

Theorizing the refugee/migrant distinction

DGSKA/GAA (German Anthropological Association) Workshop of the Working Group Migration

Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna

September 18–19, 2018, Vienna, Austria

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Deadline for application: May 30, 2018

Call for participation

So far, scholars engaging in ‘migration studies’ and those engaging in ‘refugee studies’ often operate with distinct theoretical apparatuses and engage in different scholarly debates. While refugee scholars often build on the distinctiveness of the refugee experience and the necessity to acknowledge related claims, migration scholars have increasingly argued for jointly addressing migrants, refugees and other mobile groups through concepts such as transnationalism or mobility/immobility. The refugee/migrant distinction cannot be found only in academic debates but also in ethnographic encounters. The question how to theorize the everyday practices of enacting and reproducing the refugee/migrant distinction, however, has rarely been addressed.

In this workshop, we will systematically tease out the parallels, differences and interrelations of the concepts ‘refugees’ and ‘migrants’ both in ethnographic encounters and anthropological debates. This includes various intersecting domains such as (a) individuals’ life-worlds, personal experiences and strategies, (b) institutional structures, policies (local, national and beyond), legal frameworks and humanitarian work, (c) media and public discourses, and (d) academic engagement and intervention. Thereby we aim to collect and discuss theoretical tools to anthropologically scrutinize the refugee/migrant distinction that unfolds in the above-mentioned domains. We particularly invite those engaged in refugee and/or migration studies to reflect on the epistemologies, power relations and situated practices related to the notions ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ in their own research (fields) and to contribute their ideas about theorizing the refugee/migrant distinction.

Rather than presenting conference papers, participants will be invited to submit short think pieces (approx. 2 pages) a few weeks before the workshop. These think pieces will be circulated among the workshop participants in advance and will be the basis of discussion during the meeting in Vienna.

During the VANDA Vienna Anthropology Days organized from Sep 19–22, the Working Group Migration is organizing a panel “Migrant versus refugee: An arbitrary distinction?”

(<https://vanda.univie.ac.at/call-for-papers/>). This means the participants will also have the opportunity for presenting a fully developed conference paper in this or any other panel during the conference following our workshop.

Participation

We invite anthropologists (or those working in related fields) to take part in this workshop. If you are interested, please send us an email with a short description of your work (related to the workshop themes) and with a few questions/topics you would be interested in

discussing during the workshop. Please send this together with a short bio to: eva.koessner@univie.ac.at and monika.palmberger@univie.ac.at

Participants will be informed the latest by end of June, 2018.

There are limited funds available for our workshop for support with travel and accommodation expenses. Please let us know in case you require funding.

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