

Migrantization

People are not (im)migrants by nature or by default. Migrants are also not born migrants: they become migrants when they cross a national border, for example. Sometimes people are called migrants even though they have never crossed a border, but have been citizens of the state they live in for generations. Or they might be labelled migrants because they have a name or skin colour that is discursively and politically constructed and interpreted as not 'native', not from here, not like us. In other words, people become ascribed as migrants through various social, economic and political processes. Migrantization grasps these processes and can be understood as all performative practices that ascribe a migratory status to certain people, designating them as (im)migrants, second-generation migrants, people with a migrant background, migrant communities, minorities, refugees, and so on. These practices thus (re-)establish a priori the non-belonging and a difference, and thus symbolic and material exclusion and differentiation of those who are labelled migrants, and the belonging of those who are defined as non-migrant (citizens), regardless of whether or not the people labelled migrants are citizens of the nation-state in which they live, and regardless of whether or not they have crossed a national border.

The concept of migrantization has emerged from a broad body of research that critically examines the production of knowledge in migration studies. This scholarship has shed light on the ways in which the category and figure of the migrant is the product of nation-state building, embedded in a nation-state logic, and therefore the result of border regimes and coloniality (among many, see Mayblin and Turner, 2021; Nieswand and Drohtbom, 2014; Tazzioli, 2019). The idea of migrants as being different from non-migrant citizens and the perceived need for nation-states to control and manage this difference became institutionalized in the course of modern nation-state building (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002). Migration-related categories in this sense reproduce the nation-state and postcolonial inflected worldview according to which migration-related differences are natural and predominant. In other words, that people are moving around is far from new, but what is more recent is how nation-states

categorize certain people as migrants and others as non-migrants, and the consequences that this embodies. In addition, the migrant is generally perceived as a person whose movements or presence is problematic and who is poor (Anderson, 2019). Privileged border crossers are often not considered as migrants – hence, are not migrantized – as in the case of the so-called highly skilled, or expats (Kunz, 2019): class overrides migrantization. Migrantization can therefore be considered as a structural process which provides not only exclusion, but also material and symbolic benefits to those people who are not migrantized.

A wide range of scholars contribute their work to the conceptualization of migrantization. For example, Dahinden proposes to demigrantize migration and integration studies in terms of changing the unit of analysis from the group of migrants to the overall population, in order to investigate when and how the category 'migrant' becomes significant, empirically, theoretically and politically. Once we have demigrantized, she argues, we can see and analyse the significance of migration both to the people themselves and to others, hence one can see how migrantization intervenes in terms of exclusion and state power (Dahinden, 2016; Wyss and Dahinden, 2022). Amelina's (2021) 'doing migration' approach is another crucial contribution. She theorizes how the practice of moving from one locality to another becomes socially transformed into migration, and how individuals (some of whom are immobile) are turned into migrants through a variety of routinized institutional, organizational and interactive means. The important work of Tudor (2018) should be mentioned, having coined the term 'migrantism' to theorize the power relations that ascribe migration to certain bodies and establish non-migration as the norm of intelligible national and European belonging. Similarly, Scheel and Tazzioli (2022) propose to study instances of what they term 'migrantization', and turn it into an analytical lens for investigating transformations in contemporary border and citizenship regimes. These scholars, and others, elaborate on instances of how both state and non-state actors contribute to migrantization, how these processes become performatively inscribed in representations, structures, regimes and interactions, and how they relate to power.

Of course, migrantization occurs differently dependent on national, historical and contextual peculiarities (and in their interaction with other power relations, such as those related to gender, sexuality or class). For example, one can identify different patterns of how the question of who is a migrant is answered according to the way in which specific migration apparatuses and nation-building processes became entangled. In the so-called Global North, we might distinguish three ideal-types: settler colonies which transformed into immigration or multicultural states, such as the United States and Canada, where migrantization is often linked to undocumented people; nation-states that emerged from European colonial empires where former colonized citizens were in due course turned into migrants, as happened in the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands; and nation-states that, strictly speaking, never had colonies (while having been deeply involved in colonial projects) and where nation-building occurred as demarcation, both vis-à-vis neighbouring states and immigrants, as in Switzerland, and where migrantization unfolds on strong nativist grounds. Yet, what they all have in common is that at some point migration-related categorizations came up – in national statistics, representations, societal structures, everyday categorization, and so on – and immigration and integration laws were created to govern the (non-)rights of migrantized people. Moreover, in all these contexts we can observe a placement of migrantized people into a distinct hierarchy which goes along with an unequal distribution of societal symbolic and material resources. Migrantization can therefore be considered as a performative technology of power and governmentality producing not only (partial or full) exclusion, but also affirming a national ‘we’ in the context of global inequalities. In other words, migrantization is part of a set of technologies that reshape a national – at times nativist – racialized and civilized/liberal ‘we’ (Favell, 2022). Finally, migrantization is related to and intersects with, but can be distinguished from, racialization (Tudor, 2018; Dahinden and Korteweg, 2022). Racialization also places people into a hierarchy, leads to symbolic and material inequalities and discrimination (Meghji, 2022), yet it is often based on a logic of coloniality (Quijano, 2000), and on particular racialized constructions of skin

colour or Islam. In many European countries, for instance, migrantization is placed within a racist logic of Europe as white (El-Tayeb, 2011). For example, the way in which Polish or Kosovo-Albanian Europeans are migrantized in Western Europe – in terms of Eastern Europeanness or Balkanness – is different from the ways in which Black or Arab Europeans are ascribed as extra-European migration.

The suggestion is to use migrantization as an analytical lens which makes it possible to investigate the uses of migration-related categories and their consequences in terms of power and ex/inclusion from/into a global system of inequalities and nation-states.

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