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Narratives of Migration in Politics, Ideology, Historiography and Literature: Introduction

This workshop addresses historical migration and representations of migrants across diverse and often overlapping discourses in

1. the post-Ottoman Balkans,
2. the British Empire and
3. post-WW2 Britain until Brexit.

Major historical processes under consideration include:

1. the decline of empires (British and Ottoman),
2. the strengthening of ethnic nationalism throughout the 19th century, WW1, post-WW2, and
3. post-2004 migrations to the UK in a wider historical context, namely the outcomes of the spread of Communism across Europe and its fall in the 1990s.

These geographical areas and historical processes are the focus of the three individual research projects:

1. Laura Brody's project focuses on the post-Ottoman Balkans and the strengthening of ethnic nationalism starting with the end of WW1 and continuing until nowadays,
2. Zoheb Mashiur's project focuses on the treatment of Indian and other colonial soldiers during WW1, and
3. Cornel Borit's project focuses on the migration into the UK after WW2 and particularly after the expansion of the EU in 2004.

One of the major topics in all the three projects and a principal theme in Cornel's project are the migration myths. They are approached from several different perspectives:

1. Historically – Laura is considering their role in the formation of modern national and regional identities and the perpetuation of nationalist rhetoric in the eastern Balkans.
2. Typologically – Cornel is implementing a theoretical typology of migration myths based on recent and contemporary populist propaganda.
3. In interaction with other – critically analysed – myths, such as
 - the 'clash of civilizations' explored chiefly by Laura, or
 - 'the martial races' studied by Zoheb to describe the ways the British

imperial war machine used to differentiate between Indian and other colonial soldiers.

Apart from presenting the current developments of the three individual research projects (in session 1), the workshop aims to present

1. New perspectives on the formation of modern collective identities. The emphasis of Laura's research has been laid on the formation of cross-border regional identities. This is also the topic of one of the source texts, "Beyond the Greek and Turkish Dichotomy" by İlay Romain Örs, discussed during the second session, which will have a form of the seminar where participants will be divided, as usual, into virtual rooms.
2. The WW1 and related colonisation as instances of "organisational migration". This is the key theme of Zoheb's research, which is partially covered by the second optional article discussed in the seminar: Alison Fell's "Nursing the Other".
3. The critical potential of literary narratives to counter the ideological deployment of migration myths. This is the key topic of Cornel's research. The legal outcomes of the ideological deployment of migration myths and the discursive construction of undesirable foreigners as criminals are discussed in the third optional reading for the seminar, Melanie Griffith's article "Foreign, Criminal: a Doubly Damned Modern British Folk-Devil."

The overarching seminar theme generally relevant for MOVES research is the dangers of "othering". As "others," the participants of our field research may be stereotyped, treated negatively by our mechanical application of western, ethical, heteronormative, ethnic and other values, or flattened down to chunks of data by means of quantitative methods. The sole objectivity of data depends on used interpretive frameworks, as shown in Kumer-Nevo's and Sidi's article "Writing against Othering," the only mandatory reading in today's seminar.

There is no easy way dealing with the Other or others. As Jacques Derrida demonstrated a long time ago in his critique of Emanuel Lévinas: the community accepting the other must be the "community of the question," In such a community, the main relationship to the Other does not consist in the "unbreacheable responsibility" (as Lévinas has it), but "in the **freedom of the question,**" which should not be restricted by law or by a commandment. The community of the question is based on

1. **resolution** ("I will be responsible to the Other."),
2. **initiative** ("It is up to me to take the Other as the other human being."), and
3. the **absolute moment of beginning** ("No common language is readily available: it has to be found, and there is no assurance of the community's chances in a society.).

Kumer-Nevo and Sidi show that this “freedom of the question” exists both on the side of the poor, marginalized interviewee and the researcher interviewing her. It is rewarding to see how Derrida’s theory anticipates the principles of practical sociologic research carried out by Kumer-Nevo and Sidi. Here I see another relevant example of an interdisciplinary relationship between the humanities and social sciences.

The interdisciplinary links between approaches to narratives and sociological analysis will also be the topic of the third section of the workshop, a presentation of Dr. Lucy Williams, the Visiting Researcher at the University of Kent, teaching at the Brussels School of International Studies. Her talk entitled “Sociological Approaches to Working with Migrant Narratives” will be chaired by Andreas Mahler, followed by his short response and questions and answers.

Let me thank Laura, Zoheb and Cornel for preparing this topical and very interesting workshop, to Clare Wallace for chairing the seminar, to Lucy Williams for her very relevant talk and to Andreas for preparing his response. I hope that this workshop will become a fitting conclusion of the whole series.