

Workshop on “Forced Migration, Exclusion, and Social Class” (23-24 May 2019, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany)

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This workshop directs its attention to the interrelation between forced migration, exclusion, and social class. In the literature on forced migration, social class is often hidden behind other terms, when refugees are described as “vulnerable” and “poor” or as “better off. A few studies that do address class have recognised that a forced migrant remains a ‘classed’ person (Van Hear 2004, 2014; McSpadden 1999: 251) and observed that a middle- or upper-class background can ease the start in a host country but also lead to sense of frustration and misrecognition (Kleist 2010: 198) and that a celebrated social status is not always transferrable to the host country (Jansen 2008: 182).

Treating forced migrants as a homogeneous group with respect to class leads to ignoring relevant differences that can help explain trajectories of forced displacement and migrant integration. Furthermore, attention to the class backgrounds of forced migrants can help us understand the multi-layered nature of their social exclusion and inclusion in the host country. Class background functions as an additional layer of selection and differentiation, not only when fleeing the homeland but also after arrival in the host country.

We understand forced migration as a process of movement compelled by conflict, social and political oppression, and disaster, or induced by development projects. Hence, forced migrants are “ordinary people” faced with particular kinds of social, political, and historical situations (Turton 2003: 1, see also Malkki 1995: 496). Exclusion refers to the outcome of practices by state and non-state actors that restrict migrants’ access to territory, rights, and resources, as well as participation in various societal spheres. This may entail practices of boundary-making between migrant communities and across different social class backgrounds, as well as acts of self-exclusion. Class may be approached in the sense that Weber uses the term, i.e. referring to (market) opportunities based on resources; this definition is also used in more recent class concepts (e.g. Savage 2013). Following Bourdieu, this includes focusing on “ascribed social class”, i.e. markers which are interpreted in certain ways by others and the individuals themselves.

Both ascribed social class and class position in the Weberian sense often change during forced displacement, simply due to the change of context. While such changes are likely to be an anticipated or desired consequence of other forms of migration, this is often not the case for forced migration. We thus examine the degree to which markers of class and their interpretation

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by others are subject to change during forced displacement and how forced migrants experience their (different) class positions.

The workshop will address questions such as:

- How does class (whether defined in terms of profession, education, or property) influence experiences of forced migration?
- What can a focus on class contribute to the study of forced migration and how can the study of forced migration influence conceptualisations of class?
- How do we measure class and social mobility for forced migrants, taking into account their situations before, during, and after migration? What frame of reference can we use when speaking about social class and migration?
- How does the class background of forced migrants influence social exclusion and inclusion?
- How are migration routes, the choice of destination, the time spent travelling, and the possibility of return to the homeland related to a refugee's class background?
- What is the relationship between social and spatial mobility?
- How do refugees deal with the “status paradox” (Nieswand 2014) of belonging to different classes in different places and at different times?
- How do refugees and asylum-seekers define markers of social class? What factors shape their self-image?
- And how do forced migrants who are put in the category of “refugee” perceive and deal with this label?
- How does the class background of a forced migrant interact with his/her nationality, ethnicity, or religious belonging, particularly in relationship to the “majority society” (e.g. Pedersen 2012)?

We welcome proposals from researchers working on various aspects of the overarching topic of forced migration, exclusion, and social class, as well as papers dealing with specific regional or temporal foci, including internal displacement. The format of the two-day workshop will centre around discussion of pre-circulated papers. We plan to prepare an edited volume or journal issue based on selected papers from the workshop.

A keynote lecture will be given by Nicholas Van Hear (COMPAS, University of Oxford).

Please submit your abstract by 15 October 2018 to both scharrer@eth.mpg.de and yanasmayan@eth.mpg.de

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