolte 2014) has been gaining momentum.¹ This means that the necessary prerequisites exist for developing a perspective on historical forms of migration that spans multiple eras and contributes to understanding and explaining migratory processes and structures in the present.

However, many studies in recent years have viewed the migration phenomena they have examined as more or less solitary events resulting from specific socioeconomic, political or cultural »crises«. We can see a trend in historical work to develop isolated individual perspectives that do not place value on revealing relations, hierarchies and interrelationships, that is, situating the actions of individuals or microstructures into societal contexts and structures on the meso and macro levels. Efforts to offer new perspectives by engaging with the concept of migration regime can be viewed as a reaction to that situation. This contribution is to be understood within this context. It will first provide a brief introduction to perspectives of observation in historical migration research and then outline a concept of migration regimes as

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¹ On this, see an overview with a global historical perspective in Oltmer (2016b). Also see Cohen (1995), Gungwu (1997), Hoerder (2002), McKeown (2004), Kraler et al. (2007), Ness (2013), Manning (2013), and Fisher (2014).

well as an approach to analyze the negotiation processes that form and produce migration.²

1 Observational Perspectives of Historical Migration Research

Historical migration research investigates spatial movements of people. These movements vary greatly in terms of their size, and studies look into many different social aspects.³ This applies, for example, to the large-scale European emigration abroad in the »long« 19th century, which can and has been studied with the help of process-produced mass data and quantitative methods in terms of its dimensions, forms and structures,⁴ but it also applies to the fluctuating intra- and interregional labor migration between rural and urban areas or between differing types and sizes of cities during the course of industrialization and urbanization (Woude et al. 1990; Hohenberg and Lees 1995; Lenger 2014, chapters II and III; on the German example, see: Lange-wiesche 1977; Hochstadt 1999). It can also be used for asking about the motives and strategies of migration or integration for collectives, families or individuals, as can be observed in the increasing employment of laborers who immigrated from other countries to west, central and north European industrialized states in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and then took on much larger dimensions starting in the 1950s (for a European perspective: Oltmer et al. 2012).

Many different materials can be used to study these kinds of historical processes and structures, and the materials can in turn be examined using various methods: Hermeneutic methods look at the migrants' motives and goals, their knowledge of their actions, their strategies, self-constructions and self-identities based especially on ego documents (such as letters, journals, biographies, newspaper ads) or visual material (especially paintings, drawings, photographs, videos), although the latter type is used to a much lesser extent. Biographical interviews are another option for research related to contemporary history. The majority of migrants (or potential migrants) in past centuries and decades have left behind no ego documents or only traces of them. That is why a large part of the materials which have been investigat-

² In the following, the notes and recommended literature will be kept to a minimum.

³ Terms and approaches can be found in McNeill and Adams (1978) (in particular Tilly 1978), Hoerder and Moch (1996), Yans-McLaughlin (1990), Bade (2004), Hoerder et al. (2012), Hoerder (2005), and Oltmer (2016a).

⁴ Overviews on European migration overseas can be found in Nugent (1995), Moch (1992, pp. 147–160), Baines (1995) and Bade (2003, pp. 81–117).

ed by historical migration research, using content-analytical methods with the goal of learning about migrants' actions, attitudes, experiences, expectations, motives and biographical circumstances, stems from the collections, observations and evaluations of other actors, especially institutional actors. These are often available in writing (for example, minutes from interrogations and court proceedings, passports, naturalization certificates, case files for naturalizations, deportations, entries into the country and residence permits, or official, medical and scientific reports etc.) or, in rarer cases, they are available as oral information (expert or other interviews). Usually, these records come from the discourses and practices of those who ruled and from elites, and they must therefore be considered with specific hermeneutical approaches to be able to draw out the aspirations and interpretations of the world and situation that influenced or shaped migrants' actions.

Historical migration research looks at migration processes that had the aim of permanent residency in a destination area (and thus required particular preparations in the region of origin), but also at the numerous forms of temporary stays—from seasonal or circular movements to multiple-year stays to work far from home or working as a nomadic migrant laborer, a lifestyle that was typically only able to be maintained for a limited period of time. It thereby overcomes a viewpoint that long dominated historical research, namely, that migration is primarily a linear process stretching from the decision to leave the place of origin through the journey to the destination region and lasting until permanent residency was established there (Bade 1988).

The establishment, transformation and destabilization of migration systems (see Lucassen 1987; Kriz et al. 1992) are also objects of modern historical migration research. A migration system is understood to be a relatively stable and long-lasting migration relationship between a region of origin and a destination region. Historical migration research asks why and in what way these interregional and transregional migration relationships, some of which existed over decades or centuries, were established and stabilized—and typically points out economic, political or cultural links and relationships that enabled and structured a close-knit interregional exchange of goods, services, information and people. Studies on migrant networks and the establishment of migration traditions, especially in the context of settlement and labor migration, show the dynamics with which migration transformed the existing relationships of exchange.

In addition, contributions from historical migration research can also offer snapshots of the overall migration situation in a region, and these snapshots can be used to illuminate the interactions among various different forms of migration in a specific social, economic, demographic and political

constellation. To help understand these constellations, we can use published and unpublished documents from official statistics at various levels. However, these pose serious challenges to research in particular regarding the critical assessment of the specific interests and conditions behind the production of such statistics. Large spatial movements of people were usually an object of direct attention for statistics, as these movements were considered to be socially, economically, demographically and politically relevant phenomena and problems. This then resulted in particular logics for categorizations that historical migration researchers often do not question but simply take on as a standard in their own assessments.

Starting in the 17th century, population statistics have been at the heart of the rise of modern official statistics, which were especially important for planning and government activities because they provided a way to gather data to ensure compliance with tax requirements and military drafts. From the very beginning, registering the scope, dynamics, direction and social make-up of migration movements played a key role in this context. This applies to censuses that were at first carried out sporadically, on a case-by-case basis and with little nuance, and then, starting in the 19th century, data on the population were gathered regularly and with a great deal of effort (e.g. Schneider 2013). Data that can be used for historical migration research also include population and civil registers at the national or municipal level as well as information about the number of border crossings and deportations and the number of documents issued (passports, visas). Since the late 19th century, statistics on the labor market have also grown in importance. Process-produced data on many different migration phenomena are available for modern times with varying levels of quality and scope. The range is enormous, as are the challenges involved with critically examining and using the material: The information includes relatively simplistic assessments of the scope of individual movements, but as public administration grew and states began to take intervening measures starting in the (late) 19th century, highly nuanced data were also gathered that enable more detailed quantitative analyses on topics ranging from migrants' participation in the labor market to their social composition, from key demographic data to marriage trends, media consumption and nutritional habits. In terms of methods, descriptive statistical analyses are much more common than analyses that use exploratory statistics.

Historical migration research primarily asks about 1) migration aspirations, that is, the background for the decision to migrate, the development of (gender-specific) migration strategies in the context of individual and collective migration projects under various economic, social, political, ecological, cultural and linguistic conditions; 2) the many different patterns of spatial

movements between regions of origin and destination regions in the context of political, economic and cultural interrelationships between the two regions; 3) the constitution and functions of migrant networks and migrant organizations; 4) migrants' expectations and experiences; 5) the dimensions, forms and consequences of migration in the destination region when that migration is temporary in nature but could also result in permanent settlement and integration in a multi-generational process; 6) migrants' living conditions and biographies; 7) self-constructions, practices and challenges of identity-building in the process of migration and integration; 8) the efforts of authorities, states and non-governmental organizations to influence migration and integration; 9) the production of (academic) knowledge about migration; 10) the emergence of migration as a media event and 11) the effects of emigration on the members of the families and collectives who stayed behind and on the economic, social, political and cultural structures and dynamics in the regions of origin (for Germany, see e.g. Oltmer 2016a).

2 Migration Regimes

Why do I differentiate between migration regimes and negotiations about migration in the following? Why do I take on a perspective that distances itself from using the term »regime« in a way that encompasses all interests and actors involved in the production, observation and structuring of migration (in particular the migrants themselves) as a part of the regime? The term »regime« as it is used in many different disciplines refers to systems of order and regulation. The word »regime« has Latin origins and is related to ruling or regimen; the Latin verb »regere« means to direct, guide or rule. A concept of regime that does not exclusively refer to institutionalized, formalized and relatively stable forms of power relations and domination remains too expansive and vague. However, studies on negotiation processes are able to analyse highly varied social relationships that are directed at acquiring power (at least sporadically) in conflict or cooperation, but these are not always relationships of domination.

Max Weber's definition can be drawn on when discussing the concepts of »power« and »domination«: »Power« (Macht) is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests« (Weber 1976, p. 53). In this sense, »power« does not have the same meaning as the general usage in reference to an object, or the idea of owning something, of »having power«, but is meant as a relationship. »Power« is a social relationship; it is an asymmetry in social relationships that can take on many different forms, at times being a long-term state, sometimes ad hoc, some-

times comprehensive and sometimes only for particular situations and constellations. »Power« is constantly being re-negotiated.

In contrast, Weber defined dominance as »the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons« (Weber 1976, p. 53), and he specifies that »every genuine form of domination implies a minimum of voluntary compliance, that is, an interest (based on ulterior motives or genuine acceptance) in obedience« (Weber 1976, p. 212). In this sense, dominance is consolidated, perpetual power that can be understood in particular as an institutionalized and formalized exercise of power that is intended to be permanent on the part of an individual or a collective over another collective. It is based on obedience and legitimacy so that it can be exercised more than just sporadically. Organizations in particular ensure that dominance is a »special case of power« (Weber 1976, p. 941), that the asymmetry can be maintained for a relatively long period of time, and that it is recognized, sustained and visible (Nassehi 2011, p. 254 f.). Regimes are characterized by institutionalized power. They are arenas containing relatively stable apparatuses that produce norms, structures and organizations to influence migration.

Studies in historical migration research have made clear that individual and collective action on the part of (potential) migrants has always been subject to various institutional actors making efforts to control, steer and regulate them. It can therefore be seen that institutional actors limited or expanded the agency of individuals or collectives in improving or opening up new opportunities for themselves in the realm of work, business, settlement, education or training by moving to different geographical and social spaces. The attempts to influence these movements represented a reaction to observed migrant behaviors, to other institutional actors' competing efforts to control, steer and regulate migration and to social, economic and cultural changes induced by migration processes.

What conclusions can be drawn from this when it comes to observing historical migration processes? Migration movements were and continue to be shaped by a web of norms, rules, constructions, knowledge and actions on the part of institutional actors, and the components of this web differ in each individual case. It can be described as a migration regime. The term »regime« is used in a wide range of different contexts. In general, »regime« is used when referring to authoritarian political systems, even in academic contexts, although there is no systematic use of the term. When reflecting on the use of the term »regime« and its foundation as an academic concept, since the 1970s we can see that in research on international relations the term has referred to principles, norms, rules and procedures that order cooperation between participating states in specific fields of policy on a long-term basis (see Krasner

1982; Hasenclever et al. 1997). In migration research, regime concepts have entered the debate via political science studies on the governance or management of migration (among many other works, see, for example, Gosh 2000; Tamas and Palme 2004). One critical view of the (political) ideas on the necessity of far-reaching control and governance of transborder migration took up the term and emphasized that the typical thoughts on the management of migration only see migrants as objects of this categorization, administration and governance (among many other works, see King and Skeldon 2010, p. 1621 f.; Geiger and Pécoud 2013). In contrast, research into border regimes stresses the agency of migrants vis-à-vis state institutions. It has also significantly advanced methods in border studies, but tends—often from an activist position—to demonize state actors and romanticize migrants (among many other works, see: Transit Migration Forschungsgruppe 2007).

Migration regimes are to be understood here as integrated fields of the shaping and activity of institutional actors which focus on a specific aspect of migration processes, channel migration movements and categorize migrants and potential migrants. Each migration regime has its own institutional actors and specific migration objects on which it focuses its attention. It problematizes migration, plans and acts in ways that differ from other migration regimes. It includes specific rules and processes, conditions and forms of collecting information about migration. It evaluates this information differently than other regimes and conveys the results in different ways within and to institutional actors, migrants and potential migrants, and the public (on this and the following with further references, see Oltmer 2009, 2012a, 2012b, 2014).

Institutional actors can be state (legislative, executive, judicial), supra-state and international entities, or they can be municipal apparatuses or private organizations (companies, associations). Their interests, norms, practices and ways of observing situations produce very different categorizations of migrants, and these categories influence the migrants' societal, economic, political or cultural participation at their destination.

Migration regimes continually change—this process can be gradual due to the slow pace of change in political, economic, societal, environmental and mental structures, or rapid as a reaction to events or paradigm changes. They can include spaces of different sizes, they can operate within political territorial borders or extend beyond these borders. Migration regimes differ in the possibilities they have for enforcing measures because they have different access to resources and power. They also acquire, communicate and use their knowledge in different ways to model and predict migration. Each regime therefore produces, categorizes and processes »its« migrations differently. Regimes' differing approaches and practices of institutional actors by no

means have to be harmonized, as regimes and different regime types are intertwined, they overlap, and they maintain conflictual or cooperative relationships.

Migration regimes always comprise two essential fields that are intertwined: The first field constitutes a »mobility regime« that refers to the influence exercised in regard to access to or emigration from a region or territory. The second field is the »presence regime« that includes norms and practices of including or excluding migrants in various societal areas in the region or country of destination such as politics, law, labor market, or education. Hence, presence regimes frame »integration«, which can be understood as the constant negotiation of opportunities for economic, political, religious or legal participation.

Analyzing migration regimes can help evaluate the conditions, forms and consequences of migration by offering answers to the basic question of which institutional actors observe and influence migration for what reasons, in which way and with which consequences. Such an analysis attempts to give shape to the multitude of actors involved and to offer a nuanced picture of these actors and groups while also mapping out their specific constellations. Studying the relationships and thus the hierarchies is proving to be key to this question: Migration regimes create arenas in which institutional actors can engage in conflicts and cooperation, and the actors' agency and interests are continually changing. When considering these arenas, we must remember that while institutional actors are often spoken of in blanket terms (»the state«, »the business sector«, »the administration«, »the municipal government«), each of these is quite heterogeneous. They are each made up of numerous individual and collective actors whose interests, ideas and actions clash and interact with one another.

This type of open concept offers far-reaching perspectives for the macro level, for example for investigating long-lasting migration regimes that span continents or for looking into the interconnections among various regional, transborder and global areas of responsibility (such as in the context of influencing migration movements in the modern empires such as in the Spanish, Portuguese, British and Dutch colonies or the Ottoman and Russian Empires). Not only that, the concept can also be applied to the micro level and can include, for example, an examination of an aspect of the regime's daily operations (such as the attempt to decipher the routines of selecting migrants as part of the daily tasks carried out by the border police, who belong to the mobility regime), or it can be used to investigate the foundations of a regime as a knowledge apparatus (such as looking for medical criteria for recruiting skilled laborers or gathering statistics to identify and influence the composition of migrant populations). Looking into the daily processes and decisions

of how institutions handle migration and the micro-perspectives into knowledge and power apparatuses help us to categorize the potentials and perspectives of institutional influence on migration so that we can better understand the extent of the impact that governance concepts and production of meanings have in modern societies. They enable us to understand the specific paradigms, concepts and categories—which are different for each actor and are constantly changing—that were and continue to be used by the actors to name and describe migration based on their respective interests, to form constructions of reality, and to plan specific actions. Another key area of investigation includes research into the conditions of regime changes as well as the forms such changes take and the consequences they have: These are sequences that are characterized by a new constellation of actors as well as a production of new norms, procedures, organizations, processes and legitimation for (political) actions and decisions; investigating them could also contribute to understanding what is up for discussion and used to be a part of everyday life.

3 Migration as a Negotiation Process

How do migration regimes relate to migrants? For migration regimes, migrants are objects of tasks and the reason for problematizing issues and implementing measures, but migration regimes also compete in conflicts or when recruiting migrants. Migrants or potential migrants react to restrictive interventions (such as prohibitions for emigrating or immigrating), to force (e.g., by flight as refugees) or to attractive offers (such as recruitment by businesses, immigration policies that benefit trades or attracting highly skilled workers). Individually or collectively, migrants can present a challenge to the migration regime. They develop strategies to assert and maintain their own movement in a field characterized by domination practices and ascriptions of identity, and these strategies also enable them to realize their aspirations, express their reasons, and present and modify their life careers.

Migrants act as individuals or in networks or collectives (including their families) and have varying degrees of autonomy based on their differing experiences with societal expectations and preferences, on norms, rules and laws, and on the images they have of themselves and others have of them. As they act, they pursue their own interests and objectives with differing amounts of economic, cultural, social, legal and economic capital at their disposal. They each have a different degree of agency vis-à-vis the migration regime. Migrant infrastructures and interest managers develop self-images that shape processes of migrant community-building through identity politics.

We can observe different ranges of impact and degrees of effectiveness in the interplay between norms, strategies and measures carried out by institutional actors in migration regimes on the one hand, and migrants' or potential migrants' tactics, activities and actions, on the other. In this way, institutional and individual actors influence, form and (co)produce migration through conflict and cooperation. If we take this perspective seriously, then we can successfully reveal relations, hierarchies and interrelationships, that is, we can situate individual cases and the actions of individuals into contexts and structures on the meso and macro levels (Hoerder 2005, pp. 73–84). This can help us achieve our goal of counteracting the described tendency in historical work to produce isolated individual perspectives that do not refer to one another.

Focusing on certain integrated fields of action with actors that each have specific relations and degrees of autonomy reduces migration-related complexity, thus offering an approach that helps understand complexity and therefore also has an epistemological function. Migration regimes and migration-related negotiation processes refer to research objects; they are co-produced by migration researchers' observations and descriptions, including those of researchers who work with historical methods. These researchers know that in the context of producing and negotiating migration, actors carry out daily activities on the basis of unquestioned routines, assuming »that most of their surrounding environment was simply a given« (Pries 2014, p. 109; see also: Welskopp 2014, p. 64). That is, they act based on action dispositions and on standardized, spontaneous interpretations of the situation they formed due to internalized experiences (Kroneberg 2011, pp. 119–164). Historians define the boundaries of the migration regime and the negotiation arena with, against or about migrants, using problem-oriented research questions. These questions determine the ways in which complexity is reduced, processes are explained and thus patterns, models and approaches are developed as well as which tools are used. The research object is the problem-oriented focus on investigating interests, objectives and actions as part of a co-production of migration.

Past migration regimes and the many different negotiation processes that took place on various levels are not merely constructs of historical migration research, however. Rather, they constitute historical structures and allow their focused reconstruction, as these structures have left remains and traces. Information about the actions of individuals, collectives and institutions as well as their motives and practices have been documented in various forms (see above) because it was considered newsworthy by contemporaries and therefore became the subject of knowledge production. Historical migration research can—and must—draw on this knowledge today. The way the mate-

rial was passed down was highly selective, not only because storing it always came with risks, but especially because the material that was saved was primarily that which seemed worth preserving in the context of reproducing structures of domination and power. This means that complexity was reduced in three ways: 1) Contemporary knowledge producers were neither motivated nor able to describe their reality comprehensively. 2) The producers often belonged to higher social classes and, due to their social or professional position (often as »power-holders« and »rulers«), they took on a specific and thus limited view. 3) The material that was passed on was usually that which was relevant for law, politics or business and was considered to be worthy of being passed on from the perspective of the authorities or state institutions.

A historiographical position that is critical of knowledge must react to the conditions, forms and consequences of this reduction of complexity (Herbst 2004). To do so, it is necessary to reconstruct the conditions under which the sources used were created and passed on. In addition, historical sources of different origin and scope must be included as far as possible. This once again points to the benefits of applying approaches that focus on actors and actions. Doing so offers a perspective that attempts to understand the positions and actions of individual actors in the context of negotiating migration to better grasp the forms of specific knowledge production at play. That is important because this knowledge production had fundamental consequences for producing and passing on the materials used as a basis for the investigation into the negotiation of migration in the past.

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